



**LINKING NEW ORLEANS AND CHINCHA:
JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE IN STRUGGLE**

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The recent commemoration ceremonies to mark the second anniversary of that natural and human-made disaster we call Katrina, was a rightful remembrance of those lost, reaffirmation of support for the survivors and recommitment of the people to return home, rebuild their neighborhoods and communities, maintain their cultural and physical presence, secure adequate health care and housing, and restore the educational, economic, cultural and political basis to live recovered and renewed lives. At the heart of the lessons we learned from the natural and unnatural disaster of Katrina is that we live in a world where oppressors routinely pass judgment on the life and death of the oppressed, where justice, resources and decisions to rescue, let return, kill or let die rest in the hands of the possessors of unjust power. And only thru ongoing and unrelenting struggle can we change it. In other words, there is no remedy except resistance and no real relief except in continuing struggle.

There is, by any righteous account, too much needless suffering in the world, especially among the most vulnerable among us who can ill afford it. And so when one hears of another massive devastation among African people, and a slow, inadequate and ineffective governmental response, we know that race and class oppression are still alive and unwell around the world but will not go quietly to their overdue death and burial.

It reads like a page from a New Orleans paper: hundreds dead and counting; thousands injured; 100,000 left homeless; lack of food, clean water and adequate clothes for the winter which has already come; electricity out, highways and hospitals destroyed; inadequate staff and dimin-

ished facilities for those remaining; and devastation on a grand and gruesome scale. And at the eye and epicenter of this natural disaster are communities of Africans, plagued with poverty, relative powerlessness and structured underdevelopment, and easily vulnerable victims. Add to this a history of racist oppression, exclusion and marginalization and a government disregardful of the people's needs, slow in response and ineffective in its eventual efforts, and New Orleans and the Gulf region easily come to mind. This is a portrait of the Ica region in Peru where an earthquake hit on August 15, devastating the Chincha area which is home to the majority of the Africans of Peru and the central source of African culture.

Our Afro-Peruvian brothers and sisters have asked for our assistance and support and others of good will around the world. And we can, as fellow Africans, do no less. The groups brought to our attention are Asociación Negra de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (ASONEDH) and Centro de Estudios y Promoción Afroperuanos (LUNDU). Here we must remember the teaching of Marcus Garvey that the whole world is our province of focus and action where Africans are concerned. Indeed, at the center of the principles and practice of pan-Africanism is a profound and persistent sense of our interrelatedness as African people with a shared history and common struggle to free ourselves from domination, deprivation and exploitation, live full and meaningful lives and make an ongoing contribution to starting a new history of humankind. This means in practice standing in active solidarity with African peoples around the world. Surely, there are so many battlefields and fronts: New Orleans, Darfur, Haiti, Congo and elsewhere, and we are

called upon to aid in any way and everywhere we can.

Moreover, we owe a reciprocal solidarity to Africans throughout the Americas both mainland and islands. When Katrina brought death and devastation to New Orleans and the Gulf region, Afro-Latinos reached out to support us. And even though the Bush regime rejected the offers at our expense, Cuba and Venezuela stood in solidarity with us, offering money, disaster advice and equipment and disaster-trained doctors.

Furthermore, we must assist and support because it is ethically commanded of us by the sacred teachings of our ancestors which make us know that how we treat the most vulnerable—the poor, the infant, the aged and the ill—is the moral measure of who we are as a people and society. Indeed, we are enjoined to give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, and a boat to those without one. We are to house the homeless, be a guide and help to the stranger, a raft for the drowning, and a ladder for those trapped in the pit of desperation and despair.

Finally, we must act as Africans who understand themselves in ethically-grounded and expansive ways, who stand in solidarity with the oppressed, poor and struggling peoples of the world, especially other Africans. And we do this because it defines us, confirms and reaffirms us in our self-understanding of the best of what it means to be African: culturally grounded, ethically committed, and socially active in the ongoing ethical project of bringing good in the world. It is in this context that the *Husia*

teaches “it is your Maat (truth, justice, rightfulness) that creates your power. It is your character which makes you noble.”

As it is with a person, so it is with a people; we are ennobled and exalted by the truth we speak, the justice we do and the good we bring and secure in the world. The judgment of history will be hard on oppressors, but neither judgment nor justice will come into being by itself. There is no life well-lived that is built on illusion; no high or worthy hopes that do not require hard work and no progress or promise of freedom and justice in the U.S., Peru or anywhere in the world that does not demand and depend on struggle.

And this too is a key lesson of our struggle in New Orleans, Chincha and everywhere: we are more resilient and resourceful than routinely reported by others and often remembered by ourselves. We have been constant victims of natural and unnatural disasters, hurricanes from the sea and those from society and yet we are not broken or blown away. We have been continuing survivors of repeated burials, constantly standing up in the coffins prepared for us, walking away from the grave of oppression and ignorance in which our oppressor had placed us, and outliving all attempts to destroy and dispirit us. Indeed, it is in our refusal to be defeated that lie our power and the path to our ultimate victory. (Please call the African American Cultural Center, (323) 299-6124, to aid us in our efforts of assistance or contact ASONEDH@asonedh.org or LUNDU at (0511) 93530955 directly.)