

Puerto Rico declares state of emergency over gender violence



The declaration includes measures like creating a mobile app for victims to request help and report attacks. (Photo: Ricardo Arduengo / AFP)

San Juan, January 26 (RHC)-- Puerto Rico has declared a state of emergency over its deep-rooted problem of violence against women, creating new measures demanded by activists for years to battle a deadly tide. The U.S. colonial territory has seen sustained levels of violence that on average result in one woman's death per week, measured in a 2019 report.

The declaration, which also offers protection to gay and transgender people, includes measures like creating a mobile app for victims to ask for help and report attacks. Authorities will create a new program to check in with women who have taken out restraining orders against abusers, and a new committee will be responsible for enforcing policies and proposing other measures.

Puerto Rico Governor Pedro Pierluisi said the order aims to combat "an evil that has caused too much damage for too long." He said: "Victims have suffered the consequences of systematic machismo, inequity, discrimination, lack of education, lack of guidance and above all lack of action."

The declaration defines sex or gender-based violence as conduct that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to another person motivated by stereotypes. According to a 2019 report from non-profit advocacy groups Proyecto Matria and Kilometro Cero, one woman is killed every seven days in Puerto Rico.

Latin America and the Caribbean are among the most dangerous regions for women. Rights groups have drawn attention to the issue in recent years, staging protests and securing key demands, such as the legalization of abortion in Argentina.

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