



## General Assembly

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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 6th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 10 June 2002, at 3 p.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Huntley. . . . . (Saint Lucia)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda** (aide-memoire 8/02)

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

**Requests for hearings** (aide-memoire 8/02/Add.1 to 10/02)

2. **The Chairman** drew attention to the requests for hearings on the question of Puerto Rico contained in aide-memoire 8/02/Add.1. If he heard no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to accede to those requests.

3. *It was so decided.*

4. **The Chairman** drew attention to a request for a hearing on the question of Guam contained in aide-memoire 9/02. If he heard no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to accede to that request.

5. *It was so decided.*

6. **The Chairman** drew attention to a request for a hearing on the question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) contained in aide-memoire 10/02. If he heard no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to accede to that request.

7. *It was so decided.*

**Question of Puerto Rico**

8. **The Chairman** recalled that at the fifth meeting held on 21 June 2001, the Special Committee had decided to hear the representatives of organizations concerned with the question of Puerto Rico.

*Hearing of petitioners*

9. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Canals (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

10. **Mr. Canals** (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) recalled that the national masonic association of Puerto Rico, which had been in the vanguard of the struggle for decolonization and independence since its establishment in 1948, had appeared before the Committee on many occasions. It called for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners, the return of activists involved in the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico who had fled the island in order to escape repression, and their

reintegration into Puerto Rican society, all measures necessary for ensuring national reconciliation, and a democratic and equitable decision-making process.

11. Resistance to the occupation of Vieques Island had led to the incarceration of hundreds of patriots, including two freemasons. It was surprising that a United States federal district court had been able to prohibit bombing exercises on a Pacific island in order to protect a species of migratory bird, while no such decision could be taken to protect human beings who were themselves forced to migrate. Furthermore, the death penalty had been imposed by the United States Government, even though in Puerto Rico it had been abolished in 1929 and was prohibited in the 1952 Constitution.

12. He hoped the Special Committee would do the right thing and put an end to the oldest colony in the world. For its part, the national masonic association of Puerto Rico, whose aim was a society based on the universal masonic principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, was committed to helping Puerto Rico achieve self-determination through consensus and democracy.

13. *Mr. Canals withdrew.*

14. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Velez Mitchell (Primavera, Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

15. **Ms. Velez Mitchell** (Primavera, Inc.), a Puerto Rican artist from Vieques, said it was regrettable that the island's economy, formerly based on agriculture and sugar plantations had been transformed into an industrial economy as a result of the 60-year presence of the United States Navy. She hoped that the naval forces would leave the island by 2003.

16. Puerto Ricans, particularly those living in New York, were going through an identity crisis: sometimes they were "Hispanics", for example after the attacks on the World Trade Center in which nearly 800 Puerto Ricans had lost their lives; sometimes they were "Americans", as when it came to taking up arms to defend the country, and sometimes they were "Puerto Ricans", as when incidents tarnished the national parade in New York. They did not deserve the discriminatory treatment they received. They were stereotyped, despite their rich and diverse genetic heritage, as evidenced by many artists and very varied personalities in public life and the media.

17. If Puerto Rico gained independence, it would reclaim St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John, which formed part of the Puerto Rican archipelago. If it became a fully fledged State, it would preserve its cultural heritage and never renounce the Spanish language, the vehicle of the Puerto Rican spirit.

18. *Ms. Velez Mitchell withdrew.*

19. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Adames (Al Frente) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

20. **Mr. Adames** (Al Frente) said it was deplorable that the United States of America, the model of democracy, should be capable of such discrimination against Puerto Ricans, which was enforced by political power and sustained by the influence of money. The omission of Puerto Rico from some maps of the United States was proof of that discrimination. Nevertheless, Puerto Rico had become a territory of the United States long before some states of the Union, all its citizens had the same duties and responsibilities — including that of sacrificing their lives for their country — and Puerto Ricans were well represented in the United States army and police force. When it came to their rights, however, discrimination prevailed.

21. The bargaining by the United States over the statehood of Puerto Rico was an insult to its own citizens. Independence, a form of divorce between Puerto Rico and the United States, would lead to unpredictable and incommensurable harm to both parties. In fact, half the Puerto Rican population lived in the United States and was widely mixed with other races. A political decision along those lines would deprive close to one million Americans of Puerto Rican parentage of their roots of citizenship.

22. Recalling that the United States Constitution granted all citizens equal rights, he expressed the hope that the Special Committee would support his appeal to the President of the United States to end discrimination against the Puerto Rican people and submit to Congress the declaration on the statehood of Puerto Rico.

23. *Mr. Adames withdrew.*

24. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Rexach (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

25. **Ms. Rexach** (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) drew the attention of the Special Committee to the fundamental problem of Puerto Rico;

namely its legal and moral rights, which could have been solved by the United States Congress many years earlier. Despite their indisputable contribution to the United States, Puerto Ricans were still not represented in Congress, which had full powers to impose federal law on the island.

26. Public Law 600 of 1962 had established "Commonwealth" status for Puerto Rico, as a state in free association. That was just a name to which some people from the island were still attached, but one which in no way governed the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, nor did it create a free state.

27. If Puerto Rico became the fifty-first state, its culture would not run the risk of being absorbed by United States culture. Four million Puerto Ricans currently lived in the United States and shared the same mixed culture as Puerto Ricans living on the island. The United States Congress had a moral obligation to define the legal and political relations between Puerto Rico and the United States. The issue of Vieques had been very intelligently used by both pro-independence activists and proponents of Puerto Rico as a state in free association. Nevertheless, it was the United States Congress, through its inaction, which was solely responsible for the current situation.

28. She called on the President of the United States to end discrimination against the people of Puerto Rico and urged the Special Committee to assist Puerto Rico in becoming the fifty-first state of the United States. In conclusion, she quoted the slogan of her organization, "Stop aggression and live in peace".

29. *Ms. Rexach withdrew.*

30. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Calero (Socialist Workers Party) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

31. **Mr. Calero** (Socialist Workers Party) said he joined others present in demanding the immediate withdrawal of the United States military from Vieques and the release of all those jailed for protesting the United States Navy's use of that Puerto Rican island for bombing practice and war exercises, a situation which highlighted the fact that Puerto Rico was a colony of the United States.

32. A successful struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico was in the interests, not only of the Puerto Rican people, but of the vast majority of the people of

the United States, and would deal a powerful blow to their common exploiters and oppressors, the tiny class of billionaire families that rules the United States, and show that it was possible to stand up to the world's mightiest and most brutal imperialist power and break free from its domination.

33. For more than a century, the United States rulers had maintained Puerto Rico as a colony, viewed by many as one of the last remaining colonies in the world. As imperialism sought to salvage its declining power, the United States rulers were turning more and more to the use of military might to impose their interests. There were increasingly colonial aspects to current United States foreign policy, as seen in the United States-led wars of conquest and occupation in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. Washington's so-called war on terrorism was simply a cover for waging war on other nations and peoples, as well as on working people in the United States, a course that had begun well before 11 September 2001.

34. As part of the war at home against workers and farmers, the United States Government was taking steps to militarize the country, seeking acceptance of the presence of troops at United States airports, train stations, bridges, tunnels and elsewhere in the United States. The creation of a domestic military command structure was part of the preparations by the United States rulers for broader and more intense working-class resistance.

35. Since the previous September, the massive round-up and detention of hundreds of Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants formed part of an assault on the rights of workers in the United States. So was the indefinite detention of more than 300 men who had been kidnapped from various countries, with no charges against them, and were being held under barbaric conditions in a concentration camp at the United States naval base at Guantanamo, which was territory occupied against the will of the Cuban people.

36. Similarly, the probes to loosen restrictions on the powers of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other political police agencies to use informers and wiretapping and carry out disruption operations would be used to target unions, Black rights organizations, farm protest groups, and others who resisted employers or opposed United States Government policies.

37. Puerto Rican independence fighters and unionists and other Puerto Ricans were more than familiar with

many of those methods. For decades, they too had been smeared as "terrorists" to justify United States Government harassment and repression against them.

38. He appealed for the release of five political prisoners held in Washington prisons because of their ideas and actions on behalf of Puerto Rico's independence. Some had been jailed for more than 20 years, making them some of the longest-held political prisoners in the world.

39. The working class struggles in the United States could draw inspiration from the workers, fishermen and young people of Puerto Rico who were fighting to remove the United States Navy from Vieques, and refused to subordinate their struggle to the war drive that the imperialist rulers were carrying out under the banner of "fighting terrorism".

40. He recalled that the 2.7 million Puerto Ricans living in the United States represented a significant component of the working class of that country and were subjected to systematic discrimination and second class status, as were Blacks, Chicanos and other oppressed nationalities in the United States. The United States colonial rule of Puerto Rico reinforced racist prejudices and every reactionary force in the United States.

41. Since its invasion of Puerto Rico more than a century ago, Washington had used that Caribbean nation as a base to launch military aggression around the world, from Grenada to Cuba to the Middle East. The militarization of Puerto Rico reinforced the United States Government's moves to accelerate its military intervention and construction of bases in Colombia, Ecuador and other South American countries.

42. The young people of Puerto Rico had been used as cannon fodder in every imperialist war. For Puerto Rico, United States colonial rule had meant high levels of unemployment and the plunder of its wealth and natural resources. That was the future the United States offered Puerto Rico.

43. The United States leaders had told the Puerto Rican people that they could not survive on their own, but the example of Cuba had proved the contrary. The Cuban revolution had proved that it was possible to fight and win independence from United States domination. Condemnation of colonial rule over Puerto Rico would serve the interests of the majority of the people of the United States and of all those fighting

everywhere for the right to self-determination and the future of humanity.

44. *Mr. Calero withdrew.*

45. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Ramos (American Association of Jurists) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

46. **Ms. Ramos** (American Association of Jurists) recalled that her Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, had been deeply involved in the fight for the self-determination of peoples and action against imperialism and colonialism. Her organization was therefore appearing before the Special Committee to defend the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to free self-determination and independence, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and to give its full support to the draft resolution presented in the current year referring to the Puerto Rican people's requests that a decolonization process be initiated without any coercion or interference by the United States Government. Her organization urged the United States Navy to immediately and unconditionally end bombings and military exercises in Vieques, withdraw all military personnel, and dismantle military installations including the ROTHF radar system.

47. She recalled that at the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights, the American Association of Jurists, in cooperation with the Puerto Rican Bar Association, had condemned the violations of human rights committed by the United States Navy in Vieques, stating that the population of Vieques lived in abominable conditions in the midst of military exercises which had caused deaths and serious illnesses as well as extensive damage to the environment. The United States was responsible for human rights violations against communities in which it had military bases, in Hawaii, Alaska, the Philippines, Guantanamo, Cuba and Ecuador.

48. She stressed that, in its 2001 report, Amnesty International had condemned the use of excessive force and mistreatment of peaceful demonstrators by the United States Marines. Moreover, Puerto Rican civil society, in an unprecedented consensus, had expressed its opposition to the discharge of one more bullet or bomb on Vieques Island, demanded that the island should be demilitarized and decontaminated and that the United States Navy should leave the island.

49. The American Association of Jurists condemned the arrests carried out between 4 May 2000 and April 2002 and believed that the sentences handed down against persons accused of civil disobedience were excessive and of a political and imperialist nature. It therefore supported paragraph 6 of the draft resolution urging the Government of the United States to order an immediate halt to its armed forces' military drills and manoeuvres on Vieques Island, halt the persecution, incarceration, arrests and harassment of demonstrators, and to release immediately all persons incarcerated in that connection.

50. She urged that the draft resolution, as introduced, be adopted by consensus, thus conveying a message of firm commitment in favour of decolonization. It was also essential that President Bush release the Puerto Rican prisoners serving long sentences in United States prisons. In conclusion, she said her Association was in favour of the proposal to convene in Puerto Rico an Assembly of the people of Puerto Rico to force the United States Congress to transfer to them the full powers it exercised over Puerto Rico.

51. *Ms. Ramos withdrew.*

#### **Special Committee decision of 21 July 2001 concerning Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/2002/L.8)**

52. **The Chairman** said that he had received a letter from the delegation of the Dominican Republic asking that it be allowed to participate in the proceedings as an observer. If he heard no objection, he would invite the delegation of the Dominican Republic to take a place at the Committee table.

53. Similarly, if he heard no objection, he would invite the Committee to take action on draft resolution A/AC.109/2002/L.8 without a vote.

54. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2002/L.8 was adopted without a vote.*

55. **Mr. Streeter** (Chile), explaining his delegation's position, said that although it had joined the consensus, his delegation did not agree with the draft resolution in its entirety. There were differing attitudes among the Puerto Rican people with respect to the status of the island. Nevertheless, his Government was concerned about the incidents which had occurred on Vieques Island. It therefore welcomed the statement by the President of the United States announcing that military activity on the island would cease by May 2003 at the

latest. The Puerto Ricans themselves should find a satisfactory solution to the problem.

56. **Mr. Rodríguez Parilla** (Cuba) said that the Special Committee had, for the third time, adopted a draft resolution on the question of Puerto Rico without a vote, thereby strengthening the Committee's common position on the matter. However, the Committee's role should not be limited to the adoption of a text, and the resolution should be used as a tool for achieving specific objectives. He hoped that the adoption of the resolution would pave the way for the Puerto Rican people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

57. *The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.*