



Presentation to the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries by Digna Sánchez Jiménez, member of the Executive Committee, National Hostos Movement for the Independence of Puerto Rico, 29 september 2017, United Nations

Dear Members of the Coordinating Bureau of the NAM,

My name is Digna Sánchez Jiménez. I am a member of the Executive Committee of the National Hostos Movement for the Independence of Puerto Rico (MINH). We are grateful for this opportunity to bring here the voice of my people who are going through a catastrophic crisis brought on not just by hurricane María or hurricane Irma the week before.

When the United State invaded Puerto Rico in 1898 with the excuse of the Spanish American War it initiated the history of United States colonialism domination of Puerto Rico. Since that ominous beginning, our country has been used for the plans of savage capitalism which has sought only to benefit the capitalists in the metropolis. We have thus been used for diverse plans which have destroyed our agriculture to the point where we now import 85 per cent of what we consume thus making our food supply greatly precarious, especially since we are an island.

Meanwhile, regarding the economy, the United States projects the image that its federal government is benevolent towards us, but in reality they extract billions of dollars from Puerto Rico. The economic policy they have promoted in the colony has resulted in a situation where our economy has been shrinking for more than a decade. As a result, in 2016 they imposed a Fiscal Control Board to ensure payment of the debt to Wall Street and the hedge funds. They

are not concerned about the future development of Puerto Rico for the benefit of Puerto Ricans. The three branches of the United States government finally recognized in 2016 that Puerto Rico “belongs to, but is not a part of” the United States. It is a colony, and despite the lies, even they have recognized that.

That Fiscal Control Board has refused to audit the 70 billion dollar debt. Their only purpose is payment of the bonds many of them now in the hands of hedge fund hands. But much of this debt did not comply with legal requisites. Nonetheless, to ensure its payment the Fiscal Control Board has imposed austerity measures that are drowning the already small local economy. The people have been struggling against this Board, but the situation has become extremely difficult and one of the results has been the massive migration of Puerto Ricans mainly to the United States where there are now more Puerto Ricans than in Puerto Rico!

Now we have been hit by hurricanes María and Irma. The devastation is unbelievable. Our beautiful archipelago is wounded and our people are suffering. The United States has a responsibility it is has not been fulfilling, and President Trump had the audacity to say that Puerto Rico is devastated, but it has to pay the debt. It was not until yesterday that Puerto Rico was temporarily exempted, for ten days, from United States maritime laws, imposed on Puerto Rico through the Jones Act, which mandate since 1917 that only ships built in the United States and manned by United States crews may carry cargo into and out of Puerto Rico. These laws must be struck down permanently. In the face of the Puerto Rico’s present humanitarian crisis we should be able to receive aid from other countries and to engage in commerce with other countries without having to use the United States merchant fleet which is the most expensive in the world.

Criticism to the United States due to its slow pace in responding to its responsibility to aid has been answered with the statement that it was a problem of the Puerto Ricans. They have now assigned a general to coordinate the aid. We are greatly concerned about the militarization of Puerto Rico. Pro independence forces has historically been persecuted and this terror was part of the script that the armed forces used in Puerto Rico.

We ask that our friends help us. Solidarity is powerful. When hurricane Irma struck the smaller countries of the Caribbean ships of people from Puerto Rico went to the aid of our neighbors in the Caribbean before the U.S. and European governments brought help. Puerto Rico, my people, will rise and we are counting on your support.

Thank you.