

Source 1

Instructions: Read the following source and follow the instructions on the handout “Comparing Sources.”

United Nations human rights experts

The following statements by United Nations human rights experts were quoted in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on October 30, 2017. The group of experts was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on human rights issues in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria.

You can access the news release at <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22326&LangID=E>>.

“The hurricane has aggravated the island’s existing dire situation caused by debt and austerity measures....

“Even before Hurricane Maria struck, Puerto Rico’s human rights were already being massively undermined by the economic and financial crisis and austerity policies, affecting the rights to health, food, education, housing, water and social security....

“We can’t fail to note the dissimilar urgency and priority given to the emergency response in Puerto Rico, compared to the US states affected by hurricanes in recent months.... After a natural disaster, with around 90 thousand homes totally destroyed, people are at their most vulnerable. It’s the obligation of all levels of government to act to protect them, and to ensure that lives can return to some normality quickly. People need safe and adequate homes—temporary and long-term—with electricity, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities....

“We call on the United States and Puerto Rican authorities to remove regulatory and financial barriers to reconstruction and recovery. All reconstruction efforts should be guided by international human rights standards, ensuring that people can rebuild where they have lived and close to their communities. Reconstruction should aim to increase the resilience of Puerto Rico’s infrastructure, housing and hospitals against future natural disasters.”

Source 2

Instructions: Read the following source and follow the instructions on the handout “Comparing Sources.”

Governor Ricardo Rosselló of Puerto Rico

The following excerpts are from an interview with Puerto Rico’s governor, Ricardo Rosselló, on National Public Radio (NPR) on November 1, 2017. Governor Rosselló speaks with NPR host Mary Louise Kelly about how Puerto Rico plans to rebuild in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. The Army Corps of Engineers is a U.S. federal agency that is part of the Department of Defense. It manages public engineering, design, and construction projects for the U.S. government.

You can access the interview at <<https://www.npr.org/2017/11/01/561427855/puerto-rico-governor-says-hes-frustrated-by-islands-situation-42-days-after-hurr>>.

KELLY: We’re glad to have you here. I want to start by asking you about the power grid. Officially, about a third of the grid is now working, but that leaves, of course, the vast majority of Puerto Ricans without electricity. And we’re hearing from our reporters on the ground that...far more than two-thirds of the population is still without power. Why is it taking so long?

ROSSELLÓ: [Y]ou know, September 30 I signed a mission statement with the Corps of Engineers under the statement that it was going to take them 45 days to pick up the energy grid. It has been more than 30 days now, Mary Louise, and all we have are seven brigades from the Corps of Engineers in Puerto Rico, whereas the bulk of the work or all of the work has been done by our power authority, over 400 brigades, that we have over there. But right now, based on that limitation, we have asked for mutual aid assistance from the states of New York and Florida so that we can bypass that, you know, that lack of urgency from the Corps and actually get brigades into Puerto Rico.

....

KELLY: The last time you and I spoke, Governor Rosselló, not even a week had passed since Hurricane Maria hit. And you had a message you wanted to deliver loud and clear that Puerto Rico needed the full support of the U.S. government. Has that message been heard? Do you have everything you need from the federal government?

ROSSELLÓ: Well, there are certain areas that it has. I mean, I have to say, for example, that the Department of Defense has been working diligently. FEMA, for the most part, has been working within the limitations that it has. But again, the Corps of Engineers—right now, we don’t know when those brigades are coming, when they’re going to start working and executing. So my role, you know, is to shine a light on that, establish that we are extremely unsatisfied with that, that has—you know, that has been a significant obstacle to our growth and then look for alternatives, which have been the mutual aid agreements that we’ve established.

Source 3

Instructions: Read the following source and follow the instructions on the handout “Comparing Sources.”

Jason Beaubien, National Public Radio reporter (reporting on interviews with residents of Puerto Rico)

The following excerpt is from a report on National Public Radio (NPR) on October 29, 2017. The reporter, Jason Beaubien, shares what he has heard through interviews with people in Puerto Rico. He is speaking with NPR host, Lourdes Garcia-Navarro.

You can access the report at <<https://www.npr.org/2017/10/29/560660114/puerto-rico-still-reeling-after-hurricane>>.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Do you see people at work on the power system?

BEAUBIEN: You do—absolutely. I mean, this is like this incredible project that is happening all across the island. There are crews that are out there. You see them moving. But you also see that there are power lines down absolutely everywhere. I mean, you know, we are talking weeks after Maria came through, and they’re just—you know, wires are still lying all over the place. You know, big towers are down. It’s dominating the media. It’s dominating the news everyday. This is the obsession in Puerto Rico right now—is the power.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: People must be frustrated. Who are they blaming?

BEAUBIEN: You know, people are, to some degree, blaming, you know, the hurricane. But there’s also growing frustration with the power company here. People recognize that this had a lot of problems before even Maria came through. The power company had gone bankrupt earlier this year. Rates were always incredibly high. Service had been bad even before this.... So now you’ve got this power company that is desperately trying to rebuild across the entire island. It doesn’t have any revenue coming in because it is not providing any power. People’s bills have been suspended. So people are very frustrated with PREPA, which is the power authority [in Puerto Rico].

Source 4

Instructions: Read the following source and follow the instructions on the handout “Comparing Sources.”

Residents of Río Piedras, Puerto Rico

This video was created by Democracy Now! and published on October 2, 2017. In the video, residents of the Río Piedras neighborhood in San Juan, Puerto Rico speak about relief efforts that they and fellow Río Piedras residents have organized in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

You can access the video and transcript at <https://www.democracynow.org/2017/10/2/voices_from_san_juan_puerto_rico>.

Video transcript:

JUAN CARLOS DÁVILA (reporter): After Hurricane Maria made landfall, the community of Río Piedras in the capital city of San Juan has taken matters into their own hands, not expecting help from the government anytime soon. Río Piedras is home to the University of Puerto Rico, which was on strike last spring. This is José Bellaflores Díaz, a striking student who has been leading community efforts in Río Piedras since Hurricane Maria hit.

JOSÉ BELLAFLORES DÍAZ: A friend of mine and I were sitting in our apartment, and we understood that this was a major catastrophe and we had to do something to help our neighbors, to help our community and to help our country. So, one day, we just headed out and started to remove plants and everything that fell in the streets. Once we started working, the people that passed by, the community, started to join us, to work with us. And basically, we started organizing ourselves. We started reuniting ourselves in this church, the Bautista church here nearby. And we just started to create a plan. Here is where we organize ourselves. This is where we reunite ourselves. And these are basically our strategies that we use to attend the different necessities.

FERDINAND GONZÁLEZ: [translated] My name is Ferdinand González. I’m an artist. We’ve already had situations where we’ve waited for the central government to come and help us. And we’ve waited in vain. We’ve waited and waited. So, this time, we did not wait. What we did was unite the whole community. We know what we need. We know what each of us requires. So we established five committees. There’s a committee for security, another one for food and one for improvements to lift up Río Piedras together. We’re seeing that the effort needs to be done from the inside out. We cannot wait for someone to come from outside, because of the urgency. They’ve left us a week without anything. There’s no supplies, nothing. We need to take care of ourselves. And that’s what you see here.

JUAN CARLOS DÁVILA: One of the efforts made to help the community of Río Piedras is providing food to those in need. In a Baptist church, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Río Piedras, different organizations cook food daily and distribute it in the nearby plaza.

MARIAN MORALES: [translated] My name is Marian Morales. There are people here with different beliefs and cultures, but we’re all united for the common good of helping each other, of offering that helping hand to those in need. Today we cooked lentil soup, rice and beans, and brown rice. We also offered melon, pineapples and nectarines.

FABIO CORTÉS: [translated] My name is Fabio Cortés. We've united with university students, and the churches have also helped us by bringing food. We clean and pick up the garbage. We are trying to lift up Río Piedras however it is possible, because the government hasn't come here. Río Piedras exists. We should not be abandoned, but helped. We're not asking for anything for ourselves individually, only for the community. The help should come as it becomes available. We should receive support, not only material support, but also emotional support.

JUAN CARLOS DÁVILA: As Río Piedras residents are hoping that government assistance eventually arrives, José Bellaflares Díaz voiced concern about the way relief efforts are put into effect by governmental agencies and NGOs run by outsiders.

JOSÉ BELLAFLORES DÍAZ: The ideal is that they come here and they, you know, try and listen to what's happening. I think that's the most important part here, is just to listen—not establish their ways, not establish their protocols. It's not just to work hand by hand what was already started here in the community. We are very organized. We don't need no one to come here and tell us what we need to do, because we know what we need to do. We know our community. We know our necessities. We know how to attend them. Obviously, we don't have the resources.

Source 5

Instructions: Read the following source and follow the instructions on the handout “Comparing Sources.”

Xiomara Caro Diaz, Puerto Rican lawyer and activist

Xiomara Caro Diaz is a lawyer, activist, and director of New Organizing Projects at the Center for Popular Democracy. She previously worked for community and advocacy organizations based in Puerto Rico. Below are excerpts from her interview with Democracy Now! on October 2, 2017.

You can access the interview at <https://www.democracynow.org/2017/10/2/san_juan_activist_after_hurricane_maria>.

“Right now what’s happening is that the veil of colonialism has been lifted for the world to see what it looks like when a place that has been left out of the political infrastructure and has been exploited for 119 years by the United States goes through something like this.

“So people are organizing, because that’s what they’ve been doing to survive for a very long time.... [T]here are several groups, many probably we don’t even know of, that are assuming the responsibility not of immediate relief, but really starting to do what people—poor people and people who have been marginalized for a very long time have known what to do to survive in Puerto Rico. We need to remember that before this hurricane passed, Puerto Rico was already going through a crisis that is not economic, about money only, it’s political. So, right now, there are groups that are setting up popular food kitchens, that are creating citizen brigades to take care of the streets. And that is what we need....

“So, the response is, we don’t need help. We need the United States to assume responsibility for a political relationship that has been abusive, that has been about exploitation. So we need the resources to repair what has been done and for the space for the groups on the ground to do what they’ve been doing for a very long time....

“We need, one, relief that does not come with strings attached. We don’t need any more loans with high interest. We need repair and investment for 119 years of exploitation and then the amount of money that has been made off Puerto Rico. We need the repeal of the Jones Act and all other laws that limit the capacity of Puerto Rico to be a sustainable place to live.... We need a commitment to just rebuilding, no displacement, no evictions. We’re already hearing from communities where FEMA is telling them that they cannot rebuild their home where it currently is. And that is starting to lift up grave, grave questions about what is the agenda behind telling people who have lived in a place for a very long time, in a moment like this, that they cannot rebuild their home there. We need debt relief. And we need to end colonialism, which is at the heart, it is at the core, of this issue....

“So the people for real who are doing the work are groups like Comedores Sociales in Caguas, who are feeding 500 people in the public plaza every day since last Friday; people, organizations like Calle Salud in Loíza, who distributed 300 lunches yesterday. We are not waiting for his [President Trump’s] help, and the military is not helping.

“The military, right now, what it’s doing is occupying Puerto Rico. It’s making it even more difficult to get help on the ground. We have even heard a story from a comrade in Utuado who came to San Juan and told us that citizen brigades were helping to clean a street and to rebuild, to create a new way to cross a river, and police and local military told him to stop, that that was not their role. So, right now, the military in Puerto Rico is holding a role of violence and not of facilitation.”

Source 6

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U.S. Senators Schumer (D-NY), Nelson (D-FL), Cantwell (D-WA), Gillibrand (D-NY), Murphy (D-CT), Menendez (D-NJ), and Booker (D-NJ)

On October 16, 2017, seven U.S. senators sent a letter to Brock Long, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), urging him to immediately approve federal funds for Puerto Rico following the devastation left by Hurricane Maria. Puerto Rico’s governor had submitted a request for this funding over a week earlier.

You can access the letter at <<https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/PR%20Categories%20C-G%20ltr%2010-13-17.pdf>>.

Dear Administrator Long:

We write to urge you to approve Puerto Rico’s request for Permanent Work Public Assistance (PA) for damages caused by Hurricane Maria as expeditiously as possible. The scale of damages across the island is clear, and Puerto Rico should not have to wait any longer for this assistance to be granted so they can begin the process of rebuilding their infrastructure and communities.

It is our understanding that Governor Rosselló submitted a request for Permanent Work over a week ago. As you know, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Permanent Work, also referred to as Categories C-G PA, includes permanent repairs to roads and bridges; water control facilities; public buildings and contents; public utilities; and parks, recreational, and other facilities. Permanent Work funding from FEMA is the main source of federal assistance to help a community repair and rebuild its public infrastructure after a natural disaster, and there should be absolutely no ambiguity that the federal government intends to provide this crucial assistance to help Puerto Rico build back after Hurricane Maria.

In addition to approving Categories C-G as quickly as possible, we urge the Administration to work with Congress to increase the federal cost-share of these expenses for rebuilding and repair. As you know, Puerto Rico has faced a challenging financial situation for some time now, and we are concerned about the Commonwealth’s [Puerto Rico’s] ability to find the funds to pay the 25 percent local match that is generally required for Public Assistance. We call on the Administration to work with Congress to set the federal cost share at 100 percent for all categories of Public Assistance, including permanent repairs.

Thank you for your attention to this important request. We hope that FEMA and its other federal partners will work to ensure that Puerto Rico receives all appropriate resources and assistance that it deserves as the island continues to recover and rebuild.

Sincerely,

U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY)

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL)

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA)

U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)

U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT)

U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ)

U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ)

Source 7

Instructions: Read the following source and follow the instructions on the handout “Comparing Sources.”

U.S. President Donald J. Trump

U.S. President Donald J. Trump posted the following tweets in the weeks following Hurricane Maria. The first tweet was from September 30, 2017. The second was from October 12, 2017. Sharyl Attkisson is a television host who made a comment suggesting that Puerto Rico was largely responsible for its financial crisis.

“Such poor leadership ability by the Mayor of San Juan, and others in Puerto Rico, who are not able to get their workers to help. They want everything to be done for them when it should be a community effort. 10,000 Federal workers now on Island doing a fantastic job.”

“‘Puerto Rico survived the Hurricanes, now a financial crisis looms largely of their own making,’ says Sharyl Attkisson. A total lack of accountability say the Governor. Electric and all infrastructure was disaster before hurricanes. Congress to decide how much to spend. We cannot keep FEMA, the Military & the First Responders, who have been amazing (under the most difficult circumstances) in P.R. forever!”

Source 8

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Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz of San Juan, Puerto Rico

The following public statement was written by Carmen Yulín Cruz, the mayor of San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico. Cruz published the statement on October 12, 2017, partly in response to recent tweets by U.S. President Donald J. Trump.

You can access the letter at <<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/12/16465226/puerto-rico-trump-san-juan>>.

Puerto Ricans have suffered greatly in the past month. Two hurricanes devastated our homes and our electrical infrastructure leaving us without the essentials to survive: drinkable water, food and medicine. But perhaps more frustrating has been the devastating actions, time after time, by a President whose tweets, comments and actions seem to be taken out of a book on “how to add insult to injury” rather than a book on “how to help during a humanitarian crisis.” He is simply incapable of understanding the contributions, the sacrifices and the commitment to democratic values that Puerto Ricans have shown over decades. His actions are unbecoming of a leader of the free world.

Mr President, you seem to want to disregard the moral imperative that your administration has been unable to fulfill. Your replacement of the FEMA Coordinator in Puerto Rico is an admission that things are not going the way they should. Your tweets and comments just show desperation and underscore the inadequacy of your government’s response to this humanitarian crisis....

Ever since this ordeal began, San Juan has had over 300 sustained volunteers from the United States. Good, hard working people from New York, Florida, California, Texas and many others who embody the fundamental values of compassion, ingenuity and hard work that you are certainly unable to express. These men and women, most of them union workers, have literally taken care of our bodies and souls....

Tweet away your hate to mask your administration’s mishandling of this humanitarian crisis.... Condemn us to a slow death of non drinkable water, lack of food, lack of medicine while you keep others eager to help from reaching us since they face the impediment of the Jones Act.

I ask every American that has love, and not hate in their hearts, to stand with Puerto Rico and let this President know we WILL NOT BE LEFT TO DIE. I ask the United Nations, UNICEF and the world to stand with the people of Puerto Rico and stop the genocide that will result from the lack of appropriate action of a President that just does not get it because he has been incapable of looking in our eyes and seeing the pride that burns fiercely in our hearts and souls....

Mr. President fulfill your moral imperative towards the people of Puerto Rico.

Carmen Yulín Cruz
Mayor of San Juan