



# An Appeal to the Philanthropic Community at Large: Hurricane Ian



Dear Friends, Family and Allies,

Photo and video footage documenting the horrific aftermath of Hurricane Ian continues to dominate our vision of what a natural disaster looks like. And for good reason, considering the path of destruction Ian left in southwest and central Florida, and up the Eastern seaboard with varying degrees of severity and a death toll of well over 100. Boats and cars strewn across debris piled up along the roads and surviving, battered buildings, and impassable bridges disconnecting entire island populations all reinforce this surreal version of catastrophe.

Over 7,000 patients were evacuated from upwards of 150 healthcare facilities, including nine hospitals and 43 nursing homes that lacked running water. With nearly all power restored in the Carolinas, and approximately 85% of power restored in impacted regions of Florida, many government officials and politicians have expressed optimism in terms of bringing essential utilities and services (power, gas, potable water) back online. Now, it's dealing with FEMA, state bodies, the National Flood Insurance Program, homeowners' and renters' insurance, and the associated cost this will have for national insurance companies. These are the major headlines.

Missing from these major headlines is the human experience of Black and Brown communities who, in part thanks to decades of Census undercounts, have not received the same level of federal funding to combat aging infrastructure and the closures of rural hospitals and clinics. Communities that are still waiting for government aid to tackle the disproportionate state of ruin that most historically marginalized communities, rural and urban, now expect upon returning home after disaster strikes. Communities that know they will likely be last in line for government sponsored reconstruction and will personally encounter more challenges in accessing federal and state emergency resources.

Only now, more than a week later, are these headlines beginning to touch on the devastation in communities living paycheck to paycheck like Harlem Heights, a small, predominately Hispanic enclave near Fort Myers where many rely on hotel or tourism-based jobs for employment and have been out of work since before Ian's landfall.

Historically African American communities like Dunbar, the only of its kind in Fort Myers proper, which also has a growing Hispanic and Latino population, or River Park in Naples, another Historically African American community that blossomed out of segregationist policy in the mid-1900s and into a community of various ethnicities and cultures. These are only a few examples of such communities.

Meanwhile, the full scope of Hurricane Ian's impact on Florida's community of approximately 700,000 farmworkers (roughly half of whom are undocumented), their wellbeing, and livelihoods, is looking bleak at best. Coming to light now is the havoc river flooding has unleashed on a major agricultural corridor that includes Charlotte, DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, Manatee and Polk counties, where citrus farmers are reporting substantial losses of up to 90% for current harvests, 70% for the upcoming harvest, and 50% for next year's harvest. This equates to roughly two years of total losses, taking a full three to four years to replant and resume citrus production to pre-Ian levels.

With an affordable housing crisis and record-breaking inflation, most of Florida's farmworking population had already been relegated to manufactured home parks or homes that simply could not withstand hurricane Ian's lethal trifecta of wind, storm surge, and rain. In anticipation of events like Hurricane Ian, having the flexibility—financial and otherwise—to evacuate is a luxury. And while most historically marginalized communities were already getting priced out of flood protection (or worse, ineligible), those fortunate enough to have coverage are still burdened with astronomical insurance deductibles and long waits.

There is little time to process or grieve when you are displaced and facing immense recovery efforts. The trauma of losing their homes, employment, and in some cases family members or friends will have a devastating impact on these communities' future economic and mental health. For the undocumented, this trauma is compounded when language barriers or fears of deportation keeps them from calling emergency services in life-threatening circumstances or from seeking government assistance (FEMA, National Flood Insurance Program, etc.) after the fact. In a cruel twist of fate, displaced and newly unemployed migrant farmworkers and their families will likely bear the brunt of the exhaustive manual labor necessary to rebuild such large swaths of Florida.



In chronicling our collective past, it is still clear that those worst affected by the climate crisis, especially in the South, are historically marginalized communities where environmental justice and racial justice have become deeply intertwined. Over the years, Justice Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal (JFDRR) grantees—small, rural community organizations—have compiled key community profile data that includes the names and ages of entire households, in addition to their healthcare providers, medical conditions and medications, nearest of kin, and transit needs, among others. JFDRR grants empower grantees to build trusted coordinated response teams that frequently act as a community's first responder. Moreover, JFDRR grantee partners are better equipped to help local

governing bodies work with FEMA and the state in securing emergency financial aid and restoring other imperative services in their towns and counties. At the same time, this disaster exacerbates voter suppression, and access to voting precincts and ballot boxes in affected areas, though more markedly in these communities of color.

Environmental justice concerns continue to deepen in the face of climate change and natural disasters, like Hurricane Ian, another in a mounting list of “100-year-events” that seemingly occur annually. With these 100-year-events growing in frequency and scale (last year’s Hurricane Irma!), grassroots organizations are increasingly relying on JFDRR grants for emergency resources.

SPF continues to use every resource at its disposal to help meet this demand and keep historically marginalized, rural (and urban, in the case of JFDRR grants), communities in the South intact. In that vein, SPF is proactively sending out JFDRR grant applications to its network of grassroots organizations in Florida, North and South Carolina and will maintain support well after the extent of Hurricane Ian’s destruction has been documented. Promoting a renewal process that is racially, environmentally, and economically inclusive and equitable—one that leaves the communities it serves tangibly stronger and better able to withstand future disasters—is critical to the foundation’s mission.

So, once again and on a personal note, I am making an urgent appeal to our philanthropic partners and community at large to support this vital work. I am equally grateful for your insight and willingness to connect SPF to other parties interested in sending disaster relief to the rural South. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me directly if you have any questions.

In solidarity and gratitude,

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