

Special Decolonization Committee Approves Annual Self-determination Text

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Noting with concern the way in which political insubordination impedes Puerto Rico's ability to tackle its serious economic and social problems, the Special Committee on Decolonization approved a draft resolution today that calls once again upon the United States to shoulder its responsibility to facilitate the realization of the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination.

2019 Session, 5th & 6th Meetings (AM & PM) 24 June 2019

Speakers Voice Concern about Environmental, Fiscal Challenges of Puerto Rico as Special Decolonization Committee Approves Annual Self-determination Text

Panel Hears Petitioners Describe Health-care Woes, Increased School Closures, Sell-off of Assets to Foreign Interests

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Noting with concern the way in which political insubordination impedes Puerto Rico's ability to tackle its serious economic and social problems, the Special Committee on Decolonization approved a draft resolution today that calls once again upon the United States to shoulder its responsibility to facilitate the realization of the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination.

More than 50 petitioners from Puerto Rican advocacy groups and international allies addressed the Special Committee, with many denouncing the colonial occupation of the Territory by the United States. Several called for Puerto Rico to be reinstated on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories; others suggested that it be admitted to the United Nations as the Sovereign State of Borinken. Speakers also called attention to the Territory's environmental challenges, including climate change and the devastating aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

Approving its annual draft resolution on Puerto Rico without a vote, the Special Committee — formally known 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 — called on the Government of the United States to promote a process that enables Puerto Ricans to fully exercise their right to self-determination and independence, and to take decisions in a sovereign manner to address their challenges. It also noted with concern that, by virtue of the decision by the United States Congress under the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act — known as PROMESA — the already weakened area in which the prevailing regime of political and economic subordination in Puerto Rico operates is reduced any further.

The Special Committee further expressed serious concern about actions carried out against Puerto Rican independence activists and encouraged investigations into those actions, while

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also requesting that the General Assembly comprehensively consider the question of Puerto Rico and decide on the issue as soon as possible.

Oscar López Rivera of Fundación OLR Libertá — a Puerto Rican political prisoner held in the United States for more than 35 years and released in 2017 by former President Barack Obama — said that the only way Puerto Rico can only exist as a Latin American and Caribbean nation is by becoming an independent and sovereign nation. Otherwise, it will lose its national identity, culture, language and way of life. “What’s happening in Puerto Rico is the culmination of colonialism,” he said, emphasizing that it is time for the General Assembly to rectify the mistake it made in 1953 when it took Puerto Rico off the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Agreeing, Edgardo Roman-Espada of the Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Puerto Rico added that the Special Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it ask the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the international status of Puerto Rico and the fiduciary responsibility of the United States. Trilce Torres Lopez of the Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico said that Puerto Rico’s absence from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories means it cannot access support and services from the United Nations.

Many speakers drew attention to the impact the Financial Oversight and Management Board of Puerto Rico is having on the social, economic and political life of Puerto Rico and its estimated 3.2 million inhabitants. Established through the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), adopted by the United States Congress in 2016, that entity oversees the payment of Puerto Rico’s \$70 billion debt.

Julio Ortiz-Luquis of the Boricuas Unidos en la Diaspora said the Board is imposing austerity

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measures while robbing the pockets of the people. Millions of Puerto Ricans are going elsewhere while the island's assets are being sold off to foreign interests.

"We need to revise our relationship with the United States," said Maria de Lourdes Santiago of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, who emphasized that Puerto Rico has yet to recover from the devastating impact of fatal hurricanes in 2017. The United States has a moral imperative to give Puerto Ricans the right to decide their own future, she added.

Walter Alomar of the Organization for Culture of Hispanic Origins said hundreds of schools in Puerto Rico are closed and rotting due to fiscal austerity measures. Also underlining the challenges faced by health care workers, he said Puerto Ricans have become a permanent underclass. "If I didn't know any better, I would say this systemic sociocultural process of dismantling the education system is intentional," he said.

Puerto Rico cannot participate in the global economy, nor can it care for its own needs, he said, emphasizing also its vulnerability to climate change. He said the Assembly should address the situation in Puerto Rico, adding that the Special Committee should call for a free Puerto Rico, which should have the opportunity for independence and self-determination.

"The legacy of United States colonialism in Puerto Rico has been, is now and will always be one of racism, exploitation, forced relocation, repression, assassination and incarceration," said Benjamin Ramos Rosado of the ProLibertad Freedom Campaign.

Jihad Abdulmumit of the National Jericho Movement, warned the Special Committee not to be confused by the touted concept of citizenship, explaining that no Puerto Rican was ever asked, nor offered a choice, about becoming a citizen of the United States. President Donald Trump throwing paper towels to Puerto Ricans impacted by Hurricane Maria demonstrated the relationship between colonizer and colonized, he stated.

Describing the situation in Puerto Rico as dire, John Melendez Rivera of the Frente Independentista Boricua said the United States has launched economic warfare against the Territory's people. Emphasizing that independence is the only way forward, he urged the United Nations — having failed the people of Puerto Rico in the past — not to fail them again as the fight for independence ensues.

The Special Committee also heard the following petitioners: National Hostos Movement for the Independence of Puerto Rico; National Lawyers Guild; Las Lolitas en su Centenario; National Sovereign State of Borinken; Movimiento de Conciencia; Legislatura Municipal de San Juan; Comité Unidos por Borinquen en Hostos; Comites de la Resistencia Boricua; Partido del Pueblo Trabajador; LatinoJustice PRLDEF; Consejo Amplio Unitario de Solidaridad y Accion; Boricuas Unidos en la Diaspora; Movimiento Union Soberanista; Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico; Colegio de Profesionales del Trabajo Social de Puerto Rico; Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas; Compañeros Unidos para la Descolonizacion de Puerto Rico; Socialist Workers Party; Congreso del Estado de Veracruz, Mexico; A Call to Action on Puerto Rico; Comité de Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico; Brigada Guarionex; Comité de Puerto Rico en Naciones Unidas; Asociacion Americana de Juristas; Conferencia Internacional por La Paz and La Fundacion por la Paz, la Justicia y el Medio Ambiente; Generation 51; Centro Cultural Bieke; Enlace Cultural Villa Zapata; Fuerza de la Revolucion; Hostos Community College; Coalicion Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte; League of United Latin American Citizens; Puerto Rico Me Llama; Alianza Patria; Casa de Las Américas New York; Grupo por la Igualdad y la Justicia de Puerto Rico; Jornada Por La Dignidad Boricua; Puertorriqueños

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Unidos En Accion; and Instituto Puertorriqueño de Relaciones Internacionales.

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

The Special Committee will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 25 June, to continue its work.

Question of Puerto Rico

OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA, Fundación OLR Libertá, said that the only way Puerto Rico can continue existing as a Latin American and Caribbean nation is by being decolonized and becoming an independent and sovereign nation. Otherwise, it will lose its national identity, culture, language and way of life. The United States Government invaded and occupied Puerto Rico militarily in 1898. In 2016, the United States Supreme Court made it clear that Puerto Rico is a Territory of the United States with no sovereign power. Puerto Ricans have never had the opportunity to govern themselves and neither have they ever exercised their inalienable right of self-determination. "I believe it is time for the United Nations General Assembly to rectify the mistake it made in 1953, by taking Puerto Rico off the list of non-self-governing countries...", he said. "What's happening in Puerto Rico is the culmination of colonialism."

EDGARDO ROMAN-ESPADA, Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Puerto Rico, described Puerto Rico as an example of the catastrophe that results from colonialism. In the wake of a 2018 decision by the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, basic human rights are under threat. His group is asking the Special Committee to affirm that Puerto Rico is not a Non-Self-Governing Territory and to recommend that the General Assembly take steps to end its colonial subordination. It should also recommend that the Assembly ask the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the international status of Puerto Rico and the fiduciary responsibility of the United States. Moreover, it should ask the United States, as the administering Power, to submit a report on the economic, political and social crisis.

MARIA DE LOURDES SANTIAGO, Puerto Rican Independence Party, emphasizing that Puerto Rico has yet to recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, said there are still people who do not realize that the Territory is a colony of the United States. Pointing to a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*

magazine titled “America’s Forgotten Colony”, she said the United States has a moral imperative to give Puerto Ricans the right to decide their own future. “We need to revise our relationship with the United States,” she said, asserting that Puerto Rico is a colony and that it is increasingly evident that political stability is not possible under the current framework. She went on to draw attention to the Territory’s debt burden and the threat of bankruptcy, even as it remains a fiscal refuge for the United States. Given the situation, it is increasingly relevant for international organizations such as the United Nations to become engaged, she said.

WILMA REVERON COLLAZO, National Hostos Movement for the Independence of Puerto Rico, said that, since 1953, the United States considered the question of Puerto Rico a domestic matter, when the Territory was removed from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. The United States has made a false representation and violated international law. Puerto Ricans have lived under the colonial rule of the United States for 121 years. A Harvard University

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study argues that Puerto Rico is a Non-Self-Governing Territory. It is a forgotten colony. The Special Committee can support Puerto Rico's efforts towards decolonization by helping to urge the United States to come to the negotiating table.

JAN SUSLER, National Lawyers Guild, said that the work of the Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico is hardly subject to public scrutiny. Rather, it fights to maintain secrecy. Private organizations have had to litigate in order to shed light on its inner workings, only to discover "evidence, in black and white, how the United States Government exercises a colonial Power relationship over Puerto Rico through the Board". The Special Committee should seek cooperation from the United States to end the colonial situation of Puerto Rico.

INES MONGIL, Las Lolitas en su Centenario, described the colonial situation in Puerto Rico as genocide, as North American imperialism has destroyed everything, including Puerto Ricans' identity, culture, livelihood and the environment. After Hurricane Maria, Puerto Ricans saw their families separated and forced to migrate in search of a better future. The subsequent closure of schools and the University of Puerto Rico crushed the aspirations of the island's youth. The Government-supported AES coal plant has caused cancer among the population and agricultural giants like Monsanto are poisoning fertile lands. The Special Committee must carry out its mandate and bring the case of Puerto Rico to the General Assembly.

RAMÓN NENADICH, head of state, National Sovereign State of Borinken, requested the Chair of the Special Committee to submit to the Secretary-General a petition requesting that the Security Council consider its request for membership in the United Nations. No response was received when a similar petition was submitted to the Secretary-General several months ago, he said. If the Council rejects or defers the request, it should report on its deliberations and decision to the Assembly, he said, describing United Nations membership as the only possible way to ensure decolonization.

ELIZAR MOLINA PEREZ, Movimiento de Conciencia, said the failure of the United States to assist Puerto Rico after the fatal hurricanes of 2017 was a crime against humanity. Underscoring the level of control that the United States wields over the territory, he said its current situation can be attributed to Wall Street. “They are the vultures here,” he said. Asking the United Nations for its help, he said the Organization cannot speak of self-determination so long as his people could not even ensure their own identity as Puerto Ricans.

MARCO ANTONIO RIGAU, Legislatura Municipal de San Juan, said that one must be very cynical to deny that Puerto Rico is a colony. He requested the Special Committee to reject the course of action taken by the United States since the adoption of the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act, known as PROMESA, and the establishment of the fiscal control board. The Government of the United States must recognize that its relationship with Puerto Rico is not an internal matter, he said, adding that resolving the colonial situation would be a form of reparations. “We must find a way for the United States to understand that it is in the best interests of its citizens and of Puerto Ricans to resolve the colonial subordination of Puerto Rico,” he said, inviting the Special Committee to ask the Assembly to look into the situation in the territory.

ANA LOPEZ, Comité Unidos por Borinquen en Hostos, said that the colonial situation in Puerto Rico is now occurring in the Puerto Rican diaspora community in the United States. Six million Puerto Ricans have been forced to migrate to the United States as second-class citizens, she said, describing this “internal colonialism” as an act of genocide. It was an error that the United Nations removed Puerto Rico from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

MANUEL MELENDEZ LAVANDERO, Comites de la Resistencia Boricua, said it is difficult to bring children into his world, where being born means being born into colonization. What's happening is a process of extinction, he said.

MARIANA NOGALES MOLINELLI, Partido del Pueblo Trabajador, said Puerto Rico is a colony and described how the United States federal law and the fiscal control board are exerting control over Puerto Rico's budgetary matters and have restricted how the island's scant resources are spent. This has led to school closures, a reduction in social and government services, a worsening of labor conditions and increased violence, among other ills. The PROMESA Act keeps Puerto Rico in a constant state of debt, impeding socioeconomic development. The lack of electricity in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria claimed thousands of lives. She called on the Special Committee to demand that the United States Government take immediate action toward the decolonization of Puerto Rico and that the fiscal control board end its policies which contradict international law.

NATASHA LYCIA ORA BANNAN, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, said that Puerto Rico is the largest Non-Self-Governing Territory and urged the Special Committee to further its work to support decolonization of the Territory. Citing the 2016 United States Supreme Court decision, she said Puerto Rico is a political entity with no sovereignty that has been subjected to United States' rule.

WALTER ALOMAR, Organization for Culture of Hispanic Origins, recalled that he visited Puerto Rico in January in the hopes of identifying a location for a community-based mental health and substance abuse agency. Around the island, hundreds of schools are closed and rotting due to fiscal austerity measures, and the United States Government is now making them available for purchase. Also underlining challenges faced by health care workers there in

accessing medical reimbursements, he said all those challenges make clear the Government's "blatant disregard for everyone and everything on the island". Puerto Ricans have become a permanent underclass, robbed of their opportunity to advance through learning. "If I didn't know any better, I would say this systemic sociocultural process of dismantling the education system is intentional," he stressed, underscoring the need to "get our heads out of the sand, take his proposal to the General Assembly, make the Senate institute a change and remove the colonial status from the island".

DANIEL VILA, Consejo Amplio Unitario de Solidaridad y Accion, recalling the Territory's debt burden of more than \$70 billion, said the neo-liberal policies of the Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico — "a foreign body" — are impoverishing pensioners and others in the Territory. Recalling successive petitions by the National Sovereign State of Borinken for membership in the United Nations, he said that five plebiscites in Puerto Rico have resulted in nothing. Any initiative that imposes greater United States control should be rejected. He called for a resolution that would request a review of the National Sovereign State of Borinken for admission to the Organization as a full-fledged member.

JULIO ORTIZ-LUQUIS, Boricuas Unidos en la Diaspora, recalling Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) titled Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, said the future of Puerto Rico is being determined by the Financial Oversight and Management Board, which is imposing austerity measures while robbing the pockets of the people. Millions of Puerto Ricans are going elsewhere while Puerto Rican assets are being sold off to foreign interests. Puerto Rico cannot participate in the global economy, nor can it care for its own needs, he said, emphasizing also its vulnerability to climate change. He said the Assembly should address the situation in Puerto Rico, adding that the Special Committee should call for a free Puerto Rico, which should have the opportunity for independence and self-determination.

MARIA DE LOURDES GUZMAN, Movimiento Union Soberanista, calling for an independent

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Puerto Rico, said the United States is engaged in a farce, deceiving the United Nations and the world that the Territory has its own Constitution and self-government when the Financial Oversight and Management Board has appropriated its budget and redistributed assets as it sees fit to pay back the Territory's debt. Recalling that Hurricane Maria led to a further exodus of Puerto Ricans, she said the Board's measures are ruining her country. She expressed the wish that the situation be brought before the Assembly with a view to ending an illegal occupation.

TRILCE TORRES LOPEZ, Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico, noted that Puerto Rico has no access to the support and services extended by the United Nations to other Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Bureau of the Special Committee can change that by adding Puerto Rico to the list of such territories. Otherwise resolution 1514 (XV) will be a dead letter even if the Assembly has declared the period 2011–2020 as the third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. Emphasizing that colonialism has put Puerto Rico in a precarious situation, she also recommended that the Special Committee enter into a dialogue with the administering Power.

MABEL LOPEZ ORTIZ, Colegio de Profesionales del Trabajo Social de Puerto Rico, described how Puerto Ricans suffer psychologically from colonialism, which destroyed the island's culture and exploited its resources and wealth. Colonialism has been imposed on Africa, leading to the extinction of many of the continent's indigenous people. Unfortunately, this is not a thing of the past, she said, denouncing the United States policy as an attack on education in Puerto Rico.

JOCELYN VELAZQUEZ, Jornada Se Acabaron Las Promesas, denounced the United States' continued control over Puerto Rico as a crime. Despite decades of effort to decolonize the island, colonialism is continuing. This is not acceptable. She expressed appreciation for the solidarity shown by countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela in rejecting the United

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States policy on Puerto Rico.

BENJAMIN RAMOS ROSADO, The ProLibertad Freedom Campaign, said the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898 and has completely disregarded and abandoned Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria. “The legacy of United States colonialism in Puerto Rico has been, is now and will always be one of racism, exploitation, forced relocation, repression, assassination and incarceration,” he said. Turning to the incarceration and mistreatment of Nina Droz Franco and Ana Belen Montes, he said the former was arrested while protesting the fiscal control board and the latter for sharing information she collected for the United States Government against Cuba with the Cuban Government. “As I speak, Nina has yet to receive medical care for her various physical ailments and she’s being denied her right to receive mail,” he said. Meanwhile Ana Belen Montes’ case has nothing to do with Puerto Rico. He called on the Special Committee to pass a resolution calling for an end to the United States colonization of Puerto Rico and help set forth the release of Nina Droz Franco and Ana Belen Montes. This topic should be brought before the General Assembly, he added.

JOSE LOPEZ SIERRA, Compañeros Unidos para la Descolonizacion de Puerto Rico, said that, although 9 per cent of the population in New York are affected by the colonialization of Puerto Rico, media organizations, including *The New York Times* and *New York Post*, have not published articles about the annual hearings at the United Nations about this situation. Few know the United States Government has violated the United Nations Charter for the past 74 years and has ignored 37 United Nations resolutions. The international community could greatly help to eradicate colonialism by eradicating ignorance. The United Nations Headquarters should be moved to a country that respects the rule of law. “We must send a clear and strong message before beginning the fourth decade [on decolonization] that we are serious about achieving our goal,” he said, that injustice will not be tolerated.

SETH GALINSKY, Socialist Workers Party, joined with other speakers in demanding that the United States “take its boot off Puerto Rico”. That fight is one that belongs to working people everywhere, as large United States banks and corporations continue to bleed Puerto Rico. “Are the big pharmaceutical companies there out of charity? No, they are there for cheap labour and super profits,” he said, stressing that capitalists make billions by keeping wages down, buying up the island’s resources cheap and selling dear. Voicing support for the demand to open the books to the scrutiny of an elected committee of Puerto Rico’s working people – and to cancel all of the island’s debt immediately – he said what the people need is not dependency on demeaning welfare programmes but jobs, affordable housing, mass transit and hospitals. “The old imperialist world order is coming apart at the seams,” he declared, adding that capitalist rulers in crisis “are taking it out on the backs of working people everywhere”.

ADRIANA ESTHER MARTINEZ SANCHEZ, Congreso del Estado de Veracruz, Mexico, called for the freedom of Puerto Rico, which should be accepted as a member of the United Nations and appealed to the Security Council and the General Assembly to support such efforts.

LORRAINE LIRIANO, A Call to Action on Puerto Rico, said the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico stems from the inability of its people to make their own decisions. Measures adopted by the fiscal control board are having a serious impact, including school closures, reduced pensions, the sale of public lands and a reduction in the minimum wage for younger workers. The colonial Government does not care, he said, adding that corporations are destroying the flora and fauna in acts of environmental terrorism. “We have to wonder if this is not premediated genocide,” she said, calling for the Special Committee to take immediate action.

EDUARDO VILLANUEVA-MUÑOZ, Comité de Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico, said the

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University of Puerto Rico is being turned into a technical college. Many students have been imprisoned and put on trial for exercising their right to protect that institution, which is in danger of dying. Protest is being criminalized and free thinking is being stifled. Comparing the members of the Financial Oversight and Management Board to “the seven plagues of Egypt”, he said their plan is to punish Puerto Rico for resisting the interventionist and militarist policies of the United States. He urged the United States to engage in a true decolonization process and for the Special Committee to act before genocide is complete and the Puerto Rican nation has disappeared.

JOSÉ L. NIEVES, Brigada Guarionex, wondered how it is possible in the twenty-first century for the United States to carry out crimes against the Borinken nation. Everything in the Territory is under the control of the United States, which takes more than it gives. He called for the Territory’s debt to be annulled and for independence to be exercised as an immediate right. Requesting the Special Committee to intervene on behalf of the Borinken people, he called for all powers usurped by the United States to be transferred back to the Territory.

OLGA SANABRIA, Comité de Puerto Rico en Naciones Unidas, drawing attention to the two articles recently published in *Foreign Policy* and *Harvard Law Review* *For*
magazines about the colonial situation in Puerto Rico, urged the United States to implement General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). With the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism ending in 2020 and after 28 years of the existence of the Special Committee, the process of decolonization of Puerto Rico has not been concluded. This matter needs urgent attention.

VANESSA RAMOS, Asociación Americana de Juristas, urged the General Assembly, based

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on its resolution 1514 (XV), to vote to make Puerto Rico a sovereign Latin American and Caribbean country, also recommending that the Special Committee take further steps to address poverty in Puerto Rico and the lack of the will of the United States to promote development there. Also expressing concern about food security and health issues in Vieques, she said that the case of Puerto Rico should be brought before the General Assembly.

ALFREDO ROJAS DIAZ DURAN, Conferencia Internacional por La Paz and La Fundacion por la Paz, la Justicia y el Medio Ambiente

, said that the Security Council must analyse the question of Borinquen and take a stand on the issue as it is a case of foreign intervention. Such intervention is a crime against humanity and must be brought to the International Court of Justice. The Secretary-General should ask the Security Council to act and the General Assembly to vote on the issue.

EDWIN PAGAN BONILLA, Generation 51, asked the Special Committee for its opinion on the difference between apartheid and the system of inequality that exists in Puerto Rico. He urged the Government of the United States to comply with the democratic will of the people of the territory, warning that those who fail to respond in the affirmative will be sanctioned by history.

MYRNA VEDA PAGAN GOMEZ, Centro Cultural Bieke, who sang a song, said that Puerto Rico is experiencing a health crisis due to the closure of a hospital in the wake of Hurricane Maria. Several illnesses have reached historic levels. Trade and development are at a standstill and a “tsunami of gentrification” is unfolding. The United States Navy, meanwhile, is carrying out a superficial cleanup of Vieques. “We need action, not more words,” she said, emphasizing that the situation of Puerto Rico belongs in the Assembly.

SAMUEL MONCADA (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, recalled that a ministerial conference in April 2018 expressed concern about the political insubordination of the Puerto Rican people and the financial and humanitarian challenges that they face, as well as the imposition of a fiscal control board on the Government in San Juan, undermining its authority. The Non-Aligned Movement appeals to the Government of the United States to assume its full responsibility and accelerate a process that allows Puerto Ricans to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

MAIRA MARIELA MACDONAL ÁLVAREZ (Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), underscored the Latin American and Caribbean nature of Puerto Rico. Member States of CELAC are committed to continue working in the context of international law and Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) to ensure that the region is free of colonialism. Speaking in her national capacity, she called for the start of a process that would enable Puerto Rico to exercise its right to independence in keeping with resolution 1514 (XV) and resolutions of the Special Committee. She also called for compliance with the Assembly resolution of 10 December 2010 that declared the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

ANA SILVIA RODRÍGUEZ ABASCAL (Cuba) said that the definitive solution to Puerto Rico's fate is not an internal United States issue, but a matter for the Special Committee and the entire international community. Expressing solidarity with the brotherly people of Puerto Rico, she said: "Our peoples were born in the Caribbean Sea. Together, we were plundered and together we received African and Spanish blood, a mixture that forged our own race and identity." She recalled that Puerto Ricans, including Major General Juan Rius Rivera, shed their blood on the battlefield of the Cuban scrublands fighting for independence against Spanish colonialism.

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MOUNZER MOUNZER (Syria), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, supported the struggle of the people of Puerto Rico for independence, noting that this year marks the 121st anniversary of the United States relationship with Puerto Rico. Dozens of resolutions have been adopted to affirm their right to self-determination and independence in line with resolution 1514 (XV), he said, insisting that Puerto Rico belongs to the Latin American and Caribbean region. Syria hopes that the resolution tabled by Cuba will be adopted by consensus.

MANUEL ANTONIO MADRIZ FORNOS (Nicaragua), associating himself with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), expressed its support for the self-determination of Puerto Rico, which should not be an exception in the process of eradicating colonialism. His delegation co-sponsored the draft resolution, calling for its adoption by consensus.

The representatives of China expressed its support for the draft resolution tabled by Cuba.

MOHAMMAD REZA SAHRAEI (Iran), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, expressed its full support for the self-determination of Puerto Rico on the basis on resolution 1514 (XV), and hoped that the resolution would be adopted by consensus.

AGUSTIN VILLA CORDOVA, Enlace Cultural Villa Zapata, said that he is speaking to defend the right of Puerto Rico, describing how freedom fighters defended Latin America from

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aggressors, including his own country Mexico. Demanding full independence of Puerto Rico, he urged the General Assembly to heed the request for Puerto Rico's self-determination and its seat in the 193-nation body.

JIHAD ABDULMUMIT, National Jericho Movement, said his organization advocates for the release of political prisoners in the United States who have fought for the self-determination of people of colour and human rights. Emphasizing that Puerto Rico is indeed a colony of the United States, he warned the Special Committee not to be confused by the touted concept of citizenship. No Puerto Rican was ever asked, nor offered a choice, about becoming a citizen of the United States. Islanders lack any voting representation in the United States Congress and the right to vote in presidential elections, he said, noting that Hurricane Maria and its lingering devastation made clear how powerless the Government and people of the island are. "The act of President Trump throwing paper towels to the people demonstrates the nature of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized," he stressed, asking the Special Committee to take informed testimonies and wield the force needed to compel the General Assembly to place the matter of Puerto Rico's colonization "front and centre on the world stage".

RAMON ESTRELLA, Fuerza de la Revolucion, said that generations of independence fighters never stopped their pursuit of self-determination. However, practitioners of imperialist and colonialist fundamentalism turned deaf ears to them, he said, expressing a determination to build a country he and his fellow people desire, without foreign intervention. Puerto Rico is not a failed country.

NELSON TORRES, Hostos Community College, introducing himself as a professor from the Bronx in New York, discussed the legal status of Puerto Rico, recalling that the Supreme Court of the United States — in an era when it was dominated by white supremacists — adopted the concept of a non-incorporated territory. That same court had an opportunity in 2016 to correct

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that injustice, but it chose instead to perpetuate colonialism. In usurping the power of the elected branches of Government in the Territory, the fiscal supervision board is creating more problems than it has solved. Puerto Rico is a Latin American nation and that is why it has never been incorporated. Puerto Ricans can adopt Anglo-Saxon principles, “but this is not who we are”, he said, urging the Special Committee to promote the self-determination of the Puerto Rican people.

EVELYN MICHELLE ROMAN MONTALVO, Coalicion Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte, said the death penalty dramatizes the fact that Puerto Rico is subjected to a foreign Power. The Territory abolished the death penalty in 1929, two years after its most recent execution, but its restoration remains possible, she said, noting that the world in recent years has been moving towards abolition of the death penalty.

JOSE ENRIQUE MELENDEZ, League of United Latin American Citizens, said it is absurd for the Special Committee to meet every year and adopt resolutions on independence that have no impact because nothing happens in the General Assembly. Emphasizing that independence is not the only available decolonization measure, he said that statehood would guarantee the equality to which Puerto Ricans are entitled.

JOSE HERNANDEZ, Puerto Rico Me Llama, said that 37 resolutions on decolonization of Puerto Rico have been adopted over the past 47 years but not a single resolution has been observed. The United States has no intention of observing them. Puerto Rico should remain on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories until it achieves full independence.

NINA VALEDON, Alianza Patria, denounced the United States discriminatory political and economic policy for Puerto Rico and those practices, demonstrated in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, should come under the scrutiny of the international community. With the hurricane season approaching, she called for an end to the fiscal austerity plan imposed by the United States through the fiscal control board.

JAMES MENDIETA, Casa de Las Américas New York, recalled the parallel histories of Cuba and Puerto Rico, followed by the former's independence in 1902. On 20 September 2017, Hurricane Maria caused economic losses exceeding \$95 billion in Puerto Rico, and the United States recovery response was minimal and insulting. Indeed, he stressed, Puerto Ricans learned the sad lesson that the United States views them as a second-class colony. The bank-led junta imposed on the island is downsizing the public sector and privatizing public entities, transforming Puerto Rico's economy and society. Recalling other elements of the island's relationship with the United States — including a mid-century surveillance and disruption programme run by the Federal Bureau of Investigation — he also cited a close historical relationship between Puerto Rico and Cuba, pointing out that the latter sent medical and relief brigades in the wake of the 2017 hurricane which were turned away because the Cuban doctors and aid workers lacked United States visas. In addition, he listed many expressions of support for Puerto Rican independence from political and intellectual leaders across Latin America.

HECTOR BERMUDEZ-ZENON, Grupo por la Igualdad y la Justicia de Puerto Rico, said that the United States considers Puerto Ricans as children who are not capable of making decisions and called for efforts to kick the United States out of Puerto Rico. "We cannot allow the United States to treat us as slaves," he said, adding: "There is no way to justify the attitude of the United States towards Puerto Rico."

JUAN DE DIOS DEL VALLE, Jornada Por La Dignidad Boricua, noted that Puerto Rico has been under United States domination for the past 121 years. The fiscal control board has absolute power over the affairs of Puerto Rico, a situation which has increased the island's debt. "Our debts are not ours, but those of the imperial Power," he said, also denouncing that the imperial Power has turned 25 per cent of Puerto Rican land into a storehouse for atomic bombs.

MANUEL RIVERA, Puertorriqueños Unidos En Accion, said the United States must be forced to get involved in the decolonization of Puerto Rico. Putting the Territory on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories would force that country to submit reports to the United Nations and establish a genuine decolonization plan. Evidence put before the Special Committee over the years is enough to justify such a decision, he said. Rejecting suggestions that Puerto Ricans cannot agree on anything, he said they cannot accept a game in which they are strung along by promises of referendums.

LINDSAY T. LOPEZ MURILLO, Instituto Puertorriqueño de Relaciones Internacionales, said that 77 years after the people of Puerto Rico called for the start of a decolonization process, "we are as indignant as we were then", with the fiscal control board and its seven appointed members being the clearest expression of colonial status. She urged the Special Committee to address the matter to ensure that it is taken up by the Assembly, adding that the Government of the United States, as the administering Power, must submit reports to the United Nations.

JOHN MELENDEZ RIVERA, Frente Independentista Boricua, said the situation in Puerto Rico is dire, with massive unemployment, 45 per cent of people living in poverty and wages at subsistence levels, among other things. The United States has launched economic warfare against the Puerto Rican people, prompting an exodus from the Territory. Many believe that achieving prosperity requires submitting further to the United States and hoping that its

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Anglo-Saxon majority will treat it well. Emphasizing that independence is the only way forward, he urged the United Nations — having failed the people of Puerto Rico in 1952 — not to fail them again as the fight for independence ensues.

Ms. RODRÍGUEZ ABASCAL (Cuba) then introduced the draft resolution titled “Decision of the Special Committee of 18 June 2018 concerning Puerto Rico” (document A/AC.109/2019/L.7). Among other things, she said the text reiterates that Puerto Rico is a Latin American and Caribbean nation with its own national identity which its people have defended despite colonization. It recognizes that Puerto Rico’s status prevents its people from making sovereign decisions, especially to address serious economic and social problems. It also expresses deep concern about the imposition of a fiscal control board, as well as concern about action taken against Puerto Rican independence activists. She said that adoption of the text at this very important juncture for the cause of decolonization will be the most effective contribution that the Special Committee can make to the just cause of the people of Puerto Rico in their struggle for the right to self-determination.

The Special Committee then approved the draft resolution without a vote.