



LOWER EAST SIDE – CHINATOWN CONSORTIUM

*Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund * Cabrini Immigrant Services * Chinese Staff & Workers Association * Chinese United Methodist Church * Hamilton-Madison House * Immigrant Social Services * It's Time * NMASS Lower East Side Workers Center * St. Teresa's Parish*

VISION STATEMENT

PREAMBLE

The Lower East Side and Chinatown have long been the home of immigrant and native-born working people of all backgrounds who invested their lives' work into making these communities strong.

Despite the commitment of its workers and residents, the Lower East Side and Chinatown did not always receive the assistance of its elected officials and civil servants responsible for the well being of the community. The government often ignored sweatshop working conditions, hazardous environmental conditions, lack of low-income housing, inadequate access to quality of health care and other vital services – all of which has led to crippling health and economic problems and unimagineable stress for workers and their families.

The World Trade Center disaster dealt a devastating blow to these already impoverished east-side communities of Lower Manhattan. Not only were workers and residents traumatized as they witnessed the collapse of the Twin Towers into dust, thousands lost their steady jobs and health insurance, leaving their families in disarray. The only immediate response to human needs was by area workers and residents themselves, who acted quickly, not only to help out at Ground Zero, but also to assist neighbors to cope with both emotional trauma and a desperate need of basic utility services cut off by the disaster. Although the government was keenly aware of the disaster's impact – particularly on low-income people – its discriminatory relief policies shamelessly locked out the working poor and failed outright to address pressing economic and health-related needs.

The Lower East Side & Chinatown Consortium (LESCC) represents the working people, clergy, community organizations and small businesses that refuse to allow their communities to be bulldozed by failed government policies that have invested recovery funds into corporate and real estate profits than into the well-being of working people hit hard by 9/11. We believe that there is an alternative to the harsh health and development policies promoted by the government through agencies like the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC). We demand nothing less than policies that rebuild the health, housing and economic security for the people who kept Lower Manhattan strong even after the 9/11 disaster, while their own government's rebuilding policies knocked them down.

I. HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

The trust and health of Lower Manhattan's workers and residents were perhaps most betrayed by the government's immoral response to the toxic fallout of the World Trade Center tragedy. The government allowed the current 9/11 health crisis to develop not only by covering up the truth about the toxicity of the post-9/11 environment, but by refusing to acknowledge its role in permitting hazardous work and living conditions to sicken the community long before 9/11. This reckless inaction by our elected leaders – at a time when we needed them most – set the tone for the destructive public health policy to come.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took instructions from federal, state and city government officials to ignore the unique needs of this disaster and also refused to comply with the Stafford Act, which established its scope of duty. As a result, tens of thousands of displaced workers were denied needed rental assistance and living expenses; tens of thousands more area residents affected by the toxic fallout were denied any meaningful health care or environmental clean-up. Recent investigations have shown that FEMA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) carefully followed strict orders from the White House refusing to acknowledge toxic contamination of Lower Manhattan.

Almost 7,000 people surveyed by LESCC members since September 11, 2001 have reported new or worsened health problems appearing only after the disaster. The vast majority of these include respiratory problems such as exacerbated asthma, newly developed allergies, and chronic cough and colds. It is clear to those of us who live, work and have talked to our neighbors and co-workers: there is a growing public health crisis caused by the 9/11 fallout and subsequent government inaction – and we cannot afford to wait to take action.

We demand that the government protect the health of all workers and residents of Lower Manhattan affected by the post-9/11 toxic environment and government cover-up of this problem by:

- Creating a long-term health study and treatment program that serves affected people living/working outside of immediate Ground Zero area;
- Providing health insurance for all those living and working in New York affected by the disaster;
- Making reparations to those suffering permanent health damage resulting from 9/11 toxic fallout and government misconduct and inaction.

II. HOUSING & LAND USE

The Lower East Side and Chinatown have always been vibrant *communities* because of the working people who toiled to earn an honest living, raise families, and make these neighborhoods livable. In the eyes of wealthy real estate developers and unscrupulous slumlords, it is a valuable piece of real estate known as the “Last Frontier.” A study by the Two Bridges Neighborhood Council shows that the displacement of low- and moderate-income families from housing they could truly afford has intensified steadily over the past two decades. However, after the World Trade Center tragedy, developers and slumlords saw a perfect opportunity to make millions in profits and cleanse Lower Manhattan of the poor once and for all. Both residents of tenement buildings and public housing are reporting more frequent use of bribes, intimidation and anti-poor housing regulations by housing management to push low-income families onto the streets.

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), designated by President Bush and Governor Pataki as the chief agency directing rebuilding efforts, fell disastrously short of meeting the real housing needs of those most impacted by 9/11 when it proposed its ill-conceived Residential Grant Program. The program was created with only a fraction of the \$2.7 billion in Community Development Block Grants – federal anti-poverty funds – given to New York after the disaster; most of the money went into repair of the damaged buildings of large financial corporations. The program ultimately denied benefits to thousands of low-income residents as well as small businesses north of Delancey Street, and left all working poor of the Lower East Side and Chinatown without any lasting protection for their rent-regulated or subsidized housing.

We demand that the government expand and improve the LMDC Residential Grant Program in the following ways, so as to distribute needed assistance to residents who lived through the 9/11 disaster and have suffered economic and health problems as a result:

- Extend the Residential Grant Program to assist all residents and small businesses south of 14th Street;
- End discrimination by eliminating “zones” and equalizing financial assistance;
- Create a simplified application and appeals process to distribute aid in a timely manner.

We demand that the government prevent displacement of current residents of Lower East Side and Chinatown by preserving all existing low-income housing and prioritizing rebuilding funds to restore low-income housing:

- Protect existing low-income housing, including using “surplus” funds to replenish funding for NYCHA, Section 8, Mitchell Lama and other publicly subsidized housing
- Amend federal regulations governing Liberty Bonds to prioritize the funding of new low-income housing in Lower Manhattan
- Restore low-income housing in the Lower East Side to pre-9/11 levels
- Begin restoration of low-income housing by expanding the development at Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA) to include *at least* 1000 residential units, 100% of which should be low-income housing*

*The position of the LESCC is based upon a careful analysis of the history of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area, as well as statistics confirming the mass displacement of low-income families from the Lower East Side. The creation of SPURA over 30 years ago led to the displacement of over 2,000 low-income families from the Seward Park site alone. Since the 9/11 tragedy, it is estimated that over 1,000 low-income families have been forced from the Lower East Side and Chinatown communities as a result of the economic and environmental impact of 9/11, and the subsequent discriminatory policies of FEMA and LMDC. Our position is also a response to the NYC Housing Development Corporation and Economic Development Corporation, which have proposed that the majority of the 5-lot site be developed for commercial use, with only 400 *total* residential units (80% at market rate and 20% “affordable”).

III. JOBS & ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The September 11th disaster left tens of thousands of Lower Manhattan workers traumatized not only by the attacks on the World Trade Center, but by the uncertain future into which they faced. Many actively sought immediate assistance from FEMA so they would be able to buy food, pay rent and generally survive – of the thousands who applied for assistance, most received little or no assistance. Private charities filled their need for a limited time, but many were unable to escape hunger, worsened health, unemployment, eviction and homelessness.

Despite claims that the economy has rebounded and that productivity has increased, workers affected by the 9/11 disaster know the ugly truth. Our government has forced businesses to survive by exploiting those still employed and ignored those left unemployed by ending all disaster assistance programs that supported displaced workers. There has been no effective aid to Chinatown garment manufacturers and workers, who took perhaps the hardest blow of all; on the contrary, government helped unscrupulous landlords to speed up the displacement of the garment industry in Lower Manhattan. Home attendants and health aides, as well as full-time mothers and grandmothers, have worked long, hard hours to care for those with new or exacerbated respiratory problems, emotional trauma and other health ailments – putting their own health on the line for little or no compensation.

We demand that the government protect low-income working people who were displaced, injured or suffered economic hardship as a result of the 9/11 disaster through innovative disaster assistance and job creation strategies:

- Create a new disaster assistance program to help affected workers to pay for basic living costs, health expenses, etc.
- Give priority to Lower Manhattan workers and residents affected by the 9/11 disaster for all jobs (construction, maintenance, security, administrative, etc.) created by rebuilding efforts

We demand that the government keep decent jobs in the community by protecting the garment industry and small businesses from displacement caused by 9/11 economic fallout and lack of government disaster assistance:

- Strengthen and maintain the existing zoning regulations designed to protect garment manufacturing jobs and other jobs displaced or threatened by 9/11 economic fallout.
- Create a new rent control and subsidy program to assist garment factory owners and workers keep jobs in Lower Manhattan