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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 1497th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Monday, 10 August 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. RODRIGUEZ PARRILLA

(Cuba)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY IN CONNECTION WITH THE RECENT TSUNAMI IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA  
AND THE RECENT FLOODS IN CHINA

1. The CHAIRMAN, on behalf of all the members of the Special Committee, expressed sympathy to the Government and people of Papua New Guinea in connection with the recent tsunami in their country and to the Government and people of China in connection with the recent floods in their country.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

2. The agenda was adopted.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE DECISION OF 15 AUGUST 1991 CONCERNING PUERTO RICO  
(A/AC.109/L.1885)

3. The CHAIRMAN recalled that, in aide-mémoire 17/98, the Committee had decided to hear representatives of organizations interested in the question of Puerto Rico. Communications containing requests for hearings had been circulated to members in aide-mémoire 18/98. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to grant those requests.

4. It was so decided.

Hearing of petitioners

5. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Arraiza (Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.

6. Mr. ARRAIZA (Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico) said that Puerto Rico was a nation of 6 million people, some of whom were living in the diaspora because of present and past socio-political conditions. It had been invaded by the United States of America 100 years previously and had been kept under that country's authority ever since. It was subject to laws imposed unilaterally by the United States Congress, and the infamous territorial clause of the United States Constitution gave it the ambiguous status of belonging to but not forming part of the United States of America.

7. The Puerto Rican nation had never exercised its inalienable right of self-determination, despite United States claims to the contrary. The end of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism was approaching, but the Special Committee still had two years in which to resolve Puerto Rico's colonial status. His organization did not advocate any particular solution; it would support the freely expressed will of the Puerto Rican people. Bills on Puerto Rico's future status were currently before the United States Congress and Senate. A local referendum had also been proposed, but the outcome would not be binding on the United States.

8. The United States, as the colonial Power, must stop interfering in the process of resolving the status of Puerto Rico. It was up to the United Nations

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General Assembly to act, and to do so urgently. A genuine, efficient process which was binding on all the parties was essential for the decolonization of Puerto Rico.

9. Mr. Arraiza withdrew.

10. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Reverend Eunice Santana (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs) took a place at the petitioners' table.

11. The Reverend Eunice SANTANA (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs) said that the right of peoples and nations to self-determination and independence was intrinsically linked to the right of each individual to develop his or her potential as a child of God. One task of the churches was to see that people's spiritual, emotional and physical needs were met. Since political, economic and social problems could affect the satisfaction of those needs, self-government was an important component. There was profound dissatisfaction in Puerto Rico with the political status quo and the churches of Puerto Rico had expressed concern at the way in which the situation was affecting people's everyday lives. Only recently, there had been a general strike against the policies of the local government.

12. Many Puerto Ricans had been taken aback by the change in the position taken by the United States Government on the status of Puerto Rico. Its recent assertion that Puerto Rico remained subject to the territorial clause of the United States Constitution and had not exercised its right of self-determination made it imperative that the Special Committee take early, effective action.

13. The United States military presence in Puerto Rico was growing, particularly in Vieques where, for years, the United States Navy had been conducting training exercises using live ammunition with the participation of troops from other countries of the region. The quality of life, health and safety of local residents had been affected and entire ecosystems destroyed. As indicated in a recent resolution of the Special Committee, such a military presence was an obstacle to self-determination. The presence of Puerto Rican political prisoners in United States prisons was another indication of the unequal relationship between the two peoples which could not be ignored.

14. The international decolonization process was not complete, for some cases had taken longer than others. The agreement signed recently between the representatives of the people of New Caledonia and the French Government, which would have been unimaginable 15 years previously, had been made possible by reinstating New Caledonia on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. She therefore urged a comprehensive review of the case of Puerto Rico by the General Assembly, with a view to securing its decolonization in accordance with resolution 1514 (XV).

15. The Reverend Eunice Santana withdrew.

16. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Martín García (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) took a place at the petitioners' table.

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17. Mr. MARTÍN GARCÍA (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that the time had come for the Special Committee to take action on the question of Puerto Rico and to contribute to its decolonization by adopting the draft resolution before it. For decades, his organization had been denouncing Puerto Rico's dependent political status, but now even the United States Government had joined in recognizing that Puerto Rico remained a United States possession. It was therefore inconceivable that, in the year marking 100 years of United States colonialism in Puerto Rico, the Special Committee should shirk its responsibilities. In adopting the draft resolution before it, the Committee would be sending a message to the United States Government, the international community and the people of Puerto Rico that the international community was committed to ensuring Puerto Rico's inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

18. The proposed referendum, in which the Puerto Rican people would vote on Puerto Rico's political future, would not solve the problem, but it might set in motion a political process that would ultimately lead to recognition of Puerto Rican national sovereignty. Already, there was widespread opposition to perpetuating his country's colonial status and recognition that annexation was impossible. It was only a matter of time before political opinion in the United States recognized that independence was the only possible alternative.

19. He appealed to the Latin American countries members of the Special Committee to show their support for the decolonization of Puerto Rico by voting for the draft resolution.

20. Mr. Martín García withdrew.

21. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Mari Brás (Causa Común Independentista) took a place at the petitioners' table.

22. Mr. MARI BRÁS (Causa Común Independentista) said that 1998 marked two important anniversaries for Puerto Rico: 100 years had passed since its invasion by United States troops and 25 years had passed since petitioners had first appeared before the Special Committee to plead its cause. For the past century, the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and to decide their own destiny as a Latin American and Caribbean nation had been denied. In the past 25 years, the Special Committee had adopted 16 resolutions and decisions on the case of Puerto Rico. Since the latest resolution, in 1991, no action had been taken because legislation on the matter was pending in the United States Congress. Seven years had elapsed, but no progress had been made on that legislation and there appeared to be no serious commitment on the part of the United States Government to genuinely allowing the Puerto Rican people to exercise self-determination.

23. While a decision on the status of Puerto Rico continued to be postponed, the United States was stepping up its military and naval activities and expanding its bases on Puerto Rico, preventing Puerto Rico from joining regional organizations, continuing to hold 15 Puerto Rican political prisoners despite universal demands for their release and using Puerto Rico as a captive market for its exports.

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24. The time had come for the Special Committee to fulfil its obligation to uphold the principles of decolonization in the case of Puerto Rico. It was unacceptable that a double standard should apply simply because the administering Power of Puerto Rico was the most powerful country in the world. Only appropriate action by the United Nations would force the United States Government to resist pressures from its military establishment to oppose the decolonization of Puerto Rico. United Nations inaction played into the hands of the most reactionary forces in Washington, perpetuating a grave injustice that could only lead to violence. The Puerto Rican people were placing their hopes on the Special Committee's ability to fulfil its mandate and to end colonialism before the new millennium.

25. Mr. Mari Brás withdrew.

26. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Farinacci (Frente Socialista) took a place at the petitioners' table.

27. Mr. FARINACCI (Frente Socialista) said that the relationship between the United States of America and Puerto Rico was undergoing a crisis that threatened to end the tenuous stability which had prevailed for several decades. The annexationist colonial Government had reacted to the deteriorating socio-economic situation in Puerto Rico by imposing a neo-liberal model, privatizing essential State-run services and eliminating social protections for the working class. Such measures had galvanized large sectors of the population into a movement for far-reaching social change, resulting in the first general strike in Puerto Rico's history. The colonial capitalism imposed by the United States was no longer viable.

28. The United Nations must intervene to defuse the political tension in Puerto Rico before it was too late. If the United States succeeded in making Puerto Rico a permanent part of its territory that would be a violation of the right of self-determination and of international law and would be seen by the Puerto Rican people as a declaration of war which must be met with resistance.

29. Any process of self-determination must include the immediate and unconditional release of Puerto Rican political prisoners, the payment of compensation for a century of colonial exploitation and the dismantling of United States military bases in Puerto Rico.

30. The referendum on the political status of Puerto Rico recently proposed by the United States Congress failed to take into consideration elements essential under international law and did not even guarantee Puerto Ricans living in the United States or their descendants the right to vote. No account had been taken of Puerto Rico's needs and his organization rejected the claim that Puerto Rican public opinion had been adequately consulted. Large sectors of Puerto Rico's population were not represented by any of the three parties consulted by the United States Government. His organization would not participate in processes designed to perpetuate the colonial domination and facilitate the annexation of Puerto Rico by the United States.

31. The right of nations to self-determination and independence took precedence over the laws of any imperialist State. The situation in Puerto Rico was

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serious and required immediate action. The Special Committee must fulfil its responsibilities; the Puerto Rican people would fulfil theirs.

32. Mr. Farinacci withdrew.

33. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Zayas Nuñez (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.

34. Mr. ZAYAS NUÑEZ (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) pledged his organization's solidarity with the struggle of the Puerto Rican people for liberation and joined in calling for the immediate release of all Puerto Rican political prisoners.

35. The Special Committee must condemn the colonial status of Puerto Rico and state clearly that all Puerto Rican nationals, no matter where they lived, had a right to participate in the self-determination process. The Treaty of Paris had been used to justify the military occupation of Puerto Rico for the past century. In the past year the United States military presence in Puerto Rico had expanded, with the relocation to it of the Southern Command and the opening of new regional offices of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Such expansion posed a potential threat to the sovereignty of all Latin American and Caribbean countries.

36. The Special Committee must recognize that the sovereignty of the Puerto Rican nation was vested in its people and that it was they who should decide what form their exercise of self-determination would take. He drew attention to the inconsistency of the United States position in first declaring its readiness to allow the exercise of self-determination and then refusing to implement it.

37. If the Committee felt that the time was not yet ripe for adoption of the draft resolution on Puerto Rico in its entirety, he urged that it at least call for the immediate release of Puerto Rican political prisoners on humanitarian grounds.

38. Mr. Zayas Nuñez withdrew.

39. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry (Partido Popular Democrático) took a place at the petitioners' table.

40. Mr. VIZCARRONDO IRIZARRY (Partido Popular Democrático), speaking also on behalf of the Comisión Autonomista Puertorriqueña, said that his party defended Puerto Rico's current status as a commonwealth, which had been supported by a majority of the Puerto Rican people since its establishment in 1952. His party was committed to the principle of self-determination of peoples and demanded that it be respected by the United States Government and the international community. Commonwealth status had been the result of the exercise of self-determination by the Puerto Rican people in the constitutional process which had taken place in Puerto Rico from 1950 to 1953 and, since then, had consistently received more support than statehood or independence.

41. In that situation, supporters of the annexation of Puerto Rico had attempted to impose such an outcome fraudulently, against the wishes of the

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majority of the Puerto Rican people. The Young bill, which had passed the United States House of Representatives by only one vote, reflected an apparent change in the Government's interpretation of the legal validity of Puerto Rico's commonwealth status, in that it portrayed Puerto Rico as a colony governed by the territorial clause of the United States Constitution. His party categorically rejected such an interpretation, which contradicted the intentions of the founders of the commonwealth state and federal jurisprudence and the position taken by the United States Government in 1953. The options offered to the Puerto Rican people in the Young bill were presented in a totally unbalanced manner which openly favoured statehood. Commonwealth status was presented as a form of non-self-governing territorial status under which United States citizenship could, moreover, be revoked unilaterally by Congress.

42. Puerto Rico's own government, which favoured statehood, was attempting to expedite legislation based on the Young bill. As Puerto Rico's main opposition party, his party therefore called on the Special Committee to monitor political developments closely, to ensure that the Puerto Rican people do not lose the rights acquired under the commonwealth status recognized by General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII).

43. Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry withdrew.

44. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Lizardi (Jovenes Lulac) took a place at the petitioners' table.

45. Mr. LIZARDI (Jovenes Lulac) said that Puerto Rico's commonwealth status had proved untenable. While Puerto Rico enjoyed some of the powers and autonomy enjoyed by states under the federal system, it did not have the power to elect the President of the United States, nor was it represented in the United States Congress, which ultimately controlled its fate.

46. There were two obvious solutions: statehood or independence. With two reasonable options available, it was difficult to understand what was delaying the process. Some circles were trying to blame the delay on the United States Government, but those in Puerto Rico who supported the status quo were also a factor. Puerto Rico's legislature was currently working on arrangements for a referendum which would enable the Puerto Rican people to express their preference as to the territory's future status. He therefore appealed to the Special Committee to actively support the referendum process in Puerto Rico.

47. Mr. Lizardi withdrew.

48. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Crespí Marrero (Agricultores Pro-Estadidad) took a place at the petitioners' table.

49. Mr. Crespí MARRERO (Agricultores Pro-Estadidad) said that the granting of United States citizenship to Puerto Ricans in 1917 had given them a taste of democracy, but had not given them equal rights with other citizens. More recently, they had been duped into believing that Puerto Rico was no longer a colony. Puerto Rico's current situation could be seen as a form of servitude in the trappings of democracy.

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50. The Special Committee had an obligation to find a solution to the colonial situation of Puerto Rico in the remaining months of the twentieth century. It must recommend to the United States Government that it grant self-determination to the people of Puerto Rico.

51. Mr. Crespí Marrero withdrew.

52. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Santiago (Educadores Arecibeños Pro-Estadidad) took a place at the petitioners' table.

53. Ms. SANTIAGO (Educadores Arecibeños Pro-Estadidad) said that the 3.7 million United States citizens living in Puerto Rico were allowed no part in the democratic process in the United States and thus did not exist in the eyes of its Government. It was truly regrettable that the Special Committee had failed to take a clear position in recent years on Puerto Rico's colonial situation and had been taken in by the hypocrisy of colonialism's defenders.

54. Puerto Rico was not a member of the regional community of nations because it was not a sovereign State; nor could it participate in the decision-making process of the nation of which its people were citizens. Puerto Rico was in fact a colony of the United States.

55. There were three possible outcomes to the current situation: independence, commonwealth status or statehood. All of them had merit, but those Puerto Ricans who favoured statehood wished to become citizens of a new state within the Union, in a relationship based on mutual respect and trust and as true partners in the future of the country.

56. She called on the Special Committee to adopt a resolution unequivocally supporting self-determination for the Puerto Rican people and also to support the referendum which was being organized in Puerto Rico within parameters established by the Committee in the past, namely free association, independence or integration and statehood.

57. It was a sad but undeniable fact that the success or failure of the aspirations of a community were in direct relation to the political power wielded by it. The advocates of statehood saw that option as the best means of securing political power for Puerto Rico and its people.

58. Ms. Santiago withdrew.

59. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Vega Ramos (PROELA) took a place at the petitioners' table.

60. Mr. VEGA RAMOS (PROELA) said that his organization advocated the development of Puerto Rico's commonwealth status, to complete the process of genuine self-determination. The United States Congress continued to evade its responsibilities in that regard. Because of its failure to act, Puerto Rico's own government had announced a local referendum on the island's status, to be held in December 1998. The legislation governing the referendum was clearly biased in favour of statehood, yet the United States Congress had rejected that option in favour of annexation. A vote for statehood was thus a vote for

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annexation, not self-determination, and the option of an autonomous, sovereign commonwealth, the best solution for Puerto Rico, was not even being offered. In any case, the results of the referendum would not be binding on the United States Congress and Senate.

61. In any referendum, the options should be guided by three minimum criteria: applicable international law, the United States Constitution and the aspirations of the various sectors of Puerto Rican society. International law, through General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) recognized three options for self-determination: independence, integration with the right of secession, and free association. In 1978, the Special Committee had established independence and free association as the only options for Puerto Rican self-determination. It should reaffirm that position at its current session. In Puerto Rico, public opinion was divided between assimilation, independence and autonomy.

62. Time after time, the Puerto Rican people had expressed a preference for developing their commonwealth status towards a relationship with the United States that preserved and strengthened their national identity, restored their sovereignty and safeguarded their United States citizenship. That option did not even appear in the bill governing the referendum. His organization would therefore oppose the referendum process, which was designed to achieve a fraudulent electoral result.

63. The process whereby the Puerto Rican constitution of 1952 had been adopted, although extremely important, had been subject to serious limitations and could not be viewed as the full and definitive exercise of self-determination. At the time, the United States had not offered Puerto Rico the options of statehood or independence and, subsequently, it had failed to implement the provisions of General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) of 1953 whereby the commonwealth would gradually acquire full sovereignty. The Special Committee should therefore request the General Assembly to confront the United States over its failure to implement that resolution and urge it to institute a process for the full exercise of self-determination as soon as possible.

64. Mr. Vega Ramos withdrew.

65. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Corretjer Ruíz (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.

66. Ms. CORRETJER RUÍZ (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) said that none of the bills currently before the United States Congress had any validity for Puerto Rico but simply represented oppression of the weak by the strong. Only when full powers had been transferred to the Puerto Rican people would it be possible to talk of a referendum. The Puerto Rican people must not allow the United States of America, which had invaded their country a century earlier, to determine their future. Puerto Rico must be given its sovereignty and independence and United States intervention in its affairs must end.

67. The accreditation of the Partido Nacionalista as a non-governmental organization had been summarily revoked; she urged that it be restored so that the party could participate in the work of the United Nations. She reiterated earlier demands for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners held in the

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United States and condemned the abuses committed by members of the United States armed forces against the civilian population of Vieques and the expansion of the United States military presence in Puerto Rico.

68. Ms. Corretjer Ruíz withdrew.

69. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Lozada-Colón (Unión Nacional Pro Patria) took a place at the petitioners' table.

70. Mr. LOZADA-COLÓN (Unión Nacional Pro Patria) said that the United States invasion of Puerto Rico had cost Puerto Ricans rights which they had enjoyed under Spanish rule. The imposition of United States citizenship in 1917 had made Puerto Ricans liable for military service, forced them to swear loyalty to the flag and kept them subservient to the laws of the United States Congress. It had also enabled the United States Government to claim that the status of Puerto Rico was a domestic issue and to attempt to erase the identity of the Puerto Rican people.

71. His organization believed that the struggle for recognition of Puerto Rican nationality and citizenship was a struggle for recognition of a Puerto Rican identity and that renouncing United States citizenship and claiming the right to Puerto Rican citizenship was a legitimate and effective means of struggle for the decolonization of Puerto Rico. Some Puerto Ricans had taken steps to renounce their United States citizenship and in November 1997 the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico had recognized the existence of Puerto Rican citizenship and the right of those who had renounced United States citizenship to vote in Puerto Rican elections. The first two such renunciations had been recognized by the United States Government, but subsequent ones, including his own, had not, and the earlier ones had later been declared null and void. That decision and a ruling requiring Puerto Ricans who had renounced United States citizenship to register as aliens, was being appealed, and a complaint had been submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS).

72. Bills on the final status of Puerto Rico were pending before the United States Congress and the Puerto Rican legislature, but they were seriously flawed. The bill being rushed through the Puerto Rican legislature presented commonwealth status as being subject to United States sovereignty, while the statehood option did not confer all the rights enjoyed by other states under the federal system. Many people in the United States and Puerto Rico believed that the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Special Committee had had no impact on the decolonization process, but the Committee could prove them wrong by adopting a resolution reaffirming the international law of decolonization and denouncing United States attempts to thwart Puerto Rican nationhood. Failure to seize that opportunity could set the decolonization process back by a decade.

73. Mr. Lozada-Colón withdrew.

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

75. Ms. RAMOS (American Association of Jurists) said that the recently-opened Puerto Rican chapter of her organization had earned people's respect during the recent strike prompted by the privatization of the public telephone company. It had denounced police brutality, informed citizens of their rights and demanded that the police wear identification badges and stop using chemical aerosol sprays. The two-day strike had been a demonstration of the people's rejection of such privatizations and a reaffirmation of Puerto Rican nationhood.

76. In the 100 years since the signing of the Treaty of Paris, Puerto Rico's political status and the civil rights of its people had been determined by the United States Congress. As a result, Puerto Rico had had to endure the voracity of United States corporations, the occupation and expropriation of land by the United States armed forces and the persecution and imprisonment of its freedom fighters. She called on the Committee to adopt the draft resolution on Puerto Rico, which had been deferred each year since 1992, and thereby to reaffirm Puerto Rico's inalienable right to self-determination and reiterate the need for the United States to transfer all sovereign powers to Puerto Rico. It was important to show that the process currently under way in the United States Congress was contrary to international law and the Committee's resolutions.

77. Her organization had called for the unconditional release of imprisoned Puerto Rican freedom fighters and respect for Puerto Ricans' civil, political and human rights, since the island's status could not be decided in a climate of intimidation. Decolonization had always been one of the cornerstones of the United Nations and she appealed to the Latin American and Caribbean members of the Committee to support a genuine process of self-determination in Puerto Rico based on resolution 1514 (XV). She called on the Committee to exert its influence to secure the unconditional release of all those imprisoned for supporting Puerto Rican independence.

78. Ms. Ramos withdrew.

79. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Muriente Pérez (Nuevo Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueño took a place at the petitioners' table.

80. Mr. MURIENTE PÉREZ (Nuevo Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that his organization, a grouping of several independence movements, sought the Committee's support for the process of self-determination and national independence. For 100 years, the United States had subjected the Puerto Rican people to every form of colonial domination. Nevertheless, they had kept their pride and persisted in the unequal struggle for national independence.

81. Metropolitan Powers had often given the false impression that they acknowledged the existence of colonialism and were willing to end it, while actually attempting to prolong it. In recent months, the United States Congress had been discussing a bill that purportedly sought to resolve the situation of Puerto Rico but was actually an initiative of those factions which wanted to make Puerto Rico a state of the United States, contrary to the wishes of the majority of its people. While that had been going on, the United States military presence in Puerto Rico, particularly in Vieques, had actually been stepped up. Moreover, 15 Puerto Rican political prisoners were still being held. He appealed to the Committee to ensure that any initiative taken by the

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United States Government with regard to Puerto Rico was in accordance with international law.

82. The proposed local referendum was not a real exercise in self-determination but an attempt to impose the annexationist agenda of a minority. In the recent two-day strike led by employees of the public telephone company, the Puerto Rican people had taken to the streets to defend their national heritage and oppose the privatization of public assets. The government had responded with repression and police brutality, thereby further unifying the Puerto Rican people.

83. The Special Committee could make an important contribution by promoting awareness of the incomplete decolonization of Puerto Rico and ensuring that the Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism did not end without Puerto Rico taking its rightful place among the nations of the world.

84. Mr. Muriente Pérez withdrew.

85. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Ward Llambias (Fundación Acción Democrática Puertorriqueña) took a place at the petitioners' table.

86. Mr. WARD LLAMBIAS (Fundación Acción Democrática Puertorriqueña) said that his organization promoted education about the option of commonwealth status based on Puerto Rican sovereignty, which would allow Puerto Rico to exercise self-determination and to enter into a non-colonial relationship with the United States. Of the various options advocated by the United Nations, free association was the most appropriate to Puerto Rico's situation, since the political and economic relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States would have to be transformed before full independence could be considered, and full integration with the United States was impossible because Puerto Rico had its own culture and language.

87. The United States Congress and the people of Puerto Rico had been trying for over 30 years to resolve the island's colonial status. The 1967 and 1993 referendums had failed to do so, as had many other initiatives. That Puerto Rico remained a colonial territory of the United States, subject to the territorial clause of that country's Constitution, was no longer in question; even the Puerto Rican Senate had recently affirmed that most Puerto Ricans aspired to the benefits and responsibilities of sovereignty and self-government.

88. The time had come for the Committee to take the lead in finding a solution to that situation. Positive, creative action was needed, rather than more studies. Both Puerto Rico and the United States would benefit from the exercise of Puerto Rican self-determination. The United Nations must play a mediating role and ensure compliance with international law and with the Committee's decolonization mandate.

89. Mr. Ward Llambias withdrew.

90. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. González-Colón (Give Puerto Rico a Chance) took a place at the petitioners' table.

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91. Ms. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN (Give Puerto Rico a Chance) said that her organization advocated statehood for Puerto Rico. It was absurd that the Puerto Rican people should have achieved political maturity and awareness yet have been denied the right to self-determination, whether through statehood within the Union or through full independence. A commonwealth was a pact between independent, sovereign nations, but Puerto Rico had no international status. The United Nations must revoke resolution 748 (VIII), which had been based on a misrepresentation of the situation prevailing in 1953. The denial of self-determination for the Puerto Rican people was a denial of their human rights under the Charter and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee must insist that the United States consult with the Puerto Rican people on the options set forth in resolution 1541 (XV): integration, free association or independence.

92. Puerto Rico must be given a chance to choose its own destiny as Alaska and Hawaii had done, and to enjoy the same rights and benefits. Statehood meant political and economic integration, not cultural assimilation. Puerto Rico was seeking to create jobs, improve health services and housing, promote banking and manufacturing and help children and families, but its continuing colonial status was holding it back. Commonwealth status simply perpetuated Puerto Rico's political, social and economic inferiority and was therefore unacceptable under international law. Maintaining the status quo was not an option and Puerto Ricans' aspirations could no longer be denied.

93. Ms. González-Colón withdrew.

Draft resolution A/AC.109/L.1885

94. Mr. DAUSA (Cuba), introducing the draft resolution, said that various Puerto Rican political forces, all of whom had participated in the consultations on the draft resolution, concurred with important political sectors in the United States on the need for a process to change Puerto Rico's status. Only two years remained of the Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. The adoption of the draft resolution would send a message to the international community that the Committee was genuinely committed to its mandate and he hoped that a majority of members would support it.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.