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Katrina Makes Twice Refugees Asian American Press (Minnesota) Just as millions of Gulf Coast residents affected by Hurricane Katrina, one of the most devastating and costliest natural disasters in U.S. history, several thousand Southeast Asian communities evacuated prior to the hurricane not knowing they would lose everything. The one-time refugee population that came to grips with building a new life after a war will now rebuild for a second time after a natural disaster of unimaginable proportions. Current damage estimates range as high as \$26 billion, as thousands have been left homeless and millions more lack electricity. "We encourage each of you to reach out to our extended neighbors and families by supporting local fundraising efforts organized Vietnamese American organizations or by supporting the American Red Cross," said Hung Nguyen, National Congress of Vietnamese Americans. "We wanted to update you with information regarding the Vietnamese Americans who were stranded at Lavang Church in the Versailles section of New Orleans. Through the actions of many outside the affected area, we were able to help those in the affected area." From New Orleans, across Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, the Gulf Coast region is a magnet for people wanting to continue a life on the sea. Because of their proximity to the sea, and their vulnerability to hurricanes, most residents took little more than a days clothes to the evacuation center, not realizing they would lose everything. A national Lao media source reported Lao and Cambodian-American residents of New Orleans evacuated to New Iberia, La., where they were given refuge in the local Buddhist temple, Wat Thammarattanam of Louisiana. They remained until sent off to Houston or other permanent shelters. By-in-large most of the displaced Asian community are Vietnamese that lived off the sea in coastal towns. The Vietnamese community comprises over half of all Asian Americans along the Gulf States. In New Orleans, the Vietnamese families sought shelter from the storm in New Orleans churches, such as Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, and the Lavang Church in Versailles. After the storm, rising floodwaters trapped hundreds of people in the churches, "growing weak and sick from lack of food and water plus the heat," said one blogger that was carried over Vietnamese community emails. Some would be rescued and taken to the Superdome, either by helicopter, or crowded in the back of an over-the-road "18-wheeler" truck that somehow kept going through the water. Those who could walk or had a boat moved to higher ground – and some faced the armed street gangs. The sick and elderly waited in the church with a priest who stayed with them. Some stayed all night on a dry, risen highway without food and water. Many required medical attention. Along the way many friends and family became separated, but somehow knew a city evacuation was imminent. They all agreed to meet in Houston at Duc Me LaVang Church. "Please pray even if you haven't for awhile, pray," said another blogger. That's the only thing that's going to help us now." Many of the bloggers said to meet on www.AsianNola.com, a New Orleans Vietnamese community site that hasn't seen any activity since the hurricane struck. "How can we assure them that violence is unnecessary and that everyone will get out?" asked Anna, another blogger. "Why can't we just pull together? No one will be left behind if we could help it." Alabama is in great need of Vietnamese translators to help conduct needs assessment with the Vietnamese communities. The Vietnamese community of Houston has been working around the clock to assist the relief efforts. Chi Tieu Muoi Huynh organized an effort to raise more than \$10,000 in two days. The money went to serve the immediate needs for more than 850 refugees that are currently residing in churches, convents and temples. Volunteers from BPSOS, Lend A Hand, VSA at University of Houston, Catholic Youth groups, VN Teamwork and Asian Family Services Agency assisted Le Canh Hai and the Dong DA Minh (Dominican Sisters Convent) of Houston with helping 100 families to fill in their online application for disaster support. Within one week, the Vietnamese Community of Houston and Vicinity and the Office of Hubert Vo and Radio Saigon Houston together raised more than \$40,000 for the Katrina Relief Fund. The VCSA raised more than \$10,000 for the same cause. Tuyet Duong from Boat People SOS is currently working around the clock to coordinate all the volunteer effort in all different areas: FEMA