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Groups to Urge a Southern Initiative on Climate Change at People's Climate March and Summit

From Texas to Maryland, a delegation of students and professors of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), environmental and social justice advocates, leaders of faith-based organizations, and survivors of Hurricane Katrina will join the People's Climate March and Summit in New York, which precedes the United Nations Climate Summit.

"The painful experiences of Hurricane Katrina compel us to change our thinking that a climate treaty will save the day," said Dr. Beverly Wright, Executive Director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Dillard University. She was displaced for two years from her home and predominantly Africa American neighborhood in New Orleans, which were under eight feet of water during Katrina. "We need a southern initiative on climate change that supports the people who are most vulnerable to hurricanes, droughts, heat waves, and tornadoes and most likely to suffer from racial, social, and economic inequities which set back our ability to be climate resilient," she said.

Although some of the loudest voices denying climate change in the US Congress and Senate come from southern states, the delegation points to the critical role that the South has in climate change. Much of the fossil fuel energy produced in the United States come at the expense of communities in the South, where there is significant air and water pollution and coastal erosion. In both scale and magnitude, climate-related disasters in the South outnumber those in other regions of the country. In addition, the largest number of people who are less likely to rebound from a climate-related disaster as a result of social and economic disadvantages live in the South.

"A southern initiative is critical to the United States making and keeping a commitment on climate change," said Dr. Robert Bullard, Dean of the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Policy at Texas Southern University in Houston. "The work of people, organizations, and institutions represented in this delegation is about climate action as part of the long fight for human rights and civil rights to bring about racial, gender, environmental, economic, and social justice in this country," he said.

Members of the delegation have organized teach-ins at Empire State College on Saturday, September 20. The first teach-in focuses on how HBCUs can support communities in being climate resilient and effective advocates for transforming environmental and economic policies. This teach-in is followed by a workshop on the actions being taken by organizations in the south to sustain communities and ecosystems. The delegation will be near the front of the People's Climate March on Sunday, September 21, where organizers have reserved space for marchers who hail from communities on the frontlines of climate change.

"The People's Climate March and Summit are about our human rights and how we want to live free from the control that the oil, gas, and coal industries currently have over our laws and economy," said Nathalie Walker, who co-directs Advocates for Environmental Human Rights in New Orleans. "This is a critical time as our coastal cities in the South are projected to be under water if we don't take control," she said.

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