



Peace and Justice Commission

CONSENT CALENDAR
November 15, 2005

To: Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

From: Peace and Justice Commission

Submitted by: Steve Freedkin, Chair, Peace and Justice Commission

Subject: Humanitarian Aid for Victims of Disasters

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution urging the United States to accept international offers of medical and humanitarian aid for victims of disasters without regard to partisan political calculations, and send a copy of this Resolution along with a cover letter to President George Bush, Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, and Representative Barbara Lee.

BACKGROUND

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued numerous health alerts for residents of the affected areas.¹ Among the fears were that disease would spread from unsanitary water supplies and that standing water would lead to increases in mosquito populations, which in turn could foster health epidemics.

According to Joe Conlon of the American Mosquito Control Association, the mosquito population in hurricane-affected areas is expected to increase at a staggering rate.² Although he said an epidemic of West Nile Virus is unlikely, he did not rule out the spread of other diseases. Only time will tell how severe the health impact will be.

In response to Hurricane Katrina, dozens of nations — including Cuba, Israel, Nicaragua and Venezuela — offered assistance to United States (U.S.) hurricane victims.³ The federal government rebuffed several such offers, and was particularly harsh in rejecting the offer of

¹ See, e.g., “Environmental Concerns after Hurricane Katrina,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, at: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/environmental.asp>

² “Katrina Increases Mosquito Population,” *The Horse.com: Equine Health Care*, Sept. 2005, at: <http://www.thehorse.com/viewarticle.aspx?ID=6155>

³ As of Oct. 27, 2005, *Wikipedia*, the online collaborative encyclopedia, listed more than 75 countries as well as numerous international organizations offering aid to the U.S. in response to Hurricane Katrina. “International Response to Hurricane Katrina,” at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_response_to_Hurricane_Katrina

Cuba to provide, at that country's expense, more than 1,500 medical personnel equipped with tons of emergency supplies.⁴

Over the years, Cuba, by virtue of its geography, has accumulated extensive hurricane-relief experience, and has been recognized by Oxfam, the United Nations, and other international organizations as a leader in disaster response.⁵

The Peace and Justice Commission recommends acceptance of such assistance because in the absence of national health coverage, the lack of accessible, free medical care could unnecessarily add to the suffering of those whose lives have been devastated by the hurricanes' destruction. Such decisions should be handled without regard to Cold-War politics. Hurricane victims deserve the benefit of humanitarian aid regardless of political considerations.

At the regular meeting on October 17, 2005, the Peace and Justice Commission discussed the issue of humanitarian aid from foreign countries, and after the discussion, the Commission passed the following motion:

M/S/C (Cohen, Beltran) the Peace and Justice Commission recommends that the Berkeley City Council urge the United States to accept international offers of medical and humanitarian aid for victims of disasters without regard to partisan political calculations, and that a copy of this Resolution along with a cover letter be sent to President George Bush, Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, and Representative Barbara Lee. **Ayes:** Unanimous; **Absent:** None.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of sending copies of this resolution to President Bush, Senators Feinstein and Boxer, and Representative Lee will be minimal

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager takes no position on the content and recommendations of the Commission's Report.

Attachments:

1: Resolution

⁴ "Bush Administration Refuses Cuban Offer of Medical Assistance Following Katrina," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Oct. 19, 2005, at: <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/2889>

⁵ "Hurricane Katrina: Can We Learn from Cuba's Lesson?" *St. Petersburg Times*, Sept. 9, 2005, at: http://www.sptimes.com/2005/09/09/Worldandnation/Can_we_learn_from_Cub.shtml

RESOLUTION NO. -N.S.

URGING THE UNITED STATES TO ACCEPT INTERNATIONAL OFFERS OF MEDICAL
AND HUMANITARIAN AID FOR VICTIMS OF DISASTERS

WHEREAS, the Peace and Justice Commission advises the City Council on matters related to Berkeley's role on issues of peace and social justice (Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) Section 3.68.070 C), including the initiation and development of cultural and educational foreign exchange (BMC Section 3.68.070G); and

WHEREAS, Hurricanes Rita and Katrina have devastated parts of the Gulf Coast with flooding that health authorities contend could result in disease; and

WHEREAS, the United States rejected an offer by Cuba to provide over 1,500 doctors and medics and 83 tons of medical supplies to assist disaster victims; and

WHEREAS, offers of humanitarian aid by several other nations, including Israel, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, were also rebuffed; and

WHEREAS, United States citizens lack guaranteed national health care, and those whose lives have been disrupted by these disasters do not deserve to suffer further; and

WHEREAS, the decision to accept humanitarian aid in an emergency should not involve any partisan political calculations; and

WHEREAS, tragedies can bring conflicting parties together, as politics were put aside by India and Pakistan in response to a humanitarian crisis caused by the earthquake of October 2005; and

WHEREAS, if a disaster were to strike the City of Berkeley or the State of California, we would want to receive humanitarian assistance from any source that offered it.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Berkeley requests the United States to accept international offers of medical and humanitarian aid for victims of disasters without regard to partisan political calculations, and that a copy of this Resolution along with a cover letter be sent to President George Bush, Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, and Representative Barbara Lee.