



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 11.30.06

Kai Barrow: 917-701-9180

Robert "Kool Black" Horton: 504-813-4714

## **Faith Communities call for Healing and Reconciliation during Amnesty Sunday Services Across New Orleans**

### **Beautiful, powerful display of hundreds of brilliant blue fans with white doves to be raised in solidarity with the prisoners of Katrina during pray-in after services**

NEW ORLEANS — Local leaders and hundreds of members of the New Orleans faith community will come together on Amnesty Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, to call for healing and reconciliation following the disaster of Hurricane Katrina. "Our call for amnesty reflects broad community support for the reconstruction of New Orleans, one not built on a foundation of jail cells," said Pastor Tom Watson of the Watson Memorial Teaching Ministries on St. Charles in New Orleans.

When Hurricane Katrina hit, hundreds of people at Orleans Parish Prison were trapped by the flooding; even more people had their cases impacted due to multiple transfers and ruined evidence as a result of the storm. In the aftermath of Katrina, hundreds of New Orleanians with criminal charges like public intoxication and sleeping in abandoned buildings spent time in jail. Many never set eyes on a lawyer. Today, some of these New Orleanians are out of prison and still awaiting court appearances. Some are still imprisoned, and still others have a conviction on their record – damaging their present and future opportunities for jobs, housing, and education.

The themes of forgiveness, reconciliation and healing are a part of every faith tradition. A call for amnesty recognizes that the storm, the flood, and the conditions everyone faced were violent, and that in the context of that violence, an unjust system already in substantial chaos and disorder fell apart even further. "People did what they could to protect their families, to feed their neighbors, to find safety," said Walter Umrani, Officer of the Millions More Movement, Muhammad Mosque #46. "Amnesty Sunday will be an opportunity for people of faith to address genuine public safety and community needs in ways that are not about locking people up."

**A powerful display of solidarity with the prisoners of Katrina will involve hundreds of congregants across New Orleans praying for healing and reconciliation for the people and the city. Immediately following the morning service, congregants will gather outside of Watson Memorial Teaching Ministries for a pray-in. The dramatic, beautiful display, featuring hundreds of congregants in prayer holding aloft brilliant blue fans with white doves, highlights the connection between faith-based communities and the call for human rights and amnesty.** In most religious traditions the dove is an icon of great significance. In

the Christian church, it was the dove that brought the news that the great flood was over. In Islamic tradition, the dove protected Muhammad from his enemies. The Hindu god of love, Kamadeva, is depicted riding on a dove. In some Native American cultures, the spirits of the dead take the form of a dove immediately after leaving the body.

“Doves are known for having a fierce desire to return home to their nest and their family, much like folks who remain imprisoned or displaced because of the storm,” said Ebony Hawkins, member of The Sixth Baptist Church. “It is our responsibility as people of faith to promote healing and reconciliation and to bring them home.”

**Participating houses of worship and religious leaders include: Christian Unity Baptist Church, Rev. Dwight Webster; Muhammad Mosque #46, Minister Willie Muhammad; The Sixth Baptist Church, Pastor Torin Sanders; Watson Memorial Teaching Ministries, Senior Pastor Tom B. Watson; and Zion Baptist Church, Reverend Tyrone Edwards, with more to confirm.**

**The media is invited to a pray-in immediately following the service outside Watson Memorial Teaching Ministries, 4400 St. Charles Ave., at 12:30pm. Senior Pastor Tom B. Watson will be joined by congregants, community members and Angela Davis.**

Amnesty Sunday is part of a weekend of events entitled *Amnesty for Prisoners of Katrina: A Weekend of Reconciliation and Respect for Human Rights* – organized by Critical Resistance New Orleans, the local chapter of a national grassroots organization whose mission is to end society’s use of imprisonment as an answer to social problems.

Saturday December 9 events will begin at Watson Memorial Teaching Services, 4400 Charles Ave., with a Human Rights Teach-in from 4-6pm, followed by a Roundtable Discussion with local leaders from 6-7:30 and a keynote by Angela Davis at 8pm. Immediately preceding Davis’ address she will be joined on stage by local leaders to issue a unified call for Amnesty.