



For Immediate Release:
October 9, 2009

Contact: Kerry Birnbach
(212) 825-0028, ext. 212, kbirnbach@nyccah.org

Wealth of 56 New York City Billionaires Still Dwarfs Earnings of 1.5 Million Low-Income New Yorkers The Richest New Yorker's Worth Equals 342,000 Average Families; Middle Class Becoming an "Endangered Species" in New York

Using data from the new "Forbes 400" report, the New York City Coalition Against Hunger (NYCCAH), has just calculated that the 56 richest people in New York had 27 times the money of the 1.5 million poorest. The richest single New Yorker – who just happens to be Mayor Michael Bloomberg – has two and a half times the money of the 1.5 million poorest.

According to Forbes, New York City had 56 billionaires this year, slightly down from 64 last year, but the combined net worth of all 56 New York City billionaires this year was \$183.5 billion. According to new data from the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2008 there were 1.5 million people in New York City living below the meager poverty line of \$17,600. Many of the poor families made far less than that: fully 43 percent earned less than half of that and 26 percent earned less than three quarters of that. NYCCAH calculated the collective yearly earnings of all 1.5 million city residents in poverty to be \$6.8 billion. Since people in poverty often have no net worth or negative net worth, that means the 1.5 million low-income New Yorkers have 1/27th the income of all 56 billionaires and less than half the income of Mayor Bloomberg.

In comparing the billionaires to average middle class New Yorkers, the difference was slightly less but still massive. The median family income in New York City in 2008 was \$51,116, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Thus, the 56 billionaires had a net worth that equaled the annual earnings of 3.5 million average New York City families; Mayor Bloomberg had a net worth equal to the earnings of 342,000 average New York City families.

Said Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, "Even in the horrid economy, the wealthy still have astounding sums of money, reinforcing the reality that they have created a 'heads we win, tails you lose economy.' This is further proof that the opportunity capitalism allowed many grandparents (and so many other New Yorkers) to build a better life for their children and grandchildren has been replaced by the crony capitalism of the present time in which the ultra, mega-rich barely get dented by the recession while lower and middle class are facing the greatest struggles in decades. I want to be clear that I am *not* blasting the wealthy for being personally wealthy, but rather pointing out that the State and City have implemented public policies – tax cuts and corporate welfare for the mega rich combined with fee hikes and service cuts for the middle class and the impoverished – that are directly responsible for this soaring inequality of wealth, which is now higher in New York than in Sri Lanka and Mexico. Middle class families are being driven out of New York so rapidly that they are becoming an endangered species. If we continue these failed policies, someday the only way that we'll be able to see as middle class family in New York is at a fossil display at the American Museum of Natural History."

###