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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 5th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 24 June 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. McGuire (Grenada)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Special Committee decision of 18 June 2018 concerning Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/2019/L.7 and A/AC.109/2019/L.13)

Hearing of petitioners

1. **The Chair** drew attention to aide-memoire 06/19/Add.1 relating to the Special Committee decision of 18 June 2018 concerning Puerto Rico, which contained additional requests for hearing under that item received after the circulation of the initial requests, bringing the total to 53. She took it that the Committee wished to accede to the additional requests.

2. *It was so decided.*

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

4. **Mr. López Rivera** (Fundación Oscar López Rivera Libertá) said that, after 120 years under the colonial yoke of the United States Government, social, economic and political conditions in Puerto Rico were dire. Only through a decolonization process that fostered an independent and sovereign nation could the national identity, culture and language of Puerto Rico continue to exist. Millions of Puerto Ricans had been forced to emigrate to the United States as a result of the actions of the United States Government, which was determined to keep Puerto Rico from self-government.

5. In 2016, in its decision on *Commonwealth of Puerto Rico v. Sánchez Valle*, the United States Supreme Court had made clear that Puerto Rico was a territory of the United States, with no sovereign power and subject to the plenary powers of the United States Congress. That decision had exposed the lie that the people of Puerto Rico had acquired the full measure of self-government. Also in 2016, the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act ("the PROMESA Act") approved by the United States Congress had thwarted the already discredited constitutional government through the imposition of a financial oversight board with the power to overrule the elected government of Puerto Rico. Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights had clearly stated that Puerto Rico lacked self-government. The Committee was urged to use those facts to convince the General Assembly of the need for Puerto Rico to be decolonized and gain its sovereignty. The General Assembly must rectify the error it had made in 1953 by accepting the lies from the United States Government and taking Puerto Rico off the list of

Non-Self-Governing Territories. In fact, the majority of Puerto Ricans had not supported the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico adopted in 1952, and the designation of Free Associated State of Puerto Rico adopted at the time was false, as the island had remained a colony.

6. The economic collapse of Puerto Rico over the past three decades was the culmination of colonialism. Job shortages had caused young professionals to migrate and the most productive public corporations had been privatized. Puerto Ricans had asked for an audit of the public debt, which stood at more than \$70 billion and which the structures created by the United States Congress had refused to address. The financial oversight board was intent on cutting pensions and the budgets of the University of Puerto Rico and public schools, putting at risk the development of human resources. The government encouraged foreign investors by offering incentives that were not available to residents. In an accelerated gentrification project, communities were being displaced while expensive property was built and the number of foreign buyers grew exponentially. The decolonization and independence of Puerto Rico must therefore come quickly.

7. **Mr. Román Espada** (Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Puerto Rico) said that the United States had falsified its colonial relationship with Puerto Rico and was in clear violation of Article 2.2 of the Charter of the United Nations. It had never advanced a genuine process to decolonize Puerto Rico. The PROMESA Act had further entrenched the colonial relationship by stripping the Puerto Rican government of its meagre powers. An appeal against the automatic stay on all civil right actions, imposed under the PROMESA Act, had failed. As a result, the fundamental civil rights of Puerto Ricans remained suspended while the long debt-restructuring process was under way. Additional grave violations of the right to self-determination included the imposition of cabotage laws and the death penalty by the federal courts and the delays in the clean-up of Vieques.

8. He called on the Committee to affirm that Puerto Rico was not an autonomous territory and recommend that the General Assembly take all available measures to end its colonial subordination, including those set out in the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV); to recommend that the General Assembly request the International Court of Justice for an opinion on the international status of Puerto Rico and the fiduciary responsibility of the United States; and to request the United States, as the administering Power, to submit a report on the island's political and economic crisis. He also asked the Chair to communicate in writing to the Human Rights

Council the work of Pedro Rosselló González describing the applicable legal framework on the right of Puerto Rico to self-determination.

9. **Ms. de Lourdes Santiago** (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that the term “colony” did not appear anywhere in the United States legal order. The category of Free Associated State had been invented to cover up the politically inferior status of Puerto Rico, in violation of international law. The colonialist relationship had culminated in the imposition by the United States Congress of the financial oversight board, which decided the laws that would be enacted in Puerto Rico, developed and implemented the public budget, and represented Puerto Rico in bankruptcy proceedings, leaving Puerto Ricans with less capacity for self-government than ever before. A number of sectors in the United States had acknowledged the need to address the colonial status of Puerto Rico, including the Supreme Court in its 2016 decision on *Commonwealth of Puerto Rico v. Sánchez Valle*.

10. The subordinate political structures in Puerto Rico were incapable of ensuring economic stability. It was estimated that the public debt resulting from the restructuring negotiations conducted by the financial oversight board was more than double what could be paid by the people of Puerto Rico, creating a risk of a second bankruptcy. The austerity measures called for by the board forced Puerto Ricans to choose between living in precariousness or in the anguish of economic exile. At the same time, Puerto Rico remained a tax shelter for funds from the United States to such an extreme degree that a congressional committee had launched an investigation into the issue. The role of international organizations was ever more relevant, as they could provide forums to both denounce the status of Puerto Rico and engage in dialogue and find consensus. In view of the current situation of Puerto Rico, it was clear that the Committee no longer faced the obstacles of years past to take action.

11. **Ms. Reverón Collazo** (Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano) said that, in 1953, the General Assembly had removed Puerto Rico from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories based on the United States claim that the adoption in 1952 of a constitution had granted sovereignty to the Puerto Rican people. However, inter-agency reports of the executive branch of the United States on Puerto Rico in 2005, 2007 and 2011; the recent decision of the Supreme Court; the positions of the Justice Department; and the PROMESA Act clearly established that the United States had made false claims before the international community. Puerto Rico remained a colony and the United States was in violation of the Charter of the United Nations,

the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The economic development of Puerto Rico depended on the resolution of its colonial status and decolonization was a moral imperative.

12. It was up to the Committee to fulfil its responsibility to support the people of Puerto Rico in the pursuit of a democratic, just and informed decolonization process. In that regard, she called on the Committee to ensure that the Puerto Rican people had access to balanced and complete information regarding the resources available to them within the international community, and to ensure that the administering Power did not pressure or deceive the people of Puerto Rico. Whatever had been recovered and rebuilt following the destruction caused by Hurricane Maria had not been the result of disaster assistance from the United States but of the labour of the men and women of Puerto Rico. They needed solidarity, not owners, in order to rebuild their nation.

13. **Ms. Susler** (National Lawyers Guild) said that, rather than comply with its international mandates, the United States had gone in the opposite direction. Its President’s racist conduct towards Puerto Rico and the adoption of the PROMESA Act had illicitly ramped up colonialism. In 2015, the governor of Puerto Rico had announced that the government owed a debt of more than \$70 billion, which it could not pay. That debt had never been audited, despite the widely held understanding that much of the debt was illegal. The United States Government had fundamentally shaped the island’s economy and bore responsibility for its plight.

14. The constitutionality of the unelected financial oversight board, which had supplanted the elected government of Puerto Rico, was the subject of litigation, including a case headed to the United States Supreme Court. The board was hardly subject to public scrutiny; private organizations had to litigate to obtain information about it, while the people of Puerto Rico footed the bill for its \$300 million budget. The displacement of Puerto Ricans from their island continued apace; the University of Puerto Rico was under threat; collective bargaining was crippled; and child poverty was on the rise. As a result of the PROMESA Act, the federal court had begun to apply automatic stays, suspending civil rights cases of litigation against the government, which ensured that civil rights violators, such as police officers who had committed abuses, were never brought to justice.

15. The wealthy were being lured to replace the emigrating population through so-called opportunity

zones and laws that had converted Puerto Rico into a tax haven, hastening the displacement of communities in the name of economic development, when in fact much of the investment was subsequently being taken out of Puerto Rico. Action was needed in response to the irreversible changes taking place. She called on the Committee to urge the General Assembly to take up the colonial case of Puerto Rico and get the United States out.

16. **Ms. Mongil** (Las Lolitas en su Centenario) said that the Puerto Rican independence fighter, Dolores “Lolita” Lebrón, who had led an armed attack on the United States Congress in 1954, had appeared before the Committee in 1980 and in 1997. Both times she had denounced the abuses of the Yankee empire against Puerto Rico and called on the Committee to eradicate the evil of colonialism. In 1980, recently released from prison, she had presciently evoked the methodical and genocidal plan to destroy the cultural roots of the Puerto Rican people by controlling their education and mass media and imposing North American values and language. She had also warned of the environmental damage that would be caused by the petrochemical and pharmaceutical industries that were establishing themselves in Puerto Rico.

17. The imperialists had recently confirmed that Puerto Rico was nothing but a territory and had imposed a financial oversight board to act as a de facto government. Citizens of the empire were granted the privilege of enjoying Puerto Rico as a tax haven, while the future of Puerto Rican youth was undermined through the closing of schools and budget cuts to the university. Corporations were polluting entire towns, appropriating water resources and transforming fertile fields into wasteland. The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights had confirmed that the cause of poverty in Puerto Rico was colonization and that the PROMESA Act would worsen conditions for those living in poverty. Fifty years after the Committee’s first resolution on Puerto Rico, the same abuses were being denounced. Another resolution would be adopted that year, but it was clear that the Committee’s work would not be complete until it demanded that the North American empire give Puerto Rico its freedom and that the situation of Puerto Rico be brought before the General Assembly.

18. **Mr. Nenadich Deglan** (National Sovereign State of Borinken) said that in December 2017 he had submitted a request to the Secretary-General to initiate the process to admit the National Sovereign State of Borinken as a Member State of the United Nations. Pursuant to article 59 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the Secretary-

General was mandated to immediately place the application for membership before the representatives of the Security Council for examination. Furthermore, article 60 of the provisional rules of procedure stated that the Security Council would then decide whether or not to recommend the applicant for membership to the General Assembly. The actions mandated in the two articles were not discretionary, either for the Secretary-General or the Security Council.

19. As he had not received a response to his earlier application, he requested that the Chair of the Committee transmit without delay the application of the National Sovereign State of Borinken for membership of the United Nations to the Secretary-General. The National Sovereign State of Borinken would consider any rejection of its application by the Secretary-General to be a discriminatory act in violation of the human rights of the Boricua people. He urged the Secretary-General not to avoid his responsibilities, as the liberation of Puerto Rico from the imperialist yoke of the United States depended on it. The application for membership was the best mechanism for the Committee to help achieve the decolonization of Puerto Rico.

20. **Mr. Molina Pérez** (Movimiento de Conciencia) said that the political model imposed on Puerto Rico by the United States Congress had created a tax haven where Puerto Ricans earned less than \$8 an hour while millionaires paid no contributions. Without self-government, the Puerto Rican people could not stop the cultural and social genocide taking place. Following Hurricane Maria in December 2017, they had been forced to watch people die as they waited for the United States President to authorize assistance. That was a crime against humanity.

21. The United States had perpetrated an economic assault on Puerto Rico by taking control of its ports, thus preventing its integration into the world market; imposing its currency; and raising the cost of production in Puerto Rico, thereby destroying its national industries and turning its three million residents into captive consumers of United States products. Companies had gone bankrupt, unemployment had increased and emigration had followed, producing an economy that could not be self-sufficient and that had been destined for public debt to Wall Street. The PROMESA Act had made it a crime for the government to work for its society. Instead, the aim was to guarantee the profitability of financial capital. Payment was guaranteed to the vultures of Wall Street before provisions were made to ensure the health, education and safety of the people of Puerto Rico, who did not have the political power to take any action in response.

22. He called on the United Nations to relinquish its hypocrisy and apply the provisions of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), repeal General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) and launch a genuine decolonization process through a constituent assembly. Puerto Rico was not a territory and its people did not have to define themselves as a nation; their identity and culture was established and could only be reaffirmed.

23. **Mr. Rigau** (Legislative Assembly of the Municipality of San Juan), said that the 1952 constitution did not mask the obvious fact that Puerto Rico had been a possession of the United States since 1898. The financial ruin of the government, the recognition by the United States Supreme Court of the colonial status of Puerto Rico and the establishment of a financial oversight board through the PROMESA Act had destroyed the myth of economic and democratic development.

24. In May 2019, the financial oversight board, which had been created primarily to recover payments to bondholders, had decided to assume jurisdiction over the municipal governments in Puerto Rico, although the PROMESA Act did not provide for any such delegation of power. The Municipality of San Juan and its Mayor had sued the board in the United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico, disputing the lawfulness of its actions. He called on the Committee to denounce the adoption of the PROMESA Act and the financial oversight board.

25. In order for the United States to address the colonial situation of Puerto Rico at the institutional level, its Government must recognize its role as a colonial power and acknowledge that its relationship with Puerto Rico was not a domestic affair, which was a euphemism Governments used to obscure issues they knew to be serious problems. The international community must move beyond criticizing and find a way for the United States to accept that it was in its own best interests, and in the best interests of Puerto Rico, to resolve the colonial situation. He urged the Committee to include his recommendations in its resolution and the General Assembly to respond to the issue of Puerto Rico.

26. **Ms. López** (Comité Unidos por Borinquen en Hostos) said that United States colonialism in Puerto Rico constituted a genocidal war in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Following the establishment of the farcical Free Associated State of Puerto Rico in 1952, Puerto Ricans had taken drastic measures to make their struggle for independence visible, including heroic acts by Lolita Lebrón and other members of the Puerto Rican nationalist party. The international community had

stood by as those anti-colonial combatants were incarcerated and tortured in United States prisons for 25 years. From the 1950s through the 1970s, the international community had not taken action against the repressive acts of the United States Government against the Puerto Rican independence movement, including the prohibition of political expression, the bombing of the town of Jayuya and the mass incarceration of freedom fighters.

27. Hurricane Maria had unmasked the 121-year colonial relationship. Following the disaster, half a million Puerto Ricans had migrated to the United States seeking refuge, and nearly 4,700 had died as a result of government neglect and failure to provide speedy relief. Forty-five per cent of the population lived below the poverty line. Puerto Rico was ruled by an illegal parallel government established through the PROMESA Act; the financial oversight board did not represent the interests of the Puerto Rican people and had authority over all matters, adhering to the demands of Wall Street. The international community had said nothing about that atrocity. Cultural assimilation had been forced on the six million Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, while the same colonial conditions present in Puerto Rico had been transported to communities in the United States, where Puerto Ricans had been relegated to the status of second-class citizens.

28. **Mr. Connelly Reyes** (Vidas Viequenses Valen) said that, without hospitals and with no legal births registered in Vieques, the people of that island were being colonized and their identity eradicated from the time of birth. Agricultural prospects were limited: because Vieques had functioned as a United States military training installation for decades, the Puerto Rico Department of Health had prohibited the distribution and consumption of produce from the island. Although the military installations had closed in 2003, the United States Environmental Protection Agency had only recently initiated an application to conduct research on the toxic substances in the environment and its inhabitants.

29. The so-called clean-up phase of the bombing range had consisted of detonating unexploded material, with the United States Navy estimating that the effort would require another 20 years. If the situation of Puerto Rico was not brought before the General Assembly that year, the environmental issues of open burning and open detonation in Vieques must be discussed in the context of the Secretary-General's call for action by 2020 to avoid disastrous consequences for the natural systems that sustained life on earth. The pursuit of money and power had led to the irresponsible and immoral clean-up process in Vieques. He urged the Committee to take

responsibility and draw attention to the need for action on the environment.

30. **Ms. Nogales Molinelli** (Partido del Pueblo Trabajador) said that Puerto Rico had always been a colony, as evidenced by the adoption of the PROMESA Act and the statements of the United States Attorney General and Supreme Court. The illegitimate financial oversight board determined how the government budget was spent and was responsible for school closures, reductions in health services and worsened labour conditions.

31. The PROMESA Act provided for the repayment of public debt through a process overseen by a judge appointed by the United States, who approved or rejected agreements made with creditors of various types of debts. Through that Act, Wall Street and the United States Government had condemned Puerto Rico to at least 50 years of precariousness, high interest rates and an unsustainable cost of living. Such conditions were leading to large-scale emigration and impeded economic and social development. One approved agreement obligated Puerto Rico to 40 years of repayment of unaudited debt, a potentially unconstitutional and illegal decision. Under another agreement, the electricity service had been privatized, which would lead to high costs for that essential service and inequality in access with potentially fatal consequences. Several other agreements were still pending and in their totality would slow the decolonization process by exacerbating debt. The international community had the responsibility and the capacity to take action in response.

32. **Ms. Ora Bannan** (LatinoJustice PRLDEF) said that Puerto Rico was experiencing an economic, humanitarian and political crisis, and any semblance of democracy had collapsed. The three branches of the United States Government had clearly asserted that Puerto Rico was a colony. Despite an outcry from the international community, the illegal and immoral colonialism of that non-self-governing territory continued unabated without economic, political or legal consequences for the United States. The Committee must step up its work and push for a legitimate decolonization process that included a vote in the General Assembly.

33. The executive branch of the United States had recently argued before the Supreme Court that the only form of sovereignty available to Puerto Rico was ultimately determined by the United States Congress. In a 2016 ruling, the Supreme Court had stated that, while the Free Associated State created in the 1952 Constitution was a new type of entity, the political

relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States had not changed. The situation of Puerto Rico would not be resolved in the courts, which would always rule in favour of the interests of their own nation. For example, the United States courts had ruled that the financial oversight board was constitutional. That board, made up of just seven executives from the financial and banking sectors, had the power to veto the decisions of the elected government, refused to provide information on their conflicts of interest, did not consult with the Puerto Rican people and paid millions of dollars in contracts to foreign law firms. Those acts of plunder and dictatorship had been allowed only because Puerto Rico was a colony. The Committee must bear the message of collective repudiation of the colonialism of the United States beyond its own meeting room.

34. Hurricane Maria had deepened the systematic and structural inequalities on the island and had led to a massive wave of forced migration owing to a lack of basic services, decent work and a healthy environment. The criminal abandonment and negligence of Puerto Rico by the United States in the wake of the disaster had incited indignation around the world, leaving many pondering the source of such contempt towards the people of Puerto Rico.

35. **Mr. Alomar** (Organization for Culture of Hispanic Origins) said that his experiences in attempting to open a community-based substance abuse agency in Puerto Rico had revealed the continued harmful effects of colonization on the island. For example, it had been impossible to determine the fees for specific public medical services because all financial aspects of residents' lives were on the bargaining table. There was no transparency or system of checks and balances in the public health system. The public schools that had been closed and abandoned by the United States Government in line with fiscal austerity measures were being cared for only through the good will of the people in the community. Many children had been displaced and were not attending school. In one abandoned school, there had been no effort to remove files containing students' confidential personal information. That was all evidence of the disregard the United States Government had for the people of Puerto Rico.

36. **Mr. Vila** (Consejo Amplio Unitario de Solidaridad y Acción) said that Puerto Rico had been plunged into crisis and saddled with \$70 billion in debt that could not be paid. The financial oversight board imposed by the United States was destroying the University of Puerto Rico, violating labour rights and impoverishing pensioners while paying off Wall Street vulture funds.

37. The five plebiscites held on the status of Puerto Rico had only generated expense and frustration, and internal divisions made gaining a decisive majority difficult. No plebiscite or referendum was binding, and any attempt by the imperialists to resolve the colonial situation through such a mechanism would always give the United States Government the final say in the matter. The integration of Puerto Rico into the North American union would only be a continuation of colonialism.

38. He urged the Committee to demand that the United States implement General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and restore the sovereignty taken from the Boricua in 1898. In that regard, the National Sovereign State of Borinken had submitted an application for membership in the United Nations in 2014 and again in 2017, but had not received a response. By submitting a resolution requesting the Security Council to examine the application of the National Sovereign State of Borinken for membership, the Committee could offer a path to a real and effective solution to the colonial situation of Puerto Rico.

39. **Mr. Ortiz-Luquis** (Boricuas Unidos en la Diáspora) said that the General Assembly had been ignoring the Committee's resolutions on Puerto Rico since 1972. In the meantime, conditions had deteriorated. The financial oversight board held more power than the three branches of the Puerto Rican government combined. An audit of the public debt would likely reveal conflicts of interests of the members of the board, who had profited from the bankruptcy of Puerto Rico. Millions of Puerto Ricans had emigrated in search of a better life, which had facilitated the selling off of Puerto Rico to United States citizens.

40. While sovereign nations could implement policies for sustainable development, Puerto Rico could not even participate in the global economy, which hindered its economic and social development. By gaining independence, Puerto Rico could participate in the international market, making it self-sufficient and benefiting other countries in the region. Freedom from United States cabotage laws would allow Puerto Rican producers to sell their products and help the development of business. While sovereign small island States implemented measures to mitigate the effects of climate change, Puerto Rico had to make do with whatever funds the United States Congress decided to provide it. An independent Puerto Rico would be able to access funds and loans from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank that would allow it to invest in resilience measures. He asked the Committee to bring the case of Puerto Rico before the General Assembly and affirmed the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination.

41. **Ms. Guzmán** (Movimiento Unión Soberanista) said that the establishment of the Free Associated State had been a ploy devised by the United States Government and the colonial government of Puerto Rico to convince the United Nations that the people were self-governing. The United States Government had affirmed before its own Supreme Court that Puerto Rico was a territory subject to its plenary and absolute powers. It continued to exercise its colonial power with impunity, violating Puerto Ricans' right to self-determination before a passive international community.

42. The main objective of the financial oversight board imposed by the United States was to pay the bondholders of the debt of Puerto Rico, which if audited, would reveal the corruption and plunder behind it. The board controlled the island's budget and imposed austerity measures that stripped people of their rights to education and health, and their access to employment and public transportation. The board prevented Puerto Rico from obtaining international aid while operating companies on the island with earnings equivalent to \$35 billion annually. Puerto Rico was compelled to use the most expensive merchant marine in the world to import products from the United States and had no control over its borders, customs, postal service or air and maritime traffic. Furthermore, the poverty rate had risen to 50 per cent and the United States Navy continued to damage the environment on the islands of Vieques and Culebra. The situation should be brought before the General Assembly in order to end the illegal occupation of Puerto Rico by the United States.

43. **Ms. Torres López** (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) said that the Committee was mandated to promote the full implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). In that regard, its responsibilities included examining the political, social and economic situation of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, providing guidance on options for decolonization, facilitating decolonization processes under way and holding regional seminars to consult with local authorities and civil society. However, although Puerto Rico was a non-self-governing territory as defined in resolution 1514 (XV), it did not receive the corresponding assistance from the United Nations. The Committee could involve Puerto Rico in the support programmes made available to other colonial territories, such as those of the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme. Its failure to act was discriminatory and had left the people of Puerto Rico facing further precarity. It was time for the Committee to initiate a dialogue with the administering Power;

provide Puerto Rico with the same visibility and support as other colonial territories; recognize the right of Puerto Rico to appear before the Fourth Committee; and recommend presenting the situation of Puerto Rico to the General Assembly.

44. **Ms. López Ortiz** (Colegio de Profesionales del Trabajo Social de Puerto Rico) said that the PROMESA Act showed that the situation of Puerto Rico had not changed since the United States had invaded and assumed political, economic and sociocultural control of the island. The financial oversight board had stripped the Puerto Rican people of the most basic aspect of citizenship: the ability to participate democratically in decisions that had far-reaching effects on their lives. In order to pay off unaudited fiscal debt, the board promoted budget cuts to public services, reductions in pensions and actions that weakened the University of Puerto Rico at a time when it was critical to protest against the violation of political, social and human rights.

45. The autonomy of Puerto Rico must be respected and the use of its land to warmonger against countries in Central and South America and the Caribbean, which shared a common history and culture, must end. The environmental destruction, food insecurity and gentrification pushing Puerto Ricans to migrate and face racial and socioeconomic discrimination in the United States must end. The fundamental problem of Puerto Rico was the lack of political power to implement solutions devised by its own people. She called on the Committee to insist that the General Assembly reassess the case of Puerto Rico, compel the United States to recognize its political responsibility and facilitate a genuine decolonization process in line with international law.

46. **Ms. Velázquez Rodríguez** (Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas) said that her organization denounced the PROMESA Act and the dictatorial financial oversight board it had established, and called for recognition of the rights of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence. The long-standing control the United States exercised over the Puerto Rican people was a violation of the rights of the millions of residents of the island and those who had been forced to leave. Regardless of ideological differences, there was broad agreement among many groups, movements and countries that Puerto Rico was a colony of the United States, and that that status was unacceptable. The institutions with the greatest political power in the United States Government had openly acknowledged its absolute control over the political, social and economic destiny of Puerto Rico.

47. Puerto Ricans around the world were asking what else needed to happen before the United Nations would include Puerto Rico in the list of territories in a colonial situation. While they were grateful for the solidarity and commitment demonstrated by countries including Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, which had kept the issue alive in the Committee, those efforts, unfortunately, had not been enough. The Organization would not lead Puerto Rico to independence; its silence had rendered it complicit. Puerto Ricans were not asking for preferential treatment; they were asking the international community to call the status of Puerto Rico by its true name, a colony, and based on that reality, for the Government of the United States to be held accountable like any other criminal and imperialist country in the world.

48. **Mr. Ramos Rosado** (The ProLibertad Freedom Campaign) said that the legacy of United States colonialism in Puerto Rico was one of racism, exploitation, forced relocation, repression, assassination and incarceration. Like many Puerto Rican political prisoners, Ana Belén Montes had stood up to the imperialist agenda of the United States and had been incarcerated for the past 16 years.

49. Nina Droz Franco, another Puerto Rican political prisoner, had been arrested in May 2017 while protesting against the financial oversight board. She was accused of attempted arson, but without any evidence. During a year in prison awaiting her sentencing, she had been denied medical treatment, placed in solitary confinement, denied communication with her family and legal counsel, and sent to Florida, far from her community in Puerto Rico. That was all in violation of both her civil and international human rights as a prisoner. In 2018, she had been sentenced to 37 months in prison and three years of probation. Her basic rights were still being violated and the United States Government was using her to intimidate Puerto Ricans into believing that popular dissent would be met with cruelty and incarceration.

50. He called on the Committee to pass a resolution calling for an end to United States colonialism in Puerto Rico and assist with the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners. He also urged for the case of colonialism in Puerto Rico to be brought before the General Assembly for review.

51. **Mr. López Sierra** (Compañeros Unidos para la Descolonización de Puerto Rico) said that none of the major New York newspapers had mentioned the present meeting on Puerto Rico, despite the fact that nearly nine per cent of the city's population was Puerto Rican. That was not by accident; the empire needed people to remain

ignorant in order to exploit them. By maintaining Puerto Rico as a colony, the United States Government was in violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, it had ignored 37 United Nations resolutions calling for it to grant Puerto Rico its sovereignty. He appreciated the efforts to broadcast the Committee meeting live, which would help educate people. The international community could contribute greatly to eliminating colonialism by eradicating ignorance. Given the violation by the United States of the Charter of the United Nations, the United Nations should consider moving its headquarters to a country that respected democracy and the rule of law. The United Nations could also increase pressure by recognizing a symbolic Boricua passport that countries in solidarity with the decolonization of Puerto Rico could recognize. A clear and strong message must be conveyed before the world embarked on a fourth decade for the eradication of colonialism. It should no longer be easy for empires to continue committing crimes against humanity.

52. **Mr. Galinsky** (Socialist Workers Party) said that liberating Puerto Rico from colonial rule was in the interests of working people everywhere, especially those in the United States. Corporations and banks in the United States had been bleeding Puerto Rico dry for more than a century. United States capitalists made billions by keeping wages in Puerto Rico down, buying up resources and squeezing its people through a debt that was immoral and unpayable. That debt must be scrutinized by an elected committee of Puerto Rican working people, and should be cancelled in its entirety. Essential social services had been cut and even the much-vaunted food stamps in Puerto Rico were used to enrich United States agribusiness at the expense of Puerto Rican farmers.

53. The five million Puerto Ricans in the United States were part of the country's working class and strengthened it with their experience. Working people in the United States who had faced the endless bureaucracy and scorn of capitalist rulers after Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy and Michael could understand what was being done to the Puerto Rican people, including to the thousands still living in homes without roofs, adequate drinking water or electricity. A successful struggle for Puerto Rican independence would strengthen working people in the United States in the fight against common exploiters. The socialist revolution in Cuba was proof that working people could overthrow a dictatorship backed by the United States, take State power, establish a workers' and farmers' government and win real independence. While it was up to the people of Puerto Rico to liberate themselves, for its part, the Committee could publicize the truth presented to it

about the colonial oppression perpetrated by the United States.

54. **Ms. Martínez Sánchez** (Veracruz State Congress, Mexico) called on organizations of the United Nations to respect the freedom of the Boricua people and submit the application of the National Sovereign State of Borinken for membership in the United Nations to the Secretary-General, for transmittal to the Security Council and the General Assembly.

55. **Ms. Liriano** (A Call to Action on Puerto Rico) said that the long-standing imperialist and capitalist policies of the United States aimed at expanding its hegemony to Latin America had been devastating for the Puerto Rican people. The financial oversight board primarily sought to repay a debt of more than \$70 billion to bondholders. The austerity measures it had proposed, including closing schools, selling off public land and reducing the minimum wage, would hit the working class. In the meantime, United States companies were announcing investment opportunities and profiting from the island while harming the environment and health of the people. Notably, the corporation AES was dumping carcinogenic coal ash on the island, contaminating the water source of an entire region. Despite appeals to the United States Environmental Protection Agency and several lawsuits brought by the community, the dumping continued and the number of cancer deaths continued to rise.

56. A music teacher who had phoned a judge in the United States to express concern about a bankruptcy case in Puerto Rico had been accused of harassment and arrested by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in February 2019. In May 2017, Nina Droz Franco had been arrested while protesting against the PROMESA Act. She was being held in a federal prison and denied necessary medical care. Many others had been arrested for protesting against the austerity measures. She called on the Committee to take immediate action, as conditions in Puerto Rico were worsening every day.

57. **Mr. Villanueva Muñoz** (Comité pro Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico) said that the financial oversight board and the authorities in Puerto Rico, led by Governor Ricardo Roselló, aimed to destroy the University of Puerto Rico to stop it from serving as a hub for resistance to the policies of assimilation and the objective of federated statehood. Students who had defended the country's major cultural and professional institution against the assault had been beaten, arrested and prosecuted.

58. The attack on the university was part of the cultural genocide being inflicted on Puerto Rico by the United States Government. Similar actions included the

curtailing of labour rights and the criminalization of protest. Everything promoted by the financial oversight board was part of a plan to further impoverish Puerto Rico and encourage the emigration of professionals, thus making an example of it to countries that dared to resist interventionist and military policies on their soil. In that regard, it was worth remembering the major civil disobedience movement that had managed to expel the United States Navy from Vieques and achieve the closure of the Roosevelt Road Naval Station.

59. The long-held excuse for inaction was that Puerto Ricans could not agree on the type of legal and political relationship they wanted with the United States. However, the colonial power had consistently protected federalism in order to preserve the union for which it had endured a civil war. The anti-colonial forces of Puerto Rico must engage in a civil dialogue. The Puerto Rican people had risked everything, including their freedom and sometimes their own lives to end United States colonialism. In the light of the cultural genocide taking place, it was up to the United Nations to convoke the two parties in the imperial-colonialist relationship and begin a mutually acceptable decolonization process.

60. **Mr. Nieves** (Brigada Guarionex) said that Borinken had for centuries been inhabited and governed by its ancestral owners, the indigenous Taíno. However, first Spain and then the United States had invaded the territory and stolen the land. The colonial system imposed by the island's commonwealth status was not a legitimate government. Colonialism in all its forms and manifestations was considered a crime under General Assembly resolution 2621 (XXV). Vieques had been used as a training ground for war and then filled with poison, harming and killing the Puerto Rican people. By any definition, the imposition of a financial oversight board, a foreign President and a Congress that Puerto Ricans could not elect amounted to a dictatorship. United States control had resulted in a terrible debt and economic collapse. In a free Puerto Rico, that debt would be regarded as illegitimate and would be cancelled.

61. Borinken must be free; such was its inalienable right, as recognized in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). Discussions of Puerto Rican affairs within the United States Government were conducted by a committee concerned with indigenous matters. Indeed, the Boricua were indigenous people and had the right to a sovereign government in their own land. His organization called on the Committee to act on behalf of Borinken and seek the abolition of the colonial and illegal government currently imposed by the current

status of Puerto Rico as a Free Associated State, as well as the transfer to the Borinken nation of the sovereign powers usurped by the United States.

62. **Ms. Sanabria Dávila** (Comité de Puerto Rico en Naciones Unidas) said that the destructive effects of the colonial domination of Puerto Rico and of the deception committed against the General Assembly, resulting in its resolution 748 (VIII), were more evident than ever.

63. In its 2018 resolution ([A/AC.109/2018/L.7](#)), the Committee had reaffirmed the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence in conformity with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and had noted that the consultation undertaken by the government of Puerto Rico on 11 June 2017 had not been designed to promote decolonization in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

64. The Committee had continually requested the General Assembly to consider the question of Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, nearly 60 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and despite the nearly 40 resolutions adopted by the Committee, a decolonization process had not been initiated in Puerto Rico. That was to the great discredit of the United States and the United Nations. She urged the Committee to take concrete measures to urgently implement the guidelines to decolonizing Puerto Rico it had developed in line with its mandate.

65. **Ms. Ramos** (American Association of Jurists), reaffirming the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence, said that Puerto Rico was a Latin American and Caribbean nation with its own national identity. The United States was not meeting its commitment to foster development in the territory, where 6 out of 10 children lived below the poverty line. The federal Government and the local authorities had exacerbated the situation by facilitating the payment of unaudited debt to the vultures that circled countries after natural disasters and bankruptcy. The United States had imposed a banking system that favoured the monopolies that had benefited from the island since 1900. Its claim that it was not responsible for the debt of Puerto Rico was unacceptable. Under the current economic model of imperialism by invitation, multinational corporations received subsidies and resources that belonged to the people. Environmental protection legislation had been weakened to accelerate privatization. The primary law on environmental policy had been amended in 2017 to allow the PROMESA Act and the arbitrary decisions of the financial oversight board to supersede its provisions. The health and food safety of Puerto Ricans in Vieques and Culebra was a matter of concern owing to the toxic waste left by the

United States Navy. The people of Vieques continued to await the remediation and return of their land. Other regions of Puerto Rico were subject to the pollution of their water by transnational corporations.

66. She condemned the use of Puerto Rico as a base for imperialist aggressions against other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and called for the release of the prisoner of conscience, Ana Belén Montes, and the political prisoner Nina Droz Franco. She called for the case of Puerto Rico to be brought before the General Assembly without delay.

67. **Mr. Rojas Díaz Durán** (Conferencia Internacional por La Paz y La Justicia) called on the Secretary-General to transmit the application of the National Sovereign State of Borinken for membership in the United Nations to the Security Council. The Boricua people needed a seat in the General Assembly. The Security Council should consider the situation of Puerto Rico to be a matter of foreign intervention, as it had the invasion of Iraq by the United States. Mexico had benefited from international support in its struggle for independence, and its people supported the people of Puerto Rico in their own struggle. Colonialism was a modern form of slavery and a crime against humanity that should be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court. He called for the immediate release of Nina Droz Franco.

68. **Mr. Pagán Bonilla** (Generación 51) said that, after five centuries of colonization in Puerto Rico, his country still did not enjoy self-governance, and there was obstinate resistance to self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico. Despite the information presented in *Commonwealth of Puerto Rico v. Sánchez Valle* and the results of the plebiscites held in 2012 and 2017, the inaction of international entities, including the federal system, maintained Puerto Ricans in a shameful position of inequality, whereby they were not permitted to vote without leaving Puerto Rico.

69. He asked what the difference was between apartheid in South Africa and the current system of inequality in Puerto Rico, in particular the process of voting for American citizens in Puerto Rico without representation or the right to vote. He would welcome the recommendation of the Committee on the democratic expression of the Puerto Rican people during the plebiscites. He wondered what was stopping the United Nations from acting on the decolonization of Puerto Rico in the General Assembly, as the former United States ambassador had publicly stated that she would not be opposed to a broad discussion on the matter. The Committee's resolution on Puerto Rico should call for compliance with the democratic will of

Puerto Ricans, who had chosen statehood as a decolonization option.

70. **Ms. Pagán Gómez** (Centro Cultural Bieké) said that there was a health crisis on the island of Vieques, a colony within the colony of Puerto Rico. In the wake of Hurricane Maria, the hospital had been closed and the provisional medical centre lacked even a delivery room and X-ray services. Diabetes, hypertension and cancer rates in Vieques were up to 30 per cent higher than in the rest of Puerto Rico. People depended on a dysfunctional maritime transport system to access medical treatment.

71. For six decades, the United States Navy had bombed Vieques, experimented with unconventional weapons and used depleted uranium and toxic chemicals, contaminating the environment and its people. The Navy had been carrying out a clean-up effort since 2003, clearing some five million pounds of explosives per year, and estimated that it would take another 20 years to complete the task. She denounced the inhumane, irresponsible and illegal methods used, including the open-air detonation of unexploded bombs, which were causing the health crisis in Vieques. She called on the Committee to fulfil its mission of protecting the most vulnerable people in colonized territories, including their right to health and a healthy environment. The situation of Puerto Rico should be brought before the General Assembly; it was time for action and not more words.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.