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

Summary record of the 5th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 10 June 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Huntley. (Saint Lucia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Special Committee decision of 22 June 2001 concerning Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/2002/L.4 and L.8)

Hearing of petitioners (aide-memoire 8/02)

2. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Ruberté (Puerto Rico Bar Association) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

3. **Mr. Ruberté** (Puerto Rico Bar Association), replying to the question concerning the use of the death penalty in Puerto Rico, recalled that in its decision, the Boston circuit court had decided that the death penalty was applicable under federal law, although it was prohibited by the Constitution of Puerto Rico. In Florida, a Puerto Rican had been released from prison after 18 years on death row, since he had been shown to be not guilty of the actions with which he was charged. To some the death penalty might seem a small matter, but to Puerto Ricans it was humiliating not to be allowed to live in their own land under their own laws.

4. He also wished to talk about Vieques. In his 2001 statement he had recalled the intention of the Government of Puerto Rico to hold a referendum since the United States of America had cancelled the referendum which the Government had initially announced. In the referendum held on Vieques, the overwhelming majority of the island's residents had demanded an immediate halt to the bombing, the withdrawal of the Navy from the territory, the cleanup of contaminated sites and the return of occupied lands to the local population. The United States Government should have respected the results of that plebiscite; however, the bombing had not ended and, consequently, the civil disobedience campaign had continued. It should be noted that Amnesty International's annual report mentioned abuses committed during arrest and detention by the United States Government in Puerto Rico. With regard to the conditions of detention, concern had been expressed in various quarters in the United States regarding the conditions in which arrested members of al-Qa'idah were being held at the Guantánamo base. People arrested in Vieques were sometimes held in much

worse conditions, except that their detention periods were shorter. One of them was the chairman of the Human Rights and Constitutional Law Committee of the Puerto Rico Bar Association, who was serving a four-month sentence.

5. On 11 March 2001 the Senate of Puerto Rico had adopted resolution No. 201, instructing its Legal Affairs Committee to study the possibility of convening a constituent assembly to address the question of the country's political status. The Puerto Rico Bar Association had given careful thought to that matter for some time. On 6 October 2001 its leadership bodies had adopted resolution No. 12, noting that the United States was not carrying out a policy of decolonization on the island and that its inhabitants had not been able to exercise their right to self-determination. The Association had recommended that a constituent assembly should be convened with full powers to discuss and propose to the United States Government measures and changes that would make it possible to put an end to the current shameful regime. The Association considered it essential to empower the constituent assembly to address issues relating to the political situation in Puerto Rico, hold elections to the constituent assembly, and ensure that such an assembly had legal personality and was convened on the basis of a referendum conducted among the inhabitants of Puerto Rico. The Association had recommended that the assembly should be given full powers to discuss with the United States Government legal matters and matters of sovereignty, the solutions to which should subsequently be placed before the people of Puerto Rico and, depending upon the circumstances, the competent bodies of the United States Government for ratification; there was also a need to ensure that the constituent assembly acted independently of the current governmental authorities, that its sessions were not subject to pre-established time limits, and that civil society participated in the nomination of candidates and the election of delegates. The Association urged the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico to consider and adopt legislation concerning elections to such a constituent assembly.

6. It should also be noted that a report on the question had been submitted to the Senate by its Legal Affairs Committee on 22 April 2002. On 25 April the House of Representatives of Puerto Rico had adopted resolution No. 3873, approving that report and the aforesaid resolution of the Puerto Rico Bar

Association. Both Chambers of the Legislative Assembly had recommended that a popular assembly or a constituent assembly should be convened with the aim of achieving genuine decolonization of Puerto Rico.

7. With regard to the mechanism proposed by the Governor, a statement on its composition was expected to be made on 25 July, in other words, on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico. At the same time, concerns had emerged that the committee, which was supposed to act on the basis of consensus, would be formed without taking into account the interests of those who had no faith in the viability of the mechanism.

8. Lastly, he requested the Committee to recommend to the General Assembly that it consider the question of Puerto Rico as soon as possible.

9. *Mr. Ruberté withdrew.*

10. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Farinacci García (Frente Socialista) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

11. **Mr. Farinacci García** (Frente Socialista) said it was well known that since 1898, when the United States had invaded Puerto Rico, it had maintained a colonial regime in that country, in violation of every international norm and against the will of the overwhelming majority of its people. Concerning the situation on the island of Vieques, it should be noted that, despite the resolution adopted by the United Nations calling upon the United States Government to halt military exercises on the island and return the land occupied by troops to the people of Puerto Rico, that request had, as before, gone unanswered. At the same time, the resistance of the people of Puerto Rico to the arbitrary actions of the United States Navy had increased as a result of the intensification of repression and persecution. To date, over 1,200 persons had been convicted in United States courts for struggling on behalf of the just cause of the Puerto Rican people. More than 100 members of his organization had been convicted. The United States resorted to repression, intimidation and bribery to try to break the will of the Puerto Rican people and the residents of Vieques, who were determined to obtain the withdrawal of the United States Navy from their territory. In recent days officials of the United States armed forces had stated that Vieques was not the best place for military exercises. Nevertheless, the United States continued to exert

pressure and to attempt to weaken the will of the Puerto Rican people through various stratagems.

12. Mention should be made of the intention of the United States Government to introduce the death penalty in Puerto Rico, even though it was prohibited by the Puerto Rican Constitution — the same Constitution that the United States had used to persuade the General Assembly to adopt resolution 748 (VIII) of 27 November 1953. Ignoring the provisions of the Constitution, the United States authorities had certified 11 death penalty cases in Puerto Rico. In 2001 the Circuit Court of Appeal had rescinded a federal judge's decision that federal legislation imposing the death penalty for certain types of crimes was not applicable in Puerto Rico. The Appeal Court judges had determined that any federal legislation took precedence over the Constitution of Puerto Rico. That constituted a direct violation of the democratic rights of the country's inhabitants.

13. In recent years unemployment, crime, drug trafficking, corruption and repression had increased significantly, reflecting the crisis of the colonial regime. For example, recent statistical studies showed that Puerto Rico had the world's second highest murder rate per capita, surpassed only by Colombia, which was in the midst of a civil war.

14. His organization had no illusions that the Puerto Rican legislature was capable of initiating a decolonization process. The legislative bodies were dominated by supporters of colonialism and protégés of huge economic interests which were in favour of maintaining the colonial status. His organization reaffirmed that the Puerto Rican people would accept nothing less than the recognition of their right to self-determination and independence and the immediate and unconditional transfer of all sovereign powers to the people of Puerto Rico. His organization called for the immediate withdrawal of the United States military, legal and political apparatus from the country and the release of all political prisoners. Lastly, he expressed support for the draft resolution and urged that consideration should be given to bringing the question of Puerto Rico before the General Assembly.

15. *Mr. Farinacci García withdrew.*

16. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Vizcarrondo-Irizarry (House of Representatives of Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

17. **Mr. Vizcarrondo-Irizarry** (House of Representatives of Puerto Rico) said that on 25 July 2002, Puerto Ricans would observe the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of Puerto Rico. That document reflected the aspiration of the Puerto Rican people to build its present and its future on the basis of the democratic principles contained in the Constitution. The Puerto Rican Constitutional Convention, which had drafted the document, had also adopted resolution No. 23, reserving the right of the Puerto Rican people to change its relationship with the United States. That right, and the United States commitment to respond effectively to Puerto Rican demands for broader autonomy or full independence, were embodied in the resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 1953. Since that time, attempts to achieve consensus in Puerto Rico and the United States on the country's final political status had failed. Plebiscites, joint commissions and efforts to draft legislation had not yielded any results. In view of that situation, the Government of Puerto Rico had formed a Unity and Consensus Status Commission to consider procedural mechanisms that would make it possible to exercise the right to self-determination. In preparation for that process, both Chambers of the Puerto Rican legislature had adopted resolutions on the desirability of convening a popular assembly or a constitutional convention to resolve the question of the country's future political status and its relationship to the United States. A popular assembly or a constitutional convention was the ideal instrument for realizing Puerto Rico's self-determination.

18. As to the decision to be taken by the Special Committee, it was to be hoped that alongside General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), of 14 December 1960, which recognized the right to self-determination and independence, it would reaffirm General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV), of 15 December 1960, which recognized the right to association, with full respect for the individuality and the cultural characteristics of the people of a given territory, and their freedom to modify the status of that territory through the expression of their will by democratic means and through constitutional processes. That form of political status was embodied in a resolution of the Special Committee adopted on 12 September 1978; accordingly, a reference to General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) was of fundamental significance for ensuring the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination.

19. With regard to the situation on Vieques, during the referendum held on 29 July 2001, 70 per cent of the island's residents had voted for a halt to the military manoeuvres on their territory, and the President of the United States had announced that the Navy would leave Vieques no later than 1 May 2003. The Special Committee should mention Vieques in its resolution with a view to bringing about an immediate halt to the military drills and the return of the occupied land to the island's people as soon as possible.

20. *Mr. Vizcarrondo-Irizarry withdrew.*

21. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. González (Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

22. **Mr. González** (Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico) said that for 104 years, the United States had denied the Puerto Rican people their right to sovereignty and had used every type of aggression, including moral degradation, the systematic debasement of individuals and the annihilation of national identity, to suppress the natural impulse of the Puerto Rican people to seek freedom. In 1950, having deceived the international community and some Puerto Ricans, the occupiers managed to establish the so-called Associated Free State of Puerto Rico, which in fact was neither associated nor free. His organization had resolutely condemned that political farce, even though many Puerto Ricans had helped to implement those wretched plans. Every colony had its traitors and mercenaries, and Puerto Rico was no exception. Nevertheless, for over a century, despite the arbitrary actions of the United States, the country's inhabitants had kept up their fight against the world's mightiest military and economic Power. As time was limited, he did not intend to enumerate the crimes committed by the occupiers for over 100 years or to expose the hypocrisy of those who proclaimed themselves the defenders of democracy throughout the world, while at the same time attempting to suppress Puerto Rico's aspiration for freedom and national identity. The Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico would continue its fight to liberate the Puerto Rican people. It was certain that the Special Committee would support the right of Puerto Rico to independence and sovereignty. There might be some who would defend the occupiers' presence in the country's territory, but that was just one more symptom of the terrible disease called colonialism.

23. In conclusion, he said that the Puerto Rican people would never forget the fraternal support which it had received from Cuba and Venezuela; he was certain that the Special Committee would show those who were trying to subjugate Puerto Rico that the international community would no longer tolerate the establishment of new colonies because of the immoral and criminal nature of colonialism.

24. *Mr. González withdrew.*

25. *At the invitation of the Chairman, the Reverend Luis Barrios (San Romero de Las Américas Church) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

26. **The Reverend Luis Barrios** (San Romero de Las Américas Church) said that he considered it his Christian and patriotic duty to condemn the political terrorism that the United States was carrying out against his homeland, Puerto Rico. Such actions had a colonial character and might be described as acts of political terrorism aimed at the elimination of Puerto Rican national identity, the assimilation of the Puerto Rican people, the destruction of its culture, and an increase in its economic, political and psychological dependency.

27. On 11 September 2001 the people of the United States had undoubtedly experienced the consequences of terrorism; thereafter, the United States Government had unleashed a diabolical military, political and economic campaign which it called the "war on terrorism". Such actions reflected the hypocrisy of the United States commitment to building a better world, since in lieu of efforts to achieve peace, war had been declared. The United States, without any basis whatsoever, characterized the actions of others as political terrorism, while its policy of imperialism, expansionism and colonialism, which was a manifestation of political terrorism, were described as being in defence of "national security" or "democratic processes".

28. Thus, on 25 July 1898, the United States had bombarded and invaded Puerto Rican territory. After occupying Puerto Rico, it had declared before the world that the island constituted its "war trophy". That was political terrorism.

29. In 1917, on the basis of the Jones Act, the United States Government had imposed United States citizenship on Puerto Ricans against their will. Curiously, that Act had entered into force three weeks

before the outbreak of the First World War; Puerto Ricans had been subjected to compulsory military service, and thereafter had been forced to take part in all of the imperialist wars fought by the United States Government. That was political terrorism.

30. In 1936 the United States Navy had taken possession of the island of Culebra for military exercises, displacing the local population. In 1937, in the city of Ponce, there had been a bloody massacre of peaceful demonstrators, and in 1940 the United States Navy had established a military base on the island of Vieques. That was political terrorism.

31. In 1950, when revolutionary nationalist ideas had begun to spread in Puerto Rico, a campaign of repression had been unleashed to destroy the nationalist movement, leading to the imprisonment of over 500 activists. That was political terrorism.

32. In 1951 the United States Navy had established an Office of Naval Research at the University of Puerto Rico in order to conduct experiments involving background radiation. In 1953 experiments had been conducted to study the effects of radiation on human beings; prisoners had been used as subjects for those experiments, especially political prisoners. That was political terrorism.

33. In 1968 over 2,000 Puerto Ricans had been used as guinea pigs in experiments to study the effects of a type of insecticide on the human body. In 1978 the Puerto Rican police and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents had killed two young men who had been active in the independence movement. After that, the FBI, the Secret Service and the United States military had launched the "second invasion of Puerto Rico" and carried out mass arrests of pro-independence activists. That was political terrorism.

34. While the so-called elections in Puerto Rico were characterized as "representative democracy", what they actually produced was a government that represented and defended the interests of the United States Government. Moreover, "participatory democracy" was limited to voting in so-called elections for candidates of two parties which were ideologically indistinguishable from each other. The presence of the United States Government and its control over political, economic and social structures invalidated any notion of serious, democratic and transparent elections. Religious circles also helped to instil a colonialist mindset among Puerto Ricans. Such an

“electoralist” culture, which served to validate the presence of the United States Government in Puerto Rico, was a genuine affirmation of the country’s colonial status. In that context, elections in Puerto Rico represented a real act of political terrorism.

35. Lastly, there was a need to embark on a process of decolonization and accession to independence, culminating in the transfer of all political and economic power to the people of Puerto Rico, the immediate withdrawal of the United States from the country and the immediate release of political prisoners and prisoners of war.

36. *The Reverend Luis Barrios withdrew.*

37. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Martín-García (Puerto Rican Independence Party) took a place at the petitioners’ table.*

38. **Mr. Martín-García** (Puerto Rican Independence Party) expressed appreciation to the Special Committee for adopting by consensus, in two consecutive years, important resolutions on the colonial status of Puerto Rico; the struggle for Puerto Rican independence had received support in May 2002 from the Standing Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Political Parties, which had demanded the immediate withdrawal of the United States Navy from Vieques, and from the Council of the Socialist International, which had met recently in Morocco.

39. Replying to the sceptics who tended to downplay the significance of resolutions of the Special Committee, he said that they had had the same attitude with regard to the resolutions on East Timor; the full independence of that country had been proclaimed only a few weeks earlier. For many years that goal had seemed unattainable, but the independence fighters and the international community had not lost faith in the just cause of the people of East Timor. Events in East Timor would hardly have gained such momentum if the international community had not firmly recognized the right of the people of that country to self-determination and independence. The East Timorese independence fighters would hardly have been able to withstand their adverse circumstances without the hope and encouragement that the international recognition of their rights had given them.

40. He was certain that the same thing would happen in Puerto Rico sooner or later; those who underestimated the role of the Organization and

international law in the struggle for decolonization were ignorant of world history.

41. The draft resolution under consideration contained important new elements to strengthen and extend the resolution adopted in the previous year on issues relating to Vieques; it kindled the hope of reaching agreements that would make it possible to successfully confront the United States Congress and administration with their obligation to decolonize Puerto Rico in accordance with international law.

42. He recalled that in the summer of 2001, the Government of Puerto Rico had initiated a referendum on the United States naval presence in Vieques, in which the overwhelming majority of participants (nearly 70 per cent) had voted for an immediate halt to all military activities and the clean-up and return of the land occupied by the Navy. Nevertheless, the United States had not undertaken to abide by the results of the referendum; that was a serious violation of human rights and a flagrant violation of the right to self-determination.

43. Another important development was the recognition by both Chambers of the Legislative Assembly of the utility of convening a constituent assembly on the question of status; such a mechanism would undoubtedly be an expression of the desire of the overwhelming majority of the Puerto Rican people for decolonization. He expressed satisfaction at the fact that both events — the referendum on Vieques and the legislative measures concerning a constituent assembly on the question of status — had been reflected in the draft resolution under consideration.

44. Lastly, it was to be hoped that the Special Committee would discharge its historic obligations in a responsible manner, and that the adoption of the resolution would serve as a stimulus and a source of encouragement to those fighting for national sovereignty.

45. *Mr. Martín-García withdrew.*

46. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Guadalupe (Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques) took a place at the petitioners’ table.*

47. **Mr. Guadalupe** (Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques) recalled that the Special Committee had always been concerned about the violation of the human rights of the people of the island, which was used by the United States armed

forces as a munitions warehouse and bombing range. The Special Committee had also concluded that the relations between Puerto Rico and the United States had a colonial character and were characterized by numerous instances of abuse and harassment by the United States armed forces aimed at preventing Puerto Rico from attaining full sovereignty and self-determination.

48. The number of such violations had grown in spite of the observations made by the Committee and other international organizations and bodies, such as the São Paulo forum, the Non-Aligned Summit and Amnesty International. A clear example of a human rights violation was the refusal to take into account the results of the referendum on Vieques conducted by the Government of Puerto Rico on 29 July 2001. Seventy per cent of the participants in the referendum had voted for the withdrawal of the United States Navy from Vieques. In response to that referendum, the United States Government, which proclaimed itself the world arbiter of democratic processes, had even more brutally suppressed a demonstration against the United States naval presence on the island, imprisoned those taking part in acts of civil disobedience and, using the events of 11 September 2001 as a pretext, announced its intention to remain on Vieques. Despite the results of the referendum, the United States Navy had not taken any steps to withdraw from the island, and its abuses had continued and expanded. There were numerous other such examples.

49. Meanwhile, the Government of Puerto Rico, which had organized the referendum, had not demanded that the United States Government should respect the outcome of that referendum, nor had it brought charges against members of the United States Navy who had committed criminal acts. He noted with concern the growing number of cancer cases on Vieques, where the only source of contamination was the bombing carried out by the United States Navy.

50. There was a need to pressure the United States Navy and Government to compensate Vieques for the destruction caused over the past 60 years. That demand had acquired particular relevance after the 2001 referendum, when in addition to the destruction of the economy and the environment, economic pressure had been used. Before the referendum, in the context of a withdrawal from the territory and clean-up operations, the Navy had hired around 100 Vieques residents, and had also given money to fishermen and other island

residents as compensation for the lack of economic opportunities. As a consequence of the outcome of the referendum, however, nearly all of those 100 residents had been dismissed, and the compensation paid to others had been reduced. In his view, the measures taken by the Navy on the island, where 40 per cent of the population was unemployed, were a form of economic strangulation of the Puerto Rican people.

51. His organization had four goals: demilitarization, return of the land, decontamination and development. Emphasizing the last two goals, he said that the damage caused to Vieques by the United States Navy had been recognized by former President Bill Clinton and by President George Bush. Accordingly, the Navy could not abandon the island without paying compensation. The proposal to transfer the lands to other federal government agencies following the Navy's withdrawal was likewise unacceptable, as that would allow the Navy to return to the island at any time.

52. Lastly, he urged the Special Committee to maintain its interest in the island and express support for the United States Navy's immediate and full withdrawal from the island and payment of fair compensation for damage, including decontamination of its territory.

53. *Mr. Guadalupe withdrew.*

54. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Pagán (ProLibertad Freedom Campaign) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

55. **Mr. Pagán** (ProLibertad Freedom Campaign) said that the question of Puerto Rico continued to play an important role in the plan of action for the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (2001-2010), because the United States had not acted upon any of the recommendations adopted by the Special Committee in the past two years. On the contrary, it had redoubled its efforts to demonstrate that it was wholly in control of the 4 million Spanish-speaking citizens of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

56. Currently, there were six Puerto Rican political prisoners. In early 2001, more than 200 people had been arrested for taking part in a peaceful campaign of civil disobedience against the United States Navy training exercises on Vieques. In July 2001 a referendum had been held on the future of the Navy's

presence on Vieques; 68 per cent of the island's residents had voted for the immediate and permanent termination of military exercises and bombings on Vieques, the withdrawal of the Navy from the island and its clean-up and return to the local population. Following the tragic events of 11 September 2001, the people of Puerto Rico, out of respect for those who had lost their lives, had declared a moratorium on protests and acts of civil disobedience. At the same time, it had become clear that those events had changed the manner in which the United States Government would conduct its global wars in the future, which in turn made the Navy's earlier rationales for maintaining active bases on Vieques and holding multinational bombing exercises there totally obsolete. Nevertheless, the Navy continued to assert that the people of Puerto Rico and Vieques wanted it to remain, and therefore the bombing had not stopped.

57. During its 103-year history of colonial rule in Puerto Rico, the United States Government had taken an active part in actions that had violated internationally accepted norms of conduct for civilized governments. Two years earlier thousands of files on individuals who had been or were suspected of being active in the Puerto Rican independence movement had been declassified; that had confirmed the lengths to which the United States was willing to go and the unusual tactics which it might employ to prevent the Puerto Rican people from exercising its right to self-determination. That huge mass of data had been collected through COINTELPRO, the FBI counter-intelligence programme, which had operated from 1946 to the late 1980s and had been designed solely to discredit and disrupt the Puerto Rican independence movement by any means. Taking into account the past history of government-sanctioned sabotage, intimidation and manipulation, as well as the growing civil rights violations being carried out against minorities and immigrants in the name of the so-called war on terrorism, the Special Committee should remain actively seized of the matter and of the question of Puerto Rico. The volatility of the current political climate was cause for serious concern that the use of such tactics by the United States Government against peaceful movements seeking justice and autonomy for the people of Puerto Rico was only a matter of time.

58. The General Assembly should also re-evaluate the exemption of the United States from the obligation to transmit information under Article 73 *e* of the

Charter of the United Nations. That loophole had allowed the United States to continue to commit widespread human rights violations in Puerto Rico and its other territories, while hiding them from the international community, to which the United States felt no compulsion to offer any explanations. The Special Committee should take measures in relation to Puerto Rico that would help to end the colonial system in that country, end the bombing in Vieques and lay the groundwork for the unconditional release of all Puerto Rican political prisoners.

59. *Mr. Pagán withdrew.*

60. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Mari Bras (Causa Común Independentista) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

61. **Mr. Mari Bras** (Causa Común Independentista) said that his organization's goal was to promote the cause of Puerto Rican national independence at the national and international levels.

62. In the 30 years since the Special Committee had adopted its first resolution on Puerto Rico, it had adopted some 20 resolutions and decisions on the colonial status of that territory; nonetheless, in 2001, as attested by the Rapporteur of the Special Committee in document A/AC.109/2001/L.3, the United States Government had indicated to the Rapporteur that since the Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories was not applicable to Puerto Rico, the Special Committee should focus its attention on the 18 Territories remaining on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. For 30 years that position had consistently been rejected by the Special Committee, which had kept the question of Puerto Rico on its agenda.

63. Logic should indicate to both the United States Government and the United Nations that the issue should be resolved in a more authoritative forum, such as the International Court of Justice, from which the General Assembly should request an advisory opinion. In that connection, the resolution should again include a request to the General Assembly that it consider the question of Puerto Rico comprehensively and in all its aspects; the resolution should also emphasize that the time had come to break the impasse between the United States Government and the Special Committee over the question of Puerto Rico. It was especially important to do that in 2002 because the old imperialist strategy of "divide and conquer", which had enabled the United States Government to maintain a colonial

regime in Puerto Rico for over a century, had begun to collapse, as more and more Puerto Rican organizations and individuals of varying ideologies had recognized the need to put aside their internal differences and converge around the goal of reaching consensus on a decolonization process.

64. The following events testified to that new strategy of convergence: the joint demand by the most diverse forces in the country for the demilitarization of Vieques; progress towards convening a sovereign assembly of the Puerto Rican people as the first step in the process of genuine decolonization; and the efforts to link Puerto Rico's future to that of the Caribbean region, as shown by the request made by the current Government of Puerto Rico for the country to be admitted to the Association of Caribbean States. That was a contemporary interpretation of the idea of an Antilles confederation, put forward by the country's nineteenth-century leaders. It was to be hoped that the resolution adopted by the Special Committee at the current session would reflect those important advances in Puerto Rico's 500-year fight for decolonization and full liberation.

65. Lastly, he expressed appreciation to all the past and current members and to the Chairman of the Special Committee for the courage and loyalty which they had shown, despite pressure from the leading colonial Power, in upholding the principles on which the General Assembly's historic resolution 1514 (XV) was based. Ongoing monitoring by the Special Committee of the decolonization processes under way in Puerto Rico and Washington would ensure that they culminated in a legitimate act of self-determination.

66. *Mr. Mari Bras withdrew.*

67. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Brassell (United for Vieques, Puerto Rico, Inc.) took a place at the petitioner's table.*

68. **Ms. Brassell** (United for Vieques, Puerto Rico, Inc.) said that her organization was a multicultural working group whose goal was to raise awareness of the health, environmental and economic damage caused by the activities of the United States Navy on Vieques since 1941. The second goal was to inspire others to participate actively in protecting their communities. The organization also promoted correspondence between United States schoolchildren and their peers on Vieques.

69. In April 2000 she had visited Vieques to take part in a civil disobedience campaign. She had gone into a restricted area at the eastern end of the island and had also had an opportunity to speak with local residents and, in particular, to meet Ms. Petra Salgado, a genuine representative of the island and a United States citizen who lived with her family at the western end of the island, where the United States Navy munitions warehouses were located.

70. After Ms. Salgado had, in spite of intimidation, refused to sign over her land to the Navy, a fence had been placed along the edge of her property and she and her family members had been barred from the rest of the island. She had not been allowed on the other side of the fence even during Hurricane Hugo. Her family had been forced to get water from a sunken well, raise chickens and goats and grow their own vegetables.

71. Only after two years had her family members been allowed to go through the gate for 24 hours with written permission. After a long period had elapsed, that requirement had been lifted, but no one had been allowed to visit the family. Much later, relatives had been allowed to visit the family for 24 hours; the gate had not come down until 28 February 2002.

72. Bombs had been known to trigger earthquakes and activate fault lines beneath the Earth. Wars and bombing had eliminated whole species of plants and animals from the face of the Earth, leading to imbalances in the ecosystem.

73. Bombing posed a particular danger to small islands like Vieques because it destroyed agricultural land, contaminated the environment and led to cancer and respiratory diseases. The United States Navy knew that, yet it continued to bomb, destroy and contaminate.

74. In continuing to bomb Vieques for over 61 years, the Navy had committed crimes against all the residents of the island — men, women and children. The people of Vieques were "fenced in" — by cancer, environmental contamination, respiratory diseases and economic isolation, which robbed fishermen and their families of any hope of a decent livelihood. That fence must come down and all peace-loving people on the planet must help in that effort.

75. On the basis of its deliberations, the Special Committee should make a strong statement in support of the people of Vieques. The bombing must stop. The

environment must be cleaned up. The people of Vieques must be able to live in peace.

76. *Ms. Brassell withdrew.*

77. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Muriente Pérez (Nuevo Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueño) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

78. **Mr. Muriente Pérez** (Nuevo Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that he first wished to congratulate the people of East Timor, who had achieved independence through their heroic struggle, and to pay tribute to the international community, the United Nations and, in particular, the Special Committee, which had guaranteed the Timorese people's expression of free will and proclamation of national independence.

79. On 25 July 2002, Puerto Rico would mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Associated Free State, by means of which the United States had sought unsuccessfully to disguise the colonial status of Puerto Rico. That same day would mark the one hundred and fourth anniversary of the intervention in Puerto Rico by the United States.

80. In 1953 the United States had attempted to portray the founding of the Associated Free State as a decolonizing initiative. General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) had been adopted only in 1960, and two years later, the Special Committee on decolonization had been established; the Special Committee had concluded that Puerto Rico's status continued to be a colonial one and that from the standpoint of decolonization, the Associated Free State was a farce. Since then the Special Committee had adopted 20 more resolutions in which the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence had been repeatedly reaffirmed.

81. The main obstacle confronting the Puerto Rican people on the road to independence was the unwillingness of the United States Government to assume its responsibility and promote a process enabling Puerto Ricans to freely exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and the resolutions and decisions of the Special Committee concerning Puerto Rico. The United States Government even refused to recognize the existence of a problem with regard to Puerto Rico's colonial status.

82. Awareness of the Puerto Rican people's fight for decolonization was growing at both the national and international levels. The most important demand around which all Puerto Ricans were united was an end to the bombing and the withdrawal of the United States Navy from Vieques Island. The legitimacy of that demand had been clearly reflected in the results of the referendum of 29 July 2001, in which nearly 70 per cent of the participants had voted for an immediate end to the military exercises and the bombing and the Navy's withdrawal from the territory of Vieques. The response of the United States Government to the referendum had been to resume the bombing and the military exercises.

83. President George Bush had stated his intention to withdraw the Navy from Vieques on or before 1 May 2003. It remained to be seen whether that statement was sincere.

84. The House of Representatives of Puerto Rico had recently adopted measures that could serve as the basis for convening a constituent assembly that would contribute to the decolonization of the country. That initiative, which enjoyed the support of representatives of different political forces within the country, would generate the adoption of measures by the United States leading to the decolonization and self-determination of Puerto Rico. The success of the initiative would largely depend on participation by supporters of the Associated Free State.

85. Turning to the question of international support, he noted that the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had expressed support for the self-determination and independence of Puerto Rico at its Ministerial Conference, held in Cartagena in April 2000, and at its ministerial meetings held in New York in November 2001 and in Durban in April 2002. Amnesty International, in its annual report, had condemned the actions of the United States Navy against numerous participants in the civil disobedience campaign in Vieques.

86. In terms of ecological considerations, draft legislation was being promoted in the United States Congress, with the agreement of the former and current colonial Governments, that would establish direct federal control over rivers, forests, aquifers and areas of enormous ecological, social and economic importance. In his view, such attempts were a kind of ecological annexationism that posed a threat to the

physical integrity of the country and the security of the natural resources belonging to the Puerto Rican people.

87. He called for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners, whose only crime was their fight for the self-determination and independence of Puerto Rico.

88. Lastly, the maintenance of Puerto Rico's colonial status was one of the main reasons for the General Assembly's proclamation of the period 2001-2010 as the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. The Puerto Rican people was firmly committed to the great goal of independence and counted on the support of the international community as never before.

89. *Mr. Muriente Pérez withdrew.*

90. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Pesquera (Congreso Nacional Hostosiano) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

91. **Mr. Pesquera** (Congreso Nacional Hostosiano) said that since the adoption by the Special Committee of the most recent resolution on Puerto Rico, events had occurred that clearly testified to the violation by the United States Government of the national rights of the Puerto Rican people and its right to self-determination.

92. In July 2001 the Government of Puerto Rico had held a referendum on Vieques on the use of the island by the United States Navy as a military training centre and bombing range. Seventy per cent of those participating in the referendum had voted for an immediate halt to the bombing and the return and decontamination of the occupied land. Within a few days following the referendum, the Navy had resumed the bombing with even greater intensity. There had also been an increase in repression and violations of the civil rights of persons peacefully protesting against the military exercises. Those taking part in the civil disobedience movement had been subjected to more severe punishment.

93. The continual violation by the United States armed forces of environmental laws established by the Puerto Rican Government, the destruction of underwater archaeological sites, the abuse of limited natural resources and the contamination of the atmosphere with toxic substances which adversely affected human health and the environment throughout the Caribbean region, constituted ecological colonialism. For example, the Navy used a powder

made of aluminium and crystal fibre to intercept communications from a hypothetical enemy and from the U.S.S. *Killen*, shipwrecked not far off the coast of Vieques, which had been used in nuclear testing in the Pacific islands and might be contaminated with radioactive substances.

94. Meanwhile, the United States Congress was considering draft legislation aimed at the appropriation, through purchase, donation or expropriation, of huge tracts in the northern part of Puerto Rico containing the country's largest water reserves. Moreover, in May 2002, the United States House of Representatives had passed a bill transferring control over three of the largest rivers in the eastern part of the country, where the naval base was located, to the United States. He also drew attention to a resolution adopted by the Puerto Rican College of Physicians and Surgeons, calling upon the federal Government to clean up 79 sites on the island of Puerto Rico that had been used by the United States armed forces.

95. Attempts by the Government of Puerto Rico in 2001 to exercise rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Associated Free State had encountered opposition from the federal Government. The United States Government had repeatedly violated the provisions of that Constitution during the year. Washington had impeded efforts by the Secretary of State of Puerto Rico, Ferdinand Mercado, to take part in international forums. Washington had opposed the entry of Puerto Rico into the Association of Caribbean States on the ground that Puerto Rico was a territory of the United States and, as such, its foreign policy was dictated by the United States Department of State. Furthermore, the federal Government was seeking to impose the death penalty in Puerto Rico, which was prohibited by the Constitution of the Associated Free State.

96. In conclusion, his organization requested that the question of Puerto Rico should be included as a separate item in the agenda of the General Assembly at its next session, so that the Assembly could consider the obligations which the United States had assumed in that forum in 1952 and recognize that only the citizens of Puerto Rico could change the country's Constitution through a direct and democratic vote. The Congreso Nacional Hostosiano also requested that the United States should respect the laws and regulations adopted by the Government of Puerto Rico for the protection of the environment and natural resources, and it invited

the Special Committee to send an inspection mission to Puerto Rico to study the damage caused by the military exercises on the island of Vieques.

97. The Congreso Nacional Hostosiano recognized a Status Assembly of the people of Puerto Rico as a procedural mechanism that could advance the process of decolonization in accordance with international law, and it rejected the annexation of Puerto Rico through its incorporation into the United States, as that would be tantamount to colonial status and would be contrary to international law. The international community represented in that forum should make it clear to the United States Government that it could not speak of democracy and human rights and at the same time maintain a colony in the Caribbean basin in which the right of its inhabitants to self-determination, self-government, health, freedom and comprehensive political, social and economic development was continually violated. The United States Government should respect the results of the referendum held on Vieques on 29 July 2001; it should also declare an amnesty and unconditionally release all Puerto Ricans detained and persecuted on account of their struggle for independence and decolonization.

98. *Mr. Pesquera withdrew.*

99. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Velgara (Vieques Support Campaign) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

100. **Mr. Velgara** (Vieques Support Campaign) said that his organization had been formed following the death of David Sanes Rodríguez by an errant United States Navy bomb on 19 April 1999. The organization, which carried out a solidarity campaign with the people of Vieques, had brought together activists and community, youth and political organizations.

101. The United States Navy bombings on Vieques not only posed a clear and present danger to the lives, health and socio-economic well-being of the population and the normal development of the political process on the island; they also stood out as one of the clearest examples of the colonial control exercised by the United States over Puerto Rico. The bombing contributed to the rise of cancer and respiratory diseases of all types, contamination of the water and air, and poisoning, particularly mercury poisoning, of people, flora and fauna. The situation on Vieques could, by virtue of the economic decline and the

official unemployment rate, be characterized as slow genocide.

102. The situation on the island conclusively refuted the hypocritical claims that the population could participate in politics on the basis of democratic principles. Despite the fact that in the referendum conducted in the previous year, nearly 70 per cent of the people of Vieques had unequivocally stated that the United States Navy must leave the island immediately, the results of the referendum had been ignored in Washington and negated by the political jockeying between the colonizing Power and the colonial administrations in Puerto Rico. Hundreds of activists had been arrested in Vieques, the United States and elsewhere for demanding an end to the bombing and the immediate withdrawal of the Navy from Vieques.

103. Only a few weeks earlier, the anti-democratic and anti-popular forces in Venezuela had attempted a coup d'état. The military alert and military preparations on Vieques had recalled the build-up to the use of the territory by the United States to launch the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic, the invasion of Grenada and, more recently, the bombings in Kosovo. The current illegal and immoral war against the Palestinian people had been and was being rehearsed on the island of Vieques.

104. In defending the interests of the people of Vieques, all of Puerto Rico was fighting for national liberation, an end to colonial rule by the United States and freedom from military domination by that country, since all Puerto Ricans lived and died under its military boot, and the Puerto Rican diaspora, like other colonial peoples, suffered from racism and discrimination.

105. Even if there were only a single colony in the world, it would still be a challenge to the international community as a whole. The eradication of colonialism was an inalienable right that fully applied to the people of Vieques and Puerto Rico. Along with the entire international community, his organization supported the demand of the people of Vieques for the demilitarization of the island, the return of the land to its people, the decontamination of the environment and support for sustainable economic development in the interests of the inhabitants. Recognizing that the root of the Vieques question lay in the colonization of Puerto Rico, his organization called for the decolonization of Puerto Rico in accordance with international law and global justice.

106. *Mr. Velgara withdrew.*

107. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Santiago-Valiente (United Statehooders Organization of New York, Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

108. **Mr. Santiago-Valiente** (United Statehooders Organization of New York, Inc.) said that his organization, which sought the admission of Puerto Rico to the United States as the fifty-first state, considered it inappropriate for the question of Puerto Rico to be considered by the Special Committee solely from the standpoint of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), which proclaimed the right of colonial peoples to self-determination and independence. Independence clearly presupposed a prior act of self-determination by the people of Puerto Rico; such an act, however, did not necessarily entail independence.

109. Strict application of the Special Committee's traditional resolution would mean imposing on the people of Puerto Rico a choice that would conflict with its striving for self-determination, because only 4 per cent of the electorate had opted for that choice. That implied the following: first, if the Special Committee really wished to promote a fruitful decolonization process in Puerto Rico, then any resolution which it adopted must be based not only on General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), but also on Assembly resolution 1541 (XV). The latter, as was well known, envisaged three types of self-determination: emergence as a sovereign independent State; free association with the former colonial Power; and political integration — in the case of Puerto Rico, incorporation as a state of the Union. Second, what was at issue in the case of Puerto Rico was sovereignty, not autonomy, which was favoured by many supporters of Free Associated State status. From the standpoint of international law, and pursuant to the United States Constitution, autonomy was not solely or specifically a political status; it simply referred to the political and administrative decentralization characteristic of any modern State, including Puerto Rico, irrespective of its status — statehood, independence or free association. Lastly, the free association and statehood options implied a settlement of the issue by a mutual decision of the peoples of Puerto Rico and the United States.

110. Noting that Puerto Rico was referred to as the "world's oldest colony", and reviewing the history of the issue, he said that in the Constitution adopted 50 years earlier, Puerto Rico had been proclaimed a Free

Associated State and was, in the legal sense, an "unincorporated territory" of the United States. His organization would continue the work that supporters of statehood for Puerto Rico had carried on since the end of the nineteenth century.

111. *Mr. Santiago-Valiente withdrew.*

112. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Valdés Ramos (Puertorriqueños ante la ONU, Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

113. **Ms. Valdés Ramos** (Puertorriqueños ante la ONU, Inc.) said that Puerto Rico was continuing its fight for equality and final self-determination. In the context of the discussion of possible final-status formulas, the issues of sovereignty, political power, representation in Congress, language and access to federal resources were very important. In the current circumstances, the United States Congress could take unilateral decisions on any of those issues and on the fate of all Puerto Ricans. There was no bilateral agreement between Puerto Rico and the United States, and those who said otherwise in their political campaigns were simply lying to the people.

114. Free Associated State status was not a political status. Politically speaking, the territory as a whole came under the jurisdiction of the United States Congress, and was thus a colony. Puerto Rico could achieve sovereignty only as a state of the Union or as an independent republic, with or without a free association pact.

115. The United States could have solved the status problem as an internal matter, but it had not done so. There was much that the United Nations could do to solve the problem, but it, too, had not done so. For many years the focus had been on documents, and the dialogue had not led to a final settlement.

116. Her organization respected the right to self-determination, and believed in United States citizenship for Puerto Ricans and in the possibility of exercising rights and defending Puerto Ricans under the United States Constitution and in accordance with United States democratic traditions; it was in favour of permanent union with the United States in accordance with the will of the majority.

117. Puerto Rico was a colony of the United States and would remain one until there was a real alternative for self-determination, which would undoubtedly be permanent union. The majority of the island's residents

supported such a union, while the independence movement enjoyed the support of only 4 to 5 per cent of the population. Puerto Rico's current status as a Free Associated State not only did not eliminate its colonial condition, but on the contrary, perpetuated it. Puerto Ricans had been United States citizens since 1917. Their colonial status, however, prevented them from enjoying the rights and privileges of other United States citizens. Statehood would provide the political, legal and economic mechanisms needed to ensure equality. The question of Puerto Rico should be considered at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

118. *Ms. Valdés Ramos withdrew.*

119. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Rivera (Puertorriqueños Pro Estadidad, Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

120. **Ms. Rivera** (Puertorriqueños Pro Estadidad, Inc.) said that her organization advocated a solution to the political problem of Puerto Rico through union with the United States as a state, which would be consistent with General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV). Puerto Rico's attainment of commonwealth status 50 years earlier had not changed the fact that Puerto Ricans were not represented in the government bodies which exercised ultimate sovereignty; that they did not participate in the drafting of laws and regulations that applied to them; that the system was not permanent; and that there were no limits to the power of the senior partner in the political relationship.

121. Because of those characteristics, Puerto Rico was a territory that was not fully self-governing. That notwithstanding, it had been removed from the list of colonial territories in accordance with General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII). That resolution had been adopted with the understanding that commonwealth status would evolve in the direction of full self-government. In the past 50 years that had not happened. The United States Congress had ignored or postponed consideration of numerous petitions for defining the political future of Puerto Rico from both the independence and the pro-statehood sectors. Puerto Rico had not been given an opportunity to choose between independence, statehood or another form of association. The Puerto Rican people had been denied their sovereign right to determine their political future; indeed, those who spoke out for sovereignty had suffered intense repression. Accordingly, the right of

peoples to self-determination and independence, as called for in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV), had not been recognized.

122. Experience showed that General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) had never had the force of law. It was therefore appropriate to request the Assembly, through the Special Committee, to rescind that resolution and to recognize that Puerto Rico had not fully exercised its right to self-determination and self-government. In order for the Puerto Rican people to determine their own future, they must have the opportunity to choose one of the forms of self-determination provided for in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV), namely, full sovereignty, free association or integrated sovereignty on the basis of statehood. Statehood most effectively satisfied the needs and desires of the Puerto Rican people, over 95 per cent of whom supported one or another form of union with the United States. Such status would guarantee equal participation in the political process. It would not change the nature or the linguistic and cultural identity of Puerto Rico. So long as the illusion persisted that the creation of the Commonwealth had been a final act of self-determination and that any change in that status was an internal political matter, no progress would be possible. General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) was an obstacle to advancement.

123. *Ms. Rivera withdrew.*

124. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Vega Ramos (PROELA) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

125. **Mr. Vega Ramos** (PROELA) said that the Constitution of the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico, and especially its Charter of Rights, reflected the highest ideals of justice, solidarity, democracy and human rights, ideals that characterized Puerto Ricans. In the adoption of the Constitution, the right had also been reserved for future generations of Puerto Ricans to self-determination by peaceful and democratic means. For 50 years the United States had promised to accede to the demands of Puerto Ricans for greater powers and political freedoms. Up to then, however, those promises had not been concretized in practice.

126. Puerto Rico's demands for sovereign powers were based on the principles contained in General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV). The governing programme of Ms. Calderón, who had won the 2000 elections, stated that sovereignty would mean

recognition of the power of Puerto Ricans to govern their own affairs without subordination to the United States authorities and would leave no doubt as to the capacity of Puerto Ricans to conclude a pact on the basis of legal equality. PROELA called for the exercise of Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and the development of Free Associated State status on the way to full political association.

127. Free association was the result of a sovereign delegation to the United States by the Free Associated State of such powers as the parties deemed necessary. Free Associated State status was nothing other than full self-determination, which in turn was the aim of the development of Free Associated State status. In that connection, it was necessary to confirm Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and sovereignty in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV).

128. It should be recalled that the House of Representatives and the Senate of Puerto Rico had adopted resolutions calling for more serious consideration of the question of convening a constitutional convention as a mechanism for giving an impetus to the process of self-determination. In addition, the measures currently being adopted by the Government of Puerto Rico to broaden the international representation of the country within the framework of its current status, with the aim of strengthening its cultural, economic and political ties with the peoples of the world, deserved support.

129. Lastly, he drew attention to the demands of the people of Vieques for an immediate halt to the naval exercises conducted there by the United States Navy and for the decontamination and return of the land under military occupation. The military exercises on the island must cease immediately and the process of cleaning up and returning the lands must begin.

130. The United States Government had decided to begin a dialogue with Puerto Rican society to look for ways of ensuring the full exercise of the Puerto Rican people's right to self-determination. It was extremely important for the United Nations to participate in that process.

131. *Mr. Vega Ramos withdrew.*

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2002/L.8

132. **Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla** (Cuba), introducing draft resolution A/AC.109/2002/L.8, said that the common history and special ties between Cuba and Puerto Rico were reflected in the following line of poetry: "Cuba and Puerto are the two wings of a bird". While some had long sought to disunite and create antagonism between the Cuban and Puerto Rican peoples, the deep fraternity and solidarity between them would always endure.

133. Since 1973 the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) had been reaffirmed in the first operative paragraph of all resolutions adopted on Puerto Rico. The draft text also reiterated that the Puerto Rican people constituted a Latin American and Caribbean nation that had its own unequivocal national identity, which it had been able to preserve despite more than 100 years of political domination, economic assimilation and military subjugation. It was also noteworthy that despite all the attempts to impose English as the official language of the territory, the Puerto Rican people continued to speak only Spanish.

134. Unquestionably, there was a consensus among the Puerto Rican people as to the urgency of putting an end to the critical situation that continued to exist on Vieques Island; two thirds of its territory had, for the past 60 years, been used by the United States armed forces to carry out military exercises and manoeuvres. There was a high incidence of cancer, asthma, diabetes, and skin, heart and other disorders linked to the contamination of the soil, air and water as a result of the military exercises on Vieques. The infant mortality rate was 53 per cent higher, and the overall mortality rate 40 per cent higher, on Vieques than in the rest of Puerto Rican territory. It would take many decades, and hundreds of millions of dollars, to improve the environmental situation on Vieques. In one of its new preambular paragraphs, the draft noted the intention expressed by the President of the United States to put an end to the military manoeuvres on Vieques by 1 May 2003. Another new preambular paragraph noted that an official referendum called by the Government of Puerto Rico in 2001 had shown that the overwhelming majority of the people of Vieques were in favour of an immediate, permanent halt to military manoeuvres on the island.

135. The operative part of the draft resolution again called upon the United States Government to order an

immediate halt to military drills and manoeuvres on Vieques Island and return the occupied land to the people of Puerto Rico, and also to halt the persecution and arrests of peaceful demonstrators, release all persons incarcerated in that connection and respect fundamental human rights. The draft resolution also requested the United States to release all Puerto Rican political prisoners.

136. The draft resolution reflected the outcome of an intensive process of consultations with broad social and political sectors in Puerto Rico and with States members of the Special Committee. It also reflected the position taken by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in support of the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and the Movement's request to the Special Committee to remain actively seized of the question of Puerto Rico.

137. Lastly, it was to be hoped that, as in the past two years, the draft resolution would be adopted without a vote.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.