

*Having confessed our complicity, the 213th General Assembly (2001) calls on the whole church to affirm God's gift of abundant life in Jesus Christ to all. The church promotes the respect and human dignity of all persons and through God's love and grace, their right to safety, nurture, care, and freedom from abuse and violence. The church commits itself to listen and to seek accountability. The church further commits itself and its resources to provide leadership in creating a just and compassionate society ([Turn Mourning into Dancing: A Policy Statement on Healing Domestic Violence, 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly \(2001\), 14](#)).*

The mere fact of being born a woman brings with it a greater risk and probability of suffering domestic/intimate partner violence, sexual violence, stalking, harassment, and sexual harassment. According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 1 in 4 women have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of intimate partner violence-related impact.<sup>1</sup> In Puerto Rico in 2020, more than 45 femicides were registered, and in a horrific period of four weeks between September and October, 17 murders of women were recorded.<sup>2</sup>

Puerto Rico has experienced an alarming increase in acts of gender-based violence and femicide in recent decades, accentuated after the devastation of Hurricane María in 2017 and further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. In 2019, it was reported that 1 femicide occurs every 7 days.<sup>3</sup> Despite years of ongoing advocacy to declare a state of emergency in order to address more forcefully the issue of violence against women, earlier this year, economic and social sectors of Puerto Rico joined human rights activists, ecumenical partners, and feminist constituencies, finally receiving a positive response in this call for action. On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Governor of Puerto Rico signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency intended to establish measures to prevent and eradicate this behavior.<sup>4</sup>

The People of Puerto Rico are dismayed by two recent, high-profile, gruesome cases of femicide: Keishla M. Rodríguez Ortiz, 27, who was pregnant and whose body was found floating in the San José lagoon, and Andrea Ruíz Costas, 35, who, despite having requested a restraining order from authorities, was found partially burned in Cayey.

Gender-based violence is sin, an evil rooted in sexist understandings of gender. In our society, cultural and religious patterns and teachings that proclaim that men are superior to women have unfortunately been perpetuated for generations, resulting in consequences from mistreatment to murder.

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\*For those unfamiliar, right-clicking your mouse in the body of the articles cited gives the option to utilize Google Translate to read in your preferred language.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://observatorioviolencia.org/el-gobierno-de-puerto-rico-declara-estado-de-emergencia-por-violencia-de-genero/>

<sup>3</sup> *La persistencia de la indolencia: feminicidios en Puerto Rico 2014-2018*, 6. [https://6b021097-00e8-4f75-9e0b-ea681c4435f9.filesusr.com/ugd/8a0229\\_51b4d8d21ba047f69d0895c26b5f5342.pdf](https://6b021097-00e8-4f75-9e0b-ea681c4435f9.filesusr.com/ugd/8a0229_51b4d8d21ba047f69d0895c26b5f5342.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fortaleza.pr.gov/content/gobernador-declara-estado-de-emergencia-por-violencia-de-g-nero>

Following the lead and hearing the voices of our Puerto Rican siblings, we are calling upon the Presbyterian Church (USA) to stand firm in our commitment “to provide leadership in creating a just and compassionate society” in response to this violation of women’s safety, nurture, care, and freedom from abuse and violence.

As gender-justice advocates, we stand in solidarity with our siblings in Puerto Rico in the work of both advocacy and education around gender-based violence. We support local efforts to deconstruct social and religious stereotypes that cause harm to any child of God. We are the church together, and we stand ready to work and walk alongside our siblings in the struggle, acknowledging the work that all of us must do to eradicate sexism and gender-based violence.

We call upon leaders throughout the PC(USA) to join us.

Mujeres Hispanas Latinas Presbiterianas  
Mujeres Presbiterianas en el Sínodo Boriquén  
Presbiterio del Noroeste  
Presbiterio de San Juan  
Presbiterio del Suroeste  
Sínodo Presbiteriano Boriquén en Puerto Rico  
Pastoras Presbiterianas en Puerto Rico  
Caucus Nacional Presbiteriano Hispano Latino  
The Hispanic/Latino-a Congregational Support Office, Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA)  
The Office of Gender, Race, and Intercultural Ministries, PMA  
The Women of Color Joint Working Group  
The Racial Equity Advocacy Committee (REAC)  
The Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC)  
Presbyterian Women in the PC(USA), Inc.  
Presbyterian Disaster Assistance  
Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness  
Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations  
Pastoral de Mujeres de Justicia y Género del Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI)

For more information:

[In Puerto Rico, an Epidemic of Domestic Violence Hides in Plain Sight - Type Investigations](#)

[Q&A: Ida B. Wells Fellow Andrea González-Ramírez on Puerto Rico’s Changing Approach to Domestic Violence - Type Investigations](#)

[La+persistencia+de+la+indolencia+2019.11.12-vf.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

[Puerto Rico declares state of emergency over gender violence | Women News | Al Jazeera](#)

