

BEYOND GROUND ZERO

• Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund • Chinese Staff and Workers Association •
• Commission on the Public's Health System • National Mobilization Against SweatShops • Urban Justice Center •

September 10, 2008

Open Letter to Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain:

It has been seven years since the 9/11 attacks and to date there has been no federal acknowledgement of the extent and scope of the health crisis resulting from the toxic fallout, one of this country's worst man-made environmental disasters. There has been no federal support to residents, area workers and students for the health problems we are suffering as a result of the toxic air. While many of us are struggling with life threatening illnesses and slowly dying, Bush has turned his back on us for seven years. As Presidential candidates, you have highlighted the importance of health care. In light of the coming election, we are asking you as candidates, what is your position on the 9/11 public health crisis?

The federal government must take responsibility for the devastation that the 9-11 toxic fallout and the subsequent government misconduct has wreaked on the lives of so many. The fall of the towers contaminated the air with lethal toxins and irritants such as asbestos, lead, mercury, benzene, fiberglass, dioxin, pulverized concrete and hydrochloric acid. Lower Manhattan should have been evacuated. No one should have been allowed back in to Lower Manhattan until a safe and proper clean-up was done. Instead President Bush and Mayor Giuliani sent residents, workers and students back into harm's way just to open up Wall Street. Their decision created a health crisis that we will live with for years. Their decision was not just wrong, but a scandal and a crime.

The federal government's lie that the air was safe has caused us life-altering illnesses, such as respiratory, gynecological, neurological, mental, skin, and digestive problems, as well as cancers. Women's health has been especially hit hard. We suffer a wide range of gynecological and reproductive health problems. Our children who were exposed have disturbing health and learning problems, and some exposed in utero had lower birth weights. More of us are getting sick and dying. Many of us can no longer work or cannot work full-time jobs. We need life-long quality healthcare, monitoring, and comprehensive studies into the connections between our health problems and the toxic air exposure in order to properly diagnose and treat our health problems so that we have the best chance to recover.

The federal government's misconduct and failure to adequately study the health problems from the beginning has meant that treatment and study has not kept pace with the increasingly complicated and worsening health problems affecting residents and workers. Existing studies do not document the extent of the health problem. Therefore, current treatment programs are unable to fully understand and effectively treat the vast array of health effects including respiratory but also dermatological, neurological, gynecological or cancers. Nonetheless, studies from the WTC Environmental Health Centers (EHC), the only program that serves all residents and workers, do confirm what our communities have been saying: exposed residents are three times more likely than other New Yorkers to have respiratory problems, and those who lived or worked as far north as 14th Street are disproportionately suffering from respiratory and mental health symptoms.

The federal government must take responsibility for its misinformation and misconduct in the aftermath of 9/11 and provide life-long accessible, quality treatment for all those affected. While the City of New York has stepped in to provide modest funding to sustain the EHC treatment program built by the community, President Bush and his CDC are threatening to block the first-ever federal funding for non-responders from reaching this program. Now, Congress is poised to address the nation's 9/11 health crisis, but still refuses to entitle all of us to lifelong treatment, no matter what type of 9/11-related illness we have or where we were exposed. Any 9/11 health legislation must provide lifelong treatment to all of us in the diaspora of the 9/11-affected.

We expect the new leader in Washington to have the vision to put forward the policies and programs needed to finally secure 9/11 screening, health treatment and monitoring for all those exposed, comprehensive study into the connections between our health problems and the toxic air, and compensation for those suffering permanent health damage. We call on you to demonstrate this nation's commitment to the health and lives of countless individuals and families for whom September 11 is still very present. We look forward to receiving your response by October 10th, so that we can publish it along with this letter.

Sincerely,

Beyond Ground Zero Network

We will be publishing this letter and your response on You Tube, Google, Facebook and My Space.