

PRESS ADVISORY

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9/11 VICTIMS STILL IN NEED ON EVE OF CLOSURE OF LAST DISASTER AID PROGRAM

**Victims shut out by FEMA programs make a last attempt to access disaster aid;
Press Conference held by community groups and 9/11 victims denouncing continued barriers**

What: September 11th victims, workers and community residents seeking disaster aid before time runs out will join the Beyond Ground Zero (BGZ) Network and the Rebuild with Spotlight on the Poor Coalition for a press conference in front of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) office to demand that the agency not shut down its final disaster aid program set to end tomorrow, January 31, at 5 p.m. The Federal government's inhumane termination of its disaster-relief program slams the door in the face of thousands of low-income people hurt by 9/11. Teresa Bueno who will speak at the press conference, is a Dominican resident of the Lower East Side who suffered severe health problems since September 11th 2001.

When: Thursday, January 30, at 12 noon

Where: In front of the offices of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) located on 141 Worth Street.

Why: Over the past 16 months, BGZ and other coalitions, elected officials and community members have persistently denounced FEMA policies that have presented barriers for low-income workers and residents to access critically needed disaster aid assistance, including long delays in the processing of paperwork, documentation requirements that specifically made it harder for low income communities to prove their eligibility, inadequate outreach and strict guidelines. In response, FEMA has made some changes in its requirements but has failed to inform the public about the expanded eligibility and coverage. During this economic time of crisis and due to the vast number of individuals who have not received the assistance they are eligible for, it is critical that MRA extend its deadline beyond January 31st and immediately reform the program to address still-existing barriers.

Furthermore, BGZ denounces the complete failure of the disaster aid programs to address the critical health impact of the September 11th disaster on workers and residents, particularly among low-income communities. The coalition calls for FEMA to re-open the Individual and Family Grant (IFG) program, which was closed at the end of November and was authorized to cover urgent medical costs, and to reform the program so that it will cover critical medical expenses and cobra health insurance costs for workers who lost their health insurance as a result of September 11th.

Who: The **Beyond Ground Zero (BGZ) Network**, a coalition of community and legal organizations, seeks to develop and coordinate collective strategies to ensure the critical and immediate assistance for all low-income individuals impacted by September 11th. In addition, the network promotes organizing and advocacy efforts to demand adequate and fair policies and systems to appropriately address the issues and meet the needs of low-income and immigrant communities, particularly communities of color, in the continued ripple effect of the World Trade Center tragedy.

The **Rebuild with Spotlight on the Poor Coalition**, comprised of 30 community based organizations, was formed to ensure that low-income communities, particularly Chinatown and the Lower East Side, have a voice in the rebuilding process.