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GROWING NATIONAL MOMENTUM BUILDS FOR "COUNTDOWN TO FAIRNESS" CAMPAIGN TO REPEAL ROCKEFELLER DRUG LAWS IN NEW YORK

NATIONAL MOBILIZATION PLANNED AT JUNE 4TH 2003 REPEAL DEADLINE

NEW YORK, NY May 12, 2003 -- A growing chorus of members of the U.S. Congress, national civil rights and human rights leaders are joining Russell Simmons and the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network and Mothers of the NY Disappeared to build an unprecedented national coalition to demand the immediate repeal of the Rockefeller Drug Laws in the State of New York. This mobilization will set a precedent for the repeal of similar laws that have been established in other states since the 1973 Rockefeller Drug Laws were enacted.

Thirty years ago, the State of New York passed into law the Rockefeller Drug Laws, which required mandatory long prison terms, up to 15 years to life, for possession or sale of small amounts of drugs. These laws took away discretion in sentencing from trial judges and, as a consequence, thousands of people have been imprisoned unfairly and unjustly. At a time when many States, including New York, are facing billion dollar deficits, the urgency of repealing these repressive laws will have a significant impact in helping States to resolve their budget crises.

Russell Simmons, Chairman of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, emphasized, "The 'Countdown to Fairness' represents the broadest coalition ever assembled on this important issue. The hip-hop community's active involvement will help Governor Pataki and other State officials to see and feel the will of the people as we demand the repeal of these wack laws."

"It seems to have more energy," said "Countdown To Fairness" supporter and Oscar-winning actress Susan Sarandon of bringing the hip-hop element into the ongoing battle. "Whenever you can draw on a broad-based coalition, it can help, and I think that it's been infused with a new energy that'll be very constructive."

"The repeal of the Rockefeller Drug Laws is a national priority for all fair-minded people," emphasized Elijah Cummings (D-MD), Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

"Our leaders in Albany have talked about reform for years while thousands of low-level, non-violent drug offenders remain in jail without good reason. At a time when we need to focus our limited resources on educating our children, caring for those who are sick, and

punishing those who present true threats to our safety, we must reject these inhumane and wasteful laws. It is time to repeal the Rockefeller Drug Laws once and for all," explained former US HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo.

"We should be spending State funds to educate the children rather than using the costly Rockefeller Drug Laws to unfairly incarcerate their parents," asserted Randy Credico, Director of the Mothers of the NY Disappeared.

"The repeal of these unfair laws is an urgent matter of human rights. Non-violent health and medical issues should not be made criminal issues as the Rockefeller Drug Laws unjustly do," said Jason Flom, CEO Lava Records.

"I don't think it's fair that a young person coming up could make a simple mistake and it can affect their entire lives, preventing them from evolving and moving forward. It's also unfair that minorities are the main people who suffer in these situations. We need to repeal these laws so we can become better people and grow instead of locking these people up and throwing away the key," explained Damon Dash, CEO of Roc-A-Fella Records.

"When, in 1973, Governor Nelson Rockefeller proposed draconian penalties for drug offenders, he said it was time for 'brutal honesty' about drug addiction. Here's the honest truth: The Rockefeller Drug Laws are unjust, unfair, inefficient - and exorbitantly wasteful of human lives and economic resources. We knew this thirty years ago. It is no less true today," added Donna Lieberman, Executive Director of New York Civil Liberties Union.

Responded Robert Gangi, Executive Director of the Correctional Association and spokesperson for Drop The Rock: "Thirty years of painful experience have conclusively proved that the Rockefeller Drug Laws are wasteful, ineffective, unjust, racist. It's long past time to remove the stain of these laws from New York State's Penal code."

"We intend to involve thousands of concerned youth on this vital issue. The momentum will build everyday through the 'Countdown To Fairness.' Hip-hop culture has already shown that the energy, vitality and voice of the young will not be silenced as we move to put an end to these dumb laws," concluded Dr. Benjamin Chavis, President of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network.

Tom Golisano, former New York gubernatorial candidate, has also joined the non-partisan "Countdown To Fairness" and has pledged his full support. The "Countdown To Fairness" has been endorsed by US Senators Hilary Clinton and Chuck Schumer, US Congressman Charles Rangel, Elijah Cummings, John Conyers, Gregory Meeks, Ed Towns, Major Owens and Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Former Senator Carol Mosley Braun, NY State Senators David Patterson, Eric T. Schneiderman, Liz Krueger, NY Assemblyman Jose Rivera, NY City Council Members Joel Rivera, Bill DeBlasio, Yvette Clarke, Larry Seabrook and Adam Clayton Powell III.

National civil rights leaders Kweisi Mfume, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, the Reverend Al Sharpton and Martin Luther King III have all joined in to support the campaign.

Hip-hop artists and record company executives including Sean “P. Diddy” Combs, Jay-Z, Nas, Kevin Liles, Steve Rifkind, Reverend Run, Irv Gotti, Doug E. Fresh, Cash Money Crew, Ludacris, Red Man, Method Man, Keith Murray, Cam'ron, The Diplomats and Ghost Face have all pledged support and are now doing public service announcements for radio and television on this issue.

Among the numerous organizations which are supporting “Countdown To Fairness” are Congressional Black Caucus, National Urban League, NAACP, Donna Lieberman and the ACLU, Nation of Islam, Rabbi Marc Schneier and the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, Bob Gangi and Drop the Rock, Jann Wenner and Rolling Stone Magazine, Tony Miranda and the National Latino Officers Association, Frank Garcia and the Bronx Hispanic Association, the National Action Network, PUSH/National Rainbow Coalition, The Doe Fund and Dennis Rivera and 1199 SEIU New York's Health and Human Service Union.

For continuous, updated information on the “Countdown To Fairness,” go to the website for the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network at www.hiphopsummitactionnetwork.org

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