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# VOICE OF REVOLUTION

Publication of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

June 8, 2018

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## U.S. BROUGHT TO NEGOTIATING TABLE

### **Koreans Successful in Working Together for Peace and Reunification**

An historic fourth inter-Korean summit took place May 26, where Kim Jong Un, chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea and chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea (DPRK), held talks with President Moon Jae In of south Korea on the north side of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in Panmunjom. The two discussed how to together

**Koreans Successful • 3**



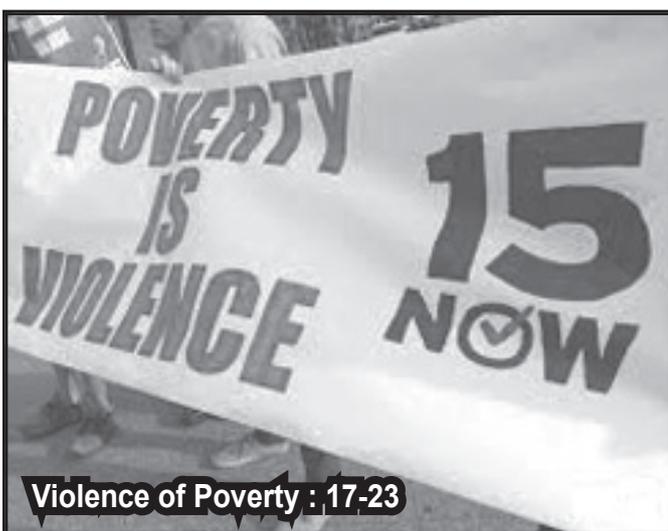
## MORE THAN 5,000 PUERTO RICANS KILLED

### **U.S. Government Guilty of Mass Killing After Hurricane María**

A new study from Harvard researchers published May 29 in the *New England Journal of Medicine* said that the number of people killed in Puerto Rico following Hurricane María is more than 4,600. They also

estimated that it is more likely 5,740 and even higher. Lack of needed health care, such as oxygen, dialysis, insulin, was the main cause of death for at least one third of those

**Government Guilty of Mass Killing • 13**



### **Stand Against Violence of Poverty — A Government Crime**

A recent report by the United Nations brings out the high levels of poverty in the U.S., especially for children and minorities, and government responsibility for it. At least 40 million people live in poverty, 18.5 million in extreme poverty, and 5.3 million live in conditions of absolute

poverty. In 2016, 18 per cent of children (13.3 million) were living in poverty, and children comprised 32.6 per cent of all people in poverty. The U.S. has the highest youth poverty rate in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which

**Violence of Poverty • 17**

**DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF ALL ABROAD AND AT HOME**

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### I • Koreans Successful

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implement the Panmunjom Declaration to realize the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and to achieve regional peace, stability and prosperity. They discussed issues facing the north and the south and how to resolve them, as well as continued work together to ensure the success of the DPRK-U.S. Summit. They firmly represented the strong desire of Koreans south, north and worldwide for achieving peace and reunification.

The two Korean statesmen, expressing that Korea is One, persisted despite U.S. efforts to derail their united work and stop the DPRK-U.S. Summit. These provocations included holding war games, known as Max Thunder, beginning May 14, that included bombers capable of dropping nuclear weapons. Prior to that U.S. officials were demanding the DPRK immediately eliminate all nuclear weapons as a pre-condition for the summit. They promoted the “Libya model,” which refers to the one-sided disarming of Libya and then the U.S. invasion, assassination of Libya’s leader Gaddafi, and decimation of the country.

While the U.S. persisted in provocations and threats, the DPRK on May 10 released three U.S. detainees. On May 21 south Korea withdrew from tri-lateral war games with the U.S. and Japan. On May 24 the DPRK dismantled its Punggye-ri nuclear testing site with the presence of foreign press. Trump chose the same day to announce the U.S. was canceling the summit. The fourth inter-Korea Summit then takes place May 26.

On the strength of the Korean efforts, the DPRK-U.S. summit is now expected to take place June 12 in Singapore. Trump has acknowledged that the issue of denuclearization is a process that involves both the U.S. and Korea. The nuclear capable F-22 bombers have been removed from the war games and the games are no being promoted in the press. On June 3, a South Korean Ministry of National Defense senior official reported that “In South Korea-U.S. defense minister talks, Minister of National Defense Song Young-moo told U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, ‘We’d like to be cautious about the military area and keep it low key for the success of the North Korea-U.S. summit,’ and Secretary Mattis



Students expressing their joy at rally in Seoul, south Korea in support of reunification and inter-Korean summits

said that was ‘100-percent fine.’”

In this manner it can be seen that the persistence by the Koreans to ensure that work for peace and reunification continue has brought the U.S. to the negotiating table on Korea’s terms. It has also secured the support of peoples worldwide, as there is great joy in seeing a united Korea and a clear example of resolving differences without use of force and threats.

While it is likely that Trump is pursuing the summit in part to undermine the friendly relations between the DPRK and China and Russia, evident in recent visits, what stands out is the strength of the united efforts of the Koreans themselves to achieve peace and eliminate all nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula, including those of the U.S.

To contribute to peace, the U.S. must use the summit as an opportunity to sign a peace treaty to end with war and take steps to remove all U.S. troops and nuclear weapons, including those on its ships and bombers, from the Korean peninsula and the region as a whole. Let all those in the U.S. that favor peace stand with the Koreans in demanding the U.S. take such action.

## Kim Jong Un Meets South Korea’s Moon Jae In

*KCNA, May 27, 2018*

The historic fourth inter-Korean summit meeting and talks took place at the Thongil House on the north side area of Panmunjom on May 26, Juche 107 (2018). Kim Jong Un, chairman of the Workers’ Party of Korea and chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, came to the Thongil House to meet and hold talks with President Moon Jae In of south Korea.

Panmunjom, the historic land that has come under a global spotlight as a symbol of peace, making a new start for north-south relations and opening up a new era of reconciliation and unity, witnessed another significant meeting between the top leaders

of north and south Korea in only the past 29 days.

Honor guards of the Korean People’s Army lined up at the Thongil House, the venue of the talks, to receive President Moon Jae In. Kim Jong Un, Supreme Leader of the party, state and army of the DPRK, warmly greeted President Moon Jae In. The two top leaders were so pleased to meet once again at the historic place after the lapse of only one month, and warmly shook hands with each other. Kim Jong Un shook hands one by one with the personages of the south side who accompanied Moon Jae In, pleased to meet with them.

Prior to the talks, President Moon Jae In made an entry in

the visitors' book of the Thongil House in memory of his visit to the north side, which reads: "Peace and Prosperity of the Korean Peninsula, together with Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea! May 26, 2018. President of the Republic of Korea Moon Jae In."

Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae In, their hands firmly held together, had a souvenir photo taken to commemorate the historic fourth north-south summit. Then, there were talks between Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae In.

Present at the talks from the north side was Kim Yong Chol, vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, and from the south side was So Hun, director of the National Intelligence Service.

At the talks there were in-depth exchanges of opinions to tackle matters that should be resolved quickly to implement the Panmunjom Declaration agreed upon at the third north-south summit; to realize the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula; and to achieve regional peace, stability and prosperity. They discussed the matters the north and the south are now faced with, and that of successfully holding the DPRK-U.S. summit.

Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae In shared the view that the two sides should trust and take care of each other and exert joint efforts to make sure that the Panmunjom Declaration reflecting the unanimous desire of all Koreans is implemented at an early date.

They agreed to hold north-south high-level talks on June 1 and further accelerate the talks by officials from various fields, including the ones of military authorities and the Red Cross. They shared the opinion that they would meet frequently in the future



to invigorate dialogue and pool wisdom and efforts, expressing their stand to make joint efforts for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Kim Jong Un thanked Moon Jae In for the great effort made by him for holding the DPRK-U.S. summit scheduled for June 12, and expressed his fixed will on the historic DPRK-U.S. summit talks.

Kim Jong Un asked Moon Jae In to continue positive cooperation with each other to improve the DPRK-U.S. relations and establish mechanisms for a permanent and durable peace.

They reached a satisfactory consensus on the matters discussed at the talks. The top leaders of the north and the south open-heartedly listened to each other's opinions on the crucial pending matters without formality, and had a candid dialogue. Kim Jong Un warmly embraced Moon Jae In and exchanged good-byes with him, promising to meet again.

The fourth north-south summit held at Panmunjom, recorded in history as a symbol of national reconciliation and unity, peace and prosperity, will provide all Koreans with new hope and vitality.

## **DPRK Says Dismantling Nuclear Test Site Shows Will to Work for Nuclear Free World**

*Xinhua, China, May 28, 2018*

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said May 28 its dismantlement of the Punggye Ri nuclear test site last week has shown its will to work for a nuclear-free world. The official Rodong Sinmun said in a commentary that the positive measures taken by the DPRK for the dismantlement of the nuclear test ground have "evoked a tremendous response from the world." It said that by inviting international media to cover the event, the DPRK has shown transparency in stopping nuclear tests.

"The DPRK is advancing along the path taken by itself according to its timetable no matter whatever others may say and

whatever way the wind blows," it said. The ruling Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) said last month in a plenary session that DPRK would halt its nuclear and missile tests and concentrate all its efforts on economic construction to improve the lives of its people.

"The whole course of dismantling the northern nuclear test ground eloquently proves the DPRK government's unshakable peace-loving stand to join the aspiration and efforts of the international community for a total stop to nuclear tests," said the newspaper of the Workers Party of Korea (WPK).

## South Korea and U.S. Agree to Keep Joint Military Exercises “Low Key”

*Hankyoreh, June 4, 2018*

South Korean and U.S. defense ministers have agreed to maintain a “low key” military approach to support the current environment in terms of denuclearization and establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula, it was reported on June 3.

“In South Korea-U.S. defense minister talks the other day, Minister of National Defense Song Young-moo told U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, ‘We’d like to be cautious about the military area and keep it low key for the success of the North Korea-U.S. summit,’ and Secretary Mattis said that was ‘100-percent fine,’” a South Korean Ministry of National Defense senior official reported that day.

Song and Mattis had a separate bilateral meeting on June 2 after attending the Shangri-La Dialogue (Asian Security Summit) in Singapore. The discussions stood in stark contrast to the two sides’ past affirmations of a stern military response amid a growing North Korean nuclear and missile threat. The change is seen as reflecting a different situation around the Korean Peninsula with recent back-to-back inter-Korean summits and an upcoming North Korea-U.S. summit.

It remains unclear whether the “low key” approach discussed by the two defense ministers refers directly to a downscaling or suspension of military exercises. The Ministry of National Defense dismissed the possibility, saying that joint military exercises would “be conducted normally according to our annual plan” but adding that it would “refrain from publicizing them to the outside.”

“Military actions have confidentiality. The general public has no way of knowing unless you make a point of telling them,” a military official said.

“Exercises are an end in themselves, but they can also be announced for political purposes. [The ‘low key’ comment] means that we will be refraining from disclosing or publicizing them,” the official added.

The official also waved off North Korea’s recent denunciation of the Ulchi-Freedom Guardian (UFG) exercises scheduled for August.

“As far as I know, the exercises are going ahead as planned,” they said. But observers speculated that joint South Korea-U.S. military exercises could actually end up downscaled as more progress is made in dialogue on the Korean Peninsula.

In a joint press statement released after their meeting, the two ministers said they planned to cooperate on a swift return of wartime operational control (OPCON) for the South Korean military, adding that U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) would be maintained at their current level. When asked by an audience member after his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue that day whether a withdrawal of USFK would be possible if inter-Korean relations improve, Mattis replied, “That issue is not on the table here in Singapore on the 12th [at the North Korea-U.S. summit] nor

should it be.”

Mattis stressed that the issue of the numbers of USFK troops is “not on the table” for the Singapore summit.

“I would tell you that any discussion about the number of U.S. troops in the Republic of Korea is subject to – one, the Republic of Korea’s invitation to have them there and the discussions between the United States and the Republic of Korea – separate and distinct from the negotiations that are going on with DPRK,” Mattis explained.

“If we can reduce the threat, if we can restore confidence-building measures with something verifiable, then of course these kinds of issues can come up subsequently between two sovereign democracies – the Republic of Korea and the United States. But that issue is not on the table here,” he added.

Mattis’ clear position stood in contrast with that of U.S. President Donald Trump, who avoided giving a direct answer on the issue the same day. After meeting with Workers’ Party of Korea vice chairman Kim Yong-chol at the White House that day, Trump was asked by a reporter whether Kim had made any demands regarding USFK.

“We talked about almost everything. We talked about a lot. And we talked about sanctions,” he replied.

During trilateral defense minister talks in Singapore on June 3 with Mattis and Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera, Song Young-moo said Seoul welcomed the halt to North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile testing and dismantlement of its Punggye Village nuclear test site. In a joint press statement, the three ministers said they “welcomed the results of the two recent inter-Korean Summits [ . . . ] and noted the positive changes that have been brought about are setting favorable conditions for the North Korea-U.S. Summit.”

“They expressed their hopes that the upcoming North Korea-U.S. Summit will contribute to comprehensively resolving matters of security and humanitarian concerns for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the region, and to this end, pledged to strengthen security cooperation among the three countries,” the statement continued.



# International Women Join With Koreans to Demand Peace on the Peninsula

*Medea Benjamin, CodePink, June 1, 2018*

I just returned from South Korea with a fabulous delegation of 30 women from 15 countries, including Russia, China, Mongolia, Japan, Canada, Colombia, Iraq and the United States. It was organized by WomenCross DMZ (the wonderful Christine Ahn) and Nobel Women's Initiative (the great Nobel laureate Mairead Maguire and director Liz Bernstein).



Our counterparts in South Korea included the YWCA (yes, it is very progressive and political in many parts of the world!), Women Making Peace, and Peace Mothers of Korea.

In a whirlwind of activities, we held a women's peace symposium at the National Assembly hosted by the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Chung, Hyun-back. We had meetings with the US, UK, Japanese and Swedish embassies and were warmly received at a reception co-hosted by Canada and Norway with five Ambassadors present and 20 foreign ministry staff. A smaller group also met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Our peace walk was a glorious six-mile-long hike to the DMZ (which turned out to be at the same time as when South Korea's President Moon and North Korea's Kim Jong Un were meeting in Panmunjom). At the end of the walk we held a beautiful ceremony with traditional drums, dancing and singing.

The low point of the trip was the second day, when we heard about Trump canceling the summit. Undeterred, we quickly organized a protest outside the US embassy and joined a Korean candlelight vigil in the evening. At a hastily called press conference in Gwangwamun Square, in the center of Seoul and in front of the United States embassy, Women Cross DMZ founder Christine Ahn declared: "Peace isn't just up to two men. It's up to the people and the leaders of North and South Korea, and that peace train has long left the station."

We called on Donald Trump to get back on board the peace train or be left behind. We were elated when we discovered,

two days later, that it looked like the summit was back on.

Among the different points we learned/discussed:

Trump's new travel ban stopped us from going to North Korea, as we did on the 2015 trip. We call on Trump to lift the travel ban when it comes up for renewal in August and instead encourage people-to-people ties. We will look for ways to challenge the travel ban.

There is still not a US ambassador to South Korea, but there is no embassy at all with North Korea. To facilitate ongoing communication during what could be a very long negotiating process, the U.S. and North Korea should establish Interests Sections in the respective capitals. This would be a step on the path to full diplomatic relations.

The key U.S. position is denuclearization and the key North Korean position is a peace treaty. The South Korean position is that the two must go hand in hand, that one will not happen without the other, and that we should be advocating for concrete steps towards achieving both.

North Korea has already given some concrete gestures of goodwill (releasing prisoner, blowing up a nuclear facility) and so should the U.S. One would be to halt or dramatically reduce the US/South Korean military exercises.

We call for June 12 to be a Global Day of Solidarity with the Korean people for peace.

We truly believe that the momentum toward peace is unstoppable, driven forward by the deep yearning of the Korean people for reconciliation and peace after 70 years of separation and conflict. We have to make sure that the U.S. government is part of the solution.

# Declaring End of Korean War First Step Toward Peace Regime

*Hankyoreh, June 4, 2018*

After U.S. President Donald Trump directly mentioned the possibility of officially ending the Korean War before his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore on June 12, attention is growing about what this declaration might mean. For the leaders of South Korea, North Korea and the U.S. to come together to declare that there will be no war on the Korean Peninsula would signify the end of the world's last remaining conflict of the Cold War and the first step toward a permanent peace regime.

That is also why declaring the end of the war has been mentioned several times since South Korean President Moon Jae-in first broached the topic during his Berlin Declaration in July 2017: the idea was made official in the Panmunjom Declaration on April 27, a suggestion was made during the press conference following Moon and Kim's second inter-Korean summit on May 26 that the war could be declared over during a trilateral summit between Moon, Kim and Trump.

Before it was decided that the Trump-Kim summit would be held in Singapore, the Blue House (home to President of South Korea, similar to the White House for the U.S.) had let the U.S. and North Korea know via various channels that it preferred for the summit to be held in Panmunjom. The assumption was that if the Trump-Kim summit — which is supposed to deal with the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a corresponding security guarantee for the Pyongyang regime — proves successful, Panmunjom would make it easier for Moon, Trump and Kim to immediately hold a summit.

The basic idea is that, if you have to skate across thin ice, it is best to go fast. The Blue House appears to think that such a trilateral summit would be very symbolic and effective at stabilizing affairs on the Korean Peninsula, which are prone to being derailed by various factors.

“A declaration of the end of the war or a peace treaty might not mean much if they don't lead to concrete steps. Even so, the reason President Moon has continued to stress the three countries declaring the end of the war is because such a declaration could end hostile relations on the Korean Peninsula and become the first step to denuclearization and the establishment of a permanent peace,” a Blue House senior official told *The Hankyoreh* over the phone.

While declaring the war over is not itself as important as the three countries' carrying out that declaration, the official said, the declaration would be significant in concluding one stage in the long journey toward a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. If the success of the Trump-Kim summit leads to the declaration of the end of the war during a summit among the three countries, it could serve as a safety valve that would prevent inter-Korean relations and North Korea-U.S. relations from “backsliding,” this official said.



## Peace treaty would come in “final stages of denuclearization”

If the three countries officially end the war, it would create favorable conditions for entering into a peace treaty that could replace the armistice agreement, Korean Peninsula experts predict. The idea is that declaring the war over would politically signify that the three countries have resolved their hostile relationship in advance of a peace treaty. By declaring the end of the war, the three countries could open the door to a peace treaty and pave the way to creating the legal and technical framework for eventually entering into a peace treaty in the final stage of denuclearization.

“Viewed in terms of its political significance, a declaration of the end of the war would basically be a peace treaty. The peace treaty that would actually be signed at a later point could take the form of a technical agreement,” said a source who is familiar with North Korea-U.S. relations. That is the stage at which it would be possible to deal with matters left over from the war, such as finalizing the inter-Korean maritime border and deciding what to do about the UN Command.

“A peace treaty or an agreement normalizing North Korea-U.S. relations could come in the final stage of denuclearization. What we need is a way to guarantee the North Korean regime's security in the intermediate stage — after the North has begun denuclearization but before the final stage — and declaring the end of the war could serve as a political guarantee of that,” said Cho Sung-ryul, senior research fellow for the Institute for National Security Strategy.

SUMMIT NOW EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE

# A Look at Events Leading Up to Trump's Cancellation of the North Korea-U.S. Summit

*Zoom in Korea, May 27, 2018*

This week, Donald Trump canceled what would have been a historic summit between North Korea and United States. Though it likely will now take place, here is a look at the sequence of events that led up to his unilateral decision:

**April 27** — Historic Inter-Korean Summit where the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula was signed by the two leaders. It has four main points:

1) all-round improvement and development in their relations so as to bring about the future of co-prosperity and independent reunification;

2) the north and south will work together to ease the acute military tension and substantially remove the danger of war on the Korean Peninsula;

3) the north and the south will closely work together to build a permanent and durable peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula;

4) the north and the south affirmed the common goal to make the Korean Peninsula nuclear-free through its complete denuclearization.

**April 29** — U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton appeared on CBS' "Face the Nation" and Fox News and discussed the "Libya model" as the U.S.' blueprint for denuclearizing North Korea. In 2003-2004, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi gave up the country's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. In 2011, after disarming Libya, the United States and NATO forces bombed the defenseless country, and U.S.-backed "rebel" forces brutally murdered Gaddafi.

**May 9** — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited North Korea to meet with Kim Jong-un. Following their meeting on May 10, North Korea released three American detainees, who returned to the U.S. with Pompeo.

**May 10** — Trump announced the U.S.-North Korea Summit will take place on June 12, 2018 in Singapore.

**May 14** — Max Thunder, an annual joint military exercise involving U.S. and South Korean fighter bombers, began less than a month ahead of the planned summit. Rather than scale down the military drills, the U.S. deployed 100 warplanes including F-22 stealth fighters and B-52 bombers designed to drop nuclear bombs. Although the U.S. justified it as a routine annual exercise, its scale was noticeably upgraded to include the F-22 fighters, which had not been deployed in previous Max Thunder exercises.

**May 16** — North Korea cancelled high-level talks with South Korea and cited the escalated Max Thunder exercise as the reason.

Kim Kye-gwan, North Korea's first vice-minister of Foreign Affairs, publicly denounced the Trump administration for its reference to the "Libya mode of nuclear abandonment." He added that North Korea never asked for nor seeks the "economic compensation and benefit" the U.S. says it will offer in exchange for abandoning nuclear weapons.

Kim clarified, "We have already stated our intention of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and made clear on several occasions that the precondition for denuclearization is to put an end to the anti-DPRK hostile policy and nuclear threats and blackmail of the United States."

**May 17** — Trump contradicted Bolton's remarks about the "Libya model": "The Libya model isn't the model we have at all when we're thinking of North Korea." He also conceded that Libya was "decimated" as a result.

**May 21** — A trilateral military exercise involving U.S., South Korean, and Japanese bomber planes was adjusted after South Korea announced it will not participate. South Korea cited its concerns about the exercise's impact on its relations with North Korea, which had dramatically improved following the April 27 Inter-Korean Summit.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham made the following comment on Fox News: "President Trump told me three days ago that he wants to end this in a win-win way. He thinks that's possible, but if they pull out, they play him, that we're going to end North Korea's threat to the American homeland in his first term and I'll let you surmise as to what that might look like."

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence spoke on Fox News and repeated Bolton's threat that North Korea could meet Libya's fate: "There was some talk about the Libyan model last week, and you know, as the President made clear, this will only end like the Libyan model ended if Kim Jong Un doesn't make a deal." Fox News noted his comment could be interpreted as a threat, and Pence responded, "Well, I think it's more of a fact."

**May 22** — Trump and South Korea's Moon Jae-in held a summit in Washington. After their meeting, Trump talked to the press about the U.S.-North Korea summit: "There's a very substantial chance that it won't work out. That doesn't mean that it won't work out over a period of time, but it may not work out for June 12. There are certain conditions we want to happen. I think we'll get those conditions. And if we don't, we

won't have the meeting.”

Trump also indicated openness to the idea of “phased dismantling of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.” While he prefers denuclearization of North Korea to happen all at once, he said, he does not want to “totally commit himself” to the all-at-once option.

Hours later, Pompeo announced that the White house’s goal is still to hold the summit on June 12. The South Korean government also expressed confidence that the summit will move forward as planned. A Blue House representative told the South Korean media that in his meeting with Trump, President Moon assured him that there is no need to second-guess North Korea’s desire for the summit.



Demonstration in Seoul, south Korea, supporting united efforts for reunification and proclaiming Korea is One

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**May 24** — North Korea dismantled the Punggye-ri nuclear testing site in front of international press.

North Korea’s Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui called out Mike Pence for his comment on the “Libya model.” She called him a “political dummy” and said the U.S. “offends against our goodwill and clings to unlawful and outrageous acts.”

On the same day, Trump sent a letter to North Korea to cancel the June 12 summit. “You talk about nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive,” he wrote. After unilaterally canceling the summit, he then wrote in typical Trumpian illogicalness, “If you change your mind having to do with this most important summit, please do not hesitate to call me or write.”

**May 25** — Trump said negotiations are back on with North Korea and the summit could still happen on June 12 or later: “We are having very productive talks with North Korea about reinstating the Summit which, if it does happen, will likely remain in Singapore on the same date, June 12, and, if necessary, will be extended beyond that date.”

**May 26** — Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae-in met at a surprise summit at the Demilitarized Zone — sparking widespread speculations that the Kim-Trump summit could happen after all.

### A MESSAGE TO CONGRESS FROM SOUTH KOREAN REPRESENTATIVE

## On Denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and Building a System for Peace

*Kim Jong-hoon, The Hill, May 4, 2018*

On April 27, the leaders of North and South Korea met for the first time in eleven years. It was an excellent meeting. We could not have asked for a better outcome. The historic Panmunjom Declaration proclaims the beginning of a new era of national reconciliation and co-prosperity.

The two leaders agreed to “declare an end to the Korean War” within this year and “turn the armistice into a peace treaty.” On the nuclear question, of greatest concern to the United States, they “confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.” As a prelude to the upcoming Kim-Trump summit, the inter-Korean summit has created optimal conditions for successful talks between the United States and North Korea.

Immediately after the Panmunjeom summit, south Korea’s Blue House announced that Kim Jong Un had pledged to shut down North Korea’s nuclear test site in May and invite experts and journalists from the United States and South Korea to observe the dismantling of the facilities. [This action was carried out — VOR Ed. Note] Kim seems determined to demonstrate, ahead of his summit with Trump, that his words are not empty

and that his agreement for peace on the Korean Peninsula is sincere.

Washington pundits, however, were quick to dismiss the Panmunjom Declaration as not having gone far enough on denuclearization and warn that Kim Jong Un should not be trusted. Their reaction, in stark contrast to that of Koreans around the world who celebrated the historic summit agreement, disappoints and worries me a great deal.

Given the historic significance of the current moment in U.S.-Korea relations, the silence of Washington lawmakers, on the other hand, is puzzling. Tens of thousands of U.S. troops shed blood in the Korean War. For the past sixty-five years, the United States deployed to Korea countless young men and women, who braved repeated war threats in a tense military standoff against North Korea. Last year, North Korea claimed to have developed a weapon of mass destruction that can threaten the continental United States. And now, the leaders of North and South Korea and the United States are discussing a solution to finally end such a treacherously dangerous situation. Should this not be applauded?

As a lawmaker in South Korea, I appeal to my counterparts in Washington to play a more active role at this critical and historic moment in U.S.-Korea relations. To that end, I share with you a few thoughts on understanding the current moment.

**One, to say that we cannot trust North Korea, as it has not proposed a roadmap for verifiable denuclearization at this juncture is nonsense.** After all, isn't the purpose of the upcoming summit to discuss this very thing? I have not seen anyone — no government official, political leader or expert in North Korea or the United States — propose a clear plan for verification. This is a task for North Korea and the United States to put their heads together to tackle after the summit.

Washington pundits — mostly those who have tried in the past but failed to find a solution to the U.S.-North Korea conflict — demand unilateral denuclearization of North Korea and cry that “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” is vague. They are either ignorant of or willfully distorting the history and the core of the conflict and negotiations between the United States and North Korea surrounding the nuclear issue.

Both the Geneva Agreement in 1994 and the Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six Party Talks in 2005 talk about “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” not North Korean denuclearization. They contain pledges by North Korea, the United States and South Korea to each take steps toward denuclearization of the peninsula.

The 1994 Geneva Agreement states, “Both sides will work together for peace and security on a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula” and commits the United States to “provide formal assurances to the DPRK, against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the U.S.” while North Korea takes steps toward denuclearization.

The Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six Party Talks in 2005, which clearly states that the goal of the talks was the “verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” commits the United States to pledge “that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons” and South Korea to affirm “its commitment not to receive or deploy nuclear weapons...and that there exist no nuclear weapons within its territory.”

So far, North Korea has taken initiative while the United States has done nothing. It takes two hands to make a sound. Refusing to budge until “complete” denuclearization would be the surest way to undermine the current process of detente.

**Two, the United States needs to be a key party to a Korean Peninsula peace agreement.** It seems most Americans believe ending the Korean War and creating a peace system on

the Korean Peninsula are merely Korean affairs, feasible simply through reconciliation between North and South Korea. This is far from the truth.

Let us remember that the signatory to the armistice at the end of the Korean War was not South Korea but the United States. Not only was it a party to the Korean War, but the United States was directly involved in the division of Korea. The United States maintained military rule from 1945 to 1948, and this led to the establishment of two separate governments in the north and south, which in turn led to the Korean War in 1950 when the United States took operational control of South Korean forces. As such, replacing the 1953 armistice with a peace treaty requires the United States and North Korea as the central parties.

Even today, the United States maintains wartime operational control of South Korean forces. In the absence of a peace treaty, war could break out at any moment in Korea and the United States will automatically be pulled in. The U.S. media and political leaders seem singularly concerned with denuclearizing North Korea, but signing a peace treaty and establishing a complete and irreversible peace system on the Korean Peninsula are the only way to free the United States from the constant threats of war on the Korean Peninsula.

**Three, reunification is a shared dream of Korean people around the world.** Americans often ask, “Do South Koreans really want reunification?” Soon, you will no longer need to ask this question. From the moment Kim Jong Un stepped over the military demarcation line at Panmunjom on April 27, there has been a sea change in the way South Koreans view the North. Excited conversations can be heard all throughout South Korea about the resumption of inter-Korean exchanges and visits and the opportunity to meet again with our North Korean counterparts.

### **Peace in Korea Requires a Bipartisan Effort**

The upcoming U.S.-North Korea summit could produce a general framework for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula as well as normalization of relations and the creation of a peace system. If all goes well, we could see, concurrent with a timeline for denuclearization, a declaration to end the Korean War before the end of this year and a peace treaty by 2020.

This requires a bipartisan effort. You do not have to like Trump to support peace in Korea. We are on the brink of achieving something historic for global peace. Let us work together to ensure the upcoming U.S.-North Korea summit leads to a long-term resolution of the Korean conflict.

*(Kim Jong-hoon is a member of the South Korea National Assembly)*

**Visit our website: [usmlo.org](http://usmlo.org)**

## Memory of Forgotten War

The documentary film, *Memory of Forgotten War*, explores the lead up to, conduct, and aftermath of the Korean War through the memories of elder Korean American war survivors. It has special resonance today on the cusp of what could be a historic first meeting between a sitting United States president and the leader of North Korea. Following a tumultuous year that threatened nuclear holocaust but also witnessed bold North – South diplomatic initiatives, all eyes are on the hoped-for summit between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump...

What many Americans have either forgotten or never known, however, are the origins of this conflict in a Korean War that remains un-ended to this day.

*Memory of Forgotten War* recalls this Cold War collision and the U.S. role in it — from the U.S. recommendation to divide Korea at the 38th parallel at the end of WWII, to its installation of a three year U.S. military government in the south, to unprecedented carpet bombing during the war, to a continuing presence of U.S. combat forces and advanced weaponry in the south in violation of the spirit of the armistice agreement that only halted the fighting temporarily. *Memory of Forgotten War*

interweaves this history with the memories of Korean American war survivors Suntae Chun, Heebok Kim, Min Yong Lee, and Kee Park. Their accounts of life before, during, and after the war animate this history and convey the profound human significance of current prospects for an end to decades of hostility. Brief historical commentary is provided by scholars Bruce Cumings and Ji-Yeon Yuh.

Unrestricted Public Access: Streaming June 4 – June 14.  
Share with friends/networks:

English speakers – <https://vimeo.com/72111902/f35cf8f8f1>

Korean speakers – <https://vimeo.com/268726626/f42eea6ac9>

To purchase a DVD – <http://www.mufilms.org/buy-dvds/>

Filmmakers – Deann Borshay Liem and Ramsay Liem

Comments/Questions:

Deann Borshay Liem [deann@mufilms.org](mailto:deann@mufilms.org)

Ramsay Liem [liem@bc.edu](mailto:liem@bc.edu)

Additional memories and legacies of the Korean War (film, video, audio, text, art installations) at

[www.legaciesofthekoreanwar.org](http://www.legaciesofthekoreanwar.org) and [www.stillpresentpasts.org](http://www.stillpresentpasts.org)

### SOUTH KOREA

## Former Dictator Chun Doo-hwan Ordered Gwangju Massacre with U.S. Knowledge, New Evidence Shows

*US-ROK Alliance, May 21, 2018*

May 18 marked thirty-eight years since the historic Gwangju Uprising when thousands of Gwangju citizens took to the streets in 1980 to demand an end to decades of military dictatorship in south Korea. Armed civilians drove out the army, which had been deployed by then-General Chun Doo-hwan to put down the uprising. For a brief moment, Gwangju citizens from all walks of life came together to realize true democracy, liberated from the military regime. For several days, they not only maintained order but self-organized to share food, provide medical aid and care for those who had been injured by the south Korean police and military.

The military government responded quickly by deploying paramilitary forces to re-seize Gwangju. Chun Doo-hwan, who had taken power in a military coup, maintained a repressive regime for seven more years until mass protests forced him to step down in 1987.

Today, the people of South Korea still seek justice for the more than one thousand Gwangju citizens who were massacred by Chun's regime in May, 1980. Many responsible for the mass killings have yet to be held accountable. Chun and others, who had previously been convicted, were pardoned in 1997. Chun walks free having served hardly any jail time.



Gwangju uprising defending rights, May 1980

### **Newly Declassified Evidence Incriminates Chun and the U.S.**

New incriminating evidence against Chun and other key figures in his military regime have recently emerged. A witness account

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## REMOVE U.S. TROOPS AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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made public earlier this month revealed that a secret chain of command called the Defense Security Command (DSC), which took direct orders from Chun, was responsible for the decision to indiscriminately shoot at civilians in Gwangju starting on May 21, 1980.

Whistleblower Heo Jang-hwan, a former investigator with the Gwangju 505 Security Unit, which worked directly under the order of the DSC in 1980, spoke with *The Hankyoreh* on May 3, 2018. In the days leading up to the Gwangju Massacre, he said, the Gwangju 505 Security Unit was briefed on a plan to preemptively open-fire at protesters. His then superior, he added, informed the unit's investigators that Chun will "assume responsibility" for the order to open-fire. Live ammunition was given to soldiers in Gwangju — an indication of the government's intent to fire at protesters without provocation, according to Heo.

Last week, South Korea's media outlet SBS also released a report based on newly-declassified U.S. State Department records that lend credence to the widely-held belief that Chun Doo-hwan had directly ordered the South Korean military to open-fire at Gwangju citizens to quell the 1980 uprising. SBS cited details from previously classified cables exchanged between the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Seoul in May 1980.

According to the documents, then-U.S. Secretary of State Edmund Muskie sent a classified message containing Chun Doo-hwan's request for a new military strategy to address the Gwangju Uprising to the embassies of South Korea, Japan, and China on May 25, 1980. Muskie also notified them that Chun's military regime was planning to implement a strategy of repression if negotiations with the protesters failed.

On May 26, 1980, U.S. Ambassador to South Korea William Gleysteen sent a classified report to Muskie to inform him that Chun was moving forward with plans to violently suppress the protests in Gwangju. In this report, according to SBS, Gleysteen explicitly said he purposefully did not tell the South Korean government to halt its plan to use military force against civilian protesters.

Two important facts are confirmed by these recently declassified records:

Chun Doo-hwan was directly responsible for planning and ordering the massacre of civilian protesters in Gwangju;

The U.S. had full knowledge of Chun's plan to use the military to suppress the Gwangju democracy movement yet did nothing



March in Gwangju honoring the uprising, May 2016

to prevent the massacre. The U.S., which had operational control over south Korean forces, gave tacit approval for Chun's plan to deploy heavily armed troops to crack down on civilian dissent.

The declassified records also show that Chun, to justify his use of military force, had fabricated the claim that north Korea was behind the Gwangju Uprising. He accused then-dissident (later democratically-elected president) Kim Dae-jung of collaborating with North Korea to incite the "riots" in Gwangju. Not a single shred of evidence has emerged to corroborate Chun's claims about north Korea's involvement.

South Korean people's movements have endured many forms of military repression and state violence, which the south Korean government has historically justified by accusing them of being orchestrated by North Korea. Clear evidence of U.S. involvement behind mass killings of Korean people, on the other hand, have not led to any formal denouncement or action to hold accountable U.S. government or military officials.

Artificial division of the Korean Peninsula has been at the root of decades of authoritarianism that sparked the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, as well as the 1948 Jeju Uprising and other mass resistance movements in South Korea's history. Division prolonged by U.S. military occupation has had a long-lasting and traumatic effect on the Korean people. As North and South Korea prepare to resume inter-Korean cooperation after the historic Panmunjom summit, a critical part of reconciliation and unification should be an examination of the multitudinous ways in which division has impacted the lives of the Korean people, and perhaps more importantly, honoring the struggles of those who stood up to the forces behind Korea's division.

### I • Government Guilty of Mass Killing

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who died. Government failures to provide clean water, electricity, safe housing, medical care or even just a functioning 911 system, were main causes for this mass killing. Displacement, infrastructure losses, including access to roads also contributed. That the U.S. government is capable of providing all of these necessities and doing so rapidly is beyond doubt, given that the military is capable of establishing whole cities in a matter of days, both in the U.S. and worldwide.

The main problem is not the devastation caused by the storm, but rather government refusal before to ensure evacuation and safety for the people and after to provide the healthcare and basic necessities needed to prevent such widespread massive death. The number of people killed is second only to the Great Galveston Hurricane of 1900, where more than 6,000 people were killed. Government-organized failures before, during and after Hurricane Katrina resulted in about 1,800 people dieing, most in New Orleans.

The number of people killed in Puerto Rico is more than 70 times the official government number of 64 deaths. The government, including both the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Governor of Puerto Rico, has systematically minimized the number of deaths. Indeed, Trump, when he visited shortly after the hurricane did the same. Complaining about the need to fund the recovery, he said there were less than twenty deaths. The people knew well there were many thousands more. As one example, in November, Puerto Rico's Center for Investigative Journalism published its first analysis of uncounted deaths, a level much higher than the governments. On December 7, using public health data, it reported an excess of 1,000 deaths, when compared to the same time period in 2016.

The Harvard study interviewed thousands of people and compared Puerto Rico's mortality rate from September 20 through December 31, 2017 to the same time period in 2016. The rate for 2017 was 14.3 deaths per 1,000 persons. This represented a 62% increase in the mortality rate as compared with the same period in 2016. The researchers brought at that even their higher number of 5,740 deaths are an underestimate, both for that time period and because many more people have died as a result of government

failure since December.

María reportedly caused an estimated \$90 billion in damage, making it the third costliest ever in the United States. The entire main island was impacted, as was Vieques. Yet FEMA, responsible for recovery, has approved only \$1 billion in individual assistance grants for residents of Puerto Rico and even less, \$500 million, has been designated for repairs to bridges, government buildings and other structures. At the same time, the U.S. government imposed Control Board is demanding that instead of funding recovery, Puerto Rico must first pay the debt to the Wall Street loan sharks. This is guaranteed to cause even more deaths and devastation.

Puerto Ricans are broadly opposing these crimes. They organized a general strike on May 1 and continue to protest the various government organized attacks. They are demanding that the debt be canceled and that the U.S. take responsibility for its many crimes, present and past against Puerto Rico. This includes reparations for its colonization, its sterilizations of large numbers of women, its disruption and distortion of the Puerto Rican economy, and full funding for the recovery.

Puerto Ricans are also demanding their right to decide how best to rebuild, including constructing the electric grid using solar and other renewable energy sources. As many have brought out, the bulk of recovery has been done based on their own efforts and their actions already show they are the ones who can best decide how to rebuild. Many organizations have come into being to contribute to the recovery and they are taking the stand that it is the people's interests that must be defended. The many Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and people all across the country are joining these efforts, demonstrating and organizing to *Cancel the Debt! Fund Hurricane Relief Not War! U.S. Out and Let Puerto Ricans Decide!*



## Judge Orders Puerto Rican Government to Release Hurricane María Death Information to CPI and CNN

*Julio Ricardo Varela, June 5, 2018*

A judge in San Juan ruled June 5 that the government of Puerto Rico has seven days to release requested mortality statistics to the Center for Investigative Journalism (CPI) and CNN, two journalistic organizations who have been reporting about the island's underreporting of deaths since Hurricane María and had sued the government's Demographic Registry for access to data.

The 27-page decision by Judge Lauracelis Roques Arroyo ordered the following to happen:

The CPI must receive:

- Registered deaths in Puerto Rico from September 18, 2017 to the most recent entry made by the island's Demographic Registry. This would be delivered as a complete database, categorized by day and by local municipality.

- A copy of all death certificates in Puerto Rico from September 18, 2017 to the present date.

- A copy of all burial requests in Puerto Rico from September 18, 2017 to the present date.

- A copy of all cremation requests in Puerto Rico from September 18, 2017 to the present date.

- Authorization to access the manual register used to record requests to funeral homes and cremation houses that are housed in each of the island's Demographic Registry offices.

- Access to the Demographic Registry database that tracks cause of death.

CNN must receive:

- A digital database copy used to record death certificates in Puerto Rico, tracking certificates from September 20, 2017 to January, 2018.

- A digital copy of all death certificates in Puerto Rico from September 20, 2017 to January 20, 2018.

“This Court concludes that, with the exception of Social Security numbers, the information contained in the death certificates and any additional information is not privileged,” part of the decision read in Spanish. “Therefore, this Court orders that the plaintiffs’ access to death certificates be allowed, as the balance is tipped in favor of the constitutional right of access to information.”

The decision comes just days after the government of Puerto Rico, in response to months of pressure from journalists and researchers, shared its first public release of 2017 mortality statistics since January 4. Those latest numbers, published on June 1, showed that there were 1,244 more deaths in September and October 2017 when compared to the same two months in 2016. Last Tuesday, a Harvard School of Public Health study estimated that the number of excess hurricane-related deaths

after Hurricane María from September 20, 2017 to December 31, 2017 was more than 70 times the government’s official’s count of 64.

On September 28, 2017, the CPI filed a story saying that the hurricane-related death toll was being underreported. A December 7 report from the CPI, in collaboration with Latino USA and Latino Rebels, said that nearly 1,000 people died in Puerto Rico the first 40 days after Hurricane María.

“The data of the people who died after Hurricane María has become the best-kept secret by the administration of Ricardo Rossello, who only gave minimal and general information, sometimes wrong information, and instead has been preventing, with the use of public resources, journalists and academics from seeing databases and death certificates. That public policy is a contradiction with its public relations strategy that proclaims transparency,” Carla Minet of the CPI said in a Spanish-language press release about the decision. “We ask Governor Rosselló to finally deliver the information without further excuses.”

The government of Puerto Rico has now announced that it will follow the judge’s order: Authorized statement of the secretary of Public Affairs and Public Policy, Ramón Rosario:

“The Government of Puerto Rico complied with what is expressly provided for in the *Puerto Rico Demographic Registry Act*. However, a Court already determined that both the CPI and CNN are interested parties. The *Puerto Rico Demographic Registry Act* is clear in that an order of the Court can convert a party into an interested party beyond the requirements established by the Law, which is what happened in this case. Our policy, at the request of Governor Ricardo Rosselló, is to work with strict transparency and facilitate access to all public information, so we will be complying with what was recently ordered by the Court.” (*June 5, 2018 – La Fortaleza, San Juan*)

## The ABCs of Boricua Resilience

*Angélica De Jesús, June 6, 2018*

In the wake of a recent Harvard study estimating that 4,645 lives were lost to Hurricane Maria, 70 times more than the official (government) count of 64, Boricuas continue to do the difficult task of mourning loved ones and protecting the people/island that remain on the island of Puerto Rico.

During times like these, it can be difficult to find out who to help or where to spend your time. Like many others in the diaspora, I am always searching for ways to help my family and la isla. These days, that search has extended beyond myself and into a mapping project in which I map, and in some cases translate, sustainable recovery work on the Island. But not just any work, I look for organizations that centers Boricua self-community and self-determination, work that unravels violent colonial infrastructures, and work that improves the material conditions for ... Boricuas on the Island. Additionally, since my family members live in the small city of San Lorenzo as well as in the large city of Bayamón, my search includes work being done from rural to urban spaces, and everywhere in between.

Mirroring the deepening relationship between islanders and the diaspora, this list also includes organizations based in the U.S. that often work in Puerto Rico.

I wrote this as an offering to those who want to know how to help and as a “gracias” to those already putting in work to transform the colonial conditions of Borinkén.

It is an archive highlighting some — but certainly not all — people, groups, and organizations committed to the daily, short-term, and long-term recovery and health of the people of the island of Puerto Rico. It is a starting place. We know these organizations are not static and will change. I witness the difficulties, layers and contradictions of fighting for a decolonized Puerto Rico in this particular political moment in the U.S. [...] This is a place to start. For now, here is a list of what people are doing that might help us continuously figure out where we can go.

Below you will find an alphabetical list featuring some of the organizations making a significant impact within range of

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## 5000 PUERTO RICANS KILLED AFTER MARIA

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sociocultural, political, economic and environmental issues. These people and organizations are working alongside Puerto Ricans, some of them working with those most impacted by this colonial disaster.

Please support these organizations by volunteering your time and donating to help continue their work.

### **A is for AgitArte**

Under founder and artistic director Jorge Díaz Ortiz, AgitArte serves the Boricua community (and beyond) as an organization of working class artists and cultural organizers who initiate and lead community-based educational and arts programs, along with projects that agitate in the struggles for liberation.

They are currently working on a 170-foot-long visual art piece about Puerto Rico and the need to #endthedebt and #decolonize Puerto Rico. The Scroll will be premiered at the AgitArte exhibit in Loisaida at the Clemente on June 29. @whenwefightwewin

### **B is for Organización Boricua**

Boricua has done grassroots agroecology and food sovereignty work for nearly 30 years. They're one of the first and major drivers of agroecology in Puerto Rico. Today, they continue fighting for a sustainable agricultural policy and creating networks and brigadas of support for farmers across the island.

### **C is for Coco De Oro**

Coco De Oro is a 20-year-old grassroots organization with the mission to grow creative and critical leaders on the island. To do this, local activist Edgardo Larregui partners with local people and organizations in the states to create innovative Post-Maria recovery initiatives. These initiatives include movie nights and the Rebuild Comerío Project, a community-based collaboration between Defend PR (see below), Coco De Oro and community members of underserved town of Comerío. Donations still needed!

### **C is also for the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción**

A feminist political project bringing together feminists from across different genders, races, classes and sexuality to fight against capitalism and the patriarchy.

### **D is for Defend PR**

Defend PR, founded by four friends (Christian Martir, Adrian "Viajero" Roman, Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi and Michael Shawn Cordero), is a multimedia project designed to document and celebrate Puerto Rican creativity, resilience, and resistance. Defend PR actively supports a range of sustainable and just recovery projects, including a participatory planning initiative between Coco De Oro, Defend PR, La Maraña and local community members in underserved barrios.



If you are in New York, you can catch Defend PR's exhibit at the Caribbean Cultural Center and African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI). The exhibit is free and runs until June 9.

### **E is for Efecto Sombrilla/El Departamento de la Comida**

Efecto Sombrilla/El Departamento de la Comida, founded by Tara Rodriguez Besosa, is committed to connecting gaps in PR's local chain of foods by integrating social networks and food education to strengthen the islands agro-ecological movement and food systems. Tara participating in the 2018 Allied Media Conference in Detroit, MI as a co-coordinator of the Ferment track: Feeding Emergent Resistance Movements, Envisioning Nourishing Traditions and as a speaker and panelist.

### **F is for the Festival de La Palabra (FDLP)**

FDLP is an annual, global literary festival held in San Juan and founded by Black Boricua author, poet, and activist Mayra Santos-Febres. In the wake of Hurricane Maria, organizers and volunteers from the FDLP have been engaged in relief activities, supporting some of the most isolated communities and youth through the arts. FDLP is based in Loíza, Puerto Rico, a historically Afrxdescendiente area of the island. The impact of the hurricane on people of African descent on the island has been especially devastating. In partnership with Palabras PR, a radical hurricane recovery project emerging from seven DiaspoRican and Latinx scholars in Michigan and Maryland, FDLP continues to address mental health issues, education needs, as well as cultural organizing on the island.

Projects include "No Estás Solo," an initiative focused on alleviating depression, suicide, and PTSD through art, books, theater, and writing workshops (talleres) and "Recuperación Escolar," a relief fund for schools in need of supplies.

### **H is for Hurricane Stories/Cuentos de Huracán**

Cuentos de Huracán (Hurricane Stories) is a new short story collection written in the precarious months after Hurricane Maria

hit Puerto Rico and edited by Mayra Santos-Febres. Born from a need to express and document post-storm survival, this collection offers diverse stories of Hurricane Maria and what it means to persist. Some of the 20 tales talk about death and devastation, while others center on resilience and continuing to fight.

### **J is for Jornada: Se Acabaron las Promesas**

Recently invited on stage by artist Residente, Jocelyn Velázquez of la Jornada galvanized the crowd, reminding them that “the fight against the Fiscal Control Board is a fight for life.” La Jornada is one group leading the lucha against the U.S.-imposed fiscal control board, a fight that began with a protest against the first PROMESA Conference in 2017 and has continued with the coordination of the National May 1 strike and march against the Junta and government’s austerity policies. This peaceful action was met with police violence and many were unjustly arrested.

### **L is for La Respuesta Media**

La Respuesta Media is a collective that speaks to the growing numbers of Diasporic Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. In their own words: La Respuesta is The Response to this growing presence and ongoing impact, showcasing the critical, provocative, and inspiring work by, for, and about Boricuas living in The Diaspora and Puerto Rico.

### **M is for Mutuo, Centros de Apoyo Mutuo**

Centros de Apoyo Mutuo (CAMS), sometimes referred to as DIY Disaster Relief, are autonomous, Boricua-run networks of mutual caregiving, rebuilding, and hurricane relief. [...] You can find CAM’s en Caguas, Rio Piedras, La Perla, Mayagüez, Utuado, Lares, Naranjito, and Yabucoa.

### **N is for #NoMásPromesas**

We cannot be free as long as we are occupied, bought, and sold with the whim of a pen. We must continue to luchar y #Resist. #NoMasPROMESAs

### **P is for PR on the Map**

PR on the Map is a grassroots media project organized by scholar, organizer, and former Green Party Vice Presidential candidate Rosa Clemente. PR on the Map offers a nuanced, raw, and inter-generational alternative to mainstream coverage of Puerto Rico. In addition to Rosa, the PR on the Map crew includes Daniel Hernandez, Kat Lazo, Raquel Reichard, Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi, Mateo Zapata, Stephanie Martin-Llanes, and Yanira Castro.

### **Q is for the Queer Kitchen Brigade**

The Queer Kitchen Brigade (QKB) also known as the Cuir Kitchen Brigade, is a New York-based organization that supports Queer and Trans Black and Indigenous People of Color food sovereignty movements. QKB works in solidarity with the sustainable agroecology movement in Puerto Rico through advocacy, volunteering, and cooking meals together.

### **R is for the Rebuild Comerío Project**

The ongoing Rebuild Comerío Project is a collaboration between two aforementioned orgs, Coco De Oro and Defend PR, as well as La Maraña. La Maraña is a “women-led participatory design and planning non-profit” founded by Sofia Unanue and Cynthia Burgos. Participatory design removed the obstacle of technocratic “expert only” model of design and incorporates community knowledge to create a sustainable built environment.

The project has expanded to include small scale agricultural projects and parks. The model used by La Maraña is now being adapted and implemented in other areas of Puerto Rico.

### **S is for the Solidarity Collective—Detroit + PR**

Teresa Basilio, Sofia Gallisá, Adela Nieves, and Ariadna Godreau organized this network gathering at the 2017 Allied Media Conference to create space for participants from Puerto Rico, longtime residents and organizers in Detroit, and Puerto Ricans in the Diaspora to talk about the ways PR and the D are similar and important ways they diverge.

### **T is for Taller Salud**

Taller Salud is a trusted, feminist, and community-centered non-profit serving the underserved, historically afrodescendiente town of Loiza, Puerto Rico. They work towards increasing the health, wellness of girls, young people, and adults in Puerto Rico, with a focus on public health and a cultura de paz.

### **U is for Uprose**

The Brooklyn-based Uprose is a Latinx community organization led by Executive Director Elizabeth Yeampierre, focused on promoting sustainability and resilience in Brooklyn’s Sunset Park neighborhood. Since hurricane Maria, Uprose has expanded their mission to include working towards a #JustRecovery in Puerto Rico.

Uprose has started multiple environmental-justice initiatives including the #OurPowerPRnyc, a diasporic organizing program.

### **V is for Varones, The Gran Varones**

Founded by Louie A. Ortiz-Fonseca, the GVs storytelling project has created space for hundreds of Latinx and Afro-Latinx Gay, Queer, Trans and Bixexual men and bois to connect with each other and share their stories of survival and joy. As a queer Boricua who grew up listening to Willie Colón and believing that queer Latinx deserve to maintain our connections to familia and culture, should they want it, the GV’s makes me cry of joy/heartbreak.

Louie is just now wrapping up a partnership with Waves Ahead, where he completed construction work to help rebuild homes for LGBTQ Boricuas.

### **W is for Waves Ahead**

An organization focused on rebuilding and recovery for LGBTQ/GnC people in Puerto Rico and the group behind the #ReconstruyeQ movement and hashtag.

### **Z is for zzzzzz.**

## I • Violence of Poverty

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includes the majority of industrialized countries in Europe and North America and Japan and Korea. The U.S. has the highest infant mortality rates among comparable OECD States.

The report also brings out the actions by the government that deny people their human rights, such as their rights to housing, healthcare, education and a livelihood while also criminalizing those forced into poverty. This includes the broad inequality and discrimination imposed by government at all levels; excluding large numbers from political life through mass incarceration, voter repression and other means; and obstacles and policies aimed at blocking people from the most minimal of assistance required, like welfare benefits.

When the problem of violence is talked about in the U.S., the issue of poverty is commonly not included. But it is a form of violence imposed on tens of millions of people, in a country that is among the wealthiest in the world. And that violence of poverty is imposed both on those the war economy cannot provide jobs for, as well as those who are working at such rotten wages that they remain in poverty. It is government violence that does not recognize people as human beings with rights — and government responsibility to guarantee those rights. The refusal is counter to the UN Declaration on Human Rights, which the U.S. signed and demands that other countries uphold. U.S. government refusal to do so is a crime. The U.S. also attempts to justify attacks on other countries in the name of human rights. What is required is for the U.S. to contribute to defending the rights of all, abroad and at home.

Poverty and inequality are broadly opposed by the people, as seen in various campaigns, demonstrations, petitions, and other actions by workers and their families. There is a sense that the great wealth, produced by the workers themselves, is easily



sufficient to eliminate poverty and provide for the rights of the people. But the existing social relations and political structure stemming from them, block the people from deciding such matters. It is the private owners deciding for the benefit of their private interests — and a government that backs them through use of force and violence, at home and abroad. This is what must change for the problem of poverty to be eliminated. It is not a problem of lack of money. And it is not the people that are the problem. The problem is the lack of political decision making power, by and for the people.

The government crime and violence of imposing poverty is an expression of the existing relations among human beings that dictate that the rich get richer and the poor poorer. They are relations that have produced a war economy and war government that is racist and violent to the core. It is time for a new direction, one that favors the people and provides the basis for eliminating poverty. It is time for an anti-war government and peace economy. By advancing in this direction through strengthening the fight for the rights of all, laying claim to the wealth that belongs to us by right, the peoples' interests can be advanced.

### UN REPORT ON U.S. POVERTY

## U.S. Criminalizes and Stigmatizes Those in Need of Assistance

*UN Human Rights Council, June 4, 2018*

The United States' principal strategy for dealing with extreme poverty is to criminalize and stigmatize those in need of assistance, a report by a UN independent expert has found. "For one of the world's wealthiest countries to have 40 million people living in poverty and over five million living in 'Third World' conditions is cruel and inhuman," the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, said in a new report.

The report, to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council

on June 21, delivers Alston's findings from a fact-finding visit to California, Alabama, Georgia, Puerto Rico, West Virginia and Washington, D.C. from 1 to 15 December 2017.

"The Trump Administration has brought in massive tax breaks for corporations and the very wealthy, while orchestrating a systematic assault on the welfare system," he said. "The strategy seems to be tailor-made to maximize inequality and to plunge millions of working Americans, and those unable to work, into penury.

“Locking up the poor precisely because they are poor, greatly exaggerating the amount of fraud in the system, shaming those who need assistance, and devising ever more obstacles to prevent people from getting needed benefits, is not a strategy to reduce or eliminate poverty.

“The evidence is everywhere. On Skid Row in Los Angeles, 14,000 homeless persons were arrested in 2016, including for urinating in public and other “quality of life” offences, while overall arrests in the city were declining. For those wondering what the problem is, the answer is not hard to find. In 2016 there were only nine public toilets available for some 1,800 homeless individuals on Skid Row. The resulting ratio of one public toilet per 200 individuals would not even meet the minimum standards the UN sets for Syrian refugee camps.

“The legal system is used to raise revenue for states, not to promote justice, a pervasive problem across the country. Fines and fees are piled up so that low level infractions become immensely burdensome, a process that mostly affects the poorest members of society. At the same time, judges set large bail amounts for defendants awaiting trial, allowing the rich to pay their way to freedom, while the poor sit in jail unable to work or provide for their families. Some 11 million people are admitted to local jails annually, and on any given day more than 730,000 people are being held, of whom almost two thirds are awaiting trial and therefore presumed to be innocent.

“Several political appointees with whom I spoke were com-

pletely sold on the narrative that the poor are scammers living high on welfare. This was reflected in the administration’s 2019 Budget, which claims that many welfare recipients should instead be forced to find employment, and that many, are defrauding the system. But the Trump Administration failed to provide me with any evidence of massive fraud or of the supposedly ample job opportunities for those currently receiving benefits. In fact, the evidence is that welfare fraud is not widespread and that most welfare recipients already work or are physically or mentally unable to work.

“The United States now has the highest income inequality in the Western world, the highest incarceration rate in the entire world, and one of the lowest turnout rates in elections among developed countries. It is no coincidence that high inequality coincides with the overt and covert disenfranchisement of millions and millions of American voters.

“The result is that democracy itself is under threat because of extreme inequality and the range of policies being pursued to make it worse.”

*(Mr. Philip Alston (Australia) is the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. As a Special Rapporteur, he is part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world.)*

## Excerpts from UN Report on Extreme U.S. Poverty

The United States is a land of stark contrasts. It is one of the world’s wealthiest societies, a global leader in many areas, and a land of unsurpassed technological and other forms of innovation. Its corporations are global trendsetters, its civil society is vibrant and sophisticated and its higher education system leads the world. But its immense wealth and expertise stand in shocking contrast with the conditions in which vast numbers of its citizens live.

About 40 million live in poverty, 18.5 million in extreme poverty, and 5.3 million live in “Third World” conditions of absolute poverty. It has the highest youth poverty rate in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the highest infant mortality rates among comparable OECD States. Its citizens live shorter and sicker lives compared to those living in all other rich democracies, eradicable tropical diseases are increasingly prevalent, and it has the world’s highest incarceration rate, one of the lowest levels of voter registrations in among OECD countries and the highest obesity levels in the developed world.

The United States has the highest rate of income inequality among Western countries. The \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts in December 2017 overwhelmingly benefited the wealthy and worsened inequality. The consequences of neglecting poverty and promoting inequality are clear.

The United States has one of the highest poverty and inequality levels among the OECD countries, and the Stanford Center on Inequality and Poverty ranks it 18th out of 21 wealthy countries in terms of labor markets, poverty rates, safety nets, wealth inequality and economic mobility. But in 2018 the United States had over 25 per cent of the world’s 2,208 billionaires. There is thus a dramatic contrast between the immense wealth of the few and the squalor and deprivation in which vast numbers of Americans exist.

For almost five decades the overall policy response has been neglectful at best, but the policies pursued over the past year seem deliberately designed to remove basic protections from the poorest, punish those who are not in employment and make even basic health care into a privilege to be earned rather than a right of citizenship.

The visit of the Special Rapporteur coincided with the dramatic change of direction in relevant United States policies. The new policies: (a) provide unprecedentedly high tax breaks and financial windfalls to the very wealthy and the largest corporations; (b) pay for these partly by reducing welfare benefits for the poor; (c) undertake a radical program of financial, environmental, health and safety deregulation that eliminates protections mainly benefiting the middle classes and the poor; (d) seek to add over 20 million poor and middle class persons to the ranks of those

without health insurance; (e) restrict eligibility for many welfare benefits while increasing the obstacles required to be overcome by those eligible; (f) dramatically increase spending on defense, while rejecting requested improvements in key veterans' benefits; (g) do not provide adequate additional funding to address an opioid crisis that is decimating parts of the country; and (h) make no effort to tackle the structural racism that keeps a large percentage of non-whites in poverty and near poverty.

In a 2017 report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) captured the situation even before the impact of these aggressively regressive redistributive policies had been felt, stating that the United States economy “is delivering better living standards for only the few”, and that “household incomes are stagnating for a large share of the population, job opportunities are deteriorating, prospects for upward mobility are waning, and economic gains are increasingly accruing to those that are already wealthy.”

The share of the top 1 per cent of the population in the United States has grown steadily in recent years. In 2016 they owned 38.6 per cent of total wealth. In relation to both wealth and income the share of the bottom 90 per cent has fallen in most of the past 25 years. The tax reform will worsen this situation and ensure that the United States remains the most unequal society in the developed world. The planned dramatic cuts in welfare will essentially shred crucial dimensions of a safety net that is already full of holes. Since economic and political power reinforce one another, the political system will be even more vulnerable to capture by wealthy elites.

This situation bodes ill not only for the poor and middle class in America, but for society as a whole, with high poverty levels “creating disparities in the education system, hampering human capital formation and eating into future productivity.” There are also global consequences. The tax cuts will fuel a global race to the bottom, thus further reducing the revenues needed by Governments to ensure basic social protection and meet their human rights obligations. And the United States remains a model whose policies other countries seek to emulate.

Defenders of the status quo point to the United States as the land of opportunity and the place where the American dream can come true because the poorest can aspire to the ranks of the richest. But today's reality is very different. The United States now has one of the lowest rates of intergenerational social mobility of any of the rich countries. Zip codes, which are usually reliable proxies for race and wealth, are tragically reliable predictors of a child's future employment and income prospects. High child and youth poverty rates perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty very effectively, and ensure that the American



dream is rapidly becoming the American illusion. The equality of opportunity, which is so prized in theory, is in practice a myth, especially for minorities and women, but also for many middle-class white workers. [...]

### Human rights dimension

Successive administrations, including the current one, have determinedly rejected the idea that economic and social rights are full-fledged human rights, despite their clear recognition not only in key treaties that the United States has ratified, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, but also in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United States has long insisted other countries must respect. But denial does not eliminate responsibility, nor does it negate obligations.

International human rights law recognizes a right to education, a right to health care, a right to social protection for those in need and a right to an adequate standard of living. In practice, the United States is alone among developed countries in insisting that, while human rights are of fundamental importance, they do not include rights that guard against dying of hunger, dying from a lack of access to affordable health care or growing up in a context of total deprivation. Since the United States has refused to accord domestic recognition to the economic and social rights agreed by most other States in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other treaties, except for the recognition of some social rights, and especially the right to education, in state constitutions, the primary focus of the present report is on those civil and political rights reflected in the United States Bill of Rights and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the United States has ratified.

### Who are “the poor”?

In thinking about poverty, it is striking how much weight is given to caricatured narratives about the purported innate differences between rich and poor that are consistently peddled by some politicians and media. The rich are industrious, entrepreneurial,

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## DEMAND GUARANTEES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN U.S.

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patriotic and the drivers of economic success. The poor are wasters, losers and scammers. As a result, money spent on welfare is money down the drain.

If the poor really want to make it in the United States, they can easily do so: they really can achieve the American dream if only they work hard enough. The reality, however, is very different. Many of the wealthiest citizens do not pay taxes at the rates that others do, hoard much of their wealth offshore and often make their profits purely from speculation rather than contributing to the overall wealth of the American community.

In imagining the poor, racist stereotypes are usually not far beneath the surface. The poor are overwhelmingly assumed to be people of color, whether African Americans or Hispanic “immigrants.” The reality is that there are 8 million more poor whites than there are poor Blacks. The face of poverty in America is not only Black or Hispanic, but also white, Asian and many other backgrounds.

Similarly, large numbers of welfare recipients are assumed to be living high on “the dole.” Some politicians and political appointees with whom the Special Rapporteur spoke were completely sold on the narrative of such scammers sitting on comfortable sofas, watching cable television or spending their days on their smartphones, all paid for by welfare. The Special Rapporteur wonders how many of those politicians have ever visited poor areas, let alone spoken to those who dwell there. There are anecdotes aplenty, but little evidence. In every society, there are those who abuse the system, as much in the upper income levels as in the lower. But in reality, the poor are overwhelmingly those born into poverty, or those thrust there by circumstances largely beyond their control, such as physical or mental disabilities, illness, old age, unliveable wages or discrimination in the job market.

### Problems with existing governmental policies

There is no magic recipe for eliminating extreme poverty, and each level of government must make its own good-faith decisions. At the end of the day, however, particularly in a rich country like the United States, the persistence of extreme poverty is a political choice made by those in power. With political will, it could readily be eliminated. What is known, from long experience and in the light of the Government’s human rights obligations, is that there are indispensable ingredients for a set of policies designed



to eliminate poverty. They include: democratic decision-making, full employment policies, social protection for the vulnerable, a fair and effective justice system, gender and racial equality, respect for human dignity, responsible fiscal policies and environmental justice. As shown below, the United States falls well short on each of these measures.

### Undermining of democracy

The cornerstone of American society is democracy, but it is being steadily undermined, and with it the human right to political participation protected in article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The principle of one person, one vote applies in theory, but is increasingly far from the reality.

In a democracy, the task of government should be to facilitate political participation by ensuring that all citizens can vote and that their votes will count equally. However, in the United States there is overt disenfranchisement of more than 6 million felons and ex-felons which predominantly affects Black citizens since they are the ones often specifically targeted for criminalization. In addition, nine states currently condition the restoration of the right to vote after prison on the payment of outstanding fines and fees. A typical outcome is that seen in Alabama, where a majority of all ex-felons cannot vote.

Then there is covert disenfranchisement, which includes the dramatic gerrymandering of electoral districts to privilege particular groups of voters, the imposition of artificial and unnecessary voter identification requirements, the blatant manipulation of polling station locations, the relocation of Departments of Motor Vehicles’ offices to make it more difficult for certain groups to obtain identification, and the general ramping up of obstacles to voting, especially for those without resources. The net result is that people living in poverty, minorities and other disfavored

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## GOVERNMENT IMPOSED POVERTY IS A CRIME OF VIOLENCE

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groups are being systematically deprived of their right to vote.

It is thus unsurprising that the United States has one of the lowest turnout rates in elections among developed countries, with only 55.7 per cent of the voting-age population casting ballots in the 2016 presidential election. Registered voters represent a much smaller share of potential voters in the United States than in just about any other OECD country. Only about 64 per cent of the United States voting-age population was registered in 2016, compared with 91 per cent in Canada, 96 per cent in Sweden and nearly 99 per cent in Japan. Low turnouts are also explained by the perception that election outcomes will have no impact on the lives of poor people. One politician remarked to the Special Rapporteur on how few campaign appearances most politicians bother to make in overwhelmingly poor districts, which reflects the broader absence of party representation for low-income and working-class voters.

The link between poverty and the absence of political rights is perfectly illustrated by Puerto Rico. If it were a state, it would be the poorest in the Union. But it is not a state, it is a mere “territory.” Puerto Ricans who live on the island have no representative with full voting rights in Congress and cannot vote in presidential elections, although they can vote in presidential primaries. In a country that likes to see itself as the oldest democracy in the world and a staunch defender of political rights on the international stage, more than 3 million people who live on the island have no real power in their own capital.

Puerto Rico has a fiscal deficit and a political rights deficit, and the two are not easily disentangled. The Special Rapporteur met with the Executive Director of the Financial Oversight and Management Board that was imposed by Congress in 2016 on Puerto Rico as part of the *Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act*. There is little indication that social protection concerns feature in a meaningful way in the Board’s analyses. At a time when even the IMF is insisting that social protection should be explicitly factored into prescriptions for fiscal adjustment (i.e., austerity), the Board should take account of human rights and social protection concerns as it contemplates far-reaching decisions on welfare reform, minimum wage and labor market deregulation.

It is not for the Special Rapporteur to suggest any resolution to the hotly contested issue of the constitutional status of Puerto Rico. Many interlocutors, however, made clear the widespread feeling that Puerto Ricans consider their territory to be colonized and that the United States Congress is happy to leave them in a limbo in which they have neither meaningful Congressional representation nor the ability to govern themselves. In the light of recent Supreme Court jurisprudence and Congress’s adoption of the *Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic*

*Stability Act* there seems to be good reason for the Special Political and Decolonization Committee of the United Nations to conclude that the island is no longer a self-governing territory.

### Social protection for children

Appropriate cognitive and socio-emotional stimulation, adequate nutrition and health care, and stable and secure environments early in life are all essential ingredients in maximizing children’s potential and achieving optimal life outcomes. Empirical evidence suggests strong correlations between early childhood poverty and adverse life outcomes, particularly those related to achievement skills and cognitive development.

From this perspective, the shockingly high number of children living in poverty in the United States demands urgent attention. In 2016, 18 per cent of children (13.3 million) were living in poverty, and children comprised 32.6 per cent of all people in poverty. About 20 per cent of children live in relative income poverty, compared to the OECD average of 13 per cent. Contrary to stereotypical assumptions, 31 per cent of poor children are white, 24 per cent are Black, 36 per cent are Hispanic and 1 per cent are indigenous. This is consistent with the fact that the United States ranks 25th out of 29 industrialized nations in investing in early childhood education.

Poor children are also significantly affected by the country’s crises regarding affordable and adequate housing. On a given night in 2017, about 21 per cent (or 114,829) of homeless individuals were children. But this official figure may be a severe underestimate, since homeless children temporarily staying with friends, family or in motels are excluded from the point-in-time count. According to the Department of Education, the number of homeless students identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2015/16 school year was 1,304,803.

(For the full report, including notes, see <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/38/33/ADD.1>)



# Report Reveals Rampant Wage Theft Among Top U.S. Monopolies

*Jessica Corbett, Common Dreams, June 6, 2018*

Wage theft goes far beyond sweatshops, fast-food outlets, and retailers. It is built into the business model of a substantial portion of corporate America. A wage theft report out this week reveals that many top U.S. corporations — from Walmart to Bank of America to AT&T — “have fattened their profits by forcing employees to work off the clock or depriving them of required overtime pay,” based on a review of labor lawsuits and enforcement actions.

Grand Theft Paycheck: The Large Corporations Shortchanging Their Workers’ Wages, produced by Good Jobs First and the Jobs With Justice Education Fund, found that hundreds of firms have collectively paid billions of dollars in wage theft penalties since 2000.

The report identifies several wage theft practices such as off-the-clock work, job title misclassifications that unfairly exempt workers from overtime pay, and uncompensated clothing purchase requirements, as well as overtime, minimum wage, meal break, and tip violations.

Researchers uncovered more than 1,200 successful collective actions challenging large companies. Those cases cost top corporations a total of \$8.8 billion. A review of actions by the U.S. Department of Labor and eight state regulatory agencies

uncovered another 4,220 cases against major corporations, which produced \$9.2 billion in penalties.

The employers who paid the most penalties for wage theft violations ranged from retailers and banks to insurance and telecommunications companies.

Kilian Colin, who worked for Wells Fargo from 2013 to 2016, said that “aggressive sales quotas based on exploiting vulnerable customers forced me into 12-hour shifts with no breaks and no food allowed—and threats to withhold my paycheck if I didn’t sign off on working extra hours for free.”

The report suggests such experiences are common among those who work for major U.S. companies. Jobs With Justice Education Fund senior policy analyst Adam Shah, who contributed to the report, said that in light of the findings, there’s also a need for crafting stronger policies to protect workers, and that recent developments in government have renewed energy to address the issue of wage theft.

“We see increased urgency for policymakers to step up with solutions,” Shah noted, “because the U.S. Supreme Court recently made it harder to bring collective action lawsuits to stop wage theft and the Trump Administration may weaken federal enforcement.”

## MAJOR MONOPOLIES GUILTY OF WAGE THEFT

### Grand Theft Paycheck

*Philip Mattera, Jobs with Justice*

Many of the largest companies operating in the United States have fattened their profits by forcing employees to work off the clock or depriving them of required overtime pay. An extensive analysis of federal and state court records shows that these corporations have been embroiled in hundreds of lawsuits over what is known as wage theft and have paid out billions of dollars to resolve the cases.

The list of the most penalized employers includes the giant retailer Walmart, as well as big banks, major telecommunications and technology companies, and a leading pharmaceutical producer. More than 450 large firms have each paid out \$1 million or more in wage theft settlements.

These findings result from a yearlong compilation of records of collective action lawsuits. In this little-studied form of labor standards enforcement, groups of workers take their employer to court to recover the pay they were wrongly denied. We identified more than 1,200 successful collective actions involving large companies that have been resolved since the beginning of 2000. In these cases, employers paid total penalties of \$8.8 billion.

We also compiled actions against large employers pursued by the U.S. Department of Labor and by regulatory agencies in eight states which enforce wage theft and provided data (California, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania and

Washington). Combining the lawsuits with the state and federal administrative actions, we found 4,220 cases against large employers that generated total penalties of \$9.2 billion.

Among the dozen most penalized corporations, Walmart, with \$1.4 billion in total settlements and fines, is the only retailer. Second is FedEx with \$502 million. Half of the top dozen are banks and insurance companies, including Bank of America (\$381 million); Wells Fargo (\$205 million); JPMorgan Chase (\$160 million); and State Farm Insurance (\$140 million). The top 25 also include prominent companies in sectors not typically associated with wage theft, including telecommunications (AT&T); information technology (Microsoft and Oracle); pharmaceuticals (Novartis); and investment services (Morgan Stanley and UBS).

Focusing on the very largest corporations in our dataset — just those listed on the Fortune 500, the Forbes list of the biggest privately held companies, and the foreign-based firms on the Fortune Global 500 — we found 2,167 cases with total penalties of \$6.8 billion. These megacorporations thus account for half of the cases we found and 74 percent of the penalty dollar total.

We found seven individual settlements in excess of \$100 million, including the \$640 million omnibus settlement by Walmart of more than 60 lawsuits and two FedEx settlements each in excess

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## GOVERNMENT IMPOSED POVERTY IS A CRIME OF VIOLENCE

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of \$200 million. Since collective actions are usually settled before trial, there are few verdicts. But Walmart leads in that category too, with a judgment of \$242 million. It has also paid the largest single administrative-case fine: \$33 million to the U.S. Labor Department.

There is considerable variety in the types of workers who brought the cases. The occupations represented in the largest settlements and verdicts range from low-wage jobs such as cashiers, cooks and security guards to higher-paid positions such as package delivery drivers, nurses, pharmaceutical sales representatives, stockbrokers and financial advisors.

Thanks to Walmart, retailing is the industry with the highest aggregate penalties (\$2.7 billion) imposed on large companies. It is followed by financial services (\$1.4 billion); freight and logistics (\$828 million); business services (\$611 million); insurance (\$557 million); miscellaneous services (\$486 million); healthcare services (\$417 million); restaurants and foodservice (\$397 million); information technology (\$335 million); and food and beverage products (\$315 million).

Of the ten most penalized industries named above, all but two — freight and information technology — employ large numbers of women, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Several of these industries — especially business services, insurance and healthcare services — are predominantly female. In about half of these top ten industries, the percentage of Black and Latino workers is greater than in the workforce as a whole. For example, Black workers account for about 12 percent of the overall workforce but 20 percent of the labor force in business support services and 17 percent in freight. Latino workers account for about 17 percent of the overall workforce but about 25 percent in restaurants and foodservice and 29 percent in food and beverage production.

Wage and hour litigation is not evenly distributed across the country. Of the 1,283 private lawsuits we analyzed, more than half came from a single state: California, which has its own labor code that can be enforced either in state court or in combination with federal rules in U.S. courts.

Although there are fluctuations from year to year, the lawsuit penalty total reached a high of \$1.3 billion in 2016. The tally in 2017 was \$732 million, the fourth-largest yearly total.

Our totals and rankings are based only on penalties that have been publicly disclosed. In numerous collective actions, large companies successfully petitioned federal or state courts to keep the details of the settlement confidential. We found records of 127 confidential cases involving 89 large companies. Among those that had multiple sealed settlements are AT&T, Home Depot, Verizon Communications, Comcast, Lowe's and Best Buy.

Given that lawsuits are typically brought against the immediate employer, our findings do not fully reflect the involvement in wage theft of large corporations that rely on temp agencies and employee leasing services. The findings also do not cover situations in which employees are compelled to resolve wage and hour disputes through arbitration proceedings, which are increasingly conducted in secret and are therefore not included

in court records.

The employers accused of wage theft include many highly profitable companies. Among the dozen most penalized corporations, all but two had an annual profit of more than \$1 billion in its most recent fiscal year. Some had tens of billions in profits, including AT&T (\$29 billion), JPMorgan Chase (\$24 billion) and Wells Fargo (\$22 billion).

These companies also award their chief executives generous salaries, bonuses and perks. Four of the corporations (JPMorgan Chase, AT&T, Walmart and Bank of America) paid their CEOs annual compensation in excess of \$20 million. When the realized gains from stock options and other stock awards are added in, total compensation can reach much higher; JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon took in more than \$162 million in 2017.

Clearly, these corporations could afford to pay their workers properly. Wage theft may have been part of their business model, but it does not need to be — and should not be.

This analysis underscores the importance of reforms to combat wage theft. Because wage theft is such a persistent problem in the U.S. economy, reforms must build working people's power, while also making targeted improvements to enforcement.

First, the fact that the amount of money recovered through private litigation dwarfs the amount recovered through administrative action demonstrates that government enforcement must be strengthened. Government agencies must have the resources to investigate pervasive wage theft, and use their resources in ways that will most effectively combat the practice. Government regulators must also partner with organizations that represent and advocate for working people so that those most impacted by wage theft have a say and role in enforcement policies and oversight.

Second, states should follow California's lead by ensuring that working people have access to the courts to enforce wage and hour laws. Our analysis provides no indication that California companies are engaged in wage theft at a greater level than those in other states. Its large number of successful state lawsuits is a result of its stronger anti-wage theft laws. Given that the U.S. Supreme Court recently restricted one of the strongest private litigation tools to combat wage theft, states should also enact a version of California's Private Attorney General Act. This law allows working people to band together to sue low-road corporations through collective or class action suits.

Third, corporations that profit from wage theft should not be able to insulate themselves from liability through franchise models, misclassification of employees as independent contractors, outsourcing, or other methods. Policy makers must update wage theft laws to effectively regulate 21st-century business and employment models.

Fourth, labor law more generally must also be updated to give working people the power to fight exploitation by negotiating as equals with the companies and executives who profit most from their labor. [...]

(For the full report see [https://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdfs/wagetheft\\_report.pdf](https://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdfs/wagetheft_report.pdf))