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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 10th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Wednesday, 12 July 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE DECISION OF 6 JULY 2000 CONCERNING PUERTO RICO  
(A/AC.109/2000/L.3 and L.11)

Hearing of petitioners

2. The CHAIRMAN recalled that at its seventh meeting the Committee had decided to hear a number of petitioners under the agenda item.

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

4. Mr. VILLANUEVA MUÑOZ (Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico) said that, as his organization had frequently stated, Puerto Rico lived under a colonial regime by virtue of which, in any questions relating to the Territory, the ultimate decision lay with the United States, not Puerto Rico. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), the Special Committee had urgently called on the United States to guarantee self-determination for the Puerto Rican people, but that country had not complied with its legal and moral obligations before either the people of Puerto Rico or the international community. The political dependence of Puerto Rico was deeply detrimental to the international image of both the United States and Puerto Rico. It was essential to put an end to the situation. It seemed that the current President of the United States had recognized that fact, since he had recently convened a high-level meeting on the Territory's status, with the aim of seeking a solution, together with Puerto Rican leaders, that would be acceptable to both countries. In view of the urgent need to create a mechanism for a speedy resolution of the problem of Puerto Rico's colonial status the Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico had on several occasions put forward a proposal, conveyed to the President of the United States by the distinguished lawyer Rubén Berrios Martínez, that a Constituent Conference should be convened, operating in conformity with the United States constitutional system yet also possessing the attributes of sovereignty.

5. In 1999 the Special Committee had adopted a resolution urgently calling on the United States to halt its bombing manoeuvres on Vieques Island and to take steps to return the land occupied by the United States Marines and decontaminate the impact areas. The resolution had also contained a request for the release of 16 political prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons on cases related to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico. A number of incidents had shown that the activities of the Special Committee and the influence of the international community in the defence of international law against colonialism had compelled the United States to take positive measures to fulfil its obligations and acknowledge Puerto Rico's right to self-determination. The President of the United States had issued a directive authorizing the Marines to hold a referendum among the local inhabitants on the

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question of whether the Marines should stay on the Island or leave it in 2003. On the other hand, authorization had also been granted for annual bombing manoeuvres lasting 90 days, using non-explosive inert ordnance.

6. In May 2000, those taking part in the campaign of civil disobedience had been removed from the United States Marines' bombing range on Vieques Island, but hundreds of people had subsequently returned to form a human shield and prevent the renewal of the bombing. Hundreds of participants in the action, including tens of Puerto Rican Independence Party candidates for elective office, had been sentenced to terms of imprisonment by the Puerto Rico Federal District Court. For almost a month the situation in Puerto Rico had been similar to a military occupation, with various basic civil rights suspended, including freedom of movement and unrestricted access to the Territory by its own inhabitants. That very day 710 people had been arrested for returning to the area of the bombing range. The Puerto Rican people and the inhabitants of Vieques were united in demanding the withdrawal of the United States Marines from the Island and an end to the bombing immediately, not in 2003. According to a survey carried out by the Puerto Rican Catholic Church covering almost a quarter of the population, 85 per cent of Puerto Ricans favoured the Marines' departure from the Island and an end to the bombing.

7. He pointed out that 11 of the 16 political prisoners had been freed and reunited with their families without causing any social upheaval. Moreover, the President of the United States had given the Puerto Rican people a written undertaking to work out a "realistic" political formula to enable Puerto Rico to enjoy full democracy, thus implying his recognition that previously it had lacked sovereignty. Such developments indicated that resolutions adopted by the Special Committee were of real political and moral significance. The Committee must continue to use its influence and political weight to encourage the United States to set in motion a real process of self-determination for Puerto Rico by fulfilling the following obligations: releasing the five political prisoners still in prison and all the protesters on Vieques Island who had been detained; adopting measures to withdraw the Marines from Vieques immediately and halt the bombing; upholding the initiative by the Puerto Rican leaders under which the United States guaranteed Puerto Rico its sovereignty; and providing the opportunity to convene a Constituent Conference, which would adopt decisions or formulations that could lead to an end of the country's colonial status.

8. Mr. Villanueva Muñoz withdrew.

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

10. Mr. MURIENTE PÉREZ (Nuevo Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that the Special Committee had adopted numerous resolutions in connection with Puerto Rico's colonial status, in which it had consistently recognized the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence. In 1999 it had unanimously adopted a historic resolution dealing with such important issues as political prisoners and the struggle for peace and demilitarization on Vieques Island. The people of Puerto Rico had since made considerable progress on both fronts. Thus a virtually unanimous demand by the people of Puerto Rico had managed to secure the release of 11 political

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prisoners, who had received a hero's welcome on their return home. Moreover, there had seldom been in Puerto Rican history such extensive, broad-based action as that which had been seen over the past year during the campaign to achieve peace and demilitarization on Vieques Island. For almost a year civil disobedience campaigners had been encamped on the areas occupied by United States forces, acting as a living shield to prevent bombing on the Island.

11. The United States Government and Marines were paying no attention to the just demands of the Puerto Rican people to restore peace on the Island. Washington, acting in collusion with the colonial government headed by Pedro Rosselló González of the Partido Nuevo Progresista, was attempting to saddle Puerto Rico with an unlawful presidential directive aimed at perpetuating the military occupation and bombing manoeuvres on Vieques Island. That was why the Puerto Rican people were increasingly taking part in acts of civil disobedience and protests against the military occupation. Hundreds of Puerto Ricans had been arrested, subjected to punitive measures and brought before the United States Federal Court in Puerto Rico simply because they had set foot on occupied land belonging to Puerto Rico. Many had been imprisoned in the federal prison in Puerto Rico. They included eminent leaders and members of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, trade union leaders and others.

12. The 102nd anniversary of the United States military invasion of Puerto Rico fell on 25 July 2000. The same day marked the 48th anniversary of the creation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a formulation by which the United States had attempted to deceive the international community with the impression that Puerto Rico's colonial status was at an end. Yet that status persisted, although the United States refused either to acknowledge the fact or to take action to settle the problem once and for all. President Clinton's most recent initiative, when he had held a meeting with the leaders of the three official parties to review ways of dealing with the country's political situation, had been greeted with deep suspicion. Even as Mr. Clinton had spoken with the party leaders, the Marines were carrying out bombing manoeuvres on Vieques Island, ignoring the Puerto Rican people's calls for peace.

13. Meanwhile, the decolonization struggle continued. The Tenth Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Countries, meeting in Cartagena in April 2000, had expressed the international community's solidarity with the cause of decolonization in Puerto Rico. Also worthy of note was the proposal to convene a Constituent Conference which would act as a representative forum enabling the Puerto Rican people to seek a solution to the problem, already over a century old, of Puerto Rico's colonial status. Lastly, he urged the Committee to adopt the draft resolution submitted for their consideration.

14. Mr. Muriente Pérez withdrew.

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

16. Mr. FARINACCI GARCÍA (Frente Socialista) said that it was common knowledge that ever since the United States Government had seized Puerto Rico in 1893 it had maintained a colonial regime in the country, in breach of international law and against the will of the overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans. The

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struggle of the Puerto Rican people against the physical manifestations of imperialism was currently growing in intensity. In that connection, he drew the Committee's attention to the situation on Vieques Island, where the criminal bombing manoeuvres by the United States Marines were having a disastrous effect on the population and the environment. He recalled that in 1999 the Committee had adopted a resolution urgently calling on the United States to halt military training on the Island and to restore the occupied areas to the Puerto Rican people. Over the past year the population's opposition to the Marines' iniquitous activities had increased, while the repression and persecution had grown in severity. Over 400 of those who had participated in the protest on Vieques were awaiting trial before the Federal Court and tens of people were serving prison sentences, including a considerable number of the leaders of the Puerto Rico Independence Party, such as Rubén Berrios Martínez and Fernando Martín, who had been convicted by the court simply for entering the area to which access had been unlawfully closed by the Marines. Criminal charges had also been laid against 40 members of the Frente Socialista for their participation in the protest action. Prosecution and intimidation would not, however, alter the aspirations of the Puerto Rican people, who were determined to secure the withdrawal of the Marines from their land.

17. There remained one other problem that increased the tension in the colonial regime, namely the intention of the United States Government to introduce the death penalty to Puerto Rico. Capital punishment was forbidden in the territory, as unequivocally stated in the 1952 Constitution - that very Constitution which the United States had used as an argument in achieving the adoption of General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) of 27 November 1953. In breach of the Constitution, the United States authorities had sanctioned 11 death sentences in Puerto Rico. Yet again the democratic rights of the Puerto Rican people were being violated by the colonial regime. The people of Puerto Rico were engaged in a struggle with that and many other clear manifestations of the political subordination inherent in its colonial status.

18. The President of the United States had recently invited to Washington the leaders of the Puerto Rican political parties taking part in the elections in order to discuss the problem of the Territory's status and to seek a solution. That meeting had proved unsuccessful but it was quite obvious that Washington showed no inclination to put an end to the colonial regime in Puerto Rico from which it derived great benefit both economically and militarily. In that connection, the Frente Socialista once more demanded respect for the rights of Puerto Ricans in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), as well as an immediate end to the operations of the military, judicial and political organs of the United States in the territory of Puerto Rico. It also called for the liberation of all political detainees and the transfer, as part of the process of decolonization, of full sovereignty to the people of Puerto Rico. The Frente Socialista thus considered that there was no acceptable alternative to recognition of the independence of Puerto Rico. In conclusion, he stated his support for the resolution under consideration and urged the members of the Special Committee to adopt it.

19. Mr. Farinacci García withdrew.

20. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Pagán (ProLibertad) took a place at the petitioners' table.

21. Mr. PAGÁN (ProLibertad) said that his organization brought together individuals and organizations that supported Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war who had been imprisoned for their political convictions and their participation in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. On 11 August 1999, President Clinton had agreed to "conditionally" commute the sentences of 16 Puerto Rican men and women whose only crime had been their action in support of the independence and sovereignty of their country. However, in view of the broad restrictions attached to that measure, which would in fact amount to life in a prison without bars, several Puerto Ricans had refused to accept the President's offer, including Antonio Camacho, Carlos Albert Torres, José Solís, Juan Segarra Palmer, Oscar Lopez Rivera and Haydee Beltran.

22. 25 July 2000 would be the beginning of the 102nd year of colonial rule and military occupation by the United States in Puerto Rico. During the course of a little over a hundred years, the United States Government had actively participated in acts that violated the standards of behaviour accepted by the international community, including the Special Committee. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had declassified thousands of files on individuals who had taken an active part in the Puerto Rican independence movement or had been suspected of being supporters. Those files confirmed the lengths to which the United States would go to deny the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination. That enormous body of secret data had been compiled by COINTELPRO, the FBI's counter-intelligence programme which had operated between 1946 and the late 1980s for the sole purpose of discrediting and disrupting, by any means, the independence movement in Puerto Rico.

23. In that context of Government-sanctioned sabotage, intimidation and manipulation, the advocates of the independence and self-determination of Puerto Rico had been sentenced to terms of imprisonment averaging over 15 years. In such an atmosphere of unaccountability the United States had been able to conduct its policy of colonial rule in Puerto Rico, while hypocritically presenting itself to the international community as a bastion of democracy.

24. In July 1999 the Special Committee had adopted resolution A/AC.109/1999/28 in which, in particular, it had called on the Government of the United States to order the halt of its armed forces' military drills and manoeuvres on Vieques Island and to return the occupied land to the people of Puerto Rico, and also expressed the hope that the President of the United States would consider favourably the request before him to release the Puerto Rican prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons on cases related to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico.

25. Since 1952, when the United States had granted commonwealth status to Puerto Rico, the transmission by the administering Power of information on the situation of the Non-Self-Governing Territory had ceased when the General Assembly had extended to Puerto Rico an exemption from the requirements of Article 73 (e) of the Charter of the United Nations. That loophole had allowed the United States to continue to violate human rights in Puerto Rico while

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hiding its misdeeds from the international community. The impunity of the United States was exemplified by the fact that for 60 years the naval forces of that country had been using Vieques Island for bombing practice and naval manoeuvres. In so doing, the United States had totally ignored the will of the citizens of Puerto Rico who were, incidentally, United States citizens and who demanded not only an immediate end to military training on the island but also the withdrawal of all naval forces. He pointed out that, on 19 April 1999, David Sanes Rodríguez, a 35-year-old Puerto Rican, had been killed as a result of an error during bombing practice.

26. The membership of ProLibertad, speaking on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans who had made their voices heard at rallies and demonstrations, during acts of civil disobedience and through peaceful petitions, implored the United Nations to intercede and monitor the human rights and environmental violations being perpetrated by the United States. Chapter I of the United Nations Charter stated the Organization's purpose to "develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace". On that basis he requested the Special Committee to take "other appropriate measures" with respect to the question of Puerto Rico, as set out in detail in the adopted resolution A/AC.109/1999/28, and to bring those measures to the attention of the General Assembly to help end the colonial system in Puerto Rico, to end the bombing on Vieques Island and to create true conditions for the unconditional release of all the remaining Puerto Rican political prisoners. He also requested the United Nations to reconsider the current exemption of the United States in the context of the obligation of administering Powers to provide information on Non-Self-Governing Territories under Article 73 (e) of the Charter.

27. Mr. Paqán withdrew.

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

29. The Reverend EUNICE SANTANA (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs) said she was concerned to note that, as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism was drawing to a close, the issue of Puerto Rico had not yet been settled, largely because the administering Power, which was an active, important and influential Member of the Organization, was unwilling to address the problem. Colonies served to provide the colonizing Powers with a means of increasing their own might or well-being, which took precedence over considerations of what was fair or reasonable. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the new century, one of the most shameful phenomena in the life of humanity had not yet been eliminated.

30. In religious circles in Puerto Rico, colonialism was considered a sin because it robbed the colonized peoples of the possibility of participating in decision-making on issues affecting them at both the national and the international levels. Christian precepts affirmed that human beings had been created in freedom in order that they might be free, but colonialism subjugated, belittled and even criminalized people's natural and God-given desire for

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freedom. It had an adverse impact on individual and collective development and withered the soul. It was contrary to the principles of democracy and did not allow them to be put into practice, and it negated the aspirations of humanity. Colonialism represented the absence of justice, without which it would be impossible to satisfy the universal desire for peace. In that connection, immediate attention must be paid to the still-unresolved problem of decolonizing Puerto Rico.

31. The events of the past 15 months in Puerto Rico eloquently illustrated the meaning of inequality, powerlessness and the lack of real participation in decision-making and of recognition of the basic rights of the Puerto Rican people. In response to the refusal of the United States Navy and Government to react positively to the demands of Puerto Ricans, nearly all sectors of Puerto Rican society, including the Church, had built permanent camps on the firing ranges, thereby impeding the conduct of military exercises. Hundreds of people had risked their lives by acting as "human shields". After more than a year had elapsed, federal marshals had removed and arrested them, and the camps, including an ecumenical chapel, had been destroyed. However, hundreds of other people had entered and continued to enter the restricted areas to stop the bombing. The United States authorities had responded by arresting and even putting many of those people in jail. Despite the protests, which had taken a variety of forms, the Navy remained on the island, continued to build additional roads in the area and threatened to deploy its forces there; it therefore appeared that the exercises would continue.

32. Currently, the United States Navy and Government were proposing a "referendum" which broad sectors of society and the Church considered a mockery of the concept of participation and of the basic principles of democracy. The referendum would consist of putting before the people of Vieques two proposals contained in a United States Presidential directive: (a) the permanent presence of the Navy, live fire training and funding in the amount of \$50 million for the local population; and (b) the presence of the Navy on the island for three more years, training with non-explosive ordnance and \$40 million for the local population. However, the option desired by the majority of the population, which was the immediate departure of the Navy from Vieques, was not on the list of alternatives. A survey on the referendum, conducted by the Catholic Diocese of Caguas, had shown that 88.5 per cent of the individuals surveyed favoured the immediate departure of the Navy. Moreover, the Navy had not undertaken to clean up the contaminated area and was unwilling to take responsibility for the high incidence of cancer on the island or to commit itself to returning the occupied land.

33. On the basis of those considerations, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs called upon the members of the Special Committee to request the United States to review the decision to conduct a referendum on the island of Vieques; to respect the will of the Puerto Rican people on that issue; to order the immediate and permanent cessation of the bombing; to undertake to clean up the area thoroughly and ecologically; and to pay compensation to the people of Vieques for the damages caused.

34. The Reverend Eunice Santana withdrew.

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35. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Martín (Puerto Rican Independence Party) took a place at the petitioners' table.

36. Mr. MARTÍN (Puerto Rican Independence Party) said that his party fully supported the draft resolution which had been circulated and he hoped that it would be adopted at the current session by an even larger majority than the preceding year's resolution on the subject. The events of the past year in Puerto Rico made it necessary for the Special Committee to play a more active role in bringing about the complete decolonization of that country. Following the adoption, in July 1999, of the resolution on the question of Puerto Rico, which had reiterated the demand that military manoeuvres on the island of Vieques should stop immediately and that the land occupied by the United States Navy should be returned to the people of Puerto Rico, the United States Government had unleashed an unprecedented campaign of persecution against Puerto Ricans who, in conducting peaceful protests against the resumption of bombing on Vieques, represented the position of the majority of Puerto Rico's inhabitants.

37. Nearly a year after the initiation, under the leadership of the President of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, Rubén Berríos, of a campaign of civil disobedience involving protests on the Navy's firing range on Vieques, the United States Government, having resolved to crush the Puerto Rican people's desire to stop the illegal military exercises on the island, had used force to remove the protesters from the firing range and had arrested participants in the protest, who had represented not only the Puerto Rican Independence Party, but also other social, religious, labour and patriotic organizations. However, in view of the inevitable threat of the resumption of the bombing, hundreds of people had once again entered the territory occupied by the Navy, resulting not only in the usual arrests, but also in judicial prosecution of the participants in the protest. Thus, Rubén Berríos and one of his supporters had been convicted by the legal system. Hundreds of other Puerto Ricans would also soon be brought before the courts for examination of their cases. In addition, more than 100 members of the Puerto Rican Independence Party were still in jail because they had been unable to pay their bail, yet the judicial examination of their cases had not yet begun. He himself and another party leader had received suspended sentences and had been released for a period of 30 days, after which they had been required to pay the fine imposed. Since they had refused to do so, they could be imprisoned for up to one year.

38. Those and other events to which the mass media had drawn attention exposed the United States Government's policy of trampling on the right of Puerto Rico to self-determination and violating fundamental human rights. It sufficed to mention that the more than 100 members of the Puerto Rican Independence Party in detention included more than one third of that party's candidates for mayor and dozens of its candidates for deputy in the Legislative Assembly, at a time when there remained only four months until the general election.

39. He called on the members of the Special Committee to adopt the draft resolution that had been introduced and, by so doing, to draw the attention of the United States, as the administering Power, to the inadmissibility of its policy in relation to Puerto Rico. The adoption of such a resolution would

serve as a decisive and firm step on the road to the decolonization of Puerto Rico based on the provisions of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

40. Mr. Martín withdrew.

41. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Colón Morera (Puerto Rican Institute of International Relations) took a place at the petitioners' table.

42. Mr. COLÓN MORERA (Puerto Rican Institute of International Relations) said that his organization favoured the establishment of mechanisms to build consensus, such as a constituent assembly that would work out new parameters for the development of political relations with the United States Government and with all other countries of the world on the basis of the right to sovereignty and respect for the cultural identity of Puerto Rico as one of the countries of the Caribbean Basin. The Millennium Forum had taken place in New York a few weeks earlier. During the forum, representatives of over 1,000 organizations from more than 100 countries of the world had set out to elaborate a programme of action for the achievement of peace and social justice in order to counter the isolationist tendencies characteristic of the process of globalization and to protect the environment and human rights at the global level. A final document, entitled "We the Peoples Millennium Forum Declaration and Agenda for Action" had been adopted and presented to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In the aforementioned Declaration it was noted that the goal of ending all forms of colonization remained as yet unachieved and that the right to self-determination was far from universally realized, especially for peoples living under occupation. In the Declaration, non-governmental organizations and citizens from all parts of the world urged the United Nations to ensure the implementation of the resolutions guaranteeing that right and to put an end to military occupation wherever it occurred.

43. In political circles in the United States, too, similar appeals had been made to the President of that country. For example, the Senator from New York State and former Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, had urged President Clinton to take measures with a view to solving the problem of the colonial status of Puerto Rico. Those appeals, like the numerous appeals of the Special Committee, had not been positively received by the United States Government, particularly the United States Senate, which, for the past 10 years, had repeatedly blocked any discussion of the question of the future development of political relations between Puerto Rico and the United States.

44. Thematic reports on human rights issues had been adopted at the Millennium Forum. It was noted in those reports that a much neglected area of human rights violations related to the activities of the military, not only in situations of conflict, but also in their day-to-day activities in military bases, training installations and testing facilities. That related directly to Puerto Rico, since it was precisely the consequences of such activities for the civilian population that had brought about the need for the Puerto Rican people's fight for the cessation of the military occupation of the island of Vieques, which was home to approximately 9,000 Puerto Ricans. Uranium, plutonium, nitrite, napalm, nitroglycerine, acetylene and many other heavy metals had been among the pollutants found on Vieques. The presence of all those substances had been the

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cause, direct or indirect, of serious disorders of the nervous and respiratory systems among the inhabitants of Vieques. There had also been reports of cases of cancer, the incidence of which was 27 per cent higher than the statistical average for Puerto Rico as a whole.

45. The United States Navy was impeding the economic development of Vieques. It was occupying the most fertile land, which restricted opportunities for agricultural activity, and controlled the best beaches, hampering the development of such branches of economic activity as ecotourism.

46. The facts he had outlined testified to the violation of fundamental human rights, for example, the right of peoples to self-determination, their right freely to dispose of their natural resources, and their right not to be deprived of their own means of subsistence (art. 1, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). Furthermore, the right to life, liberty and security of person and the right to protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment were being violated.

47. Mr. Colón Morera withdrew.

48. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Rexach (National Movement for the Advancement of Puerto Rican Culture) took a place at the petitioners' table.

49. Ms. REXACH (National Movement for the Advancement of Puerto Rican Culture) emphasized the Puerto Rican people's desire that Puerto Rico should become the fifty-first state of the United States. Puerto Rico had become a Territory of the United States in 1898 and, in 1917, in accordance with the Jones Act, all Puerto Ricans and their descendants had been granted the privilege of American citizenship. Another important step in that direction had been the decision of the United States Supreme Court to recognize the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico and to assign to it the same powers as were enjoyed by the Supreme Courts of the other states of that country.

50. At the same time, the situation that had arisen on Vieques as a result of the pursuit by the Federal Government of an ill-considered policy had contributed to the growth of nationalist sentiment. The question of the operation of a military facility on Vieques had been turned from a human rights issue into a political issue. The United States Congress bore much responsibility for that.

51. Puerto Rico had long been part of the United States. The armed forces of the United States and Puerto Rico formed a single whole. In fact, Puerto Rico was the best recruitment centre for the American military. It was also unfair that Puerto Ricans could not participate in the presidential election. All of the foregoing violated the human rights of the inhabitants of Puerto Rico.

52. To resolve the political status of Puerto Rico, it was necessary to think about which factors were impeding a solution. First, it was a lie to assert that the problem had been solved in 1952 with law 600. That gave a false notion of the existing relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Second, the party that was spreading that lie, the Popular Democratic Party, was also

lying to the people by telling them that Commonwealth status would ensure a better standard of living.

53. In the new millennium, all nations should strive to live in unity and peace. For Puerto Rico, that dream would come true once it had become the fifty-first state.

54. Ms. Rexach (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) withdrew.

55. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Adames (Al Frente) took a place at the petitioners' table.

56. Mr. ADAMES (Al Frente) said that for many years Fidel Castro had instructed his ambassador to proclaim support for the decolonization of Puerto Rico only in an effort to distract the world's attention.

57. Mr. DAUSÁ CÉSPEDES (Cuba), speaking on a point of order, requested the Chairman to draw the petitioner's attention to the need to limit his comments to the item under consideration and refrain from making offensive remarks addressed to other delegations.

58. Mr. ADAMES (Al Frente), resuming his statement, broached the issue of the situation in Cuba.

59. Mr. DAUSÁ CÉSPEDES (Cuba) said that his Government would be obliged to ask the Chairman to deny the petitioner the floor if he continued to express himself in a manner offensive to the Cuban delegation.

60. The CHAIRMAN recommended that the petitioner should refrain from attacking States members of the Special Committee.

61. Mr. ADAMES (Al Frente) said that because Puerto Rico did not enjoy full rights as the fifty-first state, it was subjected to serious discrimination, as its people did not have the right to vote in United States presidential elections or to elect their representatives to the United States Congress. At the same time, the supporters of independence enjoyed the support of less than 4 per cent of those who had voted in the plebiscite.

62. Currently they were pushing the issue of Vieques to the forefront. Nevertheless, it would be better to return to that issue after the status of Puerto Rico had been resolved. History itself was urging the people of Puerto Rico towards the only possible choice - the declaration of Puerto Rico as the fifty-first state.

63. As a result of the natural course of events over many years, half the population of Puerto Rico had settled in the continental United States. In the past, it had been patriotic to talk about independence, but now such talk could only be seen as ill-intentioned, since independence would not only rob Puerto Ricans of their rights, but would cut them in half, adversely affecting their rights as United States citizens. While up to then the issue had been that Puerto Ricans who lived on the island had a kind of second-class status, not having the right to vote even to elect their president, now the question was

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whether millions of people should be told that they were Puerto Ricans, not United States citizens, because of their mailing addresses. The solution to the problem of Puerto Rico was simple and would not be resolved through a revolution. Declaring Puerto Rico as the fifty-first state would enable all its citizens to enjoy equal rights, as envisaged in the United States Constitution. Any other solution would lead only to increased discrimination against Puerto Ricans.

64. Mr. Adames (Al Frente) withdrew.

65. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Vargas (Concerned Puerto Rican Americans) took a place at the petitioners' table.

66. Mr. VARGAS (Concerned Puerto Rican Americans) said that on 1 January 2001 the United States would be in violation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and all resolutions adopted by the Special Committee because the latter had been created to end all colonies by the end of the millennium. His organization asked the Special Committee and the General Assembly to do everything in their power to defend the right of Puerto Rico to exist among nations and to safeguard it from the genocide that had been contemplated by the United States since its invasion of Puerto Rico 102 years earlier.

67. No one should have any doubts about Puerto Rican nationality, culture and heritage. However, Puerto Rico still was not recognized by the United Nations as a country, but as a United States colony. In order to rescue Puerto Rico from the clutches of the United States, the United Nations must recognize it once and for all as a nation with the status of a freely associated State and give it a seat in the General Assembly.

68. The conflict between Puerto Rico and the United States could not be resolved by the United States Government, which treated Puerto Ricans as property. It had no moral right to resolve the conflict or the political status of Puerto Rico.

69. Four times in the past 100 years, the Puerto Rican people had voted against becoming part of the United States. It was necessary to send a clear signal to the United States that its conflict with Puerto Rico would be discussed on the floor of the General Assembly and that Puerto Rico should have a vote as an independent nation. That alone would save Puerto Rico from genocide by the United States and prevent the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent people in the bloodbath of a revolutionary war that would begin if the United States endeavoured to force statehood on Puerto Rico.

70. The past few months had shown that the United States was endeavouring to manipulate the United Nations and Cuba. In an effort to force the United Nations not to take note of the genocide threatening the Puerto Rican people, the United States had begun to pay its debt to the Organization, albeit in instalments. Furthermore, after so many years, the United States had eased the embargo against Cuba, a member of the Special Committee. Thus, the United States was giving Cuba economic incentives to remain silent and not push for the implementation of Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). He called upon Cuba to stand firm and prevent genocide against a fraternal people.

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71. On 28 June 2000 the United States Government had held a one-and-a-half-hour summit meeting with Puerto Rican leaders to discuss what form of genocide Puerto Rico preferred: a presidential order or another rigged plebiscite. It had been a tasteless joke, intended to fool the world into believing that the conflict over Puerto Rico was being solved. The United Nations should be alert and see through the trickery.

72. He appealed to the Committee and the General Assembly once and for all to recognize Puerto Rico as a full nation, with full sovereignty over its airspace, territory and maritime space. The General Assembly should select an acting first president for Puerto Rico (either Sila Calderon or Rubén Berrios) and push for presidential elections in November 2001. Such extreme action was the only way of saving Puerto Rico from genocide at the hands of the United States. Moreover, the United States was attempting to destroy the democratic process in Puerto Rico by blackening the names of political leaders from the Partido Popular Democratico and preventing them from coming into power. The United Nations must tell the United States not to interfere in the gubernatorial elections in November 2000. The United Nations had an obligation to ensure the emancipation of Puerto Rico.

73. Mr. Vargas withdrew.

74. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Héctor-Bengochea (Gran Oriente Nacional and Gran Logia Nacional) took a place at the petitioners' table.

75. Mr. HÉCTOR-BENGOCHEA (Gran Oriente Nacional and Gran Logia Nacional) said that Puerto Rico, as a Spanish colony until 1898 and thenceforth a colony of the United States, had never achieved independence. The United States Congress had denied Puerto Rico its right to sovereignty and for over a century the realization of the Puerto Ricans' fundamental rights had been dependent on the will of the Parliament of a foreign State.

76. Among the most criminal, egregious and cruel manifestations of the country's colonial status were the actions of the United States Marines against the civilian population of Vieques Island. Over the past 60 years their territory had been subjected to bombing, with disastrous consequences. Enormous environmental damage had been caused and the health of virtually all the Island's inhabitants, had been adversely affected, with a particularly high incidence of cancer and of respiratory diseases.

77. In response to an appeal by practically all Puerto Ricans to halt the bombing manoeuvres, the occupying forces had prosecuted and imprisoned 500 of the country's citizens. As a feeble reaction to the demands of Puerto Rico's civil society and political parties, the President of the United States had convened a meeting at the White House with the elected representatives of the Territory, but that meeting had held no promise for any real prospect of decolonizing the Territory.

78. On behalf of his organization, he urgently called on the Committee, in accordance with the fundamental principles - freedom, equality and fraternity - of the Masonic movement worldwide, to include in the draft resolution provisions strongly condemning the United States Marines' actions against the civilian

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population of Vieques, acknowledging the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence and recommending an instrument such as a national Constituent Conference to deal with the decolonization process. The instrument could be legitimate only if sovereignty over Puerto Rico were transferred to its peoples.

79. Mr. Héctor-Bengochea withdrew.

80. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Paralitici (Todo Puerto Rico con Vieques) took a place at the petitioners' table.

81. Mr. PARALITICI (Todo Puerto Rico con Vieques) said that for over a year his organization had worked to achieve peace on Vieques Island. Its policy was to maintain the unity of the Puerto Rican people, to achieve support among both the Puerto Ricans and the people of the United States, to seek international solidarity and to activate the civil disobedience campaign in order to make the United States understand the discontent over its policy of aggression against the people of Vieques Island. It was important for the Committee to recognize that all sections of Puerto Rican society supported the Vieques Island struggle. Surveys had shown that 88 per cent of the Island's people and 80 per cent of Puerto Ricans were in favour of the immediate withdrawal of the Marines from Vieques. Moreover, support was growing in the United States, not only among Puerto Ricans but also among representatives of other Latin American countries, African-Americans, various religious groups, pacifists, anti-militarists, academics, politicians and others. A few days earlier, even the United States Vice-President, Al Gore, had publicly acknowledged that the Marines should be withdrawn from Vieques Island as soon as possible.

82. International solidarity with the Island was by no means restricted to support from non-governmental organizations. His organization had worked jointly with Acción Democrática Puertorriqueña on an information campaign to influence the Governments of the countries which sent their Marines on joint bombing manoeuvres with the United States on Vieques. As a result of those efforts, such countries as Argentina, Venezuela and Uruguay had refused to participate in joint exercises. His organization had also written to the new Government of Bolivia. Moreover, a few days earlier it had protested to the Government of the Dominican Republic on learning that some of that country's Marines had carried out weapons testing on Vieques. The Commander-in-Chief of the Dominican Republic had denied the fact, although only in a statement to the press in his own country, but it was significant that the recently elected President of the Dominican Republic had assured the international community that he would never send troops on manoeuvres on Vieques.

83. A complaint against the United States Navy in connection with violations of the human, ecological and health rights of the inhabitants of Vieques had also been made to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The struggle for peace on Vieques had not been an easy one. Over 600 people had been arrested in the zone controlled by the Navy and almost 100 Puerto Ricans were serving prison sentences, including members of the Puerto Rican Independence Party. In spite of that, several groups at the risk of their lives, had entered the area of the naval bombing range while bombing practice was taking place. The people of

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Puerto Rico were fully resolved to continue the struggle as the only means of achieving an immediate halt to such practice bombing and firing on Vieques.

84. Mr. Paralitici withdrew.

85. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Diaz Diaz (Sociedad Bolivariana de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.

86. Mr. DIAZ DIAZ (Sociedad Bolivariana de Puerto Rico), expressing the hope that it would not be long before Puerto Rico would be able to become a member of the family of democratic States created in Latin America by the freedom fighter Simón Bolívar, said that Puerto Rico had no machinery for self-determination which would enable the people of that country to achieve development in all areas of society. Economic growth in Puerto Rico depended entirely on the economic situation in the United States which was not in keeping with the requirements of the Territory.

87. He pointed out that Puerto Ricans took part in political activity on a far greater scale than the inhabitants of the United States. Over 90 per cent of the population of Puerto Rico took part in elections whereas the corresponding figure in the United States was less than 28 per cent. That rate of participation, which occurred only once every four years, had not provided a means of effectively resolving the most complex problems with which Puerto Ricans had to contend.

88. With respect to the flagrant violations of the human and civil rights of the population of Vieques, it should be noted that, as a consequence of the activities of the United States Navy, a statistically high incidence of cancer was found among the population of the island. Puerto Ricans had recourse to the most varied forms of struggle in order to resolve their urgent problems without resort to force. However, that was no easy task and, thanks to the support of the Special Committee in resolving the problem of the colonial status of Puerto Rico, conditions were being created to remove inequalities and attain a political balance at the regional and global levels. He appealed to the Special Committee to affirm the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and called for an immediate end to military manoeuvres on Vieques.

89. Mr. Diaz Diaz withdrew.

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

91. Mr. MARI BRÁS (Causa Común Independentista) said that the current President of the United States had stated publicly that he would endeavour to review the relations between his country and Puerto Rico before the hundredth anniversary of the United States invasion and before the end of his mandate in 2000. However, the hundredth anniversary had already passed, President Clinton was due to leave his post in a few months and the United States Congress did not wish to relinquish its full powers over Puerto Rico to the people of that country as required by the standards of international law. On the contrary, it persisted in treating Puerto Rico and its inhabitants like a commodity that belonged to

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the United States. Moreover, the United States Navy, which for the past 102 years had carried out Washington's imperialist policy in Puerto Rico, intended to continue the bombing on the island of Vieques which was part of Puerto Rican territory. That was in spite of the requests that had been agreed by the Commission appointed by the Governor of the colony, Mr. Pedro Rosselló, who had declared his approval of the report of the Commission which contained a demand for the immediate cessation of firing and the departure of the United States Navy from Vieques Island. Since then, however, under pressure from Washington, he had refused to support the consensus reached by Government circles, representatives of the political parties, religious leaders and civil society of Puerto Rico. At a mass demonstration in San Juan on 21 February in support of Vieques to protest at the training being conducted by the Navy on Vieques Island, and at the Puerto Rican parade in New York on 11 June, Puerto Ricans had expressed their indignation at that betrayal.

92. In view of the failure of the efforts by the legislative and executive authorities of the United States to define a machinery for regulating the process of self-determination for Puerto Rico, the people of that country had formed a consensus with respect to the procedure which would make possible talks with the United States on an equal footing to review the relations between the two countries. In that connection, he welcomed the inclusion in the draft resolution that had been distributed of paragraphs noting with satisfaction the proposal to convene a Constituent Conference as part of the process of self-determination which would be conducive to reconciliation and convergence of the legitimate interests of Puerto Rico and the United States.

93. Mr. Mari Brás withdrew.

94. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Lebron (Puerto Rico, Mi Patria) took a place at the petitioners' table.

95. Ms. LEBRON (Puerto Rico, Mi Patria) said that in the 102 years since the United States invasion of Puerto Rico, her country had been unable to obtain self-determination and independence despite the fact that peoples under colonial domination enjoyed the protection of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and had a right to decolonization. She was grateful to the Special Committee for its efforts in support of the rights of the Puerto Rican people which had been asserted in 18 resolutions and decisions submitted to the General Assembly.

96. A peaceful revolution was currently in progress in Puerto Rico in which an overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans were participating and protesting against the crimes of the United States Navy on Vieques Island. Thanks to their endeavours, military operations by the Navy had been prevented for a whole year, the blockade of naval operations, which had begun in May 2000, was continuing and plans for the renewal of firing on Vieques had been disrupted.

97. A national consensus had taken shape in Puerto Rico transcending political, ideological, religious, economic, social and other considerations. The struggle for peace, freedom and justice for Vieques enjoyed general support. Solidarity with the inhabitants of the island was also being expressed by the inhabitants of the United States, the Latin American countries, Europe, Asia and other countries.

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98. For 60 years, the Navy had resorted to the most varied stratagems to delay the establishment of peace and to slow down the growth of the population and the progress and development of industry, agriculture and fishing. Its activities were, moreover, causing serious environmental damage. Those people who had entered the naval testing grounds on Vieques Island, which had been subjected to bombardment for 60 years, were convinced that the once fertile and flourishing soil of the island was now in deplorable condition. It had been laid waste, scorched and destroyed and could yield no harvest. She therefore asked the United Nations General Assembly to call the United States to account for the crimes it had committed against humanity and called for the withdrawal of the United States Navy from Vieques Island and from the territory of Puerto Rico as a whole.

99. Ms. Lebron withdrew.

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

101. Ms. CORETJER (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) said that the presence of the United States in Puerto Rico was a result of the aggression committed by that country in 1898 and the extension of its occupation in violation of the past and present rules of international law. Under General Assembly resolution 3314 (29) of 14 December 1974, no territorial acquisition resulting from aggression or through the threat of the use of force was lawful. That was one of the basic rules on which the condemnation of colonialism rested. Consequently, no agreement contradicting that rule was valid. That applied to the Treaty of Paris by which the United States of America had "acquired" Puerto Rico. It followed that the subsequent actions of the aggressor State in connection with its occupation were also invalid, to the extent that they were based on unlawful invasion and occupation. The situation could be settled only when the Puerto Ricans had attained their right to self-determination. That right had been established as a rule of international law by the adoption in 1960 of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

102. The Special Committee had reaffirmed year after year the right of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence. At the same time, the United States, openly ignoring that body's mandate as well as the rules obligating it to respect the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination and to cooperate in the decolonization of the Territories administered by it, stubbornly refused to part with its possessions. The colonial Power had transferred to Puerto Rican territory the staff of its Southern Command and the command of its land forces in Central and South America, supposedly in an endeavour to resolve the problem of its status. It was no coincidence that the President of the United States had recently met with the leaders of the three political parties which had voted in the elections held once every four years for the legalization of the occupier's presence on the Territory, which in no way reflected the real wishes of the Puerto Rican people.

103. At the dawn of a new century, the colonial Power was once again resorting to trickery in order to perpetuate its rule over the Territory. Any attempt made in Puerto Rico to resolve the problem of its political status would be null and void unless the Puerto Rican people were free to exercise their right

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of self-determination. The United States must initiate a genuine process of decolonization, supervised by the United Nations and the entire international community. It should withdraw its troops and naval forces from the Territory of Puerto Rico, as well as its repressive apparatus and courts, free all the political prisoners still in jail and facilitate the political, economic and social development of Puerto Rico.

104. The members of the Special Committee were aware of the heroic struggle of the Puerto Rican people shoulder to shoulder with the inhabitants of Vieques Island to obtain the withdrawal of the Americans from that part of their national territory. Vieques had been transformed by the United States into a training centre and base for its naval forces to test a wide variety of weapons. There was information that, in the coming years, tests would be conducted in the coastal waters of Vieques of new Tomahawk missiles and submarine-launched missiles such as the MK-46, MK-48 and MK-50. Moreover, it was well known, that submarines carrying Trident nuclear missiles accompanied the vessels carrying out exercises off Vieques, despite the fact that the United States was a signatory to Protocols I and II of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America (Treaty of Tlatelolco), which applied to the territorial waters and airspace of Puerto Rico.

105. The situation in Puerto Rico was a problem that had to be addressed by the United Nations and the international community on the basis of the rules of international law and respect for the basic rights of the Puerto Rican people. Failure to do so would denote an absence of political will and make the members of the international community accomplices of the United States in the genocide it was carrying out against the people of Puerto Rico.

106. Ms. Coretjer withdrew.

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS (aide mémoire 15/00/Add.1)

107. The CHAIRMAN noted that there were still a number of requests for hearings on the question of Puerto Rico contained in aide-memoire 15/00/Add.1. If there were no objections, he proposed that those requests should be approved.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.