

The Alliance for a Just Rebuilding
Statement on an Equitable, Sustainable Relief and Rebuilding After Hurricane Sandy
January 8, 2013

New York State and the New York metro region have been hit by two major tropical storms in the past two years.

In October, Hurricane Sandy devastated parts of downstate New York, Long Island and New Jersey, including high-end waterfront property, middle income coastal communities and some of the lowest income neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens. Weeks after the storm thousands of families – including those in public housing – are still without power and basic services. Last year Hurricane Irene devastated parts of upstate New York, and Irene’s effects on local economies, housing, water quality and other infrastructure are still reverberating.

The increasingly extreme weather we are facing will affect everyone, but because of systemic inequities in our city’s infrastructure and policies, the *risk* from this climatic shift is concentrated among people who are low-income, work low-wage and hourly jobs, live in low-income and non-luxury housing, whose health is compromised, and who lack access to safety nets or are barred from public relief and other opportunities due to their citizenship status. The storms exposed fault lines that our communities already knew too well:

First, Sandy exposed the fault lines of economic inequity that we see in the “two New Yorks.” One New York is the under-resourced communities who, nearly two months post-storm, are forced to live in flooded and freezing homes with no food or power, and who cannot access resources amidst the “recovery.” Those of us who live in this New York live with a dramatically unprepared, aging and severely underfunded infrastructure. This includes utilities, transportation, waterways, housing, and disaster relief, among others.

Sandy also exposed fault lines in our safety net, and between communities and government at all levels. In the storm’s aftermath, local government, FEMA and public utilities officials were unable to address the full scope of needs in impacted communities in Brooklyn, Staten Island, Queens and Long Island, compelling community, faith, environmental and labor organizations as well as the Occupy movement to provide relief, generate power and account for storm survivors. These fault lines will grow if officials use programs created in response to 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina as examples of how to proceed. These programs, based on trickle-down economic development policies, failed to reinvest in the public sphere, ignored the legions of the working poor, priced residents out of their communities and used federal resources to create luxury housing.

Finally, Sandy exposed the fault lines between New Yorkers who refuse to face the reality of climate change and those ready to prepare for our state’s future. Climate change has turned a corner: we will be hit harder and more frequently by extreme weather events. The fault lines will deepen and increase inequity, and economic and physical vulnerability to climate change unless they are fundamentally addressed. Relief, reconstruction and redevelopment of infrastructure must be organized around the principles of equitable and sustainable development for all communities, and must address past inequities in all planning. A key component of this is ensuring that communities

drive the decisions and control the resources needed to make their neighborhoods physically, socially and economically strong.

The fault lines described above are all a creation of government planning and policy, and can be changed.

We call for an ongoing response from New York State, New York City, the State of New Jersey and the federal government that builds climate, economic, housing and infrastructure sustainability together, so that our capacity to weather the coming storms is not dictated by race, class or power. The world will be watching how our region uses precious rebuilding resources. Together, building on the following principles, we can set new standards of accountability and create a resilient economy. We, the undersigned, collectively call on the state and on New York City to take these principles as the basis for post-storm planning:

Our Communities Need Immediate Relief

The city, state and federal governments must work quickly and efficiently to address the needs of people in impacted communities and must work in concert with the community-led relief efforts that were first on the ground and have remained the core of relief work. Relief must include: food and clean water, repairing utilities immediately, access to public transport, housing for the homeless, mold remediation, short-and long-term health care for storm-related illness, repairs and improvements to the public and affordable housing stock, and relief to those who have been left behind because they are excluded from disaster assistance under state and federal law or face insurmountable institutional barriers to assistance.

Equitable Investment

As public funds begin to move into rebuilding, money must be allocated first to rebuild communities that are hardest hit, including public housing and low-income housing whose residents cannot replace their housing in the open market. Publicly-regulated funding that is not specifically disaster-related, including carbon cap-and-trade (RGGI) and utility surcharges (SBC), must also be directed to communities who face the greatest risk in the new climate, to support community-driven sustainability innovation and break the pattern of market-driven programs that fail to serve lower-income populations. Subsidies, land-use policies and new building codes shouldn't displace existing or future generations from working and living in healthy, affordable neighborhoods. All such funding must be used to create economy-building jobs that maintain critical high road job quality and safety standards that employ union labor, pay family sustaining wages, provide opportunities for training and include meaningful benefits.

Transparency and Accountability in the Reconstruction Process

As government agencies begin reconstruction work directly and through contracts, transparency is essential to ensure the following: money is used effectively, communities are included in the rebuilding process, communities benefit from housing or land development and job and training opportunities. Transparency must be meaningful, and accountable. Communities must have sufficient notice of decision-making processes; details of proposals and public hearings must be made widely available on the web; and community members must have opportunities to make use of this information.

Participation, Inclusion and Decision-Making for our Communities

Beyond transparency, communities (particularly those affected and at risk) must have a permanent place in planning and budgeting of all such funds and projects, including climate response planning. Currently, labor only has one seat on the commissions created to direct relief and rebuilding funds, and there are no seats for community organizations or leaders from communities directly affected by Sandy. A genuinely democratic and transparent recovery process empowers regular citizens – especially those in hard-hit communities – so that rebuilding creates vibrant neighborhoods. We should strengthen the role of community organizations that were first on the ground in Hurricane Sandy’s hardest-hit neighborhoods, give them a central role in deciding how funds for rebuilding their neighborhoods should be spent and how to prepare for future crises. Best practices of participatory planning and participatory budgeting, in which community members determine priorities and make real decisions, are needed rather than traditional hearings that provide only consultative opportunities without decision-making power.

Sustainability in a New Climate

New York can create itself as a global model of sustainability and equity – meaning sustainability for *all* New Yorkers – in the face of the new climate. We urge city, state and federal leaders to take the threat of climate change seriously, and create a bold Climate Response Plan that ensures just, safe and resilient communities. Taxpayers expect officials to secure funds that promote development projects that benefit the environment and create good jobs, including green jobs. Rebuilding of housing and other infrastructure must be framed around sustainability and equity; and publicly regulated investments in climate change must be directed toward rebuilding of sustainable communities, not markets. Work must move beyond post-storm rebuilding to making the rest of New York City and New York State sustainable. New York must meaningfully build a green workforce that addresses income inequality and unemployment, engaging communities and contractors as equal partners at the policy table.

The First Call

It is imperative to move quickly after the storm to put relief funding in place, and generate plans and solutions to the emergent changes in climate. But it is also imperative to engage communities in that movement and address long-standing equity issues in the process. The quick convening of the Moreland Commission on utilities, and the other commissions on disaster and rebuilding planning, is laudable. However, the intention of those commissions to release recommendations in January, while basic cleanup is still underway and some communities don’t even have power back, reflects willingness to steam ahead without meaningful participation from impacted communities. Furthermore, the commissions fail to include significant representation from labor, community, and faith based organizations that have been at the frontlines of relief efforts. City and state agencies may have been duly consulted, and developers may have submitted plans. Communities have not been supported to move as quickly. Public and private development must be planned in an inclusive process.

We call on Governor Cuomo, Mayor Bloomberg and President Obama to release basic repair funds quickly so that homeowners and tenants can regain their footing – and slow down the machinery of other recovery planning until that has happened. Rebuilding and prevention of future disasters cannot be done in the absence of those most impacted by such disasters. We call on the commissions, planners and developers to locate their hearings and planning sessions in affected

communities, and give communities a central role in deciding how funds for rebuilding their neighborhoods should be spent and how to prepare for future crises.

These are basic building blocks for equitable recovery, and we pledge to uphold them, and will work together in the coming months to insist that our public officials do the same.

The Alliance for a Just Rebuilding is made up of community, labor, faith and environmental justice organizations including: 350.org, ALIGN, Brown Community Development Corporation, CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, Center for Community Change, Center for Popular Democracy, Center for Social Inclusion, Center for Urban Pedagogy, Chhaya CDC, Citizen Action of NY, Chelsea Coalition on Housing, Clergy Campaign for Social and Economic Justice, The Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center, The Carbon Disclosure Project, Community Voices Heard, Communications Workers of America, Communications Workers of America District 1, El Puente, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), Gamaliel Foundation, Hunger Action Network of NY State, Laborers Local 78, Long Island Civic Engagement Table, Long Island Jobs with Justice, MoveOn.org, Make the Road NY, National Domestic Workers Alliance, National Lesbian and Gay Task Force, National People's Action, NEDAP, New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH), New York Communities for Change, New York State Episcopal Public Policy Network, New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness, New York State Nurses Association, New York State Tenants & Neighbors Coalition, North Star Fund, NYC Labor-Religion Coalition, Occupy Sandy, Participatory Budgeting Project, PICO National Network, Pratt Center for Community Development, Public Employees Federation, PUSH Buffalo, Queens Congregations United for Action, Red Hook Initiative, RWDSU, SEIU 32BJ, Supportive Housing Network of New York, Tenants Political Action Committee, The Other 98%, The Opportunity Agenda, TWU Local 100, UFCW Local 1500, VOCAL-NY

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