

# Eyewitness, politically charged, on-the-ground truth telling from New Orleans

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It's not so much that the government is not responding [with storm relief], they are obstructing the response. They are telling us we can't bring people the basic necessities of life because that would give them hope. It is a question of oppression vs. mutual aid. That is the revolution. – Jesse, an organizer with MayDay DC volunteering in the Common Ground Wellness Center, Algiers, NOLA

## A MODEL FOR GETTING IT TOGETHER

The locally-led, mutually based community relief effort in Algiers is now being called Common Ground Algiers. Currently, more than 40 volunteer medics, doctors, cooks, communications technicians, community organizers and concerned people are directly involved in the Common Ground collective effort. Emergency services that have been created include a community garbage pick-up program; mobile kitchens to provide free hot meals to anyone in the area; a first aid clinic in a local mosque and a mobile first aid station staffed by doctors, nurses and emergency medical technicians; and bicycles for volunteers and residents to transport aid around the area; and the development of a free school for children.

These efforts could serve as a community-based model for creating both emergency response and long-term infrastructure for people affected by the hurricane and who are in need of these kind of vital services. Donations can be sent to Common Ground, PO Box 3216, Gretna, LA 70054. Please pace your donations. Please no clothes or food.

## MILITARY ROLE REVERSAL

In Algiers, the military has finally put down most of their M16 machine guns and are now helping with pick-up and debris collection. Keen observers noticed this community clean-up begun in advance of a visit to the Common Ground Emergency Wellness Center by Cindy Sheehan and following a blistering report by Amy Goodman and Democracy NOW! on the dead bodies that still can be found on the streets. Rangers from Ft. Bragg continued the clean-up today around town.

**CRACKER SQUADS** Cracker squads are groups of white supremacists who are using the slanderous media coverage and storm chaos to terrorize communities of color in Louisiana and Mississippi. One young woman in a Mississippi town relayed to us that a cracker squad had shot black men in the woods and threatened retaliation for those going public with the story. Similar stories have come in from Algiers, downtown New Orleans, and the outlying

parishes of Louisiana.

A related threat are the armed mercenaries of Black Water and other contractors who are patrolling downtown New Orleans. Internet reports indicate they have been particularly brutal in the handling of storm survivors.

#### THEY SAID IT: COMMON GROUND WELLNESS CENTER

You can't start a clinic here [the 9th Ward]. That would give people hope. My job is to make their lives as hopeless as possible so they will leave. New Orleans Police Dept. officer berating relief workers in the 9th Ward

The Administration of this country needs to be put on trial for human rights violations and treason against the people of the gulf coast region; as well as negligent homicide for every person left in this region to die. Noah, Emergency Medical Technician-B with the Common Ground Wellness Center, Algiers, New Orleans

Neighborhood folks find it a lot more friendly to get their health care and healing from a community clinic with friendly faces rather than a militarized zone with soldiers toting M-16s. If the government got off their high chair, and worked with us grassroots relief people, we'd have health clinics all over the city. Believe me, we have the know-how to really help and we have the spirit of true compassion flowing here. Michael Kozart, a doctor from San Francisco, CA volunteering in the Common Ground Wellness Center, Algiers, NOLA

Our number one national priority right now should be to clean up New Orleans and rebuild vulnerable areas in a safe and environmentally sound way. Then, every single evacuee must be offered the opportunity and the resources to return to rebuild their neighborhoods in exactly the same way. We cannot allow evacuees to be forced into becoming refugees. Roger Benham, Emergency Medical Technician-B with the Common Ground Wellness Center, Algiers, New Orleans

I'm a community organizer and medic who drove all the way here to Algiers/New Orleans from San Francisco with a caravan of people. On the way here a few of us questioned if we'll be useful and why we're using resources to come all this way. But after checking in with the locals and assessing the situation, volunteering in the clinic and such, I can see people from all over [the neighborhoods] will be healed for a very long time to come. Dixie Block, an organizer/medic from San Francisco, CA volunteering in the Common Ground Wellness Center, Algiers, NOLA

It's not so much that the government is not responding [with storm relief], they are obstructing the response. They are telling us we can't bring people the basic necessities of life because that would give them hope. It is a question of oppression vs. mutual aid. That is the revolution. Jesse, an organizer with MayDay DC volunteering in the Common Ground Wellness Center, Algiers, NOLA

September 15th Update Location: The Algiers community adjacent to downtown New Orleans, Louisiana

#### ALGIERS FIRST TO REOPEN TO RESIDENTS

Mayor Ray Nagin announced Thursday that Algiers will be the first of the communities in

New Orleans to reopen to residents. While FEMA and the Red Cross will surely trumpet their efforts, the real success of Algiers belongs to those courageous community members who stayed through the storm and activist Malik Rahim who helped to catalyze the bustling Common Ground Relief effort.

Common Ground was the first on the ground relief effort of any kind in Algiers and one of the first along the Gulf Coast. The multiple success stories of Common Ground mutual aid has resulted in donations from Army personnel who wanted to see relief actually get to the community. The FEMA/Red Cross effort, bounded by razor wire, has played a poor second fiddle to the local efforts.

We anticipate an even greater need for relief support when residents begin moving back to the area. To support Common Ground, send donations to Common Ground, PO Box 3216, Gretna, LA 70054. Please pace your donations. Please no clothes or food. More information and online monetary donations will be available soon at the new action website at <http://www.commongroundrelief.org>.

AIR ALGIERS Media team members have created a phenomenal communications effort here in Algiers. Today, the Common Ground Relief website came online at <http://www.commongroundrelief.org>. This website will be an information clearinghouse for relief activities, needed supplies and breaking news.

#### COMMON GROUND IN THE 9TH WARD

Volunteers with Common Ground and Get Your Act On (<http://www.getyouracton.com>) are now cleaning and prepping a location within the highly publicized 9th Ward for a community wellness clinic. Mobile medic teams are already on the ground in the 9th serving the residents who braved the storm.

Downtown New Orleans still remains under tight military and law enforcement control. NOPD officers have expressed their displeasure with efforts to bring relief to this part of New Orleans.

“You can’t start a clinic here [the 9th Ward]. That would give people hope. My job is to make their lives as hopeless as possible so they will leave.” More good will from the “official” relief effort courtesy of New Orleans Police Department.

#### BUILDING MORE COMMON GROUND

We are now sending out teams to other areas of the Gulf coast to perform emergency medical aid (EMA) and perform community needs assessments. From this data-gathering, we can more effectively focus community-based mutual aid efforts in these areas.

Food Not Bombs and other mutual aid workers report that some communities in areas like Slidell, Louisiana have seen virtually no aid since the hurricane hit 16 days ago! Common Ground is also working with St. Marys Church in Algiers to ascertain the community needs in the surrounding parishes that have been devastated to a greater degree than New Orleans. Veterans for Peace caravans are also reporting on communities in need.

#### PROPS AND PANS

PROPS!.....The People of Algiers In a span of just fourteen days the people of Algiers have

lived through Katrina, a military take over, white supremacists, and a bumbling relief effort by the behemoth bureaucracies of FEMA and the Red Cross. From the vibrant energy of activist Malik Rahim to the helping hands of local residents, they have opened their homes and their lives to those outside the community and have contributed to making Algiers the first community to reopen.

PROPS!.....Veterans for Peace Chapter 116, Their Volunteers, and Michael Moore A great partner in the Common Ground effort has been Camp Casey in Covington and Veterans For Peace(VFP) Chapter 116. This effort has been openly funded and supported by Michael Moore and his staff. VFP has brought us food, supplies, and information about other areas along the coast. For more information about Camp Casey in Covington visit <http://www.michaelmoore.com>.

\*\*PAN\$.....FEMA's God Squad Photo-Op Leave it to a FEMA backed relief agency to provide the daily hiccup in what is otherwise a determined and efficient relief effort here in Algiers. FEMA, the Red Cross and the military have mostly played second fiddle to Common Ground in Algiers. But after learning the Common Ground Wellness Center (a converted mosque) was in need of extra doctors and medical staff, a member of FEMA's faith-based god-squad showed up for a few hours of relief from two nurses, and a physicians assistant. "The calvary is here," the white man yelled as he climbed out of their van!

One of their photographers rushed to photograph their entrance into the clinic. About fifteen minutes later, one of their video camera crews proceeded to set up in the clinic area despite the signs that said "NO CAMERAS INSIDE" presumably to show the 'calvary' in action. Chaos quickly ensued and thankfully no patients were in the clinic at the time.

A quickly organized meeting of the clinic staff and the video photographer was asked to leave. And then the photographer left. And then the medical staff walked out! Hmmm, do you think they will come back tomorrow?

PAN\$.....NOPD and NYPD

The New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) has a solid reputation... of corruption and lawlessness. Now that the Army has backed out of their community policing efforts, the state and local officials have taken their place. Among the police involved: our friends from NYPD - New York Police Department. Now, it seems like everyone and their brother had a NYPD shirt following 9/11 but their driving through Algiers in an unmarked black van openly brandishing shotguns fell short in the community relations department. Did anyone bother to tell them the only terrorists here were with the Federal government?

DON'T FORGET... We are in desperate need of doctors, nurses, PAs, medics and support personnel in addition to basic volunteers. The more people who come to Algiers and get involved with Common Ground, the more communities can be supported by mutual aid. If you think the crisis is over, you would be mistaken. Medics are still saving lives and food and personal items are still in demand.

*Naomi Archer is a global justice organizer and spiritual activist from Asheville, NC working for the Common Ground relief effort in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans. Blog at <http://www.realreports.blogspot.com/>. Website at <http://www.intuitivepath.org/>.*

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