Boricua scientist Angel Francisco Adames celebrates his identity as part of the 2025 MacArthur Fellowship class [1]

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Washington D.C. — Puerto Rican scientist **Ángel Francisco Adames Corraliza**, a professor at the University of Wisconsin and expert in tropical atmosphere studies, has just been selected as one of the recipients of the prestigious **MacArthur Fellowship**.

“For me, this is not only a celebration of my science, but of my identity... Our community has been somewhat invisible in science,” Adames Corraliza said on Monday in a Zoom interview with *El Nuevo Día*.

When announcing the 2025 fellowship winners — which include scientists, physicians, and artists — the **MacArthur Foundation** stated that the Puerto Rican professor “combines a deep understanding of the physics of atmospheric waves with a thorough analysis of observational data and climate model simulations.”

It also noted that “he has made significant advances in quantifying the role and impact of moisture in tropical weather and climate phenomena, bringing us closer to an integrated dynamic theory of the tropical atmosphere.”

The nomination process for this fellowship — which includes a grant of **$800,000 over the next five years** and is commonly known as the “**genius grant**” — is secret. Therefore, the Puerto Rican scientist does not know who recommended him or the specific criteria the jury used to select him among the 22 winners, beyond what the foundation highlighted in its announcement.

However, Adames Corraliza, 37, suspects that his work on understanding the movement of moisture in the tropical atmosphere played a key role. “More than developing basic theory, I think my contribution has been in popularizing these ideas, making them more widely accepted in the tropical meteorology community,” he explained.

The Puerto Rican scientist earned his **bachelor’s degree in Physics** from the **University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez**, and completed his **Master’s and Ph.D. in Atmospheric Sciences and Meteorology** at the **University of Washington in Seattle**.

He worked for a year at the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** before being recruited as an assistant professor at the University of Michigan. He has spent the past five years as an **associate professor at the University of Wisconsin**.

Adames Corraliza says that the devastating impact of **Hurricane Georges in 1998**, which hit his hometown of San Sebastián when he was about 10 years old, inspired him to study the atmosphere and meteorology.

“In Puerto Rico, you can’t just leave — you have to live through the hurricane and stay awake all night listening to the house shake from the winds. As a child, you see nature as something beautiful and noble, and then you realize that nature does whatever it wants. I was astonished, and I wanted to understand why that was possible,” he said.

He currently supervises research focused on **heat waves, the El Niño phenomenon, tropical wave interactions with tropical climatology, and how low-level moisture transport can create turbulence zones associated with hurricanes**.

The professor noted that the steps taken now to combat climate change, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, will take decades to show an effect. “We can do everything necessary right now, but the ocean will take decades to respond — possibly more than 20 years,” he said.

Because of the damage caused in recent decades, hurricanes, heat, and rainfall have become more intense.

“That doesn’t mean hurricanes will always become stronger or that there will be more of them — it simply means that when atmospheric conditions are favorable, the hurricane will reach high intensity,” he explained.

However, Adames Corraliza does not believe new hurricane intensity categories should be created. In fact, he thinks that after **Category 4** (sustained winds of 130–156 mph), there should not be another, since the level of destruction caused is already as catastrophic as that of **Category 5** (157 mph or higher).

So far, his ongoing research — funded by the **National Science Foundation (NSF)**, **NASA**, and **NOAA** — has not been affected by the **anti-diversity and anti-science policies** of President Donald Trump, unlike the experiences of some of his colleagues.

“They’re trying to eliminate all environmental programs — everything that has to do with the environment and protecting the planet,” he said.

Although his current federal funding remains in place, he said Trump’s policies have discouraged him from applying for new grants. At the moment, his projects still have two years of funding left.

With the MacArthur Fellowship grant, he plans to explore the possibility of transferring it as a **donation to the University of Wisconsin** to fund his projects. The foundation places no restrictions on how the money is used, as long as it supports initiatives that advance his scientific career.

Other Puerto Ricans who have received the MacArthur Fellowship include **painter and sculptor Daniel Lind Ramos** (2021), **writer, rapper, playwright, and filmmaker Lin-Manuel Miranda** (2015), and **saxophonist, composer, and university professor Miguel Zenón** (2008).

Because the award is popularly known as the “genius grant,” Adames Corraliza has started receiving messages from colleagues and friends making that reference. “My colleagues have started joking about it… I don’t consider myself a genius. I laugh too, but I wouldn’t use that term,” he said.
