

Puerto Rico in CELAC: A Giant Step

Escrito por Wilma Reverón Collazo / MINH Co-President
Lunes, 24 de Febrero de 2014 07:33 -



The Heads of State of 31 of the 33 nations that comprise the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC by its Spanish acronym) met in Havana on 28 and 29 January in a Summit whose high level guests reflected the importance and recognition of this regional integration process.

[In its paragraph 21, the First Summit of CELAC (January 2013) had pointed out that Puerto Rico is Latin American and Caribbean and in taking note of the resolutions on Puerto Rico adopted by the UN Decolonization Committee, it expressed that it is an issue of interest to CELAC. In its paragraph 38, the Final Declaration of the Second Summit reiterated the 2013 statement. In paragraph 39 that follows the member countries commit to continue to work in the framework of UNGA resolution 1514(XV) and International Law in order that Latin American and the Caribbean be free of colonialism and colonies. Paragraph 40 calls on the CELAC Quartet to present, together with other States wishing to join in the mandate, to present proposals for advancement as regards paragraph 38.]

This is of tremendous importance as is the history of the process of the item of Puerto Rico within the UN Decolonization Committee, which follows juxtaposed with the process in the CELAC.

The Decolonization Committee was created in 1961 following adoption in 1960 of UNGA resolution 1514(XV). Immediately thereafter the Puerto Rican organizations Movement for Independence (MPI, which later became the PSP), the Pro Independence Party (PIP) and others began initiatives in order that the Committee assume jurisdiction on the colonial case of Puerto Rico. Participation of Puerto Rican pro independence organizations in the Second Summit Conference of the Movement of Non Aligned Countries (NAM) opened the doors as its Final Declaration called on the Decolonization Committee to study the case of Puerto Rico in light of resolution 1514(XV). Based on this NAM statement, Cuba requested the Decolonization Committee to include the item of Puerto Rico on its agenda.

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In 1966 the Decolonization Committee reported to the General Assembly that it would study inclusion of Puerto Rico on the list of territories to which resolution 1514(XV) was applicable. The Committee did not take action, which led Cuba to request inclusion of the item on the agenda of the General Assembly in 1971. On 23 September the General Committee discussed inclusion of designed item 104, The colonial case of Puerto Rico. That year, the General Committee decided against inclusion with 10 votes against five and eight abstentions. The General Assembly, in which Cuba then attempted to reverse the decision of the General Committee, decided against inclusion with 57 votes against 26 and 38 abstentions.

A long process ensued. The first Decolonization Committee resolution on Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/419), which recognized the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence in conformity with UNGA resolution 1514(XV), was adopted on 28 August 1972. Based on this resolution and perseverance, in 1973 representatives of the PSP and PIP, Juan Mari Brás and Rubén Berríos, respectively, had the opportunity to address the Committee for a whole day.

As this history reflects, it took four years for the Decolonization Committee to express itself on Puerto Rico and six for it to adopt a resolution on the item. Agreement to hear petitioners took 11 years.

It is with this history in mind that we should analyze the item of Puerto Rico in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). No mention was made of Puerto Rico in the Latin American and Caribbean Unity Summit, which took place in Mexico in February 2010. Thus, representatives of the Hostos National pro Independence Movement of Puerto Rico (MINH) and the Committee for Puerto Rico at the United Nations (COPRONU) garnered the support of the ALBA/TCP countries, and wrote to the countries then comprising the Troika in order that Puerto Rico be on CELAC's agenda and Puerto Rican pro decolonization representatives be admitted in some capacity to the pending CELAC Summit. In 2011 they met in New York-UN and Havana with the ambassadors of Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, [Uruguay,] Venezuela and some of the English speaking Caribbean countries.

Only Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega Saavedra mentioned Puerto Rico during the CELAC Summit where the regional organism was founded in December 2011. The final declaration of the summit did not mention Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican organizations MINH, COPRONU and PIP persevered as did supporting countries – and the first Summit of CELAC (January 2013) – paragraph 21 – emphasized that Puerto Rico is Latin American and Caribbean and in taking note of UN resolutions on Puerto Rico, considers the item of interest to CELAC.

Efforts to strengthen this statement and for a Puerto Rican delegation to be invited to CELAC ensued. Efforts have been complex as decisions at any level of the politically pluralistic CELAC must be adopted by consensus according to its statutes; also, as reflected in the Second Summit's Final Declaration, CELAC is prioritizing the elimination of hunger and economic inequality. Conditions in Puerto Rico and its international representation have also been a factor.

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In this context, it is a great accomplishment that the Second Summit of Heads of State of the CELAC held in Havana adopted paragraphs on Puerto Rico and decolonization. Present in Havana on the sidelines of the Second Summit, supporting invitation of a Puerto Rican delegation into its sessions and other CELAC events, were members of the leadership of Puerto Rican organizations: MINH, PIP, COPRONU and the Cuba Solidarity Committee of Puerto Rico.

We are aware of the many and persistent efforts by Cuba, Venezuela and Ecuador which persevered regarding the mention and strengthening of the mention of Puerto Rico in the Final Declaration of the Second Summit. To them we are grateful as we are to all CELAC countries as they made possible the consensus on Puerto Rico. We are also aware of the need for more steps at the United Nations and another decisive step: further consensus and unity within Puerto Rico in advancing in the route to Puerto Rican independence. This step will lead to our goal of the incorporation of Puerto Rico into the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States as a sovereign country.

Summarized and translated from Spanish.

Committee for Puerto Rico at the United Nations