



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 4th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 22 June 2015, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Lasso Mendoza (Ecuador)

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The meeting was called to order at 15.20 p.m.

Special Committee decision of 23 June 2014 concerning Puerto Rico *(continued)*
(A/AC.109/2015/L.13 and A/AC.109/2015/L.6)

Hearing of petitioners (continued)

1. **Mr. Bermúdez Zenón** (Grupo por la Igualdad y la Justicia de Puerto Rico) noted the systematic absence of the United States delegation during discussions relevant to the matter at hand and wondered whether the Committee could actually compel any party to listen to petitioners. The United States of America, with its steady rise in violent crime, had become a dangerous place for afro-descendants, in particular, to live. The link between such violence and the continued colonization of Puerto Rico was a claim to racial superiority. Puerto Rico, once seen as a potential relocation site for United States afro-descendants, had known such racism since the advent of United States forces. It should be recalled that everyone was a descendant of those who had left the African continent and spread to the four corners of the world.

2. **Mr. Mangual** (Fundación Puerto Rico en Marcha, Inc.) said that, contrary to United States rhetoric, Puerto Ricans had demonstrable indigenous heritage, while independence movements had tried to make progress towards sovereignty. Despite the existence of a document with constitutional characteristics, which was subject to presidential and congressional approval, so great was United States congressional power over the island that even economic resources could not be distributed in such a way as to benefit the common good. A number of Puerto Ricans, including Oscar López Rivera, had been deprived of their liberty for being pro-independence, and Puerto Rico, itself, had become a society where the majority of the population was elderly, impoverished or forced by precarity to emigrate to the United States.

3. **Mr. López Rodríguez** (Frente Patriótico Arecibeño) said that the town of Arecibo was used by the United States Department of Defence as a military enclave. Arecibo's environment was being destroyed through the disposal of toxic human, pharmaceutical and energy waste, in contravention of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. The brazen actions of the United States, including

military activities concealed under the cloak of energy production, should be examined by the General Assembly.

4. **Mr. Arroyo** (Coalition for the Presidential Vote in Puerto Rico) decried the sacrifice of thousands of Puerto Rican soldiers in defence of freedom and democracy for a country whose public international discourse stood in stark contrast to its denial of its own citizens' fundamental right to vote. The United States Constitution referred to Puerto Rico as property while island-related issues were, absurdly, handled by a committee dedicated to non-living resources.

5. The United States should be referred to the Human Rights Committee and sanctions should be imposed on it for violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. That country had lost its credibility when it chose to ignore the will of the Puerto Rican people to withdraw consent to its current political relationship with the United States in 2012. The people of Puerto Rico deserved either full and equal rights as United States citizens, or else independence as a sovereign nation.

6. **Mr. Otero** (Latinos United For a Progressive America) expressed disappointment that as an American from Puerto Rico, he had the right to risk his life in military service for the United States of America but was not entitled to vote in its presidential elections. Indeed, thousands of Puerto Rican soldiers had sacrificed their lives in every major conflict involving the United States of America over the previous century. Nevertheless, Puerto Ricans continued to be denied presidential suffrage and to be treated as second-class citizens while their Government embarked on military campaigns worldwide under the banner of freedom. Such treatment constituted racial discrimination and hypocrisy on the part of the United States of America, whose Constitution clearly stated that a territory need not be a State or pay taxes to vote in presidential elections. In conclusion, he asked the Committee to proceed with the request that the population of Puerto Rico should be given the right to vote for president.

7. **Mr. González** (High School Republicans of Puerto Rico) drew attention to the inequality of Puerto Ricans before the law and the second-class existence they were subjected to, barred from the enjoyment of the fundamental rights afforded by the United States Constitution. That unjust situation had been detrimental to the island's social and economic

progress and must be redressed. However, it should not be used as a pretext to break ties with the United States of America, as called for by the proponents of a stubborn and utopian ideology of national sovereignty. As American citizens, Puerto Ricans must instead lay claim to the whole spectrum of rights that they were entitled to exercise.

8. In the referendum of November 2012, a majority of Puerto Ricans had voted for statehood. A mere 5.5 per cent of Puerto Ricans had voted for independence, the prospect vehemently endorsed by many who had come before the Committee claiming to speak for the population. Their insistence on continuing to debate non-viable options after the people had effectively spoken constituted an affront to the electorate, which alone had the right to determine the island's future. He called on the Committee to recognize the 2012 referendum and to support Puerto Rican efforts to conduct a new referendum, for which the United States Government had already allocated funding. The result would confirm once and for all the Puerto Rican people's desire for equality, permanence and stability.

9. **Mr. Torres** (Brigada Guarionex) said that, because the nation of Borinken had been stolen from the Taino people by Spain and subsequently given to the United States as the spoils of war, it was not legally United States territory and belonged to the indigenous Boricuas, who had always fought for their freedom against imperialism. They had never surrendered and had also fought to liberate other Latin American countries, but now needed help to become free themselves. The people of Borinken should be able to exercise their inalienable right to independence in the same way as the United States, which had not asked for independence from the United Kingdom but had simply declared it.

10. Liberty and sovereignty were the birthright of indigenous peoples. The patriots who had fought in Boston for the independence of the United States had disguised themselves as Native Americans because their conscience had told them that they were asserting rights which in reality belonged to the indigenous people. The people of Borinken, however, needed no disguise, being indigenous to the core. He asked the Committee to help dissolve the illegal colonial Commonwealth and demanded that the United States should transfer all sovereign powers to the nation of

Borinken immediately, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

11. **Ms. Guzmán** (Movimiento Unión Soberanista de Puerto Rico) said that 63 years on, the grossly colonial status of Free Associated State crushed any hope of attaining optimal development or self-rule without foreign intervention. Facing one of its worst economic crises in decades as a result of the rule of successive neoliberal Governments, Puerto Rico was being rapidly impoverished by the Free Associated State system and the demonstrated failure of its economic model.

12. The country's colonial condition had driven hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans to emigrate. Some 46 per cent of the population lived in poverty and 14 per cent were unemployed. Thousands of young people had been deceived into joining the United States Army to fight alien wars. The United States Navy had relentlessly bombed the islands of Vieques and Culebra and failed to remove toxic waste. With the full knowledge of the Federal authorities, Puerto Rico had become a transit point for the illegal drug trade, which had claimed thousands of lives.

13. Puerto Rico was subject to costly and inefficient shipping regulations, and its commercial sector had been wiped out by United States chain stores, causing an economic collapse. The FBI had persecuted numerous independence activists and continued to detain Oscar López Rivera.

14. Nevertheless, the Puerto Rican people would stand firm in the struggle for self-determination, sovereignty and prosperity and against the economic and moral poverty imposed by American colonialism. Given the difficulty of fighting against the most powerful empire in the world, Puerto Rico would need the firm support and valiant solidarity of all the world's peoples in order to prevail.

15. **Ms. Grady Flores** (Ithaca Catholic Workers, Vieques Support Group) said that the Committee must make the decolonization of Puerto Rico a reality as a matter of urgency and should continue to press for the release of Oscar López Rivera and Norberto González Claudio. Her Group supported the right of all Puerto Ricans to self-determination and independence from the United States. Recalling that it had been twelve years since the United States Navy had ended its bombing practice on the island of Vieques, she urged the United States Government to pay restitution and fulfil the four demands of the people of Vieques:

demilitarization, decontamination, devolution of occupied lands and development. Every weapons system created by the United States had been tested on Vieques, including depleted uranium shells, the use of which had been condemned by the United Nations. As a result of United States military activities, the cancer rate in Vieques was 30 per cent higher than anywhere else in Puerto Rico. Moreover, 95 per cent of the toxic mix of bombs and residue sat in the soil, with decomposing bombs contaminating the waters, despite the fact that the equipment needed to clear them had already been developed. It was therefore imperative that the demands of the people of Vieques should be met immediately.

16. **Mr. Fornel** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), noted the importance of the Latin American and Caribbean character of Puerto Rico to his organization at the highest levels. CELAC was aware of the relevant Committee resolutions and would continue to endeavour to free the region of colonialism and colonies. The Committee should refer to the 2014 Declaration of Havana made on the occasion of the Fifth CARICOM-Cuba Summit, which entrusted the task of presenting relevant proposals to the CELAC Quartet and other interested States.

17. Speaking in his national capacity, he wished to add that Ecuador supported the legitimate aspirations of the Puerto Rican people to participate in a free and impartial process that would allow it to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination and independence. The United States of America should assume its responsibility and accelerate that process. Moreover, all occupied lands should be returned.

18. Lastly, Ecuador called on the United States to bring the 34-year imprisonment of Oscar López River to an end. On the other hand, his Government welcomed the liberation of Norberto González Claudio.

19. **Mr. Ramírez Carreño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the international community should redouble efforts to eradicate colonialism. The question of Puerto Rico, subject to colonial domination for over a century, was a matter of deep concern for Latin America and the Caribbean and democratic-minded peoples worldwide. His Government supported Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and independence and its people's legitimate aspirations.

20. Despite four decades of discussion and over 33 relevant resolutions, no substantive changes had been made by the Government of the United States of America. The support demonstrated by a variety of regional and international forums, including the Non-Aligned Movement, CELAC and the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America, pointed to the need for the issue to be examined closely by the General Assembly. Puerto Rico's economic situation was dire, with the economy in recession since 2006 and a 14 per cent unemployment rate in 2014, which had resulted in mass emigration to the United States. Austerity measures and the privatization of public enterprises had also caused public discontent. In the light of those considerations, measures to allow the Puerto Ricans to exercise their right to self-determination were needed. Colonialism had also negatively impacted human rights, resulting, notably, in the 34-year imprisonment of Oscar López Rivera.

21. His delegation had co-sponsored the draft resolution submitted and urged the members of the Committee to adopt it by consensus. It also urged the United States Government to adopt measures that would allow Puerto Ricans to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and relevant Committee resolutions and decisions.

22. **Ms. Rubiales de Chamorro** (Nicaragua) said that CELAC, having claimed Puerto Rico as one of its own, had recommended that steps should be taken to advance the decolonization of the island, including the submission of proposals that would advance that process and allow Puerto Rico to make the decisions that would fulfil its urgent economic and social needs. The commitment had emerged from recent CELAC summits to continue working within the framework of international law to achieve a Latin American and Caribbean region free of colonialism and colonies. The Committee had adopted 34 relevant resolutions, and the responsibilities assigned in those resolutions should be met. The General Assembly should examine all aspects of the matter, while the colonial power in question should promote a process that would allow Puerto Ricans to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. The urgency of the question lay in the absence of real options for a new economic plan

and the progressive deterioration of Puerto Rico's economy, which directly impacted the socioeconomic situation of the people. Nicaragua had co-sponsored the resolution on the question and welcomed both its adoption as well as the co-sponsorship of the Russian Federation and Syrian Arab Republic.

23. Lastly, she called for the release of Oscar López Rivera, imprisoned for 34 years.

24. **Mr. Llorentty Solíz** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that in spite of the international decolonization efforts spurred by General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and the proclamation of the Third International Decade for the Elimination of Colonialism (2011-2020), the United States of America continued to subjugate the people of Puerto Rico, imposing a form of State administration that barred it from exercising its right of self-determination. The Plurinational State of Bolivia reiterated the inalienable nature of that right and called on the United States Government to restore full ownership of the land it had occupied on the islands of Vieques and Ceiba and to decontaminate areas used for military manoeuvres.

25. At various regional summits, his Government had endorsed the Latin American and Caribbean identity of Puerto Rico and reaffirmed its commitment to continue working to implement resolution 1514 (XV), with a view to ridding the region of colonialism. In closing, his country urged the United States Government to release Oscar López Rivera and other Puerto Rican political prisoners.

26. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that all of the Committee's resolutions on Puerto Rico had stressed that Puerto Rico was part of Latin America and the Caribbean, and had called on the Government of the United States to implement their provisions forthwith and to assume its responsibility to expedite a process that would allow the Puerto Rican people to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence. However, the people of Puerto Rico were still unable to exercise that right. Indeed, citizens of Puerto Rico who had called for independence had been subjected to violence, intimidation and imprisonment. By adopting the draft resolution, the Committee would reaffirm the sanctity of international law. He called on the United States Government to implement the draft resolution without delay by releasing its political prisoners and allowing

the people of Puerto Rico to exercise their right to self-determination.

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2015/L.6: Decision of the Special Committee of 23 June 2014 concerning Puerto Rico (continued)

27. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2015/L.6 was adopted.*

28. **Mr. León González** (Cuba) said that the close ties between Cuba and Puerto Rico, forged during the battle against dictatorship and imperial domination waged by both nations after the extermination of their indigenous Taíno ancestors, had lasted for over a century. Cuba's national hero, José Martí, had established the Cuban Revolutionary Party to fight for independence for Cuba and to support that fight in Puerto Rico, and more than 2,000 Puerto Rican soldiers had taken part in the struggle for Cuban independence. The two peoples had strengthened those bonds during years of struggle, sacrifice and resistance. They shared common heroes, such as Oscar López Rivera, who exemplified a people that remained unbowed.

29. In January 2015, the Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) had adopted a declaration highlighting the Latin American and Caribbean character of Puerto Rico and, in light of the resolutions on Puerto Rico adopted by the Special Committee, considering that issue to be of interest to CELAC. Despite 117 years of colonial domination, Puerto Ricans had maintained their culture, identity, sense of nationhood and desire for independence. His Government would defend unremittingly Puerto Rico's right to self-determination.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.