

## Puerto Rico and Decolonization Committee: Meetings Coverage

Escrito por UN Special Committee on Decolonization

Martes, 23 de Junio de 2015 09:59 - Última actualización Miércoles, 01 de Julio de 2015 15:55

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Crippling Trade Policies, Brain Drain, Sluggish Economy Constrain Puerto Rico's Progress, Petitioners Tell Decolonization Committee as Session Resumes Special Committee on Decolonization, 3rd & 4th Meetings (AM & PM).

General Assembly

Meetings Coverage

Puerto Rico remained locked in a cycle of poverty, brain drain and sluggish economic development caused by the “imperialist” policies of the United States, the Special Committee of 24 was told today as it heard from more than 30 petitioners on the matter and approved a resolution urging the United States to allow Puerto Ricans to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

Welcoming advocates from both Puerto Rico and its Diaspora community, the Special

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Committee — known formally as the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples — heard that more than half of the island's population lived in poverty, owing in large part to crippling trade policies imposed by the United States, the “colonial Power”.

Despite having been removed from the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1953, Puerto Rico remained very much a colony of the “Yankee empire”, petitioners stressed, calling for the island's independence from the United States.

In that vein, the representative of the Frente Autonomista urged the United Nations General Assembly to take action to ensure that the United States met its international obligations with regard to colonialism and took responsibility to decontaminate the Puerto Rican territory. Calling on that country to commit itself to a decolonization process, he demanded that all States help Puerto Rico with its economy and “stand on the right side of history”.

“This is an imperial situation,” asserted the representative of the American Association of Jurists, noting that the Territory was unable to establish trade relations with other countries, to the detriment of its economy. The “commonwealth” status hid the real situation of Puerto Ricans, which should be energetically condemned, he said.

The representative of the Movimiento Puertorriqueño Anticabotaje said that certain legal and trade restrictions — which had been put in place to stimulate American industry in Puerto Rico — constituted a “wall” that blocked economic development on the island. “We need access to markets which will make the flow of raw materials to the world at competitive prices possible,” she said.

The island's economy had deteriorated in recent years, said a representative of Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico, noting that half the population lived at the poverty level. Imported foods were required, which led to poor diets and high rates of non-communicable diseases. Meanwhile, the United States Government maintained the designation of “domestic terrorism” for Puerto Rican activists, such as Oscar Lopez Rivera, who had been held for more than three decades in American prisons.

Mr. Lopez Rivera — who had been convicted of seditious conspiracy in the United States — was a central figure in today's discussion, with many speakers calling for his immediate pardon and release. “He is a living legend in Puerto Rico,” said the representative of the National Lawyers Guild International Committee, adding that “the clamour for his release is a unifying factor, a call for justice and human rights across party lines, national boundaries, and religious and political beliefs”.

Among today's petitioners were those who sought, not independence, but equality under United States law as the nation's fifty-first state. “We have a half-way democracy,” said the representative of the group Igualdad, noting that, in a 2012 referendum, more than half of Puerto Rico's voting population had rejected the island's current status. In the United States, Puerto Rico was not represented at the federal level except for a resident commissioner who had no voice, she added.

Others stressed that the most basic right of citizenship — the right to vote for President — was still denied to more than 3.5 million Puerto Ricans. The representative of the Coalition for the Presidential Vote in Puerto Rico said that thousands of Puerto Rican soldiers had sacrificed their lives in every major war waged by the United States in defence of “freedom” and “democracy”, and yet they were denied the right to vote for those that governed them. “This harsh reality contradicts the United States’ public international discourse when it self-proclaims itself as the beacon of freedom and democracy worldwide,” he said.

Also participating today were representatives of Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Cuba, Ecuador (on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Syria.

The Special Committee will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 23 June, to continue its work.

### Opening Remarks

HOSSEIN MALEKI (Iran), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, called for reinvigorating the work of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, known as the Committee of 24, to expedite its efforts towards full decolonization around the world. “Unfortunately, we are still far away from the full realization of the 1963 declaration on decolonization,” he said.

The Movement reaffirmed its position on Puerto Rico, stressing the right of the people there to self-determination, he said. The colonial question there had been under the Special Committee’s consideration for more than 40 years, which had adopted 33 resolutions and decisions on the matter. The United States’ Government should assume its full responsibility to expedite Puerto Rican’s exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination and independence and to return the occupied land and installations of Vieques Island and the Roosevelt Naval Station.

### Introduction of Draft Resolution and Related Report

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba) introduced the draft resolution entitled, “Decision of the Special Committee of 23 June 2014 concerning Puerto Rico” (document A/AC.109/2015/L.6). “We have witnessed for many years the urgent demand of the international community to act on this worthy cause,” he said, noting that the Territory of Puerto Rico had not been able to exercise its right to self-determination for generations. He urged the United States’ Government to shoulder its responsibility in that regard, and said “we can no longer wait” to guarantee Puerto Ricans their right to freely determine their own political situation.

The draft resolution, he went on, reiterated that Puerto Rico was a Latin American nation with its own clear identity. It called for respecting the will of the Puerto Rican people, who had, on 6 November 2012, rejected its current status. The text took note of the various political and social forces in Puerto Rico and stressed that the political decisions of the United States in that respect were ineffective. The resolution took note of declarations adopted by the Summits of

the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which reiterated the character of Puerto Rico and expressed those countries' strong support for the inalienable right to self-determination and full independence.

Further, the text called on the Government of the United States to complete the return of occupied land and installations on Vieques Island and in Ceiba to the Puerto Rican people. It called on that Government to respect fundamental human rights, such as the right to health and economic development, and to expedite and cover the costs of cleaning up and decontaminating the areas previous used in military exercises through means that did not worsen the serious consequences of its military activity.

### Petitioners

MARK ANTHONY BIMBELA, Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico, said the United States had met its obligations under the Paris Treaty. His organization had appealed to the international community, producing the minimum requirements for decolonization. He urgently appealed for an end to the current situation, and urged the General Assembly to turn its attention to the matter. The colonial condition must be resolved, he stressed, noting that a 2012 referendum demonstrated the people's desire. He asked the Committee to take action.

PEDRO PIER LUISI, New Progressive Party, said the current situation in Puerto Rico was intolerable amid economic and health-care crises. Puerto Rico's plebiscite had demonstrated its desire to be recognized as a state within the United States. The Committee had drafted a resolution that affirmed that Puerto Rico had an inalienable right to self-determination and independence. While the Committee and Member States had supported Puerto Rico's sovereignty, its people had decided differently. Unless its people determined its own future, the draft resolution would become irrelevant.

JULIO MURIENTE, Movimiento Independista Nacional Hostosiano, said that the 117th anniversary of the United States invasion of Puerto Rico was coming up. In 1952, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico had been established; 63 years later, it was clear that commonwealth status as a decolonization tool was a "fraud". That status had been harmful to Puerto Rico, where unemployment was high and many Puerto Ricans were forced to emigrate to the United States due to lack of opportunity. Social violence, insolvency and many other problems also demonstrated the negative repercussions of the colonialism imposed on Puerto Rico.

RAMÓN NENADICH, Estado Nacional Soberano de Borinken, said the Boricua Nations were free and sovereign, with their own government and legal and political systems. Calling on all Member States to recognize the National Sovereign State of Borinken as the sole legitimate government of its people, he asked for support for its claim so that the General Assembly, during its seventieth session, could give it a seat as a Member State. The United States was an invading and occupying Power and lacked any legal and legitimate ownership of the territory or people, he said, demanding the immediate release of Oscar Lopez Rivera. He said a request for United Nations membership in 2014 had yet to be answered and underlined that its application for Member State status met all requirements. "If we are properly admitted as a

State by the General Assembly in the coming autumn, this will be the end of colonialism in our country,” he said.

JAN SUSLER, National Lawyers Guild International Committee, said that her organization had passed many resolutions reaffirming the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence and calling for the release of political prisoners. In that regard, Mr. Lopez Rivera had served more than 33 years in United States’ prisons, and his case was of a humanitarian character. “He is a living legend in Puerto Rico,” she said, noting that expressions from the Puerto Rican people revealed the deep collective injury reflected in Mr. Lopez Rivera’s ongoing, unjust and unjustifiable imprisonment. Expressions from around Latin America, including at a high level, were plentiful. “The clamour for his release is a unifying factor, a call for justice and human rights across party lines, national boundaries, and religious and political beliefs,” she stressed.

JUAN DALMAU, Puerto Rican Independence Party, said, since the Special Committee had met last year, a number of significant developments had taken place, including that Cuba and the United States had re-established relations, thereby lifting the decades-long economic embargo on the Caribbean nation. In addition, CELAC had reiterated its support for the decolonization of Puerto Rico. Amid a deep economic crisis, it was imperative to address the current situation, he said, underlining that the United States must, with urgency, release Mr. Lopez Rivera.

JOSÉ LÓPEZ SIERRA, Campaneros Unidos para la Descolonización de Puerto Rico, said his organization would be holding annual Oscar-Mandela demonstrations to underline the necessity of self-determination. Despite past efforts, Puerto Rico remained a colony and action must be taken urgently to rectify the situation. Colonialism was a crime against humanity, and as such, he demanded the release of Mr. Lopez Rivera and of Ana Belén Montes. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” he said.

JOSÉ UMPIERRE MELLADO, Acción Soberanista, said, last year, he had invited the Special Committee to visit Puerto Rico; that invitation stood. The General Assembly had determined that the Territory should have its own government. There were three main factors to consider in moving forward, including the political development of the people to determine their own future. A 1953 memorandum from the United States had recognized Puerto Rico, but it had not met the requirements of becoming an independent State. However, today, Puerto Rico had met those requirements, he said, demanding urgent action in that regard, as well as the release of Mr. Lopez Rivera.

JOSÉ ORTIZ VÉLEZ, Frente Autonomista, reiterated the call for the General Assembly to take action and ensure that the United States met its international obligations with regard to colonialism and took responsibility to decontaminate the Puerto Rican territory, which the military had exploited. He also called for the immediate release of the Mr. Lopez Rivera. For many decades, the Special Committee had supported those actions, but he had not seen any action. A worsening economic situation had been met with a passive United Nations and a lack of action on the part of the United States. Calling on that country to commit itself to a decolonization process, he demanded that all States help Puerto Rico with its economy and “stand on the right side of history”.

ROSANA LOPEZ LEON, Movimiento Puertorriqueño Anticabotaje, said that everyone had a right to an appropriate standard of living. She asked for the strongest support of the international community to “free my island” from the colonialism imposed upon it by the United States. There were legal and trade restrictions that had been put in place to stimulate American industry; however, studies carried out by international non-governmental organizations and others showed that such laws constituted a “wall” blocking economic development in Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans had for decades asked for a cessation of that law, however, it continued to remain in place. “We need access to markets which will make the flow of raw materials to the world at competitive prices possible,” she said, stressing that lifting trade restrictions was the only way such progress would be made.

MANUEL RIVERA, Puertorriqueños Unidos en Acción, denounced the poor situation in Puerto Rico, which was due to the imperialist policy of the United States, whose relationship with that Territory was one of subjugation and dependence. In the first years after the United States’ invasion, its agricultural interests were imposed on Puerto Rico and tariffs were put in place, which hampered the development of an independent economy and led to the emigration of thousands of Puerto Ricans. The general objective of the United States’ policy in Puerto Rico was to enhance its own interests. Puerto Rican retailers were suffering, as their wealth went to multinational companies. For each job created in United States’ “megastores” in Puerto Rico, jobs were lost to the local economy. The profits of multinationals in Puerto Rico were more than \$75 billion per year, he added.

ISAMEL MULLER VASQUEZ, Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico, asked the Special Committee to speak out against the prevailing regime in Puerto Rico. The United States’ imperialist policy imposed an alleged ban against drugs, which was used to control the population. Over the last nine years, the Puerto Rican economy had deteriorated even further, with 50 per cent of the population living at the poverty level and requiring public assistance. Meanwhile, United States’ companies were making great profits. Imported foods were required in the Territory, which led to poor diets and high rates of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes. Some 200 public schools had been closed, there was a shortage of medication, and indeed, every sector had been affected. The United States Government also maintained the designation of “domestic terrorism” for Puerto Rican activists, and held Mr. Lopez Rivera without charging him with any crime.

LARRY ALICEA RODRÍGUEZ, Colegio de Profesionales de Trabajo Social de Puerto Rico, called for the immediate release of Mr. Lopez Rivera. Turning to the health-care crisis, he said the current market-based system was penalizing the population, which was unable to organize universal health care. The colonialist Power had strengthened the education sector, but with a view to “erasing our culture”. His organization had helped to change the education system. Moving forward, power must be transferred to the people of Puerto Rico and colonialism must disappear from the face of the Earth.

EDUARDO VILLANUEVA MUÑOZ, Committee for Human Rights, said colonialism was a crime against humanity. Highlighting a range of grave concerns, he said that the death penalty, which continued to be enforced, ran counter to the people’s desire. Also, the Constitution, approved in 1952, had provided for the payment for external debt, with a price tag of millions of dollars,

which had been diverted from essential sectors, such as education and housing. Turning to environmental concerns, he said the United States Navy had polluted the land and subsoil, and had yet to fulfil its promises to address those and other issues. He also called on the United States to release political prisoners, including Mr. Lopez Rivera.

OLGA SANABRIA DÁVILA, Comité de Puerto Rico para Naciones Unidas, said, despite many efforts over the last decades, Puerto Rico had yet to be removed from the Committee's list of colonies. The current financial crisis had had a profound effect on its people, which must be addressed by a process of decolonization. The international community, and particularly the United Nations, must urgently provide the necessary assistance to support the process of decolonization, thus preventing continued human rights violations and abuses of the Puerto Ricans.

OSVALDO TOLEDO, American Association of Jurists, believed that anything said against the United States "empire" was considered treason, which hampered the right of self-expression of Puerto Ricans. "This is an imperial situation" in Puerto Rico, he said, adding that the Territory was unable to establish trade relations of its own with other countries, to the detriment of its economy. "We repudiate the use of the death penalty, which is against our values," but which continued to be imposed by the United States. Mr. Lopez Rivera, who had been advocating for Puerto Rico, had committed no crimes and should be released from prison immediately. There were problems with some resolutions and "we need common agreement" on the status of Puerto Rico. Moreover, the commonwealth status hid the real situation of Puerto Ricans, which should be energetically condemned.

BATASHA LYCIA ORA BANNAN, Latino Justice PRLDEF, said that Vieques Island had been a site, not only of military manoeuvres, but also of chemical and other types of testing. Its residents now suffered the effects of exposure to mercury, including cancer, asthma and other diseases. Detonation of bombs and the burning of vegetation in Vieques had also polluted the environment. The colonial Power claimed that none of that was harmful. While some 90,000 munitions had been removed, the decontamination process could take another 15 years or more. She, thus, urged an end to the clean-up.

ANNABEL GUILLEN, Igualdad, said that Puerto Ricans were American citizens, but they did not enjoy equal rights on par with other Americans. In the 2012 referendum, more than half of the voting population had rejected the island's current status. "We have a half-way democracy," she said. Puerto Rico was not represented at the federal level except for a resident commissioner who had no voice. "We are treated as second-class citizens, which is prohibited by the United States Constitution itself," she said. Puerto Rico had never asked for independence; it had clearly stated that it was an equal part of the nation to which it belonged. Puerto Ricans had expressed themselves through the vote. She asked the Special Committee to remove the resolution before it today and to listen to the voices of the Puerto Rican people, who wanted to become the fifty-first state of the United States.

JOSÉ ENRIQUE MELENDEZ ORTIZ, League of United Latin American Citizens, said there was an urgent need to take action on Puerto Rico. For one thing, economic investments were needed. He invited all Special Committee members to reflect on the body's inaction. While the

Committee could not ignore the application of resolution 1514 (1960), he said members had disregarded the fact that Puerto Ricans had been citizens of the United States for decades, with more living the United States than on the island. The General Assembly's approval of a resolution on the matter was not enough. Self-determination was not independence

OSVALDO BURGOS PÉREZ, Coalición Puertorriquena Contra la Pena de Muerte, said the death penalty imposed on the Puerto Rican people by the United States was a clear example of unacceptable and external colonial domination. Puerto Rico had abolished the practice in 1929 and reaffirmed that in its 1952 Constitution, and yet, the practice was still in place. The death penalty should be abolished and the practice should not be applied to political prisoners. As such, the Government of Puerto Rico should be able to oppose extradition to the United States. He urged the issue's inclusion in the relevant draft resolution and called the United States to abolish the death penalty.

JULIO JUAN ROLÓN, Puerto Rico No Se Vende, said the 1952 Constitution had effectively preserved Puerto Rico as a colony. Colonialism and the violation of human rights persisted today, he said, underlining the utmost importance of supporting independence for Puerto Rico. Resolution 1514 (1960) called for that, with a view to including Puerto Ricans in the process. Those groups that sought independence for Puerto Rico must work together to deal with "Yankee" colonialism and put all the "-isms" aside to achieve independence for the people.

GERALDO LUGO SEGARRA, Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico, said that the United States, the "empire of evil", had invaded Cuba and then Puerto Rico. No invasion could take place without the "despoiling" of native peoples. The United States had violated the rights of various communities and peoples, and had fought against those seeking Puerto Rico's liberation, including Mr. Lopez Rivera. Whichever party wins in the next United States' election would change nothing with regard to Puerto Rico. "How can we have a foreign debt of this level?", he asked, stressing that Puerto Rico rightly had no debt. There could be no equal relationship "between the slave and the lord", he said, urging the United States to withdraw from Puerto Rico.

ANA M. LOPEZ, New York Coordinator to Free Oscar Lopez Rivera, said that members of the Puerto Rican Diaspora had maintained that they should play a role in the self-determination process. Those who had been forced to emigrate had been branded with "second-class citizenship" and had faced racism, discrimination and poor living conditions. It was against that backdrop that her group fought to organize for the release of Mr. Lopez Rivera, who had spent 12 of his 33 years in prison in solitary confinement. He was a role model for social justice, she said, adding that "history was unfolding" as momentum grew to change the narrative around his case. Now is the time for one voice because, as there was a "small window of opportunity". United States President Barack Obama was the only one who could grant the unconditional pardon and release of Mr. Lopez Rivera.

CHRIS HOEPPNER, Socialist Workers Party, said that the five Cuban revolutionaries framed by the United States had all finally returned home to Cuba after serving many years in United States' prisons. Their release was part of a broader victory — the victory of the Cuban people over United States imperialism, which, for 56 years aimed to destroy their socialist revolution. A



successful struggle for Puerto Rico's independence was also in the interests of the vast majority of the American people. Puerto Ricans and the working class in the United States had common enemies — the United States' Government and the propertied ruling class it defended — and they shared a common struggle to get those exploiters off their backs.

EDWIN PAGÁN BONILLA, Generación 51, requested webcast transmission of the meeting and thanked the Chair for postponing action on the draft resolution to ensure that all petitioners' voices were heard. A passive right was not a real right, he said, underlining that 3.6 million Puerto Ricans suffered a lack of action in recognizing the results of the 2012 plebiscite. Raising a number of points that merited discussion, he said that, after six years without a proper Government, a re-evaluation of the situation was urgently needed. It was time for a real change for Puerto Rico, and the Committee should, in the current era, commit itself to decolonization.

ZOE M. LABOY, Ideological Statehood Reborn, said that she favoured statehood, noting that the essence of colonialism was inequality through systemic disenfranchisement. That was the reality of Puerto Rico's relationship with the federal Government. "So, yes, Puerto Rico is a colony," she said, asking the Committee why it was on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories when its people did not have a right to vote for a congressional delegation and President.

LUIS TORO GOYCO, Convergencia Nacional Boricua (CONABO), said that Puerto Rico had been the victim of horrific exploitation at the hands of the two most powerful empires in history, namely, Spain and the United States. The Spanish invasion imposed political subordination and exploited natural resources and the native Taino residents. The United States had then invaded the island and tricked its people with promises of democracy and freedom. That empire signed an illegal treaty with Spain without Puerto Rican input and "tried to assimilate us without consulting us". They had converted Puerto Rico's land into a sugar plantation and created a major military base there. The island had then been removed from the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, which was another "trick" imposed upon Puerto Rico.

HECTOR BERMUDEZ ZENÓN, Grupo por Igualdad y la Justicia de Puerto Rico, asked why the United States' seat was always empty when the Special Committee met. That country had become a dangerous place for African-American people, he said, citing many recent race-related killings there. "We're all decedents of Africans," he said. Since the United States came to Puerto Rico, there had been racism and war. Puerto Rico could be seen as a "dustbin" where all African-Americans could be relocated, he said, adding that the United States' military forces had come to occupy the island.

JESÚS MANGUAL, Fundación Puerto Rico en Marcha, Inc., said his people's official history was built on colonialism. Recent studies on genetics had shown that Puerto Ricans were predominantly indigenous, with a history dating back 5,000 years. Since the United States' invasion, independence movements had tried to make progress towards sovereignty. It was now time to continue on that path, he said, asking the Committee to take action.

RICHARD LOPEZ RODRIGUEZ, Fundación Puerto Rico en Marcha, Inc., said that, each year, the Special Committee came together to discuss Puerto Rico as a military enclave of the United States. "We are under fire" from that country, he said, noting that toxic human, pharmaceutical

and energy waste were disposed in Puerto Rico, without any accountability. In Arecibo, there was a fuel plant and an incinerator that burned plastic and other materials. The water there was polluted with lead. The United States flouted international environmental conventions, and waste deposits in Puerto Rico were legally sanctioned. “Silence and neglect kill,” he said, adding that the United States’ brazen actions — including military activities concealed under the cloak of energy production — should be taken to the General Assembly.

PHILLIP ARROYO, Coalition for the Presidential Vote in Puerto Rico, said that the United States’ Territory of Puerto Rico had been in that country’s possession since 1998 as a result of the Spanish American War, and the island’s inhabitants had been American citizens since 1917 as a result of the Foraker Act approved by the United States Congress. Since then, thousands of Puerto Rican soldiers had sacrificed their lives in every major war waged by the United States in defence of “freedom” and “democracy”, and yet, to this day, the 3.5 million Americans citizens in Puerto Rico were denied participation in the most basic and fundamental principle of the United States — the right to vote for those that governed them. “This harsh reality contradicts the United States’ public international discourse when it self-proclaims itself as the beacon of freedom and democracy worldwide,” he said.

ARTURO OTERO, Latinos United for a Progressive America, drawing attention to the empty seat behind the United States delegation’s name plate in the chamber, said that his organization was disappointed that no United States delegate was present for the meeting. He recalled that he had joined the United States military during a presidential election year. However, while he was able to go to war for the United States, he was prohibited from casting a ballot in that election. Raising the flag for freedom was essential in the world, but “what about Puerto Rico?” Calling the current situation racist, he requested the opportunity to vote in the upcoming United States presidential election and asked the Committee Chair to include that request in the draft resolution.

ALEXANDER GONZÁLEZ TORRES, High School Republicans of Puerto Rico, said that after more than a century of being treated as second-class citizens, it was essential that action was urgently taken to ensure Puerto Ricans full rights. The Special Committee had recognized their right to self-determination, and the 2012 plebiscite had resulted in a demonstration by the people that they wanted to be the fifty-first state in the United States. If democratic principles were to be respected, why then was the Committee still attempting to find new options, especially when Puerto Ricans had already spoken? “It is an insult to the electorate,” he said, adding that he hoped the discussions today would instead respect Puerto Rico’s right to self-determination.

JAVIER TORRES, Brigada Guarionex, said the Borinken was not the legitimate territory of the United States. Colonialism was illegal throughout the world and the colonial Government should not be recognized. The Boricuas people had long fought for their liberty and had resisted colonialism. It was well known that freedom was an inalienable right. The Borinken had a national identity and the Taina indigenous peoples were part of that. As such, the colonial Government should be abolished and resolution 1514 (1960) should be implemented without delay.

MARIA DE LOUDES GUZMÁN, Movimiento Unión Soberanista, said that, in her organization's fight against colonialism and sovereignty in Puerto Rico, several serious concerns had emerged, including the current financial crisis. Some 46 per cent of Puerto Rico's population lived below the poverty line, and national unemployment levels were high, there was toxic contamination on the land and drug trafficking was rampant. Additionally, Walmart, Walgreens and other "mega" stores had destroyed local businesses and fostered exploitation of labourers. Repression of nationalist movements continued, including the imprisonment of Mr. Lopez Rivera. In that light, she underscored the need for urgent action.

MARY ANNE GRADY FLORES, Ithaca Catholic Workers Vieques Support Group, urged the Committee to insist once again that the United States Navy pay restitution, including medical expenses, and meet the four demands of the people of Vieques: stop detonations of unexploded ordnance and completely remove all from the bombing practice zone; immediately remove all hazardous materials, including radioactive depleted uranium dust and shells, and end all burning in the impact zone; immediately return the lands now occupied by the Department of Fish and Wildlife to their rightful owners, the people of Vieques; and include the citizens of Vieques at the table for the planning and development of their island and put a moratorium on the sale of the Vieques lands to big developers.

### Statements

AGUSTÍN FORNELL (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of CELAC, said Heads of State and Government of CELAC, at the summit in Costa Rica, had reiterated the importance of the Latin American and Caribbean character of Puerto Rico. CELAC member countries had committed themselves to continue working, in line with international law and General Assembly resolution 1514 (1960) (XV), to free the region of colonialism and colonies. It was important to refer to the Havana Declaration of 2014, in which Heads of State and Government had entrusted the CELAC Quartet, together with the participation of other Member States, to present proposals on the question of Puerto Rico.

Making a statement in his national capacity, he said that he supported a free and independent process that would allow Puerto Rico to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination and independence. The Special Committee had approved more than 30 resolutions on the cause of Puerto Rico, he said, urging other nations to join together in a process to encourage the United States to allow Puerto Rico to exercise its self-determination right. All occupied territories must be rid of conquerors. He urged the United States to free Mr. Lopez Rivera, whose case had taken on humanitarian proportions.

RAFAEL DARÍO RAMÍREZ CARREÑO (Venezuela), associating with CELAC and the Non-Aligned Movement, said that colonial situations contravened international law and required the international community to step up its efforts to end colonialism around the world. Puerto Rico had been subjected to a form of colonialism for centuries, and its independence was championed throughout his region and the world. Simón Bolívar had supported Puerto Rico's independence; today that issue was still outstanding. "It's a question of unnegotiable principles," he said, urging the international community to put an end to the "tutelage" system, which had been in place in Puerto Rico for decades.

The Government of the United States should, as soon as possible, take steps to ensure that the people of Puerto Rico enjoyed their human rights. The colonial situation had had a negative impact on the economy and society of Puerto Rico, he said, noting that, since 2006, there had been a 3 per cent drop in Puerto Rico's gross domestic product (GDP). Mr. Lopez Rivera had been imprisoned longer than any other political prisoner in the world, he noted, urging his immediate release. "Viva Puerto Rico, free and independent," he concluded.

MARÍA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua) said that, thanks to the diligence of the Chair, the present meeting was now being webcast. Associating herself with the Non-Aligned Movement and CELAC, she recalled that the Special Committee had recently met — for the first time in Latin America — in her country. The fight that had freed the people of Nicaragua and others in the region was still alive. CELAC had made Puerto Rico part of its agenda and had submitted proposals to help the Territory make its own decisions, including on urgent social and economic issues. Indeed, her region should be entirely free of colonialism. Puerto Rico was a State, and not a territory, but it was subjugated by the United States. Indeed, the status of Puerto Rico was a remnant of an era of submission, in which Latin America and the Caribbean had suffered. The United States should meet its commitments in line with the Special Committee and United Nations Charter. Nicaragua had co-sponsored the draft resolution before the Committee today.

SACHA SERGIO LLORENTTY SOLÍZ (Bolivia), associating with the Non-Aligned Movement and CELAC, said occupying countries continued to turn a deaf ear to appeals for decolonization. Despite various resolutions and initiatives, the lengthy history of United States' occupation in Puerto Rico was outrageous for a range of reasons, including the prohibition of Puerto Ricans to choose their own destiny. His delegation firmly supported the inalienable right to self-determination and demanded that the United States decontaminate the areas used for military manoeuvres. Puerto Ricans had an inalienable right to self-determination in a region that was a zone of peace. Bolivia urged the United States' Government to end the illegal situation of political prisoners, including of Mr. Lopez Rivera.

IHAB HAMED (Syria) said the Committee had been addressing the issue of Puerto Rico for more than three decades, approving more than 30 resolutions and had requested that the United States speed up the process. Yet, despite those efforts, justice eluded Puerto Rico's people, who had lived under repression. Associating with the Non-Aligned Movement's statement, he called on the United States to take action on today's resolution and to free Mr. Lopez Rivera, who was arrested because he had demanded independence and freedom for his people.

The Committee then approved, without a vote, draft resolution "L.6".

Taking the floor following the approval of the resolution, Mr. LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba) pointed out several irregularities, namely with regard to the lack of webcast during the morning session. He thanked members of the Special Committee for approving the resolution by consensus, saying that the statements made today were firm calls for Puerto Rico's right to self-determination. The historical links of solidarity between the peoples of Cuba and Puerto Rico remained unbroken for more than a century, including during the early times of

## **Puerto Rico and Decolonization Committee: Meetings Coverage**

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colonization and the bloody struggles for independence. Today, Mr. López Rivera represented the plight of the Puerto Rican people, who “will never bend”; he would leave prison with dignity and honour. Co-sponsoring today’s resolution was part of Cuba’s commitment to its friend and neighbour, Puerto Rico, said the speaker.