

Leaders need to address poverty;

By **MARC H. MORIAL**
President of **CEO National Urban League**

Poverty is alive and well in the world's richest nation, according to a recent report by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Law and Social Policy.

The nation's poverty rate rose to 12.6 percent in 2005, up from 11.3 percent in 2000. Now, one in eight Americans and more than one in every six children lives in poverty, and more than one in every six children. A total of 37 million Americans are poor, up 5 million from 2000.

"For the past few decades, 'poor' has been nothing more than a four-letter word.

Not since President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed a War on Poverty in 1964 has there been world. Nearly half of a commitment by American leaders to address poverty. United States' political energy has focused on ending not poverty, according to a 2005 poll

"Poverty but welfare," the Pew Research Center report noted.

The picture is particularly bleak for African-Americans. 24.7 percent of whom lived in poverty in 2005, compared to 2004, 81 percent of Blacks

22.5 percent in 2000. Nearly one in three Black children under 18 getting richer while the poor years of age is poor, compared were, getting poorer, compared to 18.5 percent nationwide. That's to 65 percent of Whites. And United States ranked second among 28 developed countries, behind, Mexico of the world's the United States stands behind wealthiest countries with the Mexico in terms of widest gap highest childhood poverty between the rich and the poor, rates, according to UNICEF's according to CLASP.

Child Poverty in Rich Countries: A report for 2005.

Hurricane Katrina put a facp



Photo: Marc H. Morial, President / National Urban League

School held a forum on urban poverty in which NUL Policy Institute head Stephanie Jones participated along with New York Democratic Rep. Charles Rangel and others. A resounding consensus was forged -- that poverty must be put on

the national agenda. They were not alone in their concern. They are among many others as 'worried about poverty in our nation and the world.

As part of its so-called Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations has resolved to halve the number of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015. In August, U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, made narrowing the divide as one of his department's top priorities. In the U.S. Congress, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., introduced legislation in 2005 patterned after the U.N. millennium goals to reduce child poverty in the United States by 50 percent within a decade. In June, Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., declared poverty "the great moral issue of

our time" in unveiling a plan to eliminate it in 30 years. Connecticut passed a law calling for a 50 percent reduction in child poverty by 2014. And similar legislation in California is awaiting the governor's signature.

Poverty not only robs the poor of opportunity and breaks their spirit, it costs our nation money - well beyond direct services. For every one-percentage point rise in the poverty rate,

metropolitan areas are forced to spend an additional \$27.75 per capita on non-poverty related

services, according to CLASP.

That probably explains why Mayor Michael Bloomberg recently announced his own war on poverty in New York City, where one in five residents dwell below the poverty line."

In 2002, Miami Mayor Manny Diaz launched a \$2-million anti-poverty campaign in response to his city being designated the "poorest major city in the nation by the U.S. Census.

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett recently established an antipoverty commission to develop practical solutions to, lessen the city's 26 percent poverty rate. And the U.S. Conference of Mayors has also set up its own Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity, chaired by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

Poverty cuts across all political lines. It is not a blue or red issue. It's, as the CLASP study notes, a purple issue. Of the 10 states with the highest poverty rates, 70 percent are represented by Republican senators and 60 percent led by GOP governors. Of the congressional districts with more than 20 percent of their residents poor, 80 percent elect Democrats.

With midterm elections on the horizon, it's time to put this issue on the national agenda before it tears our nation apart. It is in everyone's best self-interest to eradicate poverty before it eradicates our democracy.