



For Immediate Release on behalf of The Isle de Jean Charles  
Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe and Tribal Council.

**The Isle de Jean Charles Tribal Resettlement: A Tribal-driven, whole community  
process**

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In 2015 The Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe (IJC) and our resettlement partners approached the State of Louisiana for support attaining our vision of Tribal-driven resettlement in response to decades of displacement from our traditional land due to extreme environmental changes and future risk to hurricanes and land loss. Our Tribe's plan included resettling IJC citizens living on the Isle de Jean Charles (the Island) *and* IJC citizens who had already been forced to move due to habitual and acute flooding. We would resettle together to a safe resilient, sovereign Tribal Community, enabling our Tribe's continued cultural survival.

The Island's landmass has vanished by 98% due to relative sea level rise, oil and gas infrastructure, levee development, and erosion. The IJC Tribal Council realized two decades ago that the only viable option left for our Tribe's future was to resettle together to a new location, as a reunited Tribal community. Our Tribe's goal has been to restore our *whole community*, and includes new economic developments, provisions to preserve our culture, and provide safe housing for IJC Tribal citizens.

Our Tribe reached out to the State to accomplish our Tribe's vision for cultural survival and resilience, and to maintain our sovereignty and Tribal rights. The National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC) Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) became our joint path forward. In January 2016, HUD announced the NDRC grantees, including \$48 million to the State of Louisiana to fund the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal Resettlement.

During the months of planning and grant proposal writing in partnership with the State of Louisiana, our Tribe worked to include our two decades of resettlement visions, new opportunities for tribal economic development, and cultural and heritage preservations into the detailed plans of the grant documents. The proposal focused on the IJC Tribe, including both IJC Tribal citizens living on the Island, and those who had already been forced to move individually. Another major innovation included in the grant proposal was that the Island would be protected and maintained under our members stewardship as their ancestral territory, even if uninhabitable.

The NDRC proposal writing process was not the beginning of the IJC Tribe and State relationship. In 2004, the State of Louisiana officially acknowledged the Isle de Jean Charles Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe in Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 105. According to the Resolution, Louisiana's policy "provides for recognition of Indian tribes within its borders, to support their tribal aspirations, to preserve their cultural heritage and improve their economic condition and to assist them in the achievement of their just rights." Additionally, the State of Louisiana's NDRC proposal assured, "All factors of design and process will help to support and enhance tribal identity, sovereignty, and dignity"

(pp. 107). State planners have further indicated their desire to support community-driven resettlement processes within the Principles of Resettlement in the Louisiana's Strategic Adaptations for Future Environments (LA SAFE) Framework.

Since the HUD award was announced in early 2016, state planners have steadily erased our role as leaders of the resettlement process, excluded our Tribal leadership from decision-making, disregarded Tribal protocols during community engagement activities, proposed we give up our Island home and that the new land be opened to public auction or to house other so-called "climate refugees" from throughout the coast. Moreover, planners have exacerbated tensions within our Tribe.

Today, our Tribe is left with growing uncertainty and empty hopes. Our Tribal Council and many of our citizens are increasingly concerned that the State is abandoning its commitment to support our Tribe's distinct vision articulated in the funded grant proposal and is undermining our efforts to preserve our cultural heritage, improve economic conditions, enhance our cultural resilience, and protect our rights through the resettlement process. We worry that the state of Louisiana's vision for a resettlement is assimilationist and more about moving people from the coast without taking the care to preserve and strengthen social relationships and distinct traditional ways of life that have been strained throughout this intergenerational crisis of land loss.

We would like to refocus the State's approach to the Isle de Jean Charles Resettlement, and encourage state planners and policy-makers to honor our rights as they did throughout the design and NDRC proposal-building process prior to receiving federal funding. We are not merely "stakeholders" engaged in a project. We are rights-holders committed to future generations of our family, our knowledge, our ways of life, and our Island people. Our Tribe's cultural survival depends on it.

For more information regarding our Tribe as well as Cultural and Physical Survival efforts visit our website at [www.isledejeancharles.com](http://www.isledejeancharles.com).