NWSA Statement in Solidarity with Puerto Rico

In September the island of Puerto Rico, and other parts of the Caribbean, were hit with a devastating hurricane. Since then the lack of an aggressive response has created a humanitarian disaster for the 3.4 million US citizens in Puerto Rico. As feminist scholars we lend our voices to those expressing outrage at the continued neglect of our neighbors and fellow citizens in Puerto Rico, and we are in solidarity with those, including some National Women's Studies Association members, who will be marching in Washington, DC on Sunday, November 19th as we conclude our 2017 annual conference in nearby Baltimore.

In October Oxfam expressed “outrage at the slow and inadequate response the US Government has mounted in Puerto Rico. Clean water, food, fuel, electricity, and health care are in desperately short supply and quickly dwindling.” The Mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Carmen Yulín Cruz, pleaded for aid, insisting, “Without robust and consistent help we will die.” Women have been hard hit by the crisis. As one of our colleagues in the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, a grassroots feminist organization in Puerto Rico, wrote to us last month: “After the hurricane María, the situation in the country has been very critical and has become even more precarious for those already vulnerable. . . . Gender-based violence is increasing rapidly. These desperate times are aggravating households and communities. Women are being harassed on the streets while waiting in lines to buy gasoline or food, others fear being raped in temporary shelters, while still taking care of children and old-aged parents/neighbors. Our infrastructure has collapsed. Women that are trying to get restraining orders are being sent back to their homes since the investigation rooms and courts are closed.”

In 2014 NWSA held one of its largest conferences to date in Puerto Rico. We were welcomed warmly by our colleagues there and were inspired by the vibrant feminist political and intellectual community in San Juan. Therefore it is with special sadness that we have watched this disaster unfold over the past two months. The fact that this is a Spanish-speaking island of primarily people of color suggests that racist and colonial politics are implicated in this failed response and in the ongoing disregard shown by those in power toward the suffering and survival needs of the Puerto Rican people.

November, 2017