



General Assembly

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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 7th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 18 June 2012, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Morejón (Ecuador)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Special Committee decision of 20 June 2011 concerning Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/2012/L.7)

Hearing of petitioners (continued)

1. **The Chairman** said that, in line with the Special Committee's usual practice, petitioners would be invited to take places at the petitioners' table and would withdraw after making their statement.

2. **Mr. Vázquez-Quintana** (Movimiento Unión Soberanista) said that in order to complete the process of rectifying the decision taken by the United Nations in 1953, when it had removed Puerto Rico from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, the case of Puerto Rico should be referred to the General Assembly as a matter of urgency. The President of the United States of America, Mr. Barack Obama, had promised to resolve the status of Puerto Rico during his term in office; a promise that had not been honoured. The statement that the Territorial Clause of the United States Constitution was applicable to Puerto Rico was a euphemistic way of saying that the islands were still a colony. The Supreme Court ruling that Puerto Rico belonged to, but was not part of, the United States was a source of indignation.

3. His party, which had been created in March 2012, had called for a constitutional assembly on status to be the mechanism for decolonization of Puerto Rico and for the holding of a referendum that offered the three options of independence, maintaining commonwealth status or becoming an integral part of the United States. The status of Puerto Rico was not a domestic matter to be settled by the United States and Puerto Rico, as claimed by the United States; it must be settled in the General Assembly of the United Nations, the custodian of freedom and self-determination of peoples. After 405 years as a Spanish colony and 114 years as a colony of the United States, it was time for the decolonization of Puerto Rico.

4. **Mr. Hernández López** (House of Representatives of Puerto Rico) said that the United States continued to shirk its international responsibilities while the Committee continued to produce resolutions similar to the many others adopted over the years. The United States controlled Puerto Rican ports and air space, without preventing drugs and arms trafficking, and its corporations monopolized local markets. Puerto Rico had rejected the death penalty, but the United States

continued to apply it in the Territory. The hope that President Obama would keep his promise to address the status issue had faded, particularly as the conclusions of the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's status had been ignored by the United States Congress and the Puerto Rican government. Moreover, the plebiscite planned for 2012 did not comply with the requirements of international law.

5. The United Nations had failed the Puerto Rican people, who were obliged to send their representatives on a yearly pilgrimage to the Committee without any tangible result. He urged that the issue of the status of Puerto Rico be referred to the General Assembly.

6. **Ms. Rexach** (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) said that although all Puerto Ricans had been granted United States citizenship under a 1917 law and thousands of them had lost their lives while serving in the United States military, they were not represented in Congress and did not have the same voting rights as other citizens. With respect to the situation in Vieques, Congress should have acted more effectively to protect the environment, while defending federal property and the United States naval forces' right to conduct training exercises. She hoped that the Committee would help Puerto Rico to become the fifty-first state of the United States, thus allowing the Puerto Rican people to enjoy the rights and equality they deserved as United States citizens.

7. **Mr. Adames** (Literary Center Anacaona) said that Puerto Rican independence would mean that some 7 million people, roughly half of whom lived on the mainland, would lose their United States citizenship. The Government of Cuba was seeking to deprive Puerto Ricans of that citizenship and to damage their relationship with the United States.

8. **Mr. León González** (Cuba), speaking on a point of order, asked that petitioners respect the courteous nature of the proceedings.

9. **Mr. Adames** (Literary Center Anacaona) said that more Puerto Rican soldiers had died in service with the United States military than from any state. He asked what would happen to Puerto Rican veterans in the event of independence. Granting Puerto Rico full statehood would finally recognize the solidarity of Puerto Ricans with the United States and give them proper representation in government.

10. **Mr. López Rodríguez** (Frente Patriótico Arcibeño) said that, as part of the World Bank project to create a Caribbean regional electricity grid, the United States had imposed a monthly tax on energy bills in Puerto Rico. Currently, all of the 35 energy projects planned for Puerto Rico were a threat to sustainable agriculture, as the installation of solar panels, wind turbines and rubbish incinerators had been authorized in areas of high agricultural yield. No information had been provided officially to the inhabitants of Puerto Rico, although contracts had already been signed and construction work had begun.

11. Another energy project that would have a negative environmental impact was the gas pipeline being built to transport natural gas from abroad to Puerto Rico. Strong local opposition had led to some changes to the project, but the pipeline would still run across almost 50 per cent of the north of the island, thus exposing many communities to the risk of an environmental catastrophe and increasing the Puerto Rico's economic dependence on energy imports. Furthermore, a recent executive order issued by President Obama had made energy resources subject to national security considerations.

12. The High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP), a military research programme based in Arecibo, was also concerned with energy production and might use Puerto Rico to test a technology involving electromagnetic irradiation of natural gas, with unknown results and side effects. Those environmentally harmful energy projects had been approved to cover up HAARP operations and they further reinforced Puerto Rico's colonial status.

13. **Mr. Camacho Moreno** (Toabajeros Contra el Gasoducto) said that the Government of Puerto Rico had announced in September 2010 that a 92-mile gas pipeline would be built from the south to the north of the island. Such a project should have required broad consultation with all those affected, but no consultation had taken place. The lack of transparency, particularly with regard to the role of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), had led President Obama to order an investigation into the involvement of USACE. Despite recommendations to the contrary from the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and despite public pressure, the Puerto Rican Government and USACE had approved the project with only minor changes. Moreover, the preliminary environmental

evaluation produced by USACE in October 2011 was based on biased and incomplete analysis. It had also violated the Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican peoples' basic human rights and environmental justice as it had been produced in English only, contrary to the Executive Order on improving access to services for persons with limited English proficiency. In response to the written complaints, USACE had merely extended the consultation period to 30 days and produced an executive summary of the evaluation in Spanish. He called on USACE to reject the permit applications to build the gas pipeline and thus protect the environment and safety of the Puerto Rican people. Lastly, he called on the Committee to take note of the complaints of the Puerto Rican people, who had no means of governing their own present and future.

14. **Ms. Iris Martínez** (Centro Mujer y Nueva Familia) said that it was important to address the psychosocial health of the Puerto Rican community in view of the chronic, pervasive and noxious impact of 500 years of colonialism on a people's sense of self, identity and agency. An ambivalent sense of identity had emerged among Puerto Ricans and the diaspora in recent years, as illustrated by her own alternating use of Spanish and English. Peoples who had been colonized and/or forced into slavery were affected by psychological trauma and unresolved grief that was transferred from generation to generation, in addition to higher rates of poverty, unemployment and social marginalization. Recent studies had shown that Puerto Ricans living in the United States were more likely to suffer from clinical depression, substance abuse and other psychiatric disorders than other Latin American nationals living in the United States. It was ironic that the economic, social, educational and psychosocial profile of Puerto Ricans, who were "citizens" of the United States, was such a cause for concern. It was essential that the decolonization of Puerto Rico start immediately.

15. **The Chairperson** said that, in line with the Special Committee's usual practice, petitioners would be invited to take a place at the petitioners' table and would withdraw after making their statements.

16. **Ms. D'Auteuil** (National Jericho Movement) said that the Puerto Rican people had earned their independence through bloodshed and struggle, although some of their activists were prisoners of war held in the most oppressive conditions in United States prisons. As a party to the destruction of the language,

culture and religion of indigenous peoples, the theft of their land and the exploitation of their resources, the United States had sustained one of the worst colonial systems in history. Centuries later, the genocide of indigenous and formerly enslaved Black peoples continued, as did the struggle of those peoples against United States oppression. European anti-imperialist political prisoners and prisoners of war had also joined the international anti-colonial and liberation struggle.

17. The United States regime had recolonized Puerto Rico, as in the case of other former Spanish colonies, and its military presence had caused environmental damage and jeopardized the health of the island's inhabitants. Despite the regime's ruthless crushing of resistance and its social oppression and isolation of political prisoners, the Puerto Rican independence movement fought on in pursuit of liberation and national sovereignty. The three remaining Puerto Rican prisoners of war, Oscar López Rivera and the brothers Avelino and Norberto González Claudio, were classified as terrorists by the United States Government.

18. It was critical that the Special Committee should reject the United States Government's pretence that Puerto Rico was a commonwealth and recognize that it was in fact a colony owned by multinationals that were attempting to destroy the island's economy, culture, language and environment. Consideration of the question of Puerto Rico by the General Assembly would allow the people of the world to lift the yoke of imperialism from the neck of the Puerto Rican nation.

19. **Mr. Martorell** (Taller de la Playa) said that, as a Puerto Rican and an artist, he felt the contradiction of being from a colonized country: if his country was a colony and belonged to the United States, then it was not his country. He came before the Special Committee to plead for the right to be recognized as Puerto Rican first and foremost, despite the fact that there was no legal basis in international law for claiming Puerto Rican nationality. Having been educated as a diplomat in the United States of America, he had found it impossible to represent the country that ruled his own. His concurrent artistic awakening had shown him that making art required freedom and a self-awareness liberated by the endless possibilities of the imagination, rather than one viewed through the colonizer's diminishing lens.

20. Oscar López Rivera and several other political prisoners had earned the right to call themselves Puerto

Ricans through their valiant struggle to liberate their country, a struggle that had led to their imprisonment. In captivity they had become artists and forged for themselves a different freedom, that of imagining a liberated homeland. He called for the liberation of Oscar López Rivera, the longest held political prisoner in United States custody and a prime example of what it meant to be both an artist and a Puerto Rican, and for the liberation of the Puerto Rican people as a whole.

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2012/L.7: Special Committee decision of 20 June 2011 concerning Puerto Rico (continued)

21. **Mr. Selim** (Observer for Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, reiterated the Movement's strong support for the work of the Special Committee on Decolonization and urged the administering Powers to grant their full support to the activities of the Committee. The Movement renewed its call to Member States of the United Nations to speed up the decolonization process to achieve the complete elimination of colonialism.

22. The Movement reaffirmed its positions on the question of Puerto Rico contained in the Final Document of the Fifteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in July 2009, and in the final document of the seventeenth Ministerial Meeting held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in May 2012.

23. The question of Puerto Rico had been under consideration of the Special Committee for more than 37 years. A total of 30 resolutions or decisions had been adopted by the Committee on the subject. The Movement welcomed the fact that over the last decade the Committee had adopted its resolutions by consensus.

24. **Ms. Rubiales de Chamorro** (Nicaragua) said that although the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism was under way, the General Assembly had yet to fully consider and discuss the question of Puerto Rico. The United States of America should assume its responsibility in the decolonization process. Self-determination and independence were necessary to put an end to centuries of occupation and environmental destruction in Puerto Rico.

25. The Puerto Rican people were clearly dissatisfied with their colonial status, and all of the island's

political parties, as well as civil society, were calling for change. All efforts related to facilitating the Puerto Rican people's exercise of its right of self-determination must therefore be conducted in line with international law and all relevant General Assembly resolutions. The forthcoming status plebiscite, to be held in November 2012, did not conform to that standard.

26. **Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), recalling the historic ties between the Puerto Rican and Venezuelan peoples, said that the colonial rule of Puerto Rico by the United States of America went against the spirit and purpose of the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). His delegation therefore requested that the General Assembly consider the question of Puerto Rico in all its aspects.

27. The international community continued to make clear its commitment to the decolonization of Puerto Rico. In particular, the Final Declaration of the Ninth Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) had reiterated its members' support for Puerto Rico's struggle to achieve national sovereignty and end the imperialist occupation and military threat. Consequently, his delegation reiterated its call for the United States Government to allow the people of Puerto Rico to exercise fully their inalienable right to independence in conformity with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and the relevant resolutions and decisions of the Special Committee.

28. **Mr. Archondo** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that after 114 years of unjust colonial domination, it was imperative that Puerto Rico, a historically Latin American and Caribbean nation, return to the Latin American family. For the time being, its place in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the home of peace-loving countries in the Western Hemisphere, was reserved.

29. It was time to release the Puerto Rican freedom fighter Oscar López Rivera, whose prison term of 31 years was an intolerable burden. Incarcerated for the so-called crime of wanting to restore his country's sovereignty, López Rivera posed no threat to the United States of America, which should pardon and release him without delay.

30. **Mr. Mostahkam** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the mandate of the Special Committee was to bring the scourge of colonialization to an end. The exercise of the right of self-determination was the most

important component of the decolonization process for territories under the Committee's consideration. His delegation reaffirmed the sovereign right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination under the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), entitled "Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples".

31. Adoption of the draft resolution by consensus would send a clear and strong message of support to the people of Puerto Rico. It would ensure increased momentum for change and indicate that the Special Committee, as the voice of the world's conscience, continued to support full achievement of the right of self-realization and independence. His Government supported the complete elimination of colonialism.

32. **Ms. Lalama** (Ecuador) said that Ecuador's Constitution enshrined the right to self-determination. Regrettably, although the Special Committee had been considering the issue of Puerto Rico for over 30 years, it had been unable to make concrete progress towards ending the colonial relationship. The many resolutions and decisions that it had adopted over the years should now be implemented. Her delegation joined those urging the General Assembly actively to consider the question of Puerto Rico in all its aspects. Ecuador also called for the release of all Puerto Ricans held in United States prisons, in particular Oscar López Rivera, whose term had exceeded that of Nelson Mandela, and other Puerto Ricans. Ecuador's decision to co-sponsor draft resolution A/AC.109/2012/L.7 reflected its commitment to the Puerto Rican people and its hope that Puerto Rico would soon join the community of independent and sovereign States, as a Latin American and Caribbean nation with its own unequivocal national identity.

33. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the people of Puerto Rico had been seeking self-determination for years, having been invaded by the United States of America 114 years earlier. Thus far the Special Committee had adopted 30 resolutions and decisions reaffirming their right to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). Tragically, the Puerto Rican people's legitimate quest for independence had been met with violent repression and arrests.

34. His delegation fully supported the call by the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement at their recent Summits for implementation

of the resolutions of the General Assembly demanding self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico, a Latin American and Caribbean country. He trusted that the draft resolution before the Special Committee would be adopted by consensus, in a reaffirmation of international legitimacy and the principles of the United Nations, of which self-determination was the most important. In closing, he demanded that the United States of America fulfil its obligation to allow the Puerto Rican people the full exercise of their right of self-determination, and called for the release of all Puerto Ricans imprisoned for their desire for freedom.

35. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2012/L.7 was adopted.*

36. **Mr. León González** (Cuba) said that the number of delegations, both members and non-members of the Committee, which had spoken on the issue was increasing each year. The statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement had been excellent.

37. Cuba and Puerto Rico had long been united in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. Both lands had been inhabited by Taino natives, had been invaded and occupied and had received infusions of African and Spanish blood. The independence struggles of Cuba and Puerto Rico had begun at almost the same time. At the founding of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, José Martí had said that its purposes were to achieve complete independence for Cuba and to aid and encourage Puerto Rican independence. Over 2,000 Puerto Ricans had shed their blood in the fight for Cuban independence. According to Martí, Cuban and Puerto Rican independence were indispensable to preserve the dignity of the United States of America. One of Fidel Castro's purposes in organizing the first congress of Latin American students in 1948 had been to demand the independence of Puerto Rico.

38. Despite 113 years of colonial domination, the Puerto Rican people had not lost their culture, identity or national sentiments. Cuba was in solidarity with the Puerto Rican people and would continue to uphold the legitimate right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.