

Colonization and Destruction: People's Tribunal on U.S. Crimes Against Puerto Rico

Grass Roots Organizations to hold a People's Tribunal on October 27, 2018, at the Holyhood Church/Iglesia Santa Cruz, New York City

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Since the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria of September 2017, the world has heard of Puerto Rico's economic, social and environmental crisis. This crisis is not new nor even due primarily to the hurricanes, but is the culmination of the savage colonialist domination and capitalist exploitation that the United States of America has imposed ever since its 1898 military invasion of Puerto Rico.

On October 27, 2018, activists and witnesses from Puerto Rico (including eyewitnesses to US crimes), the Puerto Rican diaspora, the US and the world, met in New York City to take part in a colonial crimes tribunal. The tribunal will present a people's investigation of the role of the US government during its 120-year colonial rule, and particularly since the hurricane's devastation put Puerto Rico in the world's media. They will be joined by renowned Nicaraguan legal scholar and attorney **Dr. Augusto Zamora**, who will serve as prosecutor, and a distinguished jury of US and international human rights leaders.

Call to Action

What is happening now in Puerto Rico is the culmination of a process of national destruction that began with the US military invasion of Puerto Rico on July 25, 1898.

Almost immediately the US commenced destruction of Puerto Rico's autonomous economy, suppression of historical knowledge, and repression of the independence movement. US colonial rule imposed a parasitic economic model that blocked self-sufficient development. The US imposed its own citizenship, which provided cheap labor as well as cannon fodder for its bloody imperialist wars. Puerto Rico's economic dismantling continues today, with the US imposition of an illegitimate and unpayable public debt, and since 2016 the Fiscal Control Board (called "La Junta" in Puerto Rico) created by Congress' "Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act" (PROMESA). The Junta's members represent colonial government and corporate interests who ran up the debt and sold out to Wall Street. This is like putting wolves in charge of sheep.

The world has heard of Puerto Rico's crisis as a result of the September 2017 hurricanes, which demonstrated the power of nature and the failure of capitalism to prioritize the most basic of needs: our planet's health. But the aftermath of the hurricanes also demonstrated the criminal cruelty with which the US has responded to devastation by speeding up its plans to restructure Puerto Rico for corporate and imperialist profit. Nearly a year after the hurricanes, Puerto Rico has not made real progress in its recovery. On the contrary, "real progress" refers to imposing the most terrible austerity policies, from privatization of basic services such as electricity and education, to cost of living increases while reducing benefits, pensions, and workplace security. The Puerto Rican people are being suffocated by a neoliberal economic policy, combined with a colonial political status that sequesters its sovereignty in Washington. On the one hand, the US does not provide the necessary disaster recovery assistance, while on the other hand, prohibits the entry of solidarity aid from neighboring countries.

This is the colonial, neoliberal vision of a thoroughly privatized Puerto Rico; vision that the current policies regarding the reforms of education and other essential services contemplate: A country being bought up and "resettled" by vulture capitalists and other foreign billionaires, with the sole purpose of increasing their income free of all restrictions, free of taxes or oversight, who are served by impoverished, poorly educated, politically repressed youth. With a diminished population since thousands of Boricuas have been forced to migrate in order to survive. This vision contemplates a Puerto Rico without Puerto Ricans - echoing the martyred independence leader **Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos'** warning that the US "wanted the cage without the bird." Ethnic cleansing and population substitution are recognized internationally as war crimes.

It is for the Puerto Rican movement - for decolonization, for independence and sovereignty, for social and economic justice - to give a strong response to this assault. As part of this effort, our international tribunal proposal aims to expose the policies and their consequences, for which the US has an enormous responsibility.

The Puerto Rico Tribunal AdHoc Committee is convening this important colonial crimes tribunal in order to expose the true nature of the U.S. war against Puerto Rico. This call for action is not made solely for the sake of posterity, but also seeks to strengthen the worldwide struggle for self-determination today. What is happening in Puerto Rico is different only in scale and duration from US-perpetrated destruction elsewhere.

Only a people's campaign in solidarity with the Puerto Rican struggle for decolonization, self-determination, and justice can begin to end the continued U.S. presence and domination not only of Puerto Rico, but in the Caribbean, Latin America and elsewhere. We hope that your organization can endorse this very important organizing effort and can join with us on October 27th in New York City.

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