



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson**

**“Lessons Learned: Ensuring the Delivery of Donated Goods to Survivors of Catastrophes”**

July 30, 2008 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Subcommittee on Emergency Communication, Preparedness, and Response and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery hearing entitled “Lessons Learned: Ensuring the Delivery of Donated Goods to Survivors of Catastrophes”:

“It is disappointing that almost three years after Hurricane Katrina, we are still discovering critical governmental flaws which must be corrected. Today, we examine FEMA’s distribution of donated supplies that were originally intended for Katrina survivors. It is almost as if three years after that catastrophic hurricane, FEMA does not realize that there are still survivors in need of basic necessities.

In the weeks since news networks began airing the story of donated supplies, my office has been contacted by various non-profit organizations in Mississippi telling us that they still need these supplies for Hurricane Katrina survivors.

I have learned that the State of Mississippi chose to accept the supplies and has been housing them in a warehouse in Pearl. I have written Mississippi’s Governor, Haley Barbour, and Director Jim Marler of the Mississippi Office of Surplus Property, and requested that any remaining Katrina donated supplies be given to those non-profit organizations that are assisting the survivors. I will be happy to furnish the names of the survivors and the non-profit organizations to the Governor and Mr. Marler.

It is clear to me that FEMA did not properly manage and distribute the donated supplies after Hurricane Katrina. That is why in 2006, Congress passed comprehensive legislation to reform FEMA and give it the tools it needs to respond to disasters, both large and small.

Since the enactment of that law, we know that FEMA has made an effort to improve the process. But I find it disturbing that these supplies were warehoused for two years, designated as surplus and given away earlier this year.

So, I want to know how FEMA arrived at the conclusion that these donated goods were no longer needed by the survivors. Specifically, what outreach was done to validate the donations?

It is this Committee’s sincere hope that we will hear that the logistics capabilities have been dramatically revamped and that states and non-profits are working together to ensure that supplies reach the intended people.

The Committee also understands that shortly after Katrina, FEMA awarded a \$3 million dollar grant to The Aidmatrix Foundation to create a software program to better streamline donated goods. And while Aidmatrix chose not to testify today, I look forward to hearing from our State and non-profit witnesses about the effectiveness of this software. Specifically, I want to know how FEMA is alerting States and non-profits about this software program so that they can receive donated goods should a catastrophic event occur.”

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978