



Puerto Rico's shaky path to relief and recovery is sabotaged by lack of proper funding

Since December 2019, Puerto Rico has suffered over 2,000 earthquakes, with varying magnitudes of up to 6.4 on the Richter scale. The tremors have caused an estimated \$110 million in damages, with more than 700 homes impacted and nearly 8,000 people forced to sleep outside in shelters or makeshift camps.

These disasters have occurred in the context of an already fragile island trying to recover from 2017's Hurricane Maria which caused over 4,000 deaths and an estimated of \$100 billion in damages.

Natural phenomena don't have to result in disasters. Hurricane Maria and the recent earthquakes have been disastrous for the island because Puerto Rico has been under fiscal siege for decades. Centuries of colonialism have led to a public debt of \$72 billion and has impeded Puerto Rico's ability to invest in building and strengthening infrastructure and systems that prevent natural hazards from becoming disasters. As of today the U.S. continues to promote unlawful and abusive conditions by toying with the disbursement of funds for Puerto Rico. The conditions have threatened the lives of people and are a direct result of Puerto Rico's colonial status and lack of proper representation.

Since 2016, neo-colonial institutions such as the FOMB, have continued to unilaterally impose austerity measures that have left public infrastructure to provide essential services such as the islands electrical grid, outdated, vulnerable and unable to withstand the increasing climate threats.

In the absence of a robust state or federal level response to the recent earthquakes, Puerto Ricans have organised their own community relief as they did for Hurricane Maria in 2017. Once again, islanders have demonstrated their capacity for self-sufficiency and civic duty. However, as in any other society, a stable and flexible source of funding centered in the people is essential to enable Puerto Ricans to recover and build back better.

To date, the U.S. Government has only distributed around \$15 billion of the \$44 billion in aid that the U.S. Congress approved for Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Maria. **We thus demand that the remaining funds are disbursed in an unearmarked manner and immediately.** Puerto Rico's path to self-sufficiency, and preparedness and response for other natural disasters depends on it.

This is not a matter of whether Puerto Ricans deserve a handout or not. Puerto Ricans are asking for the due compensation of over 120 years of modern colonialist structures that have drained Puerto Rico's resources, political power and, as consequence, its socio-economic development.

Boricuas Unidos en la Diáspora is a network of Puerto Rican professionals ready to activate other Boricuas in the Diaspora to directly fund community-led organizations in Puerto Rico. Since 2017, its members have worked together towards: building bridges between Puerto Rican community leaders and federal lawmakers, educating for structural change and long-term economic development, and educating and activating the Diaspora through an anticolonial and social justice lens.



It is a matter of justice and amending the historical political wrong-doings of U.S. towards our small but resilient island nation.

WHAT CAN CONGRESS DO FOR PUERTO RICO:

1. **Allow a just recovery led by the people:** While the Federal and Puerto Rico governments failed, people helped each other. The future of Puerto Rico must be led by those who understand and recognize our needs and conditions.
2. **Inspect schools and homes stop foreclosures:** Schools and homes should immediately be inspected by an independent group of engineers who can assess structural stability. A moratorium on foreclosures should be put forward immediately.
3. **Protect and improve public investment in essential public services:** rebuilding and reopening schools, returning funds to the UPR, modernizing PREPA and AAA infrastructure to lower costs, providing funds for health services and public hospitals, improving the management of emergencies, repairing roads, and restoring labor rights cut to public and private employees.
4. **Disburse the funds:** The federal government should immediately disburse funds for Puerto Rico to recover. The funds should not be restricted or limited and there should not be any oversight from the FOMB or other authorities that have imposed austerity over the island.
5. **Cancel the debt:** All money assigned to Puerto Rico must be destined to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Puerto Rico. The 8.7 billion dollars that the government currently reserves for the payment of the debt must be disbursed and used for a just recovery.

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