

RESOLUTION 56

THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN PUERTO RICO AND THE NEED FOR IMMEDIATE FEDERAL ACTION

WHEREAS, two massive superstorms, Hurricanes Maria and Irma, have caused unprecedented devastation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, amounting to more than \$100 billion in damages, according to Moody's Analytics; and

WHEREAS, an AFL-CIO multiunion delegation of 300 union volunteers recently deployed for two weeks in Puerto Rico to provide critical assistance for residents faced with damaged homes, lack of clean water, closed health care facilities, lack of power, inadequate food and shelter, and other basic needs; and

WHEREAS, the AFL-CIO volunteers deployed to Puerto Rico in response to an emergency request and in cooperation with our sisters and brothers of the Puerto Rican Labor Federation and the mayor of San Juan's office; and

WHEREAS, the response of the Trump administration has been wholly inadequate to meet the critical needs faced by the 3.6 million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; and

WHEREAS, the Trump administration's relief efforts have paled in comparison to its efforts following similar destruction by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in Texas and Florida; and

WHEREAS, union volunteers associated with the AFL-CIO deployment met hundreds of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens who have not received any assistance or who were required to fill out forms online, with a deadline rapidly approaching, at a time when most island residents continued to have no access to power, including internet access; and

WHEREAS, more than one month after the landfall of Hurricane Maria, according to the World Health Organization, the amount of water that the Trump administration says it has distributed to residents, including water for hospitals and dialysis centers, equates to only 9% of what each person needs every day; and

WHEREAS, one month after the landfall of Hurricane Maria, less than 20% of Puerto Rico's power grid has been restored and around 3 million people are still without power; and

WHEREAS, press assessments place the death count in Puerto Rico as a result of the hurricanes as at least 450 people, conservatively, with many more people still unaccounted for and health conditions continuing to be at crisis levels; and

WHEREAS, an even more severe health care crisis continues to loom as a result of people continuing to live in houses with roofs blown off and soaked interiors, where dangerous black mold is growing that creates serious respiratory distress and illness, and

WHEREAS, many people have been forced to drink untreated water from polluted water sources, and many health care centers continue to operate with a lack of needed supplies that compromises people's health and recovery; and

WHEREAS, a breakout of leptospirosis, a dangerous bacterial disease, already has claimed lives, and the lack of safe drinking water and unsafe conditions threaten the outbreak of cholera and other potential epidemics; and

WHEREAS, the response to the crisis in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands from the Trump administration has been unacceptable for the wealthiest country in the world; and

WHEREAS, at the same time as the Trump administration has failed to do its job to provide relief to the people of Puerto Rico, some politicians and interests continue to attack the very working people who are contributing to relief and recovery efforts. These attacks include spreading misinformation about the Jones Act, which ensures maritime workers in the United States are paid a minimum wage, blaming FEMA workers for policy failures of the Trump administration, and seeking to destroy the freedom of workers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to bargain with their employers.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO Convention commends the heroic and courageous efforts of the AFL-CIO union members and volunteers who participated in the multiunion emergency relief mission; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO expresses solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the Puerto Rico Federation of Labor and the Virgin Islands Central Labor Council in their efforts to rebuild and protect all their residents following the disaster; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will support and lift up the workers and their unions who are providing relief, care and supplies in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the mainland United States; rebuilding the islands; working to reopen schools and nurture children and senior citizens; and returning a sense of normal life to the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; and.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the AFL-CIO will support and promote Operation Agua, launched by the American Federation of Teachers, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Operation Blessing and the Hispanic Federation, and other efforts to provide a reliable source of clean, safe drinking water to families across Puerto Rico; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO calls upon Congress to provide assistance to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands on the scale of the damage done by the storms, to ensure full funding for FEMA in order to substantially escalate its relief efforts on the ground, to end the cap on federal funding for Medicaid in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and to set federal matching rates for Medicaid in the same fashion as they are set in the mainland United States; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO calls upon the Trump administration to deploy the Department of Defense and other federal agencies to provide the resources necessary to restore drinking water, electric power and telecommunications to the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO calls upon Congress to enact a long-term moratorium on payments of all Puerto Rican public debt, followed by debt forgiveness, to prioritize the lives of Puerto Ricans over debt payments to Wall Street and free up millions of dollars for both short- and long-term recovery efforts.