



# General Assembly

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## Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

### Summary record of the 6th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 24 June 2019, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. McGuire ..... (Grenada)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

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

1. **Mr. Moncada** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the people of Puerto Rico had the right to self-determination and independence, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and the Movement called for the prompt implementation of the related Committee resolutions. It hoped that, as in previous years, the Committee would adopt by consensus another resolution on the question of Puerto Rico that took into account the Movement's position.

2. The Movement remained concerned at the imposition of a financial oversight board on the government of Puerto Rico, which would encroach upon its already limited power over its budget. The political subordination of the Puerto Rican people impeded their sovereign capacity to take decisions to address their economic and social problems, including the current fiscal crisis, the insolvency of the government of Puerto Rico and the need to restructure the public debt. It was also hampering their ability to respond to the humanitarian crisis triggered by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which had caused poverty levels to rise from 45 to 60 per cent, undermining efforts to achieve sustainable economic development.

3. The United States Government must assume its responsibility for expediting the process that would allow the Puerto Rican people to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence. It must also return to them the occupied land in Vieques and the Roosevelt Road Naval Station.

4. **Mr. Llorentty Solíz** (Plurinational State of Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that the importance of the Latin American and Caribbean character of Puerto Rico had been highlighted at the highest level at the CELAC Summit held in January 2017. The Community had, moreover, noted the Committee's decisions on the subject and had reiterated that it was a matter of interest to it. CELAC member countries were committed to continuing to work in accordance with international law, particularly General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), to make the Latin American and Caribbean region an area free of colonialism.

5. Speaking in his national capacity, he said that his delegation had sponsored the draft resolution on Puerto

Rico as a testament to his country's commitment to anti-colonialism and support for the right to self-determination of the Puerto Rican people. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), the administering Power of Puerto Rico must immediately take actions conducive to an independent Puerto Rico that had the capacity to make decisions in the interests of its economy and society. He further called for the administering Power to implement General Assembly resolution 65/119 on the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism and formulate a constructive plan for decolonization.

6. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba) said that, since the imposition of the misleading status of Free Associated State of Puerto Rico more than 60 years earlier, the United States Congress had exercised complete authority over matters of defence, international relations, foreign trade and monetary policy in Puerto Rico. In 2016, the United States Supreme Court, Congress and even the Administration itself had unmasked the false claims of a change in the status of the island when they had clearly confirmed that Puerto Rico did not enjoy sovereignty and was a colonial territory entirely subject to the rule of Washington.

7. Notwithstanding the rejection by the majority of the population in November 2012 of its current position of political subordination, the colonial situation of Puerto Rico remained unchanged. The 2017 referendum had been yet another sham, rejected by the different political parties, as evidenced by the low voter turnout. It had not been a legitimate exercise in self-determination, as it had not been designed to promote decolonization in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

8. Since the Committee's previous discussion, economic and social conditions in Puerto Rico had worsened considerably. With a depressed economy and a public debt of over \$72 billion, it had been forced by the financial oversight board imposed by the United States Government to submit to draconian cuts in basic public services and measures that hindered economic growth. The board was the real authority running the island. Hurricanes Irma and Maria had caused mass migration and rocketing poverty levels. The lack of public funds and the slow response of the United States Government had aggravated the crisis. At the same time, the people of Puerto Rico were forced to pay a 20 per cent tax on goods produced on the island, which further hindered economic recovery.

9. Cuba reaffirmed the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence, in

accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and the applicability to the question of Puerto Rico of the fundamental principles set out therein. The final determination of the fate of Puerto Rico was not a domestic matter for the United States; it rested with the Special Committee on decolonization and the entire international community. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States had reiterated the Latin American and Caribbean character of Puerto Rico, while the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had urged that all aspects of the case of Puerto Rico should be considered by the General Assembly.

10. Cuba was historically committed to the self-determination and independence of the Puerto Rican people. Their respective struggles for independence had started almost simultaneously and many Puerto Ricans had lost their lives fighting for Cuban independence. The national hero of Cuba, José Martí, had founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party to achieve the independence of Cuba and to foster that of Puerto Rico. The fact that 120 years of colonial rule could not divest the people of Puerto Rico of their culture, identity, language and feeling was evidence of their deep-rooted desire for independence.

11. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, for more than 40 years, the Committee had adopted numerous resolutions on the question of Puerto Rico. Those resolutions affirmed that Puerto Rico was part of Latin America and the Caribbean and urged the United States Government to fulfil its obligation to expedite the process of allowing the Puerto Rican people to exercise its right to self-determination, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). His delegation hoped that the current draft resolution would be adopted by consensus, as in previous years, attesting to the importance of the right of peoples to self-determination.

12. **Mr. Madriz Fornos** (Nicaragua) said that Puerto Rico was an integral part of Latin America and the Caribbean and should not be exempted from decolonization. As established in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), its people had the right to self-determination. Although the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism was under way, an analysis and full debate on the situation of Puerto Rico by the General Assembly remained pending. The Committee's many resolutions on the colonial status of Puerto Rico were evidence of the international community's support for the decolonization process. His delegation had sponsored the draft resolution on Puerto Rico and hoped it would be adopted by consensus.

13. **Mr. Han Xu** (China) said that his delegation hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

14. **Mr. Sahraei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his Government fully supported the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence on the basis of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). His delegation welcomed the Committee's adoption by consensus of many resolutions on the issue over nearly 40 years and hoped that the draft resolution under consideration would also be adopted by consensus, which would be evidence of widespread support for Puerto Rican independence. He called on the United States to expedite procedures to facilitate the exercise of the right to self-determination by the people of Puerto Rico.

*Hearing of petitioners (continued)*

15. **The Chair** drew attention to aide-memoire 06/19/Add.2 relating to the Special Committee decision of 18 June 2018 concerning Puerto Rico, which contained an additional request for hearing under that item received after the circulation of the initial requests. She took it that the Committee wished to accede to the additional request.

16. *It was so decided.*

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

18. **Mr. Villa Córdova** (Enlace Cultural Villa-Zapata) said that his organization represented the descendants of generals Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, who had led the Mexican revolution. He had come to lend support to Borinken, which was the last Latin American nation whose freedom had been usurped. In the pre-Columbian period, Borinken had been part of the indigenous Americas and had been in close contact with the Mayan and Aztec societies on the North American continent. In the twentieth century, after assembling the greatest revolutionary army in Latin America and evading the retaliation of the United States military, Pancho Villa had become an international symbol of Latin American resistance to United States interventionism.

19. Enlace Cultural Villa-Zapata called for the total independence of the National Sovereign State of Borinken, which had been under the predatory and illegitimate colonial control of the United States since 1898. He called on the Secretary-General to give due consideration to the application of the National Sovereign State of Borinken for membership in the

United Nations, as that nation should rightfully have a seat in the General Assembly.

20. **Mr. Abdulmumit** (National Jericho Movement) said that his movement advocated for the release of political prisoners in the United States, including those who had championed the cause of Puerto Rican independence. Puerto Rico was an obvious case of colonialism, as the United States clearly had control over the island, occupied it with settlers and exploited it economically. While Puerto Ricans had allegedly been granted United States citizenship in 1917, they did not have the right to vote in presidential elections, did not have voting representation in the Congress and did not receive the same treatment as citizens born, naturalized and living in the United States.

21. The lingering devastation of Hurricane Maria had made clear how powerless the government and people of Puerto Rico were. In an act emblematic of the colonialist relationship, paper towels had been thrown to hurricane survivors by United States President Donald Trump. He urged the Committee to take the informed testimonies of all of the petitioners and compel the General Assembly to place the matter of the colonization of Puerto Rico at the centre of the world's stage. It could thus provide the resources needed for the Puerto Rican people to determine their own destiny, drive a stake through the heart of United States colonialism and implement General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#).

22. **Mr. Estrella** (Fuerza de la Revolución) said that five decades had passed since the Committee's first resolution condemning the colonization of Puerto Rico and recognizing the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination. Puerto Rican independence fighters had built resistance movements in response to the disregard for international law shown by the United States, which had tried to sell an image of a prosperous Puerto Rico that benefited from the colonial relationship. However, the aftermath of Hurricane Maria was convincing proof that conferring United States citizenship on Puerto Ricans was simply a way to sugarcoat the oppression of one people by another.

23. While his own country, the Dominican Republic, was small and poorly managed, its people would build the country they desired, without foreign oversight. The Puerto Rican people would likely be able to achieve that goal even faster. Puerto Rico was not a failed or helpless country; that was clear from its strong identity, culture and intellectuals. In a world where democracy and self-determination were increasingly common values, there was no place for military bases, occupied territories and colonized countries.

24. **Mr. Torres-Ríos** (Hostos Community College) said that the decisions of the United States Supreme Court in the so-called Insular Cases had contributed to the country's colonial expansion in the early twentieth century. Legal scholars had proposed the concepts of incorporated territories, which would be granted statehood and constitutional rights, and unincorporated territories, which would belong to, but not form part of, the United States. Academics had warned of the "danger" of incorporating territories with so-called inferior races that would be unable to adopt Anglo-Saxon values, and which had a different culture and language, such as Puerto Rico. The Supreme Court, at that time dominated by white supremacists, had subsequently adopted that legal concept of unincorporated territories.

25. In 2016, the Supreme Court had had the opportunity to correct that legal injustice, but had instead chosen to perpetuate colonialism by refusing to overturn the Insular Cases. Neither the granting of citizenship to Puerto Ricans nor the establishment of the Free Associated State had changed the fact that the principle of government by the consent of the governed was not respected in Puerto Rico. The financial oversight board had usurped the powers of the authorities elected by the Puerto Rican people. The unconstitutionality and illegality of the debt of Puerto Rico were supported by case law such as the Supreme Court case *Litchfield v. Ballou*.

26. Statehood would be considered a concession by the United States Congress, which could impose conditions that conflicted with the sociocultural reality of Puerto Rico, such as the language required in public schools and the justice system. Puerto Rico was a Latin American country and its people wished to remain so. Sovereignty was part of their inalienable right to determine their future and did not depend on a concession from the federal Congress. He therefore urged the Committee to do its utmost to support the self-determination of the Puerto Rican people.

27. **Ms. Román Montalvo** (Coalición Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte) said that the Committee's resolution should explicitly reject the imposition of the federal death penalty by the United States Government in its colony, Puerto Rico, and should characterize that imposition as a violation of the legal and constitutional decisions of the people of Puerto Rico. In effect, the subjugation of the people of Puerto Rico to foreign domination violated their human rights.

28. The island had abolished the death penalty in 1929, a decision that had been reiterated in the country's Constitution drafted in 1952, which had been accepted

by the United States Congress. The United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico had tried to impose the death penalty countless times, but no jury in Puerto Rico had yet chosen to apply it. Despite a firm rejection of that cruel punishment, the colonial relationship left Puerto Rico vulnerable to its further imposition. Moreover, although Spanish was spoken in Puerto Rico, all death-eligible federal cases were tried in English; members of those juries must therefore be fluent in English, as well as support the death penalty. Since the majority of Puerto Ricans did not support capital punishment and/or did not speak English fluently, it was impossible to obtain a jury of one's peers from the remaining handful of individuals.

29. Countries around the world were recognizing the death penalty as the most inhumane and cruel of punishments; more than two thirds of States had already abolished it. The United States was the only country in the Americas to have carried out executions in 2018. The imposition of the death penalty in Puerto Rico was another manifestation of colonialism and closely tied to the issue of self-determination. She joined other petitioners in the call to bring the case of Puerto Rico before the General Assembly.

30. **Mr. Meléndez Ortiz** (League of United Latin American Citizens) said that Puerto Rico was undergoing one of the most difficult periods in its history, as it faced economic problems and the massive emigration of its people following the catastrophic consequences of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The population had shrunk from 3.5 million to 3.1 million and it was projected that another 200,000 people would migrate. The financial oversight board had been created by the United States Government with the aim of balancing the budget, restructuring debt and facilitating the economic development of Puerto Rico. In practice, the board was functioning as a second government. While the elected government made public policy decisions, the board had the power to veto their implementation, creating a situation of political instability that discouraged private investment in the island.

31. While the future of Puerto Rico was not under the jurisdiction of the United Nations, it was important that the world knew that Puerto Rico was not self-governed. Its people could not participate in United States presidential elections, had no representation in its Congress and were not entitled to the same level of local governance as the states of the union. Nor could Puerto Rico manage its own currency, negotiate trade treaties with other countries or access tools to facilitate its economic development. It was absurd for the Committee to adopt resolutions annually that had no consequences.

Independence was not the only option; moreover, the Puerto Rican people had consistently rejected that path. Only the granting of statehood to Puerto Rico by the United States under equal conditions as its other 50 states would ensure Puerto Rico had access to the tools it needed for its economic and political development, and to ensure quality of life for its people.

32. **Mr. Hernández Jr.** (Puerto Rico Me Llama) said that none of the 37 resolutions on Puerto Rico adopted by the Committee had been considered by the oppressors in the United States or the colonial government on the island. It was clear that they had no respect for international law or the right to self-determination. In 2016, the United States Government had confirmed that the source of governing power in Puerto Rico was the United States Congress, and that the Congress could unilaterally revoke any concessions given to Puerto Rico for self-government. Puerto Rico was strangled by the economic embargo imposed by the United States and should be on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories until it achieved sovereignty. He called on the General Assembly to take action on the question of Puerto Rico.

33. **Ms. Valedón Santiago** (Alianza Patria) said that, regardless of the label given to the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, the arrangement restricted the capacity of Puerto Rico to recover from the worst economic and humanitarian crisis in its history. The United States response to the humanitarian crisis following Hurricanes Irma and Maria had been meagre and discriminatory and should be subject to international scrutiny. Reconstruction and recovery efforts were stalled as the federal Government had yet to release the recovery funds allocated to Puerto Rico, which were needed to reimburse municipal governments for their emergency response and to enable them to rebuild roads, water services and other infrastructure.

34. The austerity measures imposed by the financial oversight board were subjugating the people of Puerto Rico and undermining public health and safety. The current elected government had not articulated a plan to oppose the board. It was a failed and corrupt government that had found influence in the United States Congress to advocate for yet another exclusionary plebiscite on the status of Puerto Rico while it kept plundering the island. The Committee must advocate strongly for a status assembly and for inclusivity as a part of the self-determination process. While the Committee's efforts were appreciated, they had, to date, fallen short.

35. **Mr. Mendieta** (Casa de las Américas) said that Cuba and Puerto Rico had both fought for independence from Spain, but their histories had diverged when Cuba

had gained independence from the United States in 1902 while Puerto Rico had remained a colony. The minimal response of the Trump Administration to the unparalleled destruction wrought by Hurricane Maria had shattered the belief that the United States would provide unrestricted aid during a humanitarian crisis; it had become obvious that Puerto Rico remained a second-class colony. From its occupation in 1898 by the United States until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Puerto Rico had been a strategic asset and a profitable investment site for United States capital. Without the need to maintain a fake economy based on unsustainable debt, the status of Puerto Rico had since diminished. The financial oversight board represented the interests of the banks in downsizing the public sector, privatizing public corporations and eliminating labour protections.

36. In the 1950s, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation had introduced a programme that surveilled, infiltrated and disrupted domestic political organizations which it had classified as subversive. Approximately 75,000 persons had been under surveillance, many of whom had been part of the Puerto Rican independence movement.

37. **Mr. Bermúdez Zenón** (Grupo por la Igualdad y la Justicia de Puerto Rico) said that it was incredible that, in the twenty-first century, Puerto Ricans had to come and beg before the Committee while the United States continued disregarding the United Nations. The United States must be removed from Puerto Rico by any means necessary. The disastrous consequences of colonialism in Puerto Rico were apparent; the people lived under a form of economic and political slavery. Puerto Ricans fought and died for the United States Army defending democracy and freedom, yet both were denied to Puerto Rico, and they did not have the right to vote for the powers that could declare war on their behalf. The usurpation of their right to self-determination and independence must come to an end; the Committee could not afford to waste more time.

38. **Mr. Lugo Segarra** (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) called on the international community to recognize the right of the Puerto Rican nation to self-determination and independence. The financial oversight board had the power to arrest and imprison elected officials if they did not follow its orders. The Free Associated State, which was not a form of government but a colonial administration, did not have the capacity to negotiate as a sovereign State, and therefore could not incur debt; the debt attributed to Puerto Rico in fact belonged to the United States. The military projects and installations that occupied 25 per cent of Puerto Rican territory demonstrated its military

importance to the United States. The closing of hospitals and schools had led to mass emigration to the United States, where there were now more Puerto Ricans than in Puerto Rico. The plan to eliminate the native population was in full swing.

39. Members of his party had defied the criminalization of patriotism and imperialist terrorism and had suffered persecution, incarceration and assassination. Justice would not be achieved by begging in Washington as the United States would never recognize other nations' right to freedom. The matter of Puerto Rico was not a domestic affair, but a concern of the whole world and the United Nations must demand that the United States report on the social, economic and political situation of its colony and the steps it was taking to support Puerto Rican independence. Ana Belén Montes should be released.

40. **Mr. Rivera** (Puertorriqueños Unidos en Acción) said that placing Puerto Rico on the list of colonized nations would be a bitter pill to swallow but would obligate the United States to report to the United Nations and begin developing a genuine plan for decolonization. It was time to accept that the change in the status of Puerto Rico in 1952 had been a lie. In the plebiscite of 2012, 55 per cent of 1.8 million voters in Puerto Rico had expressed clearly their desire to change the colonial relationship with the United States, but, in response, that country had turned its back on the democratic values it demanded of other countries and continually hindered any legitimate effort to end colonialism. There was a lack of political will in the United States Congress to advance legislation on the matter and the issue remained similarly stalled within the Committee.

41. The Government of the United States had always had the last word on the affairs of Puerto Rico; it was time for Puerto Ricans to have a say. The North American empire repeated the falsehood that the Puerto Rican people could not agree on a solution. It was in fact impossible for them to agree on a solution when the United States Government would not disclose what options it would be willing to accept, and it was useless to develop a binding referendum on the status of Puerto Rico when it was clear that it would be ignored by the United States Congress as usual. The United States Government had not been held accountable since 1952. It was up to the Committee to take action and return Puerto Rico to the list of colonized nations.

42. **Ms. López Murillo** (Instituto Puertorriqueño de Relaciones Internacionales) said that the recent decisions of the United States Supreme Court, its Congress and its executive office had further entrenched



the colonial situation in Puerto Rico and shown that the claims on which the United Nations had based its decision to remove Puerto Rico from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1953 had been a farce. The General Assembly should dispel doubts about its commitment to defending the right to self-determination and heed the consistent calls from the Committee to examine the issue. Puerto Rico had exhausted its political and legal resources to demand a change in the colonial situation.

43. The establishment of the financial oversight board had led to the usurpation of the political powers of elected officials, and the imposition of austerity policies had led to cuts in social protection and increased inequality. Following the decision in *Commonwealth of Puerto Rico v. Sánchez Valle* and the enactment of the PROMESA Act, there remained no doubt that Puerto Rico was not an autonomous territory. She called on the Committee to make all efforts to have the issue of Puerto Rico brought before the General Assembly and to implement the Charter of the United Nations, General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 2200 A (XXI), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and to request that the United States submit within 12 months all of the annual reports it should have been submitting as an administering Power. She further requested the Chair to transmit to all relevant international entities, including the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, the international legal framework on self-determination applicable to Puerto Rico, drawing particular attention to case number 13.326 of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the 37 resolutions on Puerto Rico approved by the Committee.

44. **Mr. Meléndez Rivera** (Frente Independentista Boricua) said that he represented an effort launched in 2018 to consolidate all individuals working for Puerto Rican independence both on the island and in the diaspora in a united front. The situation of Puerto Rico was dire. Mass unemployment, high poverty rates, suppressed wages, inflated cost of goods owing to protectionist maritime laws, unsustainable cuts to essential services and the burden of illegal, colonial debt were all evidence that the United States had launched an economic war against the Puerto Rican people, resulting in an exodus from the land. The economic dependence of Puerto Rico on the United States, which the latter had created to achieve its own objectives, was obviously a colonialist relationship.

45. Many on the island and in the diaspora believed that, to achieve economic prosperity, Puerto Rico must further submit by becoming a state and hope that the Anglo-American majority treated them well. The United

States Government would facilitate the statehood process only once there was an Anglo-American majority on the island. That attitude dated back to the racist Supreme Court cases that had shaped the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico for more than 100 years. The depopulation of native people and subsequent repopulation with colonialists was obviously under way. The only way forward was the pursuit of independence, which was a human right recognized by nations around the world. Independence fighters had faced repression in the past, including through gag laws in the mid-twentieth century that had made it illegal to speak of independence or even possess a Puerto Rican flag. However, the movement would prevail because the fight was moral. He called on the United Nations not to fail Puerto Rico again and thanked the delegations of all States that had expressed support for Puerto Rican independence.

*Draft resolution A/AC.109/2019/L.7: Decision of the Special Committee of 18 June 2018 concerning Puerto Rico*

46. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba), introducing draft resolution A/AC.109/2019/L.7 on behalf of the sponsors, said that the text reiterated that Puerto Rico was a Latin American and Caribbean nation and recognized that its status prevented its people from making sovereign decisions to address the serious and worsening economic and social problems that affected them. The draft resolution also made mention of issues related to the financial oversight board, the United States Supreme Court case *Puerto Rico v. Sánchez Valle* and action taken against Puerto Rican independence activists. Adoption by consensus of the text would be the most effective contribution the Committee could make to the struggle of the people of Puerto Rico to exercise its right to self-determination.

47. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2019/L.7 was adopted.*  
*The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.*