Dear Mr. President:

We write to denounce your recent statements about the fatalities in Puerto Rico from Hurricanes Irma and Maria and their aftermath. These comments were grossly inaccurate, callous, embarrassing and beneath the dignity of the Office of the President of the United States. We call on you to immediately apologize and set the record straight by publicly acknowledging the official death toll.

As you are well aware, Puerto Rico’s official death toll currently stands at 2,975 and was based on a months-long study by researchers at George Washington University’s Milken Institute School of Public Health.1 This figure is consistent with other credible estimates, including a study by researchers from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Carlos Albizu University in Puerto Rico, and the University of Colorado School of Medicine.2 Furthermore, the Puerto Rico government’s own official mortality data showed that “there were at least 1,400 additional deaths on the island in the months after Hurricane Maria as compared with the same time the previous year.”3 When you wrote on Twitter, “3000 people did not die in the two hurricanes that hit Puerto Rico,” you sought to distort the truth and, in doing so, gravely insulted the mourning families of the thousands of American citizens who died from Maria and the storm’s aftermath.

Your claim that the increased death toll “was done by the Democrats in order to make me look as bad as possible” is highly offensive—not just to your fellow public servants who happen not to share your party affiliation, but also to the people of Puerto Rico who lost friends and family in the hurricanes and their aftermath. The lost lives of U.S. citizens are no political stunt, and this is not a partisan matter. In fact, one could easily surmise that your comment is a blatant effort to politicize this national tragedy to distract, divide and deflect blame from how the federal government responded to the hurricane.

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Finally, your comment “If a person died for any reason, like old age, just add them onto the list” betrayed a profound misinterpretation of hurricanes’ impact on mortality. Many lives lost in the weeks following the hurricane could have been prevented by an effective response—but they were not. You then doubled down on this comment in multiple tweets the next day. It is unclear whether your commentary on this topic stems from ignorance of the post-storm reality in Puerto Rico or a willful effort to mislead and manipulate the American people about the humanitarian crisis that befell their fellow citizens. Regardless of your motivation, this false statement is unacceptable and must be retracted.

After a disaster, the President needs to lead the country in the recovery effort, not attempt to shift blame or openly question the tragic loss of life. As President of the United States, you have a solemn obligation to lead and serve all American citizens, regardless of their political party or whether they reside in the mainland United States or in the territories. In impugning the Island’s suffering after Maria, you have abdicated that responsibility.

Puerto Ricans are American citizens who have served and shed blood in our wars, giving their lives to defend our nation’s freedoms. They deserve to be treated with the same dignity and respect we would afford any American citizens following a catastrophic storm.

To that end, we call on you to apologize for your unconscionable and unfounded claims, which belittle the scale of the tragedy suffered by the people of Puerto Rico and dishonestly cast partisan blame for their deaths. We also ask that you improve your efforts to aid Puerto Rico in its recovery and to ensure your Administration provides an effective, efficient and compassionate response to Hurricane Florence. You owe this to the U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico and across the United States of America.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress
Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

Carol Shea-Porter  
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth  
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez  
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress

Darren Soto  
Member of Congress
Ruben J. Kihuen
Member of Congress

Jacky Rosen
Member of Congress

A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Anthony Brown
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress

Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Donald Norcross
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Joe Crowley
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress
Val Butler Demings
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress

David E. Price
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Charlie Crist
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress
Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Ben Ray Lujan
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

Jim Himes
Member of Congress

Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress

James R. Langevin
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress
Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress

Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

Al Lawson
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress

Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Luis Correa
Member of Congress

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress