



August 20, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The American Civil Liberties Union today released a report, *Broken Promises: Two Years After Katrina*, documenting civil rights violations that have occurred in Louisiana and Mississippi since the storm, including reports of heightened racially-motivated police activity, housing discrimination, and prisoner abuse. The report is a follow-up to *Abandoned & Abused: Orleans Parish Prisoners in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina*, which was released by the ACLU in August 2006.

In *Abandoned & Abused*, the ACLU documented the experiences of thousands of men, women, and children who were abandoned at Orleans Parish Prison (OPP), the New Orleans jail, in the days after Hurricane Katrina. In a letter dated August 9, 2006, the ACLU urged you to direct the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate serious allegations of abuse at OPP, and to direct the DOJ to commission a technical audit of OPP's emergency preparedness system. Neither of these recommendations appears to have been adopted.

Broken Promises reveals ongoing problems at OPP, including dangerous and unsanitary conditions at the jail; inadequate medical and mental health care; and unacceptable levels of violence caused, in part, by inadequate staffing, severe overcrowding, and a pervasive culture of abuse. The report also reveals critical flaws in OPP's current level of emergency preparedness. The jail still has not received expert technical assistance from the DOJ National Institute of Corrections (NIC) regarding evacuation procedures, which might doom it to repeat the mistakes made during Katrina. The Civil Rights Division of the DOJ should investigate the serious and persistent civil rights violations occurring at the jail and detailed in this report. You should also direct the NIC to provide technical assistance to OPP, and ensure that the jail is properly preparing for future emergency situations. An NIC audit is needed in order potentially to save lives.

Finally, the ACLU urges the DOJ to vigorously enforce our nation's housing discrimination laws. *Broken Promises* details serious instances of housing

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discrimination faced by Gulf Coast residents, which have led to the exclusion of minority groups from post-Katrina recovery efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Anthony D. Romero', written over a large, light-colored circular mark.

Anthony D. Romero

Encl.

1. *Broken Promises: Two Years After Katrina*
2. *Abandoned & Abused: Orleans Parish Prisoners in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina*
3. Letter from Elizabeth Alexander to the President of the United States (Aug. 9, 2006)



The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

August 9, 2006

Dear Mr. President:

AMERICAN CIVIL
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PLEASE RESPOND TO:
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The National Prison Project of the American Civil Liberties Union tomorrow will release a comprehensive report, *Abandoned & Abused: Orleans Parish Prisoners in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina*, documenting the abuses experienced by Louisiana prisoners in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. I am enclosing a copy of that report. In conjunction with the release of the report, the National Prison Project, together with Human Rights Watch and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., yesterday called upon the Federal Bureau of Investigations to expand the scope of its ongoing investigation into allegations of abuse at multiple correctional facilities during and after Hurricane Katrina, and to bring that investigation to a public conclusion as soon as possible.

In February 2006, you received from Frances Fragos Townsend a report entitled: *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*. The enclosed report documents the experiences of thousands of men, women, and children who were abandoned at OPP in the days after the storm; many of these individuals were subjected to even worse conditions at jails and prisons around the state once they were finally rescued from OPP and transported out of New Orleans. I hope you have the opportunity to review these stories of abuse in connection with any future work you may do pertaining to the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans.

As floodwaters rose in the OPP buildings, power was lost, and entire buildings were plunged into darkness. Deputies left their posts wholesale, leaving behind prisoners in locked cells, some standing in sewage-tainted water up to their chests. The report follows the prisoners to many of the jails and prisons around the state that took them in. Thousands of the men were first transported to the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center, where they were placed outdoors in a yard with inadequate food, medical care, and protection from other prisoners. At several other facilities, prisoners were subjected to systematic abuse and racially motivated assaults by prison guards.

It is important for you to review the accounts of the prisoners contained in this report, and to take them into consideration in any future work pertaining to the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans. Although the FBI began a limited investigation into events surrounding the treatment of prisoners at the Jena Correctional Facility, that investigation needs to be expanded to include the misconduct that occurred before and after Hurricane Katrina at OPP, as well as the abuse of prisoners at several other facilities in Louisiana. Therefore, I urge you also to direct the Department of Justice to expand the scope of its investigation to cover the additional allegations of abuse documented in this report, and to complete its investigation in a prompt manner.

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES
UNION FOUNDATION

Finally, the National Prison Project urges you to direct the Department of Justice to commission a technical audit of OPP's emergency preparedness system. Such an audit could be conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, which did review the evacuation efforts by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, but excluded the failed evacuation at OPP from its review. We believe that a technical audit by the NIC would help to ensure that the mistakes chronicled in this report are never repeated.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Alexander
Director
ACLU National Prison Project

Cc:

Frances Fragos Townsend
Assistant to the President for Homeland Security
and Counterterrorism

Enc.

1. *Abandoned & Abused: Orleans Parish Prisoners in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina*
2. Letter from Alison Parker, Theodore M. Shaw, and Elizabeth Alexander, to Michael A. Mason (Aug. 8, 2006)