

**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR PUERTO RICO  
LETTER TO CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS**

September 28, 2017

From: Melvin Cordova and Daksha Cordova  
Subject: HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN PUERTO RICO AND  
SUPPORT "REQUEST FOR FORCES"

Dear Congressional Representatives:

Chris Smith, 115<sup>th</sup> District, NJ  
Karen Bass, 37<sup>th</sup> District, CA  
Adam Schiff, 22<sup>nd</sup> District, CA // Daksha Cordova is a constituent  
Gerald E. Connolly, 11<sup>th</sup> District, VA // Melvin Cordova is a constituent  
Nydia Velazquez, 12<sup>th</sup> District, NY  
Jose Serrano, 18<sup>th</sup> District, NY  
Luis Gutierrez, 4<sup>th</sup> District, IL  
Darren Soto, 9<sup>th</sup> District, FL  
Jennifer Gonzalez-Colon, PR Representative to Congress

As members of the Puerto Rican community from Reston, Virginia (Melvin) and Los Angeles, California (Daksha), with family in New Jersey, New York, Illinois, Florida, and Puerto Rico, we are writing to urge you to take action to address the HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS that Puerto Rico faces today, and which is about to get much worse.

We would like to add that it is possible that we as citizens may not have complete access to information -- but given the gravity of the crisis we feel compelled to appeal to our leaders so that the crisis can be resolved.

On September 19, 2017 Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico as a Category 4. Devastation was catastrophic, resulting in 100% loss of electric power, and almost total loss of water and communications.

A week later, Puerto Ricans are unable to request help from the government, and unable to let their relatives know their situation. There is little help in sight for residents out of San Juan metro and hysteria is setting in.

Months ago, our family purchased airline tickets to visit Melvin's father, Poncio, a USMC Disabled Veteran from the Korean War. Poncio lives in Ponce, Puerto Rico and we were planning to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on October 1. We decided to keep the plans and have organized a team to accompany us to provide communications support and medical assistance, including a medic, a deployment specialist, and an analyst to Melvin's home community of Ponce. Originally, we had plans to be on the ground Wednesday, September 27, but have delayed our travel to October 2, because we do not have access to fuel to run the generators for our communications equipment. Coordination with government officials is taking place, but we do not have an official response.

We have self-funded our expenses and purchased equipment, such as: satellite phones, airtime, generators, computers, many miscellaneous items. Our mission as volunteers is to connect Puerto Ricans with the rest of the world and provide medical attention for infants who are the

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most vulnerable. Unfortunately, the positive but limited response by the Federal Government for the magnitude of the event has created civil unrest. The U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico are facing grave risks.

On September 26, my (Melvin's) brother was able to make contact with my father for five minutes, with the only phone working briefly in the community. Fortunately, he is safe and has food and water for three days. However, this means that if the present conditions persist, my father will not have food or water for his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and beyond. My father begged my brother to have us cancel the travel plans to Ponce. There is civil unrest. He described it as a **health and humanitarian crisis**. He fears for our lives if we visit, due to rising hysteria. The situation is so desperate that citizens are stealing car batteries, syphoning the gas from vehicles, breaking into homes, and assaulting people for as little as two cans of food. Also, Centro Medico is releasing patients prematurely after surgery because there is no water or food for the patients, or fuel for the generators.

The above does not stop our team from moving forward with the visit. It actually emboldens us to create positive actions for the present and organize for a resilient and innovative future. We are not inexperienced, naïve civilians. We are approaching this with our eyes open. Melvin served 30 years in the Department of Defense and Intelligence Community and Daksha is a National Security Analyst. The basics are water, food, security, energy and communications. Each of us is bringing two weeks of food to sustain ourselves. We have a way to make fresh water, have identified a safe place to sleep, and are bringing a communications network that we will donate for one community.

The main reason for delaying our trip is that we do not have access to fuel to run the generators. We are bringing hundreds of pounds of communications and medical equipment, but they are "dead weight" if we do not get access to fuel.

Our team wanted official cover to move freely at night, but that is no longer needed, since Puerto Rico is a war zone at night. The people feel that their government has failed them.

The Governor of Puerto Rico must submit a "Request for Forces" to be approved by the President. THIS TO MY KNOWLEDGE HAS NOT BEEN DONE. If it has, it should be made public and broadcast across Puerto Rico to ensure that our citizens know that help is coming. An approved Request for Forces enables full military assistance and guarantees that expenses will be reimbursed by the Federal Government. This could bring a Navy aircraft carrier (sitting in-port in Norfolk) to Puerto Rico to dramatically increase support, which to this point has been negligible.

Let's compare the disaster in Puerto Rico with the 2010 Haiti crisis. We have prepared below an analysis to provide a rational justification for an approved "Request for Forces." Once you have validated the empirical evidence of the U.S. response to Haiti vs Puerto Rico, we urge you to act as your conscience dictates.

### **Haiti 2010:**

On January 12, 2010 a massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake occurred near Port au Prince, Haiti, killing 230,000 people, injuring 300,000, creating over 1,000,000 homeless people (IWG, 2010)

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and stranding 45,000 American citizens. The President of Haiti declared a national emergency and requested immediate assistance from the United States and the international community (USSOUTHCOM OPORD 01 2010). The U.S. government responded with a **Request For Forces (RFF)** activation notice that enabled the U.S. military to provide Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR).

Within the first week, the U.S. military had 17,000 deployed personnel operating in the vicinity of Haiti providing Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HA/DR): the US Air Force had deployed 6,000 personnel to reopen the international airport; the U.S. Navy had mustered 33 ships including the Aircraft Carrier USS Carl Vinson and two Marine Expeditionary Units; and the U.S. Army deployed 3,000 soldiers from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne.

**Puerto Rico 2017:**

On September 19, 2017 hurricane Maria (a category 4 storm) hit Puerto Rico and destroyed 100% of the electrical power system and nearly all of the water and communications infrastructure on the island.

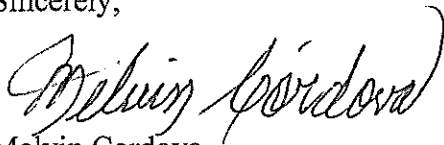
At the end of the first week after the storm hit, the available food supply reached zero days, there is limited water or power, and only 34 of 1,300 cellular towers are operational, leaving 3 million U.S. citizens without accesses to resources. As of September 24, 2017, several U.S. Navy aircraft carriers were docked at Norfolk Naval Base and no Air Force or Marine units have been activated to support the U.S. citizens on Puerto Rico. We are not sure if the Governor of Puerto Rico has made an official **Request For Forces (RFF)**, which is different than the present response from the Department of Defense. An RFF would have an aircraft carrier on our shores providing medical care, water, logistics, security and more. We ask to be treated as decent human beings, similar to the Haiti response.

Let's begin discussing real, time-bound, actionable plans to eliminate the health and humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico and rebuild a new resilient infrastructure to avoid the collapse of our society. It won't happen overnight, but we can be leaders and get the process started. We sincerely hope you will utilize your platform as an elected representative and echo the public's call for leadership on this issue. By advocating for this critical support, you can help secure a safer world for this generation and all generations to come.

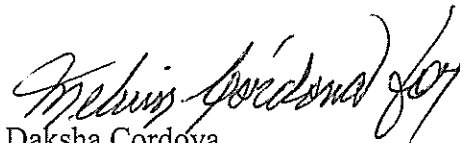
Thank you for your continued service to the people of our communities. We hope that you continue to keep our best interests in mind as you consider this issue.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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