



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.109/1999/SR.11
6 December 2000

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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 11th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 6 July 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DAUSA CESPEDES (Cuba)
(Vice-Chairman)

CONTENTS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

ECONOMIC AND OTHER ACTIVITIES WHICH AFFECT THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLES
OF THE NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES

MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND ARRANGEMENTS BY COLONIAL POWERS IN TERRITORIES
UNDER THEIR ADMINISTRATION

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS

QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO

Hearing of bodies and individuals having an interest in the question

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the record of this meeting and of other meetings will be issued in a corrigendum.

In the absence of Mr. Donigi (Papua New Guinea), Mr. Dausa Cespedes (Cuba), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

ECONOMIC AND OTHER ACTIVITIES WHICH AFFECT THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLES OF THE NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES (A/AC.109/1999/3, 4, 7 and Corr.1 and A/AC.109/1999/9; A/AC.109/1999/L.9)

Draft resolution A/AC.109/1999/L.9

2. Draft resolution A/AC.109/1999/L.9 was adopted.

MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND ARRANGEMENTS BY COLONIAL POWERS IN TERRITORIES UNDER THEIR ADMINISTRATION (A/AC.109/1999/3, 4, 7 and Corr.1 and A/AC.109/1999/9; A/AC.109/1999/L.10)

Draft decision A/AC.109/1999/L.10

3. Draft decision A/AC.109/1999/L.10 was adopted.

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS

4. The CHAIRMAN said that the Special Committee had before it a number of communications containing requests for hearings, which had been circulated in aide-mémoire 14/1999. He took it that the Special Committee wished to grant those requests.

5. It was so decided.

QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO (A/AC.109/1999/L.6)

Hearing of bodies and individuals having an interest in the question

6. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Rosselló, Governor of Puerto Rico, took a place at the table.

7. Mr. ROSSELLÓ (Governor of Puerto Rico) said that the fact that Puerto Rico was an unincorporated territory of the United States of America which had not achieved full self-government had been well-documented. There was a consensus among Puerto Ricans that the current political status did not meet their aspirations for self-government; in a plebiscite held in 1998, under one per cent of the population had supported the status quo.

8. In resolution 748 (VIII) the General Assembly had determined that the people of Puerto Rico had attained the status of self-government as an autonomous political entity. Seven years later, the General Assembly had adopted resolution 1541 (XV), establishing the principles for determining

/...

whether a Territory could be said to have a full measure of self-government. It was clear that General Assembly resolution 748(VIII) had now lost all legitimacy. All three branches of government of the United States of America had made statements which openly contradicted the premises of General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) and made it clear that the current political status of Puerto Rico did not meet any of the criteria of General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV). In 1994, the United States Supreme Court had refused to review the decision in the case United States vs. Sanchez on the grounds that, under the Territorial Clause, the United States Congress continued to be the ultimate source of power in Puerto Rico and could unilaterally abrogate the Constitution of Puerto Rico and replace it with any other rules or regulations it chose. In March 1998, the United States House of Representatives had approved the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act, which reaffirmed the authority of the United States Congress to determine the application of federal law over Puerto Rico. On 2 July 1999, President Clinton had sent him a letter on the occasion of the celebration in Puerto Rico of the Independence Day of the United States of America in which he recognized that although the people of Puerto Rico were American citizens they did not have the right to vote in national elections, and reiterated his policy that the United States Government had the responsibility to enable the people of Puerto Rico to choose an option for full self-government, and to act in accordance with that choice. President Clinton and his administration had respected the aspirations of the people of Puerto Rico to exercise their right of self-determination and achieve full self-government. However, the United States Congress had not fulfilled its responsibility. The United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act had not been sent to the Senate; once again, the United States Congress had failed to provide a valid process for the self-determination of the people of Puerto Rico.

9. The Committee would not be fulfilling its responsibility if it confined itself to recognizing the right of the people of Puerto Rico only to the option of full self-government. The General Assembly had recognized not one, but three means for achieving full self-government: independence, free association, and full integration under equal conditions. The omission of any one of those options in the Committee's resolutions would seriously jeopardize the right to self-determination of the people of Puerto Rico in violation of General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) and the Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories. Since the Committee had determined that Puerto Rico had not achieved full self-government, it must recommend the inclusion of Puerto Rico in the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. That was the only way of inducing the United States Congress to fulfil its responsibility under its own Constitution and under the Charter of the United Nations. The United States Congress had the responsibility of establishing a process to define valid options for status in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) so that Puerto Ricans could vote on them. After 101 years of political subordination, it was time for the Puerto Ricans to achieve full self-government by the consent of the governed.

10. Mr. RABUKA (Fiji) asked whether the Government of Puerto Rico had considered invoking the judicial process through an application to the United States Supreme Court or the International Court of Justice in order to obtain a final determination regarding the island's status. The absence of representatives of the United States at the meeting was indicative of that

/...

Government's attitude to the question. The international community must be made aware of the failure of the United States to fulfil its duty under the Charter of the United Nations in respect of Puerto Rico.

11. Mr. ROSSELLÓ (Governor of Puerto Rico) said that the judicial branch of the United States Government had expressed its position on the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States on many occasions. As an unincorporated Territory of the United States, Puerto Rico was essentially a colonial jurisdiction. Defining the status of Puerto Rico would not, however, move the situation forward. Progress towards self-government would be achieved only through a political initiative.

12. Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) asked why Guam was included in the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories while Puerto Rico was not, and whether there were differences in their political and legal status and in the nature of their relationship with the United States. He would welcome clarification regarding the meaning of the term social sovereignty. He also wished to know what had been the reaction to the Governor's recent statements in the United States Congress.

13. Mr. ROSSELLÓ (Governor of Puerto Rico) said that, while the powers of the Governments of Puerto Rico and Guam differed to some degree, their relationship with the United States was essentially the same: both were Territories of the United States and their peoples were thus unable to participate in decisions affecting them. Some progress had been made following his statements in Congress. President Clinton had undertaken to develop a mechanism for the exercise by Puerto Ricans of their right to self-determination and the House of Representatives had adopted legislation providing for the holding of a referendum on a number of valid status options, but the process had come to a halt in the Senate, which had adopted a decision in which it merely acknowledged the Puerto Ricans' right to self-determination, without establishing any specific means of exercising that right.

14. Mr. BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba) said that his delegation had taken note of the request by the Governor to have Puerto Rico included in the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. He hoped that the Government of the United States would adopt a more cooperative stance in its relations with the Special Committee, and urged it to begin by recognizing the legitimate nature of the discussion on the question of Puerto Rico.

15. Mr. Rosselló withdrew.

16. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Villanueva (Puerto Rico Bar Association) took a place at the table.

17. Mr. VILLANUEVA (Puerto Rico Bar Association) said that although, under General Assembly resolution 748 (XXV), the United States of America had been exempted from the requirement to transmit reports on Puerto Rico, it was now clear that it had misled the United Nations, because in reality there was no real process of self-determination and Puerto Rico was still under a colonial regime. Two examples were sufficient to support that affirmation. On 4 March 1998, the United States House of Representatives had adopted AR-856,

/...

urging the Puerto Ricans to hold a plebiscite and define their current territorial status as being subject to the full powers of the United States Congress. A former President of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico and member of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. José Trías Monge, had published a book entitled Las penas de la colonia mas antigua del mundo, in which he had argued that Puerto Rico was still under a colonial regime because, inter alia, the laws of the United States of America were applied to the Puerto Rican people without their consent; the United States President negotiated treaties and took action affecting Puerto Rico without consulting it; the United States courts ruled on cases involving strictly local questions of law; there was no equality or compatibility of rights between United States citizens resident in Puerto Rico and those residing in the United States of America; the United States Congress took it for granted that it could unilaterally exercise full powers over Puerto Rico under the Territorial Clause; and Puerto Rico's political status did not meet the standards for decolonization established by the United Nations. General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) clearly applied to Puerto Rico.

18. It was clear that the people of Puerto Rico were subject to a colonial regime which for decades had violated their right of self-determination. First, the island of Vieques, which was part of Puerto Rico, had been shelled and contaminated for years; after the death of a civilian, the people of Puerto Rico had unanimously called for the departure of the United States Navy from the island, and the Governor of Puerto Rico had informed the United States President of that official position. Second, several Puerto Ricans who had struggled for independence were imprisoned in federal prison; all of them had been in prison for 15 to 20 years. Third, although the 1952 Constitution of Puerto Rico expressly prohibited the death penalty, the United States Justice Department had now announced that it would request the death penalty for persons convicted in the federal court operating in Puerto Rico.

19. The Association urged its members to call on the United States of America to permit the people of Puerto Rico to undertake a true process of self-determination based on the following elements: the sovereign powers held by the United States of America since 1898 must be transferred to Puerto Rico; military activities by the United States of America in Puerto Rico must cease; the constituent assembly must be permitted to deliberate freely on the status formula preferred by the nation; the 16 political prisoners currently held in federal prisons must be released; and the United States of America must clearly indicate what degree of autonomy it was prepared to grant, whether it would accept a nation like Puerto Rico in the federation, and what assistance it would be prepared to grant to establish a democratic and autonomous republic.

20. Mr. TANO-H-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) asked what percentage of the population of Puerto Rico supported self-determination, based on the recent referendum.

21. Mr. VILLANUEVA (Puerto Rico Bar Association) said that there were about 2 million voters in Puerto Rico, some 70 per cent of whom had participated in the referendum; the definitions used had been drawn up by the United States House of Representatives. Only one per cent of the voters had supported the colonial formula; the rest had opted for other formulas.

22. Mr. Villanueva withdrew.

/...

23. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Santana (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs) took a place at the table.

24. Ms. SANTANA (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs) said that the people of Puerto Rico were tired of war games; of being an accomplice in aggression against other peoples; of restrictions of freedom of movement within their own Territory. They were tired of seeing their children leave Puerto Rico in search of better standards of living, and of being denied the most elementary human rights such as the right to work, to health, to the enjoyment of natural resources, to full social development and poverty eradication.

25. The imbalance between what the people wanted and the responses they received, from the United States Government and the United States Navy for example, created the conditions for social instability. While there was a consensus in Puerto Rico against the military presence in Vieques, the United States of America was stepping up its military activities with the transfer of the southern command to Puerto Rico and the construction of a radar system which included the island of Vieques and another site in Isla Grande.

26. There was also consensus in Puerto Rico regarding the release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners who were in United States prisons. The World Council of Churches, along with other ecumenical and international organizations, had joined the churches of Puerto Rico and thousands of people within and outside Puerto Rico in calling on the United States President to accede to their request.

27. Puerto Rico was entitled to a valid decolonization process under the standards of the United Nations. On behalf of the churches and the World Council of Churches, she called for the decolonization of Puerto Rico in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). She reiterated the invitation to the Committee to visit the country and receive more detailed information. The Committee must create conditions for a legitimate process of self-determination.

28. Ms. Santana withdrew.

29. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Farinacci (Frente Socialista) took a place at the table.

30. Mr. Farinacci (Frente Socialista) recalled that in August 1998 there had been a general strike, which had led to a confrontation of broad sectors of the public against the colonial Government and major United States corporations, which operated in Puerto Rico as if it were a private domain in which they could do as they pleased. Since then, the movement had grown and developed.

31. On 4 July 1999, tens of thousands of people had protested outside the Roosevelt Roads naval base, calling for the immediate withdrawal of the United States Navy from Vieques. Public pressure had been so great that the parties which defended the imperialist interests in Puerto Rico had had to support the demand.

/...

32. The United Nations, and the Committee, had a political, legal and moral obligation to call on the metropolitan power to cease and desist from its intention to perpetuate its colonial domination over Puerto Rico and must speak out about what was happening in Vieques, Puerto Rico.

33. The obstinacy of the United States Government in preventing Puerto Rico from achieving a sovereign and democratic political status was a source of great tension in Puerto Rico. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was continuing its campaign of harassment and persecution of independence fighters, both in Puerto Rico and in large cities in the United States of America. Indeed, a federal court in Chicago was scheduled to pass sentence on one Mr. José Solís, university professor and independence fighter, the very next day.

34. The Frente Socialista and its member organizations called on the Committee to speak out about the United States stubborn disregard for international law and continued colonial hegemony over Puerto Rico. It supported draft resolution A/AC.109/1999/L.6 - although paragraph 4 must make it clear that the United States Navy must leave Vieques - and urged the Committee to consider taking the case of Puerto Rico to the General Assembly.

35. The CHAIRMAN asked for details about the charges against Mr. José Solís.

36. Mr. FARINACCI (Frente Socialista) said that Mr. Solís was a university professor from the University of Puerto Rico who was alleged to have planted a bomb, although there was no evidence that he had done so, and the entire university community knew that the charges were fabricated. He could be sentenced up to 15 years' imprisonment. Demonstrations would be held on 7 July in Chicago and New York, and in Puerto Rico.

37. Mr. Farinacci withdrew.

38. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Brás (Causa Común Independentista) took a place at the table.

39. Mr. BRÁS (Causa Común Independentista) said that for the first time since the United States intervention in the country, there was a national consensus in Puerto Rico on two issues. One was that the United States Navy should pull out of Vieques island. Vieques was not - contrary to Navy claims - an uninhabited place: it currently had a population of 10,000. Thousands of others had been forced into exile in other parts of Puerto Rico or in the United States because two thirds of the island had been appropriated by the Navy. Constant shellings in the course of naval manoeuvres had destroyed the flora and fauna, eroded the land and affected the health of the inhabitants. The incidence of cancer in Vieques was far higher than in the rest of Puerto Rico. The recent killing of a member of the Civil Guard by a shot fired from a Navy ship had been the last straw and had given rise to an impressive national consensus, extending to the highest levels of Government and to the Catholic and Protestant churches, on the fact that the Navy must leave. Peaceful sit-down protests on beaches usually used for Navy shooting practice had forced the Navy to halt its manoeuvres. Thousands more had protested before the main United States Atlantic naval base in Ceiba, Puerto Rico.

/...

40. The second point on which there was broad national consensus was the need to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all Puerto Rican political prisoners in United States jails, and for a halt to the persecution of pro-independence idealists who had been forced to live in exile or in hiding. The United States claim that its Congress had full powers over the Puerto Rican people was a violation of their right to self-determination.

41. He therefore asked the Committee in the resolution it would be adopting, to refer to those two points of consensus, and to take note that the United States had yet to initiate the decolonization of Puerto Rico, a Latin American and Caribbean nation with its own national identity, whose sovereignty belonged to its people.

42. Mr. BENITEZ VERNON (Cuba) said that it would be interesting to hear the views of Mr. Mari Brás on the recent report of the Special Commission on Vieques headed by the Secretary of State of Puerto Rico.

43. Mr. MARI BRÁS (Causa Común Independentista-Proyecto Educativo Puertorriqueño) said that the publication of the report had been a landmark event in the struggle for national unity. The Committee which had prepared it was composed of representatives of the three main political parties, the Archbishop, the Archdiocese of San Juan, the Catholic Church and civil society, including the fishermen of Vieques, who were the most direct victims of the United States military presence.

44. Mr. Mari Brás withdrew.

45. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Martín (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) took a place at the table.

46. Mr. MARTÍN (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that his party welcomed the Special Committee's draft resolution on Puerto Rico, in particular, the provisions reaffirming the Special Committee's mandate with regard to Puerto Rico and the importance of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), which established the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican and other peoples to self-determination and independence. Any formula for the decolonization of Puerto Rico must recognize the island's sovereignty; annexation of Puerto Rico by the United States of America was not a valid solution under either international law or resolution 1514 (XV).

47. Referring to the fourth preambular paragraph and paragraph 3 of the draft resolution, he said that the United States Government must officially declare its willingness to assume its responsibility in expediting the process that would lead to the self-determination and independence of Puerto Rico. It should initiate talks with representatives of the Puerto Rican people in order to develop more adequate mechanisms to that end. The establishment of a National Assembly or constituent body elected by the Puerto Rican people would be an indispensable first step in the process.

48. The draft resolution also echoed the unanimous opinion of the Special Commission on Vieques, namely, that the United States Marines should withdraw from Vieques island and return the occupied land to Puerto Rico. Both the

/...

Permanent Conference of Latin American Political parties - the largest association of political parties in Latin America - and the Council of Socialist International - the largest association of political parties in the world - had condemned the presence of the United States Marines in Vieques and expressed their solidarity with the Puerto Rican people.

49. Referring to paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, he said that charges against Puerto Rican prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons in connection with the struggle for independence were political and discriminatory. Any discussion of self-determination by the Government of the United States would ring hollow unless those prisoners were released. In conclusion, adoption of the draft resolution would send a strong reminder to the international community of the continuing United States colonialist presence in Puerto Rico and the urgent need to put an end to it.

50. The CHAIRMAN asked Mr. Martín whether the United States Congress was currently considering any proposals concerning Puerto Rico.

51. Mr. MARTÍN (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that, for the time being, no draft legislation was being considered in either the Senate or the House of Representatives. The initiative put forward the previous year had met with success in the House of Representatives but had been rejected by the Senate, which had also refused to entertain any alternative proposals concerning Puerto Rico. The President of the United States seemed to support self-determination for Puerto Rico; however, no formal proposals had been submitted to the legislature as yet.

52. Mr. Martín withdrew.

53. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Guadalupe (Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques) took a place at the table.

54. Mr. GUADALUPE (Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques) said that Vieques Island had been exploited by the United States Marines for nearly 60 years. The residents of Vieques had been deprived of three fourths of their land; many had been uprooted from their communities and assigned to live in community reservations. The people, particularly the women, had been subject to human rights abuses, and a number of civilians had died as a result of the military presence. Recently, a young man, David Sanes, who worked at a military observation post, had been killed during an exercise.

55. According to the records of the Department of Health of Puerto Rico, the incidence of cancer in Vieques was much higher than average. Health problems, as well as water and land pollution, were directly attributable to the toxic substances tested and the explosives detonated by the United States Marines. After many years, the United States Marines had finally admitted that they were using uranium-coated bullets in their military exercises.

56. Recently, his organization had initiated acts of civil disobedience, calling for the demilitarization of Vieques, the restoration of their land, pollution control and land development. In the 1970s, such acts had resulted in the arrest of 21 persons, 13 of whom had been sent to federal prisons in the

/...

United States. One of them, Angel Rodriguez Cristobal, had been killed in the federal prison of Tallahassee, Florida. On 4 July, more than 50,000 persons had joined a protest march outside the United States Marines base. The President of the United States had reacted by appointing a military commission of inquiry. A number of organizations would soon propose that the Special Committee should send a delegation to Vieques to study the situation.

57. According to a recent article in a major Puerto Rican newspaper, the United States Marines were blackmailing politicians in Puerto Rico, particularly those who supported statehood, and were pressuring United States authorities to withhold federal assistance in reaction to calls for their withdrawal. Moreover, the Marines were stepping up military activity with the installation of a radar system - yet another source of pollution - and preparations to receive some of the soldiers who had been stationed in Panama.

58. According to an environmental impact study, more than 3 million pounds of explosives were detonated every year in Vieques. The result was the formation of craters, the accelerated depletion of endangered species and the destruction of other species' habitats. The risk of major accidents was ongoing and the social and economic development of Vieques was severely hampered. He urged the Committee to condemn abuses by the United States Marines, and to defend the right of his organization to protest. Lastly, he said that paragraph 4 of the draft resolution before the Committee should call for withdrawal of the Navy and return of the land to the people of Vieques.

59. Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) asked whether the withdrawal of the United States Marines would have an adverse impact on the economy of Vieques.

60. Mr. GUADALUPE (Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques) said that the economy of Vieques, which was based on agriculture, had been stifled by the presence of the Marines. There was only one factory now operating and it was about to dismiss many of its workers. The other source of income was fishing. The presence of the United States Marines generated barely 100 jobs. Their departure, far from triggering a crisis, would resolve many of the island's economic problems.

61. Mr. BENITEZ-VERSION (Cuba) referred to the alarming statistics contained in a report distributed by the Secretariat on the negative impact of the presence of the United States Marines in Vieques. In particular, he would appreciate information on the impact of biological weapons testing on the population's health and the environment. He wondered whether the Government of the United States, the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization or the United Nations Environment Programme were attempting to deal with the situation.

62. Mr. GUADALUPE (Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques) said that exposure to uranium and other pollutants had caused cancer and skin and respiratory ailments in the civilian population, which resided near the military zone.

63. Mr. AYOUB (Iraq) said that the use of American uranium-coated bullets in his country, particularly in the south, had had a serious impact on the

/...

population's health and that the incidence of cancer was on the rise. He would appreciate receiving a copy of the report in English.

64. Mr. Guadalupe withdrew.

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

66. Mr. SANTIAGO-VALIENTE (United Statehooders Organization of New York, Inc.) said that the Statehooders Organization advocated the admission of Puerto Rico as the fifty-first state of the United States of America. In its resolutions on the question of Puerto Rico, the Special Committee had focused on the right to self-determination and independence. However, in the political status referendum of 13 December 1998, that option had been supported by only 2.5 per cent of the electorate. In future resolutions the Special Committee should take into account the other political status options identified in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV), namely, free association or integration with an independent State.

67. The political status options available to Puerto Rico must be seen in the context of the current political reality. Autonomy, involving administrative and political decentralization, had been a desirable objective in the nineteenth century under Spanish rule. Today, the issue was not autonomy, but sovereignty. The gradual transfer by the United States Congress of additional powers to the island did not address the issue of sovereignty. The solution lay in the full integration of Puerto Rico with the United States, which was the only means of achieving political, economic, social and cultural maturity.

68. Statehood had been advocated historically as a means of resolving territorial claims and meeting the political and cultural aspirations of peoples; in the case of Puerto Rico, there were no territorial claims at stake. The proponents of separation argued that independence was necessary in order to protect Puerto Rico's cultural identity. The Statehooders Organization maintained, however, that full integration with the United States in conditions of equality would strengthen, rather than weaken, the island's cultural expression and enhance the diversity of American culture. That process was already taking place, even under the current conditions of political subordination.

69. Mr. Santiago-Valiente withdrew.

70. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Reverón Collazo (Congreso Nacional Hostosiano) took a place at the table.

71. MS. REVERÓN COLLAZO (Congreso Nacional Hostosiano) said that although two months had elapsed since a member of the Civil Guard had been killed and four other persons wounded during a naval exercise on Vieques island, the United States Navy had yet to issue a report or identify those responsible. It had denied the request of the Puerto Rican Department of Justice to participate in the investigation of the incident; and a request for information from the Special Commission appointed by the Governor had likewise been rebuffed by the Navy and the Environmental Protection Agency. The inhabitants had been saying

/...

for years that military manoeuvres with live ammunition on an island inhabited by over 9,000 people were bound to cause fatal accidents.

72. The United States had stepped up military activities in Puerto Rico, since 1980, despite Special Committee resolutions calling on it to desist, and had even leased its base to military allies for an estimated \$80 million annually.

73. The latest admission by the Navy that Vieques had been the testing ground for bullets clad with depleted uranium to be used in the war in Yugoslavia had caused consternation. The inhabitants of Vieques had a far higher cancer rate than the rest of the population of Puerto Rico. The Legislature of Puerto Rico had ordered an epidemiological study of the population of Vieques to find a scientific explanation.

74. The environmental problems had been compounded by a severe economic and social underdevelopment that had forced generations to emigrate in search of education and employment, in keeping with a Navy plan to hold down population growth so that it could eventually take over the entire island.

75. The Special Committee should, in the resolution it adopted on the question, call upon the United States to respect the principles of self-determination and of the human rights of peoples. Vieques was only one instance of the many violations of civil rights committed by the United States in Puerto Rico. Its persecution, repression and assassination of pro-independence fighters had been denounced and documented for decades. A recent sentencing had added another political prisoner to the 16 currently imprisoned for sedition, under the longest allowable prison terms. The international community should again, as in the past, call for their release, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

76. Ms. Reverón Collazo withdrew.

77. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Luz Rexach (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) took a place at the table.

78. Ms. LUZ REXACH (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) said that since her arrival in New York in 1970, she had devoted her life to making Puerto Rican culture known. She asked the Committee to bear in mind that more than 97 per cent of the population had rejected independence. If the pro-independence faction ever gained power, it would apply its usual tactics of intimidation on a national scale, producing a regime like that of Cuba, which was driving its people to flee in rafts.

79. Mr. BENITEZ-VERSON (Cuba), speaking on a point of order, said that the petitioner should restrict her remarks to the item under consideration, relating solely to Puerto Rico.

80. The CHAIRMAN asked the petitioner to continue without insulting any Member State.

81. Ms. LUZ REXACH (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) said that it had not been her intention to offend. She recalled that the Treaty of Paris of

/...

1898 had recognized the authority of the United States Congress to provide for the political status of the inhabitants of the Territory of Puerto Rico, the fact that the United States had liberated Puerto Rico from Spanish control had been a blessing for all the people. Puerto Rico had been a part of the United States since the Jones Act of 1917, a fact that had been recognized by the United States Supreme Court. A declaration of the statehood of Puerto Rico was the only acceptable solution to the problem of its status. The solution was not to expel Puerto Rico from the Union, as the opponents of statehood sought, but to give all Puerto Ricans their full rights as American citizens and grant them the equality that was their due.

82. Ms. Luz Rexach withdrew.

83. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Corretjer (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) took a place at the table.

84. Ms. CORRETJER (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) said that she had come before the Committee in the hope that Puerto Rico would be allowed to throw off the bonds of colonialism and gain freedom and self-determination. During the past year, even as a national consensus on the question had formed, the occupying Power had once again affirmed its absolute dominion. The international community must now acknowledge that it had been misled when it had recognized the end of Puerto Rico's non-self-governing status in resolution 748 (VIII) and that it must still complete its historic mission to bring self-determination to Puerto Rico in accordance with establishing international norms.

85. Any remaining doubts would have been dispelled by the unanimous national reaction to the violation of the life, peace and freedom of the people of Vieques island by the United States Navy. Vieques stood as a symbol of Puerto Rico's sad position as a colony. The report of the Special Commission appointed by the Governor of the colony, comprising representatives of the three political parties, Catholic Church authorities and the people, recommended unanimously that the United States Navy be called upon to end immediately and permanently its military activities in Vieques and rapidly hand over in an orderly fashion the lands it held. No nation could be free when the military forces of another put restrictions on its people's freedom of movement and fishing rights, and practised dangerous war games on its territory. Puerto Rico wanted the Navy to pull out of Vieques, but it would not agree to the military activities and dangerous exercises being shifted to other parts of the country. The raw truth was that Puerto Rico was an occupied country and has no power to oblige the Navy to cease its occupation.

86. As further evidence of Puerto Rico's colonial situation, 16 of its patriots were growing old in United States jails, serving sentences three times longer than those normally imposed for murder. The petition for political amnesty for them had been languishing for six years in the office of a President who could mobilize a war in Kosovo but had thus far proven incapable of making such a gesture of reconciliation. Such violations of the human rights of Puerto Ricans would cease only when Puerto Rico became a free and independent nation.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.