

## June 2018 Brief summary on the present situation of Puerto Rico

Escrito por Aurora Muriente Pastrana | MINH  
Lunes, 18 de Junio de 2018 06:47 -

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An economic crisis and recession have been affecting Puerto Rico since 2006, however, after the devastating hurricanes Irma and Maria in September of 2017, social deterioration due to the lack of sovereign power to address our recuperation and development have further aggravated the situation of our country.

A clear example of the irresponsibility of the Government of the United States as well as that of Puerto Rico in responding to the humanitarian need provoked by the hurricanes is the scandalous number of deaths caused by the lack of medical and other essential services such as drinking water, food, electrical power and transportation. The official number of victims is at 64 while a study recently carried out by researchers of Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and published by the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine (<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMsa1803972>) establishes that between 20 September and 31 December 2017 more than 4,645 deaths were linked to lack of essential services after the hurricane. Yet, despite this evidence the Government of Puerto Rico nor the Government of the United States have recognized the total number of victims and much less have they assumed their responsibility. To this day, almost nine months since the hurricanes, tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans remain without electrical power.

Also, due to its colonial status, Puerto Rico cannot integrate into international mitigation efforts on climate change, nor can it join accords such as those of the Paris Summit. It cannot integrate groups of countries such as the Association of Small Island States.

On June 30, 2016 the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (P.R.O.M.E.S.A.) was adopted. Besides creating a Fiscal Supervisory Board, this law is above Puerto Rico's constitution and its laws, and directly impacts on the legal, economic and social order of the country. The economic and social deterioration are made worse by austerity measure imposed by the Junta during the last two years. Anti-labor measures, privatization of public corporations and assets, hundreds of school closings, tuition increased at the state

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university, pension cutbacks to the retired and the elderly are some of the imposed measures which impact on great part of the populace, particularly the working class and the impoverished sectors. This situation has also dramatically increased Puerto Rican migration to the United States (tens of thousands) especially by university educated youth in search of job opportunities. At this historical moment, mass migration constitutes one of the main social problems and it is not being addressed by the government.

As part of the reaction of the citizenry against the austerity measures imposed by the Fiscal Supervisory Board, mobilizations and protests have increased. These have been harshly repressed by the State. In fact, the Penal Code of Puerto Rico was amended by the present government in order to increase punishment for incidents during protests.

As the pro-Independence movement has denounced for decades at the United Nations Decolonization Committee, the political and economic model of the Free Associated State is collapsing. This has led to an overall crisis in the country and government bankruptcy in the form of a 70 billion dollar public debt which has not been audited as is demanded by multiple sectors of civil society.

The Report of the Rapporteur of the UN Decolonization Committee (A/AC.109/2018/L.13), published in February 2018, addresses diverse aspects of Puerto Rico's present situation.

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/AC.109/2018/L.13&referer=http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/decisions\\_puerto\\_rico.shtml&Lang=S](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/AC.109/2018/L.13&referer=http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/decisions_puerto_rico.shtml&Lang=S)