

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for inviting me to be with you on this occasion when we commemorate a year since the passing of Hurricane Hugo.

Shortly after the hurricane hit Puerto Rico, Senator Lilliana Belardo de O'Neal came to my office and told me of the suffering that had been left behind by Hugo in St. Croix. At that time, many of us were looking for help, but we knew that the key to our joint success was that all of us were willing to help. We offered all the assistance we could and so did our neighbors with us.

Hugo was, in my personal opinion, both a sad and an exhilarating experience. Sad because we saw so many people deprived of their homes and belongings; and exhilarating because it was an illuminating experience to see how people got together to help those less fortunate.

There were entire communities who sheltered those who had lost their homes. Children were especially taken care of, so that this horrible experience would not mar their imaginations nor dwell on their fears forever.

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We, who suffered so hard in the municipalities of Río Grande, Ceiba and Fajardo, as well as in our mutually neighboring islands of Culebra and Vieques, could not continue our efforts at aiding people in our island municipalities without looking at what had happened in St. Croix.

Thus, it was just and natural that we came to aid our friends and neighbors in these islands, as we knew you would have done with us, had you been in a position to do so.

St. Croix, St. Thomas, and Puerto Rico share not only a common geography but many of our people also share a common Caribbean heritage. We are brothers and sisters commonly united by our sea.

I wish to thank you once more for this opportunity to share these thoughts with you. On behalf of my husband, the Honorable Rafael Hernández Colón and the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, as well as on behalf of all Puerto Ricans, I wish you success in your reconstruction efforts.

Thank you.