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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 11th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 12 July 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué. (Côte d'Ivoire)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Decision of the Special Committee of 6 July 1999 concerning Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/2000/L.3 and L.11)

Hearing of petitioners (Aide-mémoires 15/00 and Add.1)

2. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Wilfredo Santiago-Valiente (United Statehooders Organization of New York, Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

3. **Mr. Santiago-Valiente** (United Statehooders Organization of New York, Inc.) said that his organization, whose purpose was to promote the admission of Puerto Rico as a state of the United States of America, reiterated its position that the resolutions adopted by the Special Committee over the past 39 years on the question of Puerto Rico were biased, lacked vision and ran counter to the principle of self-determination, because they insisted on independence as the only way to the decolonization of Puerto Rico. Therefore, it was essential for the Special Committee to bear in mind General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960 and 1541 (XV) of 15 December 1960 which laid out three possible ways to decolonization: sovereignty as an independent nation-State, sovereignty in association with the former colonial Power and full political integration. The latter option would open new possibilities for the social and cultural development of the people of Puerto Rico, those of the United States and the international community.

4. In a brief review of the history of the social, cultural and political relationship which had existed between Puerto Rico and the United States, he noted that, as early as 1887, the Puerto Rican physician Ramón Emeterio Betances had founded in New York, together with a group of Cuban and Puerto Rican radical republican separatists, the *Sociedad Republicana de Cuba y Puerto Rico*, with the goal of gaining independence for both colonies from the Spanish monarchy. In 1892, the eminent Cuban José Martí, founded also, in New York, the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* and, in 1895, a group of Puerto Rican republican exiles in the city established the *Sección de Puerto Rico*. Although these were

movements with a republican and democratic orientation, the *Sección de Puerto Rico* also advocated the island's annexation by the United States and its incorporation as a state of the Union. In the first decade of the twentieth century the question of status — and particularly the use of English as the language of instruction in the schools — was debated intensely on the island as well as in the United States. After the First World War, in Paris in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson introduced the concept of self-determination, which principle stressed the need, when creating new States, to take into consideration the aspirations and cultural and national factors of the region. Later, when the debate on the teaching of English in Puerto Rico arose again in 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said that it was clear that Puerto Ricans would always maintain, and should maintain, their facility in the language of their culture, and added that he did not wish or intend to diminish the rich cultural legacy of the people of Puerto Rico. However, he also said that, with the development of transport and the possibility of a major migration of Puerto Ricans to the continent, it was necessary to strengthen the teaching of English on the island. The United Statehooders of New York saw no conflict or contradiction between political development and culture. The fruitful economic, political, social and cultural exchange between Puerto Rico and the United States during the past century and the migration experience were an integral part of the collective memory and identity of the Puerto Rican people.

5. Article 73, subparagraph (b) of the Charter of the United Nations stipulated that States which had assumed responsibility for the administration of territories were obligated to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions. However, the concept of "self-government" was not defined in the Charter, and that had made it difficult to understand the case of Puerto Rico in the Committee and in other forums. In 1952, Puerto Rico had adopted the constitution of a Commonwealth and, in 1953, the General Assembly had adopted resolution 748 (VIII) entitled "Cessation of the transmission of information under Article 73 *e* of the Charter in respect of Puerto Rico", in accordance with which the United States Government had ceased submitting reports to the Assembly on Puerto Rico. However, the fundamental issue addressed then was the autonomy of the Puerto

Rican people, not their sovereignty. In international law, and according to the United States Constitution, autonomy was not a state in itself, but referred to the political and administrative decentralization typical of modern States; thus it was a term applicable both to independent States and to a Commonwealth.

6. Sovereignty, not autonomy, was the key to the Puerto Rican statehood dilemma. Sovereignty, interpreted as the source and basis of the exercise of supreme legal authority over citizens democratically constituted as a national State, had been raised as a concern in the General Assembly resolutions of December 1960 that had clarified the concept of self-determination within the decolonization process. General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) specifically proclaimed the right of peoples to self-determination and to a speedy transition to independence, and General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) proposed the above-mentioned three ways in which a territory could achieve full self-government. In that context, the United Statehooders Organization of New York, Inc. urged the Special Committee to recommend a resolution consistent with General Assembly resolutions 1541 (XV) and 1514 (XV).

7. *Mr. Santiago-Valiente withdrew.*

8. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Ramos (American Association of Jurists) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

9. **Ms. Ramos** (American Association of Jurists) said that her organization's objective was to work for the self-determination of peoples and against imperialism and colonialism, and it defended the Puerto Rican people's right to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and denounced the resumption of military activity in Vieques by the United States Navy.

10. The American Association of Jurists had already denounced the use of Vieques for military purposes at meetings of the Commission on Human Rights. It had also circulated a document entitled "The right of peoples to self-determination and its application to peoples under colonial or alien domination or foreign occupation" (E/CN.4/2000/NGO/85), which condemned the resumption of military manoeuvres in Vieques. The Puerto Rican people rejected that outrage, which had been committed by the United States Government with the blessing of the Governor of Puerto Rico. The military manoeuvres had caused

serious environmental damage and the incidence of cancer in Vieques was 26.9 per cent greater than for Puerto Rico as a whole.

11. The American Association of Jurists also vehemently condemned the arrest of citizens who had participated in acts of civil disobedience since 1999, the year in which two powerful bombs had caused the death of one civilian and wounded four other people. The Association therefore welcomed the fact that the current year's draft resolution condemned the resumption of military manoeuvres and the arrest and harassment of demonstrators and called for the cessation of military manoeuvres on Vieques and the return of all the land to the people of Puerto Rico.

12. The Association endorsed the wording of the draft resolution because it reaffirmed the Latin American and Caribbean nature of the Puerto Rican nation and the right of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence, committed the Special Committee to keeping the question of Puerto Rico under review and called for the release of Puerto Rican prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons on cases related to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico. She therefore urged the Special Committee to adopt the draft resolution. The Association also welcomed the proposal to convene a Constituent Conference at which the United States Congress would transfer the full powers that it exercised over Puerto Rico.

13. *Ms. Ramos withdrew.*

14. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Harris (Socialist Workers Party) took a seat at the petitioners' table.*

15. **Mr. Harris** (Socialist Workers Party) said that as long as the leaders of the United States of America could continue to impose the yoke of colonialism on Puerto Rico, they could also continue to exploit American workers. There were 2.7 million Puerto Rican workers in the United States, and they were subject to discrimination as were the country's other oppressed groups. The Puerto Rican colonial regime reinforced the racist prejudices and reactionary forces of the United States to the detriment of the entire working class.

16. One year previously, the United States Government had freed 11 Puerto Rican independence activists, but 7 others were serving sentences in the

nation's prisons. The Socialist Workers Party joined those who were calling for the unconditional release of those prisoners and condemned the arrest of 200 Puerto Ricans who had been protesting United States Navy military manoeuvres in Vieques. The opposition to those manoeuvres had shown that the United States was using Puerto Rico to promote its military activities throughout the world. The United States Government and businessmen, joint oppressors of the Puerto Rican people and of American workers, were telling those workers that it was useless to struggle for independence and for their rights because that struggle could only end in failure. That myth had been dispelled by the Cuban workers and peasants who had managed to free themselves from United States domination. For all those reasons, the Special Committee should condemn the colonial regime of Puerto Rico, thereby benefiting the great majority of the American people and all those who were struggling for the right to self-determination and for the future of mankind.

17. *Mr. Harris withdrew.*

18. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Monteverde-Torres (Center for Constitutional Rights) took a seat at the petitioners' table.*

19. **Mr. Monteverde-Torres** (The Center for Constitutional Rights) said that the organization he represented, a not-for-profit legal and educational institution, was devoted to promoting and protecting the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to applying the law creatively as a positive instrument of social change.

20. After the death of a young Puerto Rican on 19 April 1999, as a result of the explosion of two bombs dropped by a United States Navy fighter plane, the people of Puerto Rico had done everything in their power to expel the United States Navy from Vieques. The feeling that that had aroused in Puerto Rico and in much of the Puerto Rican community in the United States had been expressed in an unprecedented protest march of solidarity against the illegal presence of the Navy and the expropriation of more than 75 per cent of the territory of Vieques. Puerto Rico had issued an appeal to the peoples of the world, particularly the United Nations, to put an immediate stop to the dangerous and hostile activities of the United States Navy which, during the past 60 years, had devastated the fishing zones and endangered the residents of

Vieques. Most Puerto Ricans were aware of the terrible consequences of the use of toxic substances such as napalm and depleted uranium by the United States Navy in Vieques. For Puerto Ricans, the United Nations and the entire world, that was not only unacceptable but also a crime against humanity. The detention of hundreds of demonstrators for entering Navy territory and the participation of thousands of persons in protests and vigils all over the island demonstrated the Puerto Ricans' resolve to bring the Navy's military manoeuvres on the island of Vieques to an end.

21. Many non-governmental organizations viewed President Clinton's proposal to hold a referendum as incompatible with the desires of the Puerto Rican people, and as illegal and deceitful. Illegal, because the demilitarization of Puerto Rico should be considered in accordance with international law, and deceitful because the alternatives a referendum would offer would benefit the United States Navy only. The options — to continue the military manoeuvres for two years with deactivated bombs in exchange for a payment of \$40 million, or to carry out military manoeuvres indefinitely with live munitions in exchange for \$90 million (if indeed the United States Government managed to bribe the residents of Vieques) — were unacceptable and immoral. Clearly, whether or not the referendum was held, the United States Navy should have abandoned the island of Vieques on 11 July.

22. The Government of the United States had not responded to the peaceful demonstrations against the Navy by withdrawing its armed forces from Vieques; on the contrary, it had resumed military manoeuvres and had threatened to carry out large-scale manoeuvres in the near future. It had also threatened to impose harsher penalties on anyone who continued to protest peacefully against those practices.

23. On 28 June 2000, President Clinton had met with the leaders of the main political parties of Puerto Rico to address the issue of the status of Puerto Rico, but not the question of Vieques, which many considered an insult to the Puerto Rican people. Although it was the first meeting held on the topic, it was disturbing that it had taken place only months before the end of President Clinton's term and without any commitment by the United States Congress to resolving the colonial situation of Puerto Rico in accordance with the principles of international law. Apparently, the meeting

had been held with the aim of diverting attention from the clashes in Vieques and invalidating the growing support for the campaign against the United States Navy and Government for human rights violations in Vieques. There was also the possibility that the United States Government would attempt to use the meeting to persuade the Special Committee and the General Assembly that it was doing its utmost to resolve the question of the status of Puerto Rico, thereby protecting its image and, at the same time, giving the impression that it desired in good faith to seek a solution to the problem.

24. Although United Nations resolutions called for the abolition of colonialism before the end of the 1990s, Puerto Rico remained on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories and continued to be deprived of its right to self-determination. The Special Committee had adopted 18 resolutions regarding Puerto Rico, and all its reports had been endorsed by the General Assembly. However, the United States Government had shirked its obligation to implement the Special Committee's decisions in practice. Moreover, the rights of six Puerto Rican political prisoners currently being held in United States prisons continued to be violated.

25. In view of the economic exploitation and serious violations committed by the United States Government during 102 years of colonialism and its outright disdain for the resolutions adopted by the Special Committee, the time had come for the Special Committee to fulfil its obligation to condemn what was a crime against humanity and resort to other viable means of sanctioning the United States Government for its failure to comply with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV) and the Charter of the United Nations. The Special Committee should submit an official proposal to the General Assembly during the current year to bring legal action against the United States Government before the International Court of Justice for violation of international law in respect of the colonial status of Puerto Rico and for the crimes against humanity committed by the United States Navy in Vieques.

26. Lastly, the Center for Constitutional Rights reaffirmed its commitment to the struggle of the Puerto Rican people for self-determination, the elimination of the practice of dropping bombs in Vieques and the release of the six Puerto Rican political prisoners, and its determination to ensure that the United States Government applied the same international principles

and norms to which it held other nations in the world. He also expressed the Center's support for the initiative of a number of groups urging the Special Committee to specify in a resolution that it supported the convening of a Constituent Conference in Puerto Rico with the aim of seeking a solution to the nation's colonial situation.

27. *Mr. Monteverde-Torres withdrew.*

28. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Jaime A. Medina (Taller de Trabajo sobre Puerto Rico) took a place at the table.*

29. **Mr. Medina** (Taller de Trabajo sobre Puerto Rico) said that the aim of his organization was to act as a liaison between the forces of the socialist independence movement of Puerto Rico. Although it was the first time that he had addressed the Committee, he was aware of its work concerning the situation of Puerto Rico and reiterated the appeal made by his colleagues over the years that the inalienable and irrevocable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence should be recognized. The International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism would end in 2001, but much remained to be done in order to achieve that objective. The Special Committee should increase its efforts to end the United States colonization of Puerto Rico once and for all, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

30. The current situation between the United States and Puerto Rico was unsustainable, and the political, social and economic contradictions of the relationship were increasing daily. An obvious example was the struggle of the Puerto Rican people of Vieques to free the island-municipality from the grasp of the United States Navy. The struggle for Vieques had exploded the myths surrounding the unquestioned predominance of the Navy in Vieques and the rest of Puerto Rico and had dissipated the Puerto Ricans' ancestral fears of a direct confrontation with the colonizing State in defence of their democratic rights. The historical arguments of the United States Navy concerning the strategic importance of Vieques for national security were no longer valid, because Puerto Ricans living on Vieques had realized that the national security referred to did not correspond to the national security of Vieques or of the Puerto Rican nation. The argument of misnamed "national security" had resulted in destruction of the environment and an increase in

carcinogenic diseases, had hampered economic development and had prompted the forced displacement of the inhabitants.

31. The situation of Vieques had intensified the irreconcilable contradictions in the United States colonial domination over Puerto Rico and had unleashed a new wave of political repression and intimidation by the colonial regime against all those who opposed the presence of the United States Navy within the territory. Consequently, dozens of Puerto Ricans were detained in federal prisons in Puerto Rico for the mere act of entering the territory usurped by the Navy. Moreover, the Committee should recall that although 11 political prisoners had been conditionally released, six were still detained. Any decolonization process under international law required their immediate release.

32. He reiterated the enormous importance of the processes and discussions on the decolonization of Puerto Rico for the Puerto Rican community living in the United States. The unfavourable socio-economic situation of Puerto Ricans living in United States territory was closely linked to the disastrous colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Therefore, the Taller de Trabajo sobre Puerto Rico was in favour of the resolution before the Committee and requested that the case of Puerto Rico be presented to the General Assembly as soon as possible.

33. *Mr. Medina withdrew.*

34. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Wilma E. Reverón (Comité Puerto Rico en las Naciones Unidas (COPRONU)) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

35. **Ms. Reverón** (Comité Puerto Rico en las Naciones Unidas (COPRONU)) said that, during the last year, the people of Puerto Rico had carried on an exemplary struggle to recover the territory of Vieques that was used for military purposes. As a result of that year-long struggle, members of religious groups, politicians, students, workers and women, using only the weapons of dignity and firmness, had succeeded in halting the constant environmental damage and the genocide of the residents of Vieques. On 4 May 2000, the United States Navy had evicted about 260 persons from the civil disobedience camps. However, a few days later they had returned there, and, more than 400 persons were currently awaiting trial for defending the peace in Vieques. Dozens of members of the Puerto

Rican Independence Party were also detained awaiting trial. Meanwhile, those who had committed human rights violations in Vieques, who had raped women, appropriated land to fill it with toxic waste such as cadmium, mercury, uranium and other heavy metals, caused the death of hundreds of Vieques residents and, over 40 years, caused the systematic destruction of lakes and the flora and fauna of Vieques were not only free but enjoyed the protection of the powerful federal justice system, which guaranteed them total impunity.

36. Since the Government of Puerto Rico and the federal court system were at the service of the United States Navy, the only remaining option was to have recourse once a year to the Special Committee and the Human Rights Committee in Geneva. But that was not sufficient. The people of Vieques needed help urgently to halt the Navy's genocidal military practices. The current circumstances of Vieques emphasized the powerlessness of those who had been colonized and lacked the resources to resort to the international community in search of immediate and effective solutions to situations that violated the right to life and to physical and mental health.

37. Decolonization processes were usually slow and complicated. A colonized people had to become aware of its situation in order to fight for its freedom, and the people of Puerto Rico had shown that they were ready to undertake that fight. It was important that, despite political and religious differences, they had united to demand that not one more bullet should be fired and not one more bomb exploded on the territory of Vieques. Responding to the comment of the representative of the Russian Federation regarding the need to know the views of a large majority of the Puerto Rican population, she said that, at the current session, the representative had been able to hear the views of the vast majority of the population who demanded that the United States Navy should leave Vieques immediately and permanently, and that the Puerto Rican political prisoners should be liberated. Most of the Puerto Rican population were dissatisfied with the existing political relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico.

38. Although it was true that the Puerto Rican people themselves had to seek a solution to the problem, as they had been doing in Vieques, they needed the Committee's support and its broad experience in order to facilitate decolonization. Accordingly, she asked for the Committee's support in order to determine the most

effective international mechanisms from the procedural standpoint of view and ensure that the topic of Puerto Rico was included in the agenda of the General Assembly. The assistance of peoples with a humanitarian conscience had always been fundamental in decolonization processes. She appealed to the humanitarian conscience of the Special Committee to make the topic of Puerto Rico a priority.

39. *Ms. Reverón withdrew.*

40. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Pean (North-South XXI and the December Twelfth Movement International Secretariat) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

41. **Ms. Pean** (North-South XXI and December Twelfth Movement International Secretariat) expressed the support of the organizations she represented for the historic struggle of the Puerto Rican people to exercise their right to self-determination enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The international community should acknowledge that there were still colonies and complete the decolonization process started by the United Nations 50 years previously. She was one of the 40 million Africans living in the United States of America in a situation similar to colonialism, which had begun with the transatlantic slave trade, the after-effects of which were still felt by many of the Caribbean islands, including Puerto Rico. The denial of the right of Puerto Ricans to development, as evidenced by economic poverty, was aggravated by the occupation and bombings of Vieques island. Those immoral acts had sparked large-scale demonstrations by the Puerto Rican people to express their determination to fight.

42. In the new millennium, a special emphasis should be put on the right of peoples to self-determination and sovereignty, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In that area, as in others, the occupying Powers applied a double standard, as demonstrated by the plight of the indigenous peoples or the plight of those fighting for their sovereignty, including the peoples of Puerto Rico and Palestine. She expressed, on behalf of the organizations she represented, support for the inalienable right to self-determination of the Puerto Rican people and all peoples of the world.

43. *Ms. Pean withdrew.*

44. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Marrerro (Comité pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques) took a place at the table.*

45. **Mr. Marrerro** (Comité pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques) said that for more than six decades, Vieques had suffered from the most disastrous consequences of United States imperial domination. Vieques was where the unvarnished fact of Puerto Rico's colonial status was clearly revealed. On 19 April 1999, the pilot of a United States FA-18 Navy aircraft had dropped two bombs on a military observation post, killing a civilian. That death was in addition to other civilian deaths caused by military personnel during fights and as a result of other bombs dropped over the land and sea of Puerto Rico. Moreover, the incidence of cancer in Vieques was 27 per cent higher than in the rest of Puerto Rico; the island also had the highest infant mortality rate. The bombings in Vieques had contaminated the environment with toxic substances such as royal demolition explosive (RDX), napalm, toluene, cyanide and depleted uranium, the study of which was related to the high incidence of cancer on the island. According to studies, due to the fact that winds on Vieques Island blew in an east-west direction, toxic particles were blown from the firing zone towards the areas inhabited by the civilian population.

46. In November 1999, James Porter, a Professor of Ecology and Marine Sciences at the University of Georgia, had discovered two sunken barges loaded with hundreds of bombs and dozens of containers of toxic substances that had been leaking into the environment for years. Moreover, Dr. Doug Rokke, former Director of the Pentagon's Depleted Uranium Project, had condemned the illegal use of depleted uranium by the Navy in Vieques.

47. On 31 July 1999, the Vieques community, including a cross section of civilian society, demanded a permanent halt to all war exercises of the United States military forces in Vieques, the immediate withdrawal of all United States military personnel and equipment from the island-municipality, and the return of all occupied land. On 21 February 2000, a march had been organized in which more than 100,000 people, chanting "peace for Vieques", and waving white flags, participated. They demanded that no more bombs should be dropped on Vieques. The demands for peace and justice for the people of Vieques had been supported by hundreds of bodies and groups. In that

regard, he mentioned the resolutions adopted by the Chamber of Representatives of Hawaii, the Legislative Assembly of Panama, councils of various United States cities, prominent persons like the Dalai Lama, a group of 50 Harvard University professors, a group of Argentine members of Parliament and many other prominent people.

48. The foregoing notwithstanding, President Clinton had decided to resume the bombings in Vieques and ordered the Navy to conduct a referendum that would give the inhabitants of Vieques two options: either the bombing would continue for three more years without any guaranteed withdrawal of the Navy, or the bombing would continue indefinitely. The Catholic Church published the results of a survey that indicated that 88.5 per cent of the population of Vieques wanted the Navy to withdraw immediately from the Territory and begin a contamination and handing over process. The commitment of the people of Vieques and Puerto Rico as a whole to that cause had been demonstrated from 22 April 1999 to 4 May 2000 through the continuing presence of civilians on the land occupied by the Navy. On 4 May 2000, 216 civilians who were on military land, had been arrested. To date, 698 persons had been arrested for entering that area. Special mention should be made of the case of Ismail Guadalupe Torres, son of the veteran Vieques activist, who had represented the Comité pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques the previous year before the Special Committee. He had been subjected to cruel treatment by the military authorities.

49. In view of the serious situation facing the population of Vieques, the Special Committee should adopt a resolution condemning the resumption of the bombings, the instructions of President Clinton authorizing detentions in Vieques and the bombings, and the hundreds of arrests and the inhuman treatment meted out to prisoners. He also urged members of the Committee to transmit that message to the executive and legislative branches and civil society organizations of their respective countries.

50. *Mr. Marrerro withdrew.*

51. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Rivera (Estadidad 2000 Puerto Rico) took a place at the table.*

52. **Mr. Rivera** (Estadidad 2000 Puerto Rico) said that the organization he represented had been founded in New York City with the noble goal of working for Puerto Rican statehood as the only form of government

that would give Puerto Ricans equal rights as citizens. American citizens of Puerto Rican origin were not currently entitled to vote in American presidential or vice-presidential elections owing to the political inferiority of the colonial Government, which Luis Muñoz Marín, former governor of Puerto Rico, had in 1952 termed a “free associated state”.

53. At the United States Congress hearings in 1950, Governor Marín had stated that the proposed free associated state would not change the fundamental status of Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory and would merely allow it to develop its own Government. At another hearing held that year, the then Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico in Washington had stated that the proposal would not modify the sovereign power of the United States Congress over Puerto Rico under the Treaty of Paris.

54. Since 1953, Puerto Rico’s colonial status had led to problems like that of Vieques since as long as Puerto Rico remained an American colony, no Governor of Puerto Rico could oppose presidential executive orders. He urged the Special Committee to stop recognizing Puerto Rico as an associated free state so that its people could finally hold a referendum to decide their ultimate destiny.

55. *Mr. Rivera withdrew.*

56. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Mardach Miguel (Women for Peace and Justice for Vieques) took a seat at the petitioners’ table.*

57. **Ms. Mardach Miguel** (Women for Peace and Justice for Vieques) said that the organization she represented was made up of women of all ages, political beliefs and occupations who were working on the basis of unity and solidarity to demilitarize both Vieques and Puerto Rico as a whole. The existence of over 20 military installations in Puerto Rico had been the direct cause of environmental pollution through the use, stockpiling, burning and detonation of explosives, toxic ammunition and fuel. The Navy controlled three quarters of the territory of Vieques; the population inhabited an area located between the munitions depot in the west and the bombing and manoeuvres area in the far east and had therefore been exposed to bombings, noise, pollution, and the destruction of basic structures, such as the hospital, for 60 years. As a direct result of those factors, Vieques had higher rates of child mortality and death from cancer and

cardiovascular disease than those for Puerto Rico as a whole.

58. Since 1941, the women of Vieques had been subjected to sexual abuse and violence by American soldiers. Many of them had been raped when their fathers and husbands had been forced to leave the island to perform military service or because of the lack of jobs on Vieques. Another aspect of the militarization of Vieques which had an impact on women's lives was the fact that since the closure of the hospital in 1985 had been forced to leave the island by ferry or airplane in order to give birth; consequently, normal childbirth became an emergency situation with increased risk of complications, infection and death for mother and child. Restriction of the birth rate on Vieques was part of the United States plan to halt population growth and give the impression that the population was decreasing since births were registered outside the island municipality. That, in turn, facilitated building restrictions since public spending was based on per capita growth, and was used to justify the continued military presence by an apparent decrease in the population. Women's health had also been affected by the fact that there was only one doctor on Vieques per 1,798 residents, making prenatal care less common than in the rest of Puerto Rico. With respect to primary health care, there were three times more patients per doctor in Vieques.

59. At the dawn of the new millennium, Puerto Rico remained an American colony and had entered a new stage in the struggle against colonialism. The ill-treatment and oppression of the residents of Vieques at the hands of American soldiers constituted flagrant violations of the basic human rights of the Puerto Rican people and confirmed that the militarization of Puerto Rico was slowing the decolonization process and preventing Puerto Ricans from exercising their right to self-determination. The population of Vieques was bravely confronting the well-organized, trained forces of the United States Army, a fact which had won them deserved support in Puerto Rico and worldwide. Women for Peace and Justice for Vieques supported the draft resolution which the Committee had before it and asked that it should be transmitted to the General Assembly with a request for the immediate demilitarization and decolonization of Vieques and of Puerto Rico as a whole.

60. *Ms. Mardach Miguel withdrew.*

61. **Mr. Dausá Céspedes** (Cuba) introduced the draft resolution entitled "Special Committee decision of 6 July 1999 concerning Puerto Rico" (A/AC.109/2000/L.11). After mentioning the historical similarities, brotherhood and solidarity that united the Cuban and Puerto Rican peoples, he said that the document before the Committee combined the basic elements of the resolutions and decisions adopted in previous years, but also mentioned new issues raised in the statements of petitioners, and was the result of an extensive process of consultations with representatives of broad political and social sectors of Puerto Rican society and members of the Special Committee.

62. The text of the draft resolution *inter alia* encouraged the Government of the United States to order the halt of its armed forces' military drills and manoeuvres on Vieques, and to return the occupied land to the people of Puerto Rico, halt the persecution of peaceful demonstrators, and decontaminate the impact areas. It noted with satisfaction the progress achieved towards the implementation of a mechanism ensuring the full participation of representatives of all viewpoints in Puerto Rico, such as the proposal to convene a Constituent Conference. It expressed the hope that all Puerto Rican political prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons on cases related to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico would be released, noted that the Final Document of the Thirteenth Ministerial Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries held in April in Cartagena de Indias reaffirmed the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence, and, taking into account one of the most frequent requests of the representatives of almost all political movements in Puerto Rico, expressed the hope that the General Assembly would give comprehensive consideration to the question of Puerto Rico in all its aspects. His delegation appealed to all members of the Committee to offer their valuable support and adopt the draft resolution by consensus.

63. **Mr. Mekdad** (Rapporteur) said that the report contained in document A/AC.109/2000/L.3 presented a summary of the historical background and an update of economic, political and military events which had occurred since May 1999. Owing to the events of the past year, much attention was being paid to what was happening on the island of Vieques. As had been done in the preparation of the previous report, he had consulted with the United States Mission to the United

Nations and the interested parties and organizations in Puerto Rico, which had provided information on the question of self-determination and the independence of Puerto Rico. Numerous petitioners had also been heard, and had provided direct information on the situation in the Territory. He drew attention to paragraph 38 of the report, which should read “6 July 2000” rather than “6 July 1999”.

64. **Mr. Al-Humaidi** (Iraq) reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence on the basis of General Assembly resolutions, in particular resolution 1514 (XV). The United States of America must create the necessary conditions for the Puerto Rican people to exercise that right. Therefore, his delegation supported the draft resolution submitted by Cuba.

65. **Mr. Arcaya** (Venezuela) supported the proposal of Cuba that the draft resolution should be adopted by consensus.

66. **The Chairman** said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.11 without a vote.

67. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.11 was adopted.*

68. **Mr. Eguiguren** (Chile) explained his delegation's reservations with respect to the overall content and some paragraphs of the resolution. It must be recognized that there were in Puerto Rico other positions on the island's status that merited equal respect and had broad support among the people. Therefore, such a resolution should express the view of the majority of Puerto Ricans.

69. In the resolution, the hope was expressed that the General Assembly would give consideration to the question of Puerto Rico; however, the General Assembly had adopted resolution 748 (VII) in 1953 removing Puerto Rico from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Any decision to reinstate that question in the agenda of the General Assembly would have to be based on a process of consultation among all interested parties and respond to the interests of the majority of Puerto Ricans, as expressed democratically.

70. The resolution made no reference to General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) which presented the various options for the exercise of self-determination. Furthermore, it would be appropriate to make reference

to the process begun at the recent meeting called by President Clinton, attended by the political leaders of the various persuasions, including pro-independence. As for the situation on the island of Vieques, that matter should be dealt with directly by the Puerto Ricans and the United States Government. He hoped that a swift and satisfactory solution would be found for the benefit of the people of Puerto Rico.

71. **Mr. Salamanca** (Brazil) said that, after 28 years, the Special Committee had reached a consensus in support of a resolution upholding the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). It was to be hoped that such a momentous step would be the first on the path to the dignity to which the Puerto Rican people had a right. He hoped that the colonial Power would heed the call to cease the military exercises and manoeuvres on the island of Vieques, in the interests of justice, humanitarian law and human rights.

72. **Mr. Dausá Céspedes** (Cuba) said that, for the first time in 28 years, the Special Committee was adopting a resolution on the question of Puerto Rico by consensus, which was a major triumph. The real protagonists of that triumph were the women and men who had fought all their lives for Puerto Rico's independence, enduring long prison sentences because they yearned for a free homeland; those who had been detained and mistreated for defending Vieques in recent months, or were being detained at that moment; those who faced a future in which freedom was uncertain; those who demonstrated peacefully in front of the United Nations building to protest against the United States Navy bombings in Vieques; and those who attended the Special Committee sessions year after year to speak about their plight.

Question of New Caledonia (A/AC.109/2000/L.7)

73. **Mr. Ovia** (Papua New Guinea), introducing draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.7, drew attention to an amendment to paragraph 12, which had been agreed among the administering Power, the people of New Caledonia and the resolution's sponsors. Paragraph 12, as amended, should read:

“Notes the positive initiatives aimed at protecting the natural environment of New Caledonia, notably the ‘Zonéco’ operation designed to map and evaluate marine resources

within the economic zone of New Caledonia, including preliminary studies relating to hydrocarbons.”

He stressed the importance of that amendment, in view of the negotiations taking place in Jamaica on a code of conduct governing mining of the seabed, in which the Chairman was actively participating. It was to be hoped that the amendment would contribute to that process in favour of the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories such as New Caledonia. He requested the Special Committee to adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

74. **The Chairman** said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Special Committee wished to adopt the draft resolution, as orally amended, without a vote.

75. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.7, as orally amended, was adopted without a vote.*

Question of Tokelau (A/AC.019/2000/L.10/Rev.1)

76. **Mr. Ovia** (Papua New Guinea), also speaking on behalf of Fiji, introduced the revised draft resolution entitled “Question of Tokelau”. He praised New Zealand, the administering Power, for its cooperation with the Special Committee, and encouraged all administering Powers to follow suit.

77. As a result of negotiations between the Government of New Zealand and the people of Tokelau, paragraphs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 of the draft resolution had been revised. Those revisions were important because they covered more recent events. For example, paragraph 4 acknowledged the participation of the *Ulu-o-Tokelau* in the Pacific regional seminar held in Majuro, and his account of how Tokelau’s Modern House project, in both its governance and its economic development dimensions, was seen by Tokelauans as the means to achieving its act of self-determination. The sponsors requested the Special Committee to adopt the draft resolution by consensus.

78. **The Chairman** said he would take it that the Special Committee wished to adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

79. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.10/Rev.1 was adopted without a vote.*

80. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic) welcomed the Special Committee’s adoption of the draft resolutions on New Caledonia and Tokelau without a vote. He praised, in particular, the cooperation and interest shown by France and New Zealand, the respective administering Powers, and urged other administering Powers to follow suit so that the Special Committee could continue to fulfil its mandate.

81. **Mr. Eguiguren** (Chile) agreed with the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and expressed his gratitude to Fiji and Papua New Guinea for the effort they had put into the preparation of the two draft resolutions considered by the Special Committee.

82. **Mr. Lewis** (Antigua and Barbuda) supported the statements made by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Chile and proposed that the other administering Powers should be requested to step up their cooperation with the Special Committee.

83. **The Chairman** expressed appreciation for the information on the Territories supplied by the petitioners, and the efforts of those countries which had cooperated in preparing the draft resolutions, which had enabled the Special Committee to adopt them by consensus. He supported the statements already made highlighting the laudable cooperation of France and New Zealand.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.