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NAACP DECLARES CLIMATE CHANGE TO BE CRUCIAL PROBLEM FACING OUR COMMUNITIES

“Climate Change is a crucial issue facing our world today,” said Hilary O. Shelton, the Director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and the Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy. “Sadly, like most serious problems facing this world, it has a disparate impact on racial and ethnic minorities and low-income Americans.”

“Communities of color have historically experienced environmental inequalities more than any other group of Americans. We have been, and continue to be, exposed to more pollution through the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Furthermore, we have much less access to resources to mitigate these problems, including adequate health care. One need to look no further than New Orleans, where the majority of those who lost everything, including in some cases their lives, in 2005 with Hurricane Katrina, were African American.

“The effects of the increasingly harsh and erratic change in climate are problematic enough as we address new strains of debilitating diseases, more intense flooding, more frequent and intense hurricanes and droughts, scorching hot temperatures, for starters. This along with the specific and unique challenges faced by racial and ethnic communities’ compound climate change’s devastating effects and greatly exacerbates our suffering. Disadvantage and discrimination affect them at every stage, including in the immediate aftermath of climate-related disasters and during official planning at local, national and international levels for coping with the current and future impacts of climate change.

“I am pleased to report that the plight of low income people and communities of color is beginning to attract some much-needed attention. As one report by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states,

“Even though they are among the worst affected, the effects of the changing climate are bad enough in themselves – more frequent hurricanes and droughts, burning temperatures, new plagues of diseases and worse floods, for instance. But the general failure to recognize and respond to minorities’ resulting problems greatly exacerbates their suffering.”

Yet there is much more to be done. We must continue to publicize not only the disparate impact of climate change phenomenon on racial and ethnic minorities, but we must continue to clamor loudly for action to mitigate climate change. We must call on our elected officials to base all of their policies, whether they are related to energy, the environment, housing, foreign affairs, or any other subject, on the very real effects of climate change. We must begin to look forward; we must pass progressive policies which will address climate change.

Until that time, we must also make plans to equitably mitigate the impact of climate change. We must prepare for the impact of hurricanes, floods, and drought. We must figure out how we will address the “urban heat island effect” — a physical phenomenon that makes urban areas hotter than outlying regions, and by which it is estimated that African Americans are 150 – 200% more likely to die of heat than Caucasians.

We must put policies into place which provide assistance to those who cannot afford skyrocketing heating costs associated with increased cold as well as help those who cannot endure higher temperatures due to climate change.

We must do more not only to combat climate change, but until we adequately tackle this scourge, we should do what we can to minimize the harm inflicted.

Thank you so much for participating in this important briefing and for taking the views of the NAACP into consideration. I am so sorry I couldn't be here today to share in this crucial information sharing session. If you carry away one message from today, it should be that climate change is a crucial issue facing our world today, and that sadly, like most serious problems facing this world, it has a disparate impact on racial and ethnic minorities and low-income Americans.