We, as a people, have survived and prevailed over one of the greatest holocausts in human history, the African Holocaust of enslavement; only the Native American Holocaust is comparable. And we will survive and prevail over the horror, hardship and devastation of this combined natural and man-made disaster. But as we move forward to bury our dead, bandage our wounds, recover our lost ones and rebuild our lives, let us first pause to pay homage to the many thousands dead, to mourn especially the many who died avoidable deaths, casualties of criminal neglect by the established order. Let us reaffirm the uniqueness and equal worthiness of each of their lives, as the Husia teaches, and remind all who would deny it that they were and remain equal bearers of dignity and divinity, regardless of the value a racist society or callous government assigns them.

In the prayerful words of our ancestors let us say: blessed are those who have gone but remain with us. Surely, we share the profound personal loss of their relatives and loved ones and the great collective loss of our people. May the joy they brought and the good they left last forever. May all their loved ones be blessed with consolation, courage and peace. And may the beloved departed ones rise up in radiance and be welcomed warmly in the afterlife among the ancestors, among the doers of good, the righteous and the rightfully rewarded. Ho-tep. Ase. Heri.

Let us also praise the people for their resilience in the face of such immense and overwhelming devastation, for their courage under water, fire and the gross failure of their government to serve and save them, and for their kindness and compassion toward each other. Praise is due to those who shared their meager food and drink and sacrificed seats to evacuate others, to parents who stayed behind to send their children to safety, to younger people who watched and pushed the wheel chairs of the ill and aged, and to those who deferred in line to the elderly, the ill and the infant.

Let us also praise the national African American community as a whole for its immediate outpouring of unity, empathy and aid on every level, and who acted swiftly to issue the call for aid and began at once to mobilize and organize to deliver it: funding groups, professional organizations, activist organizations, religious institutions of all faiths, artists, actors and athletes and children as well as adults. They knew that, in the final analysis, we are our own liberators and must heal and repair ourselves in the process of repairing the world.

Let us also praise other national and local groups and persons of good will and the international community for their quick and valuable support. Arab and Muslim peoples who are regularly profiled, harassed, arrested, and held without trial gave hundreds of millions in aid. Little Cuba offered doctors which are among the most proficient in the world and Venezuela offered medical teams, tons of food and water, and generators which the Bush administration rejected in their continuing irrationality at the expense of us and others.

Clearly, the horrific and heart-wrenching devastation by Hurricane Katrina, was compounded by the callous, incompetent and criminally slow response to it by the national government. Indeed, the whole world watched in disbelief and moral disgust as the so-called single superpower in the world stood still coldly, then stumbled and staggered like a drunk towards New Orleans, stopping on the way to offer press-conference promises, instead of providing the real relief and rescue efforts needed.

Let us not be afraid or hesitant, then, to speak of the race and class character of Bush and company’s response. Obviously, their political determinations of worth and need, don’t include Black and poor people in their calculus of care and concern in the way they do the wealthy, White and vote-rich regions
of Florida. Unlike in Florida, the people of New Orleans were crudely called refugees in their own country, and denied immediate aid, conjuring up images of the brutal treatment of devalued peoples like those in Haiti, Palestine and other places which Bush and company call the “dark corners of the world.”

Bush also knew about the problems of environmental degradation and weak storm protection and levee systems, but he denied and reduced funds for five years. He transformed FEMA into an arm of his so-called war on terrorism, diverted monies and attention from natural disasters, and went around the world war-mongering, wasting lives, personnel, and vital resources necessary to prevent disaster and promote development.

Let us also criticize the corporate media for profiling Black people as criminals rather than courageous victims while presenting Whites as models of cooperation. Also, the media confused “looting” with the desperate and compelling search for food, drink and other survival supplies the government denied them and corporations would not give them although these were damaged by water and would eventually spoil. And they conflated the lumpen or criminal element with the masses themselves, conveniently ignoring that in every crisis, street and corporate criminals emerge to prey on the people under different guises.

Finally, let us remember again, that we must work and struggle to build the world we want and deserve to live in, a world of freedom, justice, power of the masses and a genuine peace. With this in mind we must continue to prepare for the 40th anniversary Nguzo Saba 2005 Conference of Us, September 8-11, and the Million More March and Movement, October 16. And we must recommit ourselves to get organized, rebuild our Movement and pursue the historic tasks before us which are: to know the past and honor it; to engage the present and improve it; and to imagine the future and forge it.