

**STATEMENT OF LORI R. WEST, GULF REGION DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL
RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT CHAIR OF SOUTH MISSISSIPPI
VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER (SMVOAD)**

**BEFORE THE DISASTER RECOVERY SUBCOMMITTEE
SENATOR MARY LANDRIEU CHAIR
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**GULF COAST RECOVERY: AN EXAMINATION OF CLAIMS ADMINISTRATION AND
SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL
JANUARY 27, 2011**

Madame Chairwoman and members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to be here today to provide testimony to this prestigious Subcommittee on behalf of the South Mississippi Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster or SMVOAD. I would ask that my formal statement be submitted for the record.

I am the current chair of the Board of SMVOAD, a coalition of nearly 30 human service organizations that develop disaster response plans and respond to citizen needs following a natural or man-made disaster. I am also a principal in International Relief and Development (IRD), a global, non-profit organization which conducts humanitarian and development programming in more than 40 nations around the world including programming here in the United States. We are based in Arlington, Virginia. IRD is dedicated to improving the lives and livelihoods of the world's most vulnerable people wherever they may be.

Since 2005, the members of SMVOAD have been working together to address the effects of Hurricane Katrina, the nation's largest natural disaster. Members of SMVOAD include the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, Hope CDA, Interfaith Disaster Task Force, International Relief and Development US, Lutheran Episcopal Services of Mississippi, Salvation Army, the STEPS Coalition, and United Way South Mississippi. A complete list of members is attached to my written statement. SMVOAD is affiliated with Mississippi VOAD and with the National VOAD organization headquartered in Virginia. The VOAD mission is to respond proactively to disasters that affect US residents anywhere in the United States.

Since June of 2010 and continuing through into January 2011, SMVOAD and IRD have held frequent meetings with British Petroleum (BP) to try and address the effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the residents of the Gulf Coast. We have submitted multiple humanitarian proposals to BP and revised those proposals in response to BP's feedback. The time and effort expended by SMVOAD members on this issue has been significant because we believe the problems faced by the people of Mississippi and those all along the Gulf Coast are considerable.

I would like to draw your attention to an August 2010 study by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. I believe this study is important because it has identified some key findings which clearly show the impact the spill has had on our local populations. More specifically, the study states the following:

- More than 40 percent of the population living within 10 miles of the coast had experienced some direct exposure to the oil spill.
- More than one-third of parents reported that their children had experienced either physical symptoms or mental health distress as a consequence of the oil spill.
- One in five households has seen their income decrease as a result of the oil spill, and eight percent have lost jobs.
- Only five percent of coastal residents reported having received any cash or debit cards from BP, although more than 15 percent believe they may be eligible for compensation from BP for health consequences of the oil spill.
- More than one-quarter of coastal residents think they may have to move from the area because of the oil spill.
- The oil spill had the greatest impact on those with the fewest economic resources, much like Hurricane Katrina. Coastal residents earning less than \$25,000 a year were more likely to report having lost income than those earning more.

In the summer of 2010, the United Way of South Mississippi, United Way for Jackson & George Counties, Gulf Coast Business Council, and the Mississippi Center for Nonprofits conducted a survey of nonprofit organizations, including those that provide assistance for housing, shelter, food, clothing, health, education, employment, finances, arts, and tourism, to measure the impact of the oil spill on residents. The survey found that the top six issues facing residents were stress, loss of job or income, increased need for food assistance, problems meeting car, rent or mortgage payments, problem purchasing prescription drugs, and loss of health insurance or other benefits. Also, nearly 70 percent of the non-profit organizations that reported a decrease in fundraising since May 1, 2010 indicated that the oil spill was a significant or moderate reason for that decrease. More than 80 percent of all the non-profits surveyed expected a decrease in fundraising the next 90 days.

Despite these negative impacts on our community and the heroic effort put forth by SMVOAD and other nonprofit agencies, BP has not yet provided the funding necessary to address the multiple social service needs of Gulf Coast residents. I have been asked by our members to provide a copy of major VOAD proposals including proposals to address various aspects of the spills impact on our community including:

- Housing;
- Finances;
- Job and vocational training; and
- Livelihood needs.

These proposals have also been included herein for the record.

Our members believe that ongoing conversations with BP have provided some feedback regarding these proposals. But, BP has stated that any funding of these types of urgent programs will indicate culpability for indirect or tertiary effects of the oil spill and thus they seem to have made a decision not to fund these critical programs.

There was some hope among SMVOAD members when BP agreed to award \$52 million for mental health services for Gulf Coast residents in August 2010. SMVOAD worked with the Boys and Girls

Clubs of South Mississippi to present BP with a comprehensive program to address both mental health and basic social service needs for at least 1,300 residents affected by the spill. It remains unclear to our members why the bulk of the proposal was not funded, and no funds were allocated for victims' urgent social services or real day-to-day needs such as food, rent, transportation, and other critical financial needs.

Based on our members' experience serving tens of thousands of Hurricane Katrina victims, SMVOAD member organizations can say with confidence that offering mental health and case management services without also providing for critical housing and vocational needs is largely ineffective.

We would like the Subcommittee members to note that many organizations have expended their own resources to assess and/or address the impact of the oil spill on low to moderate income families. Between May and September 2010, my organization, IRD, enrolled 976 clients in its case management and direct services programs, compared to 266 clients during the same period in 2009. Requests for rental assistance also increased from 236 during the first four months of 2010 to 678 in the five months between May and September 2010. In addition, IRD's YouthBuild program, a program that provides job training and GED preparation to at-risk youth in the Gulf area, saw its applicant pool rise from 142 in 2009 to 314 in 2010, immediately after the oil spill.

IRD and the members of SMVOAD are addressing the needs of those affected by the oil spill through a range of direct and referral services. In addition, the VOAD organizations in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi will hold a tri-state conference in November 2011 in Jackson, Mississippi, to address the unmet social and human service needs of Gulf Coast residents and to create greater regional collaborations to address this current disaster as well as future events. We urge members of this Subcommittee to come to our meeting and participate with us in this conference.

In closing, I know this subcommittee recognizes that many nonprofit organizations in the Gulf Coast region need additional resources to deliver effective services that will help residents who have been affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill recover both in the short and long term. But, today, I am also representing the SMVOAD to ask for more direct support and engagement on this critical issue with BP and its various representatives.

I am pleased to answer any questions about the experiences of SMVOAD and IRD in responding to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. I thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing and giving us a chance to give voice to those who need your help. Thank you.

South Mississippi Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster: Member List
American Red Cross
ARC South Central MS Chapter
Bay Area Food Bank
Catholic Diocese of Biloxi
Coastal Family Health
Gulf Coast Community Foundation
Habitat for Humanity Bay Waveland
Hancock Housing Resource Center
Hancock County Retired and Senior Volunteer Program
Hands On Gulf Coast
Hijra House
Hope CDA
Interfaith Disaster Task Force
International Relief Development
Lutheran Episcopal Services of Mississippi
Mental Health Association of MS
Meridian United Methodist Church
Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)
Mississippi Interfaith Disaster Task Force
Presbyterian Church of America
Presbyterian Disaster Response
Southern District LCMS Recovery Assistance
The Salvation Army
United Jewish Communities
United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)
United Way of South Mississippi

South Mississippi Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster: “Friends of” Organizations List	
American Red Cross, New Orleans	Mississippi Department of Mental Health
ARC South Central MS Chapter	Mississippi State University Extension
Back Bay Mission	Money Management International
Humane Society of South Mississippi	Pass Road to the Future
Immaculate Heart CDC	Save the Children
Meridian Institute	Women in Construction
Mississippi Center for Volunteer Services	