



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 23, 2018

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

**MAYOR EMANUEL, CONGRESSMAN GUTIERREZ LEAD DELEGATION ON HUMANITARIAN VISIT
TO PUERTO RICO**

The visit is part of mayoral exchange program that allows leaders to share expertise with peers and support rebuilding efforts on the island

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Congressman Luis Gutierrez are leading a delegation of local officials today on a humanitarian visit to Puerto Rico. The delegation will be traveling to San Juan where they will be met by 5,200 pounds of non-perishable goods, medical equipment and other necessary supplies that have been collected locally by the Puerto Rican Agenda for distribution on the island. The Mayor coordinated with United Airlines to deliver the much needed supplies from Chicago to the island.

"Chicago has a vibrant and strong Puerto Rican community that has answered the call to support their brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico from the first moments Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit," Mayor Emanuel said. "Chicagoans have come together to raise money and donate supplies for the people of Puerto Rico, and we're honored - and humbled -to deliver on those robust efforts this weekend."

It's been six months since Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico. More than half a million Puerto Ricans are still without power, and tens of thousands lack drinking water and proper roofs and Chicagoans continue to do their part to raise money and supplies to help support recovery efforts.

"The City of Chicago and the people of Chicago have stepped up to support the people of Puerto Rico while the federal government has dropped the ball. Six months into this crisis, Mayor Emanuel and his team are still working with the Puerto Rican community in Chicago to help in any way they can. The support is very much appreciated and we are making sure on this trip that the connections are made mayor to mayor because that is where a lot of the best work is getting done. I am personally doing my best to make sure that the people of Puerto Rico do not feel forgotten or abandoned because the need is still great and the fact that our President has turned his back makes it all the more important that the rest of us show up to help," Congressman Gutierrez said.

The Mayor is participating in the visit as part of the Open Society Foundations' (OSF) Mayor Exchange program. The new initiative connects local leaders on the mainland with their counterparts in Puerto Rico to help support rebuilding efforts underway on the island.

As part of the Exchange, Mayor Emanuel will visit with Mayor Josian Santiago of Comerio and Mayor Julia M. Nazario of Loiza. The Mayor will also have an opportunity to host Mayors Santiago and Nazario back in Chicago in April to showcase the City's emergency preparedness operations and continue to build much-needed support for our neighbors and fellow citizens in their time of need.

An estimated 40 mayors will be participating in the Mayor Exchange program. Through the Mayor Exchange program, mainland mayors will share ideas, expertise and lessons learned from their own recovery efforts, giving those officials on the front lines of the island's crisis a direct line for aid and consultation on the myriad humanitarian, fiscal and rebuilding challenges ahead.

Chicago Public School students will also be taking part in Hurricane relief trips to Puerto Rico on March 25 – 31 and June 30 – July 7, organized by Storehouse Church.

The March trip includes eight youth from the Chicagoland area, who attend various schools including CICS Northtown Academy, Lincoln Park, Jones College Prep, Noble Prep, Elmwood Park, and Triton College.

During the trip the youth, alongside adult team leaders, will work with the local churches and organizations to help:

- provide labor in helping to rebuild the homes,
- bring encouragement and hope to local residents, and
- distribute needed resources.

Since the Hurricane Maria first hit Puerto Rico, Mayor Emanuel has been working with community leaders and elected officials including Congressman Gutierrez to support recovery on the island.

A delegation of 23 members of the Chicago Fire Department spent 10 days in Puerto Rico in October to provide aide, support and an on-the-ground assessment of additional resources needed.

In Chicago, nearly two thousand Puerto Ricans have gone through the City's Welcome Center in Humboldt Park Field House seeking shelter, food, health assistance and other critical services.

The City also established a website for Chicagoans to contribute to disaster relief efforts www.cityofchicago.org/DisasterRelief.

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu is chairing the OSF Mayor Exchange, along with Puerto Rico Mayors Pedro García Figueroa of Hormigueros and Javier Jiménez Pérez of San Sebastián and OSF President Patrick Gaspard.

Comerio is in the mountain area located in the center-eastern region of Puerto Rico, approximately one hour from San Juan. Roughly 1,700 homes are still without roofs and their water infrastructure is in need of investment and repair.

Loíza is a small town on the northeastern coast of Puerto Rico, approximately 20 minutes from San Juan. Over sixty percent of buildings and homes were affected and twenty percent totally destroyed. Residences affected by the storm still live with temporary covering of reinforced blue plastic.

The Mayor Exchange is funded by the Open Society Foundations, which has been working in Puerto Rico for years before the storm, supporting efforts to improve government transparency and accountability and encourage greater civic engagement. The exchange is being managed by HR&A Advisors, a New York-based consulting firm that has worked with U.S. mayors on urban development and governance issues for the past 40 years.

###