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For Immediate Release

Contact: Beverly Cheuvont

**23 CONGREGATIONS CELEBRATE DIVERSITY AND 'FAITH IN ACTION'  
BY BUILDING AFFORDABLE HOMES IN OCEAN HILL-BROWNSVILLE, BROOKLYN**

**CHRISTIANS, JEWS, MUSLIMS, JAINS AND SIKHS JOIN HABITAT FOR HUMANITY - NEW YORK CITY  
FOR OUR 9TH ANNUAL BUILDING ON FAITH WEEKEND**

Brooklyn, NY, Oct. 18-19—At a time when conflicts and intolerance among communities of faith regularly make headlines, people from 23 faith groups came together this weekend, building Habitat for Humanity homes for New York families in need and reaching across the aisles of the city's churches, synagogues, mosques and temples.

**Christians, Jews, Muslims, Jains** and **Sikhs** joined Habitat for Humanity - New York City's 9th Annual Building on Faith, a two-day home-building event that celebrates diversity and puts faith into action. (A list of participating congregations is attached).

More than 75 New Yorkers, representing a vast range of religious affiliations, installed drywall and insulation in Habitat-NYC's 41-unit affordable condominium complex in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn, one of the city's lowest-income neighborhoods. They worked side-by-side with the low-income families who will own these homes.

"Together, we are celebrating the rich diversity of our faith partners in New York City as we build affordable homes and advocate for social justice for all New Yorkers," said **Josh Lockwood**, Executive Director of Habitat-NYC.

"Habitat-NYC is known for building homes, improving the lives of our homeowner families and strengthening communities," he added. "As we see this weekend, Habitat-NYC also builds common ground where New Yorkers from all walks of life can unite to help solve our terrible housing crisis."

During a luncheon program, faith leaders discussed how their religions interpret and practice the principles of putting "faith in action" and "social justice."

Speakers included **Alok Lal**, The Jain Center; **Rev. Mark Hallinan**, Assistant for Social Ministries, Society of Jesus, N.Y. Province; **Malika Rushdan**, Director of Temporary Housing for Women, Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) Relief; **Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky**, Congregation Anshe Chesed; **Mary Ellen Kris**, Park Avenue United Methodist Church.

**Rabbi Bob Kaplan** of the New York Center for Community and Coalition Building, likened the event to “partnering with God to create a better world.” He told volunteer builders: “God created this world for you. When something in the world needs fixing—we are obligated to fix it. This is our partnership with God.”

**Mary Ellen Kris**, a member of Park Avenue United Methodist Church and a seminary student, said: “No matter what our religion, we are all dependent on God. We are interrelated and we share a common core.” She added that building with Habitat-NYC and people of many religions “has deepened my faith.”

In small groups, volunteer builders talked about how they put their faith into action. **Euline Williams** of ICNA noted that Muslims view religion as a way of life, rather than as ritual. Charity is a central tenet. “Everything we own is from Allah, so if you have \$10 and only need \$5, the extra \$5 was, in a sense, ever really yours.”

“How can you sleep in a warm bed when your neighbor is cold?” said **Malika Rushdan** of ICNA, discussing her view on charity.

**Elena Boyd** of St. Ignatius of Loyola, a Roman Catholic Church, said that “we live through the example of Jesus, that everyone is worthy of dignity and respect.”

**Elvis Nimako**, a member of the Church of Pentecost, summed up much of the weekend’s conversation when he said, “I love people, and the more you learn about them, the more you realize how similar you are. That’s what I’m learning today: We are different, but at the same time, we share so many beliefs.”

Habitat-NYC’s Atlantic Avenue site is a state-of-the-art green complex of three, four-story buildings with a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom condos. Future homeowners must earn between 45 to 80 percent of the city’s area median income (\$34,560 to \$61,450 for a family of four) and be willing to work at least 300 hours per adult to help build their homes.

Construction is expected to be completed in 2009.

Ocean Hill-Brownsville is home to more than 85,000 people. According to the local community board, affordable housing is one of the most pressing needs in this community, where the median household income is \$20,714 and one in four residents spends more than half of their income on housing. Fewer than 16 percent of all Ocean Hill-Brownsville residents own their homes.

These 41 Habitat-NYC homes will increase the supply of affordable housing in this area and help revitalize the neighborhood.

Habitat-NYC is still accepting applications for two-bedroom units. For details and an application form, please go to [www.habitatnyc.org](http://www.habitatnyc.org) and click on Own a Habitat Home.

*Habitat-NYC transforms lives and our city by uniting all New Yorkers around the cause of decent, affordable housing. With the help of an average of 10,000 volunteers every year, Habitat-NYC has built more than 180 affordable homes in the five boroughs of New York City.*

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## **Building on Faith 2008 Congregations**

### Saturday

Bridge Street AWME Church  
Church of Pentecost  
Church of the Heavenly Rest  
Concord Baptist Church  
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church  
ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) Relief  
The Jain Center  
John Street United Methodist Church  
Marble Collegiate Church  
Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
St. Ignatius Loyola Roman Catholic Church  
St. James Episcopal Church  
True Holy Church  
United Sikhs  
St. Markella's Greek Orthodox Church

### Sunday

Congregation Ansche Chesed  
Congregation Rodeph Sholom  
John Street United Methodist Church  
Kehilat Hadar  
Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
St. Bart's Episcopal Church  
Temple Emanu-El  
Congregation B'nai Jeshurun