



The Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP)

www.meaningfulworld.com

NY Office

185 E 85th Street, New York, NY 10028

Phone: 1 (201) 941-2266

E-mail: drkalayjian@Meaningfulworld.com

Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Relief Mission to Puerto Rico

Humanitarian Empowerment, Healing, and Transformation of Trauma

Pre-Press Release

On 17 December, 2017, Meaningfulworld, in collaboration with the University of Puerto Rico in Aguadilla, will travel to Puerto Rico for a Humanitarian Relief Mission following the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria less than three months ago.

In September 2017, Puerto Rico was hit by two consecutive hurricanes: first side swiped by Irma, and then taking a direct hit from Maria. The severity of Maria all but knocked out the entirety of Puerto Rico's electrical grid; even now parts of the island are still without power. The lack of electrical power has had a very adverse effect upon the operation of healthcare and hospitals on the island. Just about every interaction with the health system involves electricity, including accessing electronic medical records and powering lifesaving equipment like hemodialysis machines or ventilators. The vast power outages also caused pumps at water treatment plants to fail across the island. For years the Puerto Rican government hasn't had the financial means to invest in modernizing their electrical nor water supply systems. In an aging water system there is a serious threat of contaminants seeping into the water supply in all communities. To make matters worse, there aren't enough workers to fix the infrastructure. Young people are leaving the island in droves as the economy has tightened, and older workers are retiring en masse, with the hopes of securing their threatened pensions. Twenty percent of towns are still completely without potable water. Bottled water, even where it is still available, has been priced out of reach for many. Citizens have been driven to drink from streams of murky water contaminated by sewage, filth, and animal carcasses. This has caused a huge uptick in many types of diarrheal diseases, including cholera, dysentery and typhoid fever which exacerbates the crises in the healthcare sphere, as hospitals become overloaded with demands for their services.

Further, there is a collapsed communication system on the island. The storm knocked out 1,360 out of 1,600 cellphone towers on the island, but only 43 percent have been fixed. Many communities have been isolated from the outside world, relying only on radios for news. Even National Guard members are struggling to communicate on the ground, making their ability to

respond to the disaster exceptionally hard.

In addition to the physical devastation, there has been a strong sense that the disaster response is inadequate. Puerto Rico's territorial status and ten-year recession resulted in questions, regarding the validity of governmental funding of the disaster response, and some Americans even had to be reminded that Puerto Rico, an island in the Caribbean Sea, is classified as an "unincorporated territory," and the island is controlled by the U.S. government but it is not a state. While Puerto Ricans can vote in party primaries, they cannot vote for the US president. Puerto Ricans by birth have American citizenship and can move freely between the island and the U.S. mainland. Puerto Rico is self-governed through a local constitution that was approved by Congress in 1952. Residents can elect their own Governor, Assembly and Senate. The idea that many people in the United States didn't know that Puerto Rico is part of the United States was experienced by many in Puerto Rico as an emotional blow, and a very demoralizing one. Who can forget the images of the Mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulin Cruz, pleading for the President's help?

All of these factors have come together to produce a widespread mental health crisis on the island, with much of the population showing signs of post-traumatic stress. The storms exacerbated an already existing serious increase in mental illness in response to the ten-year economic recession on the island.

In 2016, Puerto Rico's gross domestic product amounted to around 105.04 billion U.S. dollars. The unemployment rate in Puerto Rico from 2006 to 2016 is 11.78 % of the total labor force. In 2016, the total population of Puerto Rico amounted to approximately 3.41 million inhabitants. Schooling in Puerto Rico is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 17, which comprises the elementary, intermediate and high school grades. Children may attend either public or private schools. As of the close of 2013, there were 1,460 public schools and 764 private schools on the island, and over 50 institutions of higher education. Since Hurricane Maria, 190 public schools are being used as community centers, and more than 70 are serving as shelters for those who have lost their homes. Education expenditure is 6.4% of GDP (2013) and literacy rate is 93.3%.

In response to the need, the Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention, Meaningfulworld is planning to deploy a humanitarian relief team of mental health professionals and experienced disaster response counselors to Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. Our team will be comprised of five Meaningfulworld volunteers: Meaningfulworld's founder and Director Dr. Ani Kalayjian, Meaningfulworld's Vice President Lorraine Simmons, UN Coordinator Dr. Leslie Popoff, Dr. Thomas Skurky, a clinical psychologist from Colorado, and UN Intern Meredith Carbonell. This continues to be a time of crisis in Puerto Rico, and has moved from a crisis for survival to a large scale mental health crisis exacerbated by prolonged periods without water and electricity and the lack of other basic necessities. An overall feeling of helplessness has permeated the society as a result of this natural disaster.

The Meaningfulworld humanitarian team utilizes the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model which incorporates and promotes emotional release, emotional intelligence, self-care, mindfulness, and empathy through the use of didactic and experiential learning, meditation and mindfulness, natural remedies and physical movement. This integrative model helps people work through trauma, learn self-help strategies and improve coping skills. We will provide direct services as we work with children and teens in schools, after-school centers, and orphanages. We will also work with university students, educators, mental health and medical professionals, and the community at large.

Our team has set forth the following goals:

1. To promote emotional healing and wellbeing
2. To assess the level of trauma as well as forgiveness and meaning-making
3. To offer supportive and integrative interventions
4. To train professionals in the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model
5. To help create a sense of empowerment and a sense of personal control
6. To transform Horizontal Violence
7. To establish Peace and Forgiveness Gardens, establishing centers for reflection & healing

Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Mission Team to Puerto Rico:



I am **Dr. Ani Kalayjian**, President and Founder of ATOP Meaningfulworld, and Professor of Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University. I received both Masters & Doctorate Degrees from Columbia University. Puerto Rico has been in my heart for a long time, as I have many friends residing there. We have been following the news very closely, and we want to bring a great holiday to Puerto Rico. We have outreached to our entire community, and everyone is doing a little bit to make this mission especially healing, transforming, and a meaningful one for us as well as for all the Puerto Ricans that we work with. Remember our Motto: When one helps another BOTH become stronger. I am looking forward to learning from Puerto Ricans.



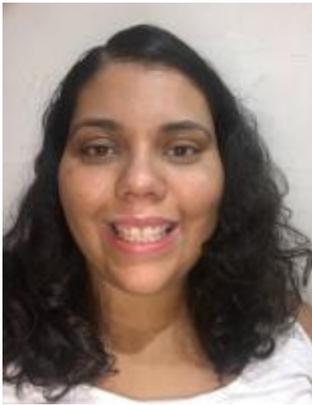
I am **Dr. Leslie Popoff**, the United Nations Coordinator for ATOP Meaningfulworld. As a licensed Psychologist my professional goals have been to facilitate the mental health, education, and well-being of children, youth and adults. Working with Meaningfulworld and the UN has broadened my understanding of the unique challenges faced by individuals and groups in various parts of the world, while at the same time reinforcing the universal human rights that connect us all. I had the wonderful opportunity to travel on a humanitarian mission to Armenia in April 2017. I am eager to do my part to support the emotional healing and well-being of the resilient people living on this beautiful island of Puerto Rico.



I am **Lorraine Simmons**, Vice President of ATOP Meaningfulworld. As a Lay Eucharistic Minister at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, an active member of the Order of Urban Missioners, and former educator in the public school system, I am dedicated to supporting, teaching and empowering people. My experience with Meaningfulworld has enabled me to broaden my reach, allowing me to work with people around the world and my volunteer work has enabled me to grow to a deeper understanding of how to provide empathy and support meaning-making for individuals and communities. I was privileged to join outreach missions to Haiti in 2015, 2016 & 2017, Armenia in 2017 and look forward to volunteering in Puerto Rico in December, 2017.



I am **Dr. Thomas Skurky**, a licensed clinical psychologist with a PhD from the University of California at Santa Barbara. I am also Professor of Psychology Emeritus and former Chair of the Department of Psychology at a liberal arts college in the mountains of Colorado. In addition, I have supervised advanced college students at high-security state mental hospitals and maintain a private clinical practice. Since 2005, under the auspices of the United Nations, the United Sikhs Foundation, and ATOP Meaningfulworld, I have been working in disaster relief in various international venues, most recently in Nepal subsequent to their two earthquakes in 2015. I am so pleased to be included with this wonderful team headed to Puerto Rico at this time.



I am **Meredith Carbonell**, United Nations Intern for ATOP MeaningfulWorld. I am pursuing a Masters in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University. I hold a BA from New York University in Human Rights and Genocide Studies. I am a trained mediator and fluent in Spanish. This is my first time joining a MeaningfulWorld humanitarian relief mission and I am excited to help our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico with our signature 7-Step Integrative Healing Model for emotional transformation and healing.

As part of this mission we will bring donations of medical and basic hygiene supplies, batteries, crayons, and other educational and play materials for children. Your donations are greatly appreciated and are tax deductible. Please donate here: <http://meaningfulworld.com/get-involved/donation>

Founded in 1990, the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld, charitable organization affiliated with the United Nations Dept. of Public Information, has achieved international recognition as a leader in training humanitarian outreach professionals as well as responding to two decades of global and local disasters. ATOP is committed to health and global education promoting state-of-the-art scientific theory, peace, forgiveness, consciousness research, internship, and the development of technical skills to train mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and lay persons committed to service the self and humanity. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach Teams have helped rehabilitate survivors from over 45 countries, making a daily difference in people's lives helping to transform tragedy and trauma into healing and meaning-making through post trauma growth, resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, mind-body-eco-spirit health, visionary leadership, empowerment and artful collaboration through a new world view.

Our Motto: When one helps another BOTH become stronger