

For Immediate Release

June 11, 2010

Contact:

Monika Gerhart, 504-258-9294

Courtney Howell, 709-587-3881

Patty Whitney, 985-859-3214



101 Gulf Coast Organizations Call on U.S. Congress and BP to Improve Oil Spill Response

Massive coalition organizes around critical needs on coast

New Orleans, LA – More than 100 Gulf Coast civic, non-profit and faith-based organizations, frustrated by a complicated and slow-moving recovery process, are calling on Congress and BP to step up efforts to protect the livelihoods and environment that are in critical peril due to the BP Horizon disaster.

In a letter being delivered to government officials today, 101 Gulf Coast organizations outline 12 critical issues facing Gulf residents and 14 steps that can be taken now to ensure a safe and equitable recovery.

“We’re working mightily to preserve and protect our people, their jobs, and our wetlands,” said Roberta Avila, Executive Director of the STEPS Coalition in Biloxi, MS. “President Obama, the U.S. Congress and BP must act to ensure that vulnerable fisher families, and all impacted by the oil spill, will be compensated for their losses and made whole.”

An extreme shortage of local hiring, uncertainty in the claims process, exploitative contracts, a lack of federal oversight on BP’s response to the spill are contributing to the increasing anxiety and frustration felt by many on the coast. The region, home to some of the nation’s most socially vulnerable communities, already bears the societal costs of decades of environmental degradation

and unsafe practices by BP and others in the oil and gas industry. Federal authorities must fully investigate this disaster and develop plans to effectively and proactively mitigate not only its current environmental and economic impacts, but to ensure the long term social health and resilience of vulnerable Gulf Coast communities.

“The situation on the coast is dire, but as with Katrina, the communities here will do everything in their power to overcome, recover and rebuild,” said Rhonda Jackson, Gulf Coast Program Director for Oxfam America. “But the people here should not have to do it all on their own. There is plenty of room for BP and the federal government to improve their response to ensure the recovery process is an open and equitable one and the people of this paradise get all the help they need to recover from this man-made disaster.”

The statement released today identifies several key steps that can be taken to ensure recovery, to include:

- Establish a Citizen Advisory Council to ensure community representation in recovery decisions;
- Authorize a federally administered claims program for compensation of maritime and related industry workers;
- Accelerate revenue sharing mechanisms such as GOMESA to promote restoration and protection of wetlands, barrier islands and coastal communities;
- Support short and long term air, water, soil and seafood research and monitoring

“As the most recent crisis in the Gulf Coast unfolds, it reveals to the nation what our communities have long known: the true cost of oil and gas production, and its impacts on America’s wetlands, barrier islands and shorelines is almost immeasurable. If we are to truly protect coastal and inland communities along the Gulf of Mexico, it must begin with restoration, protection and a commitment to making these communities truly whole,” says Adren Wilson, National Director of the Equity and Inclusion Campaign.

“The people and environment of the Gulf Coast have long borne the brunt of impacts of the oil and gas industry in order to provide 30% of domestic energy and roughly \$5.5 billion annually to the U.S. Treasury. This disaster is just another example of those impacts. Congress must provide greater balance among industry, community and environmental interests,” explains Courtney Howell, Executive Director of Bayou Grace Community Services in Chauvin, LA.

Patty Whitney, of Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing (BISCO) continues, “BISCO has been very active in providing forums for people who are impacted to express their concerns, needs and positive ideas for possible solutions. We as Americans need to extend the voices calling for equity.”

###