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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 12th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Tuesday, 6 July 1999, at 3 p.m.

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

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

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

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS (aide-mémoire 14/99)

1. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that he had received an additional request for a hearing on Puerto Rico, which had been circulated in an addendum to aide-mémoire 14/99. He took it the Committee wished to grant the request.
2. It was so decided.

QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO (continued) (A/AC.109/1999/L.6; A/AC.109/1999/CRP.4)

Hearing of petitioners

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Adames (Al Frente) took a place at the petitioners' table.
4. Mr. ADAMES (Al Frente) said that, since the passage of the Jones Act by the United States Congress in 1917, Puerto Ricans had been citizens of the United States. However, Puerto Ricans were second-class citizens, since they had all the duties but not all the rights of citizens. For 82 years, Puerto Rico had governed itself as if it was a state. During that period, Hawaii and Alaska, which were smaller to Puerto Rico in that they were also territories separate from the continental United States, had become states, while Puerto Rico had remained without representation in the United States Congress and lacked many of the federal benefits that other states enjoyed.
5. The creation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952 had caused great confusion, which was perpetuated by the positions taken by the two major Puerto Rican political parties. One party supported Commonwealth status, while the other was in favour of statehood. Considered closely, the two options were basically the same. In every plebiscite, Puerto Ricans had always voted for their two major parties; the votes should be combined and construed as expressing a desire for incorporation. Since the independence option had been rejected in every plebiscite, the only option that would enable Puerto Rico to rid itself of its second-class status would be statehood.
6. In the 1993 plebiscite, the United Nations disapproval of Commonwealth status had undermined the opposition party's platform and resulted in the inclusion of the option "None of the above". Members of the opposition party had been encouraged to vote for that option, since it allowed their party to remain a political force.
7. Moreover, each plebiscite unfairly called into question the United States citizenship of Puerto Ricans. While many countries were taking steps to recognize the dual nationality of their citizens residing abroad, some parties were advocating a position that would deprive Puerto Ricans of United States citizenship.

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8. The close relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States of America had been sealed not only by history but by demography: while 3.6 million Puerto Ricans resided on the island, another 2.7 million were currently living in all parts of the continental United States. Any attempt to separate Puerto Rico from the United States would create major social upheaval with unpredictable consequences. On the other hand, maintaining the current status would perpetuate discrimination and second-class citizenship. It was the duty of the United Nations to promote the statehood of Puerto Rico and insist on its immediate representation in the United States Congress. Only then could there be a fair debate about issues of language or culture. The fact that residents of the island could not vote in presidential elections was one of the reasons that abuses like those on Vieques island had been allowed to continue.

9. The younger generation of Puerto Ricans suffered most from discrimination and political uncertainty. The only just solution would be for the United States to declare Puerto Rico the fifty-first state.

10. Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) said that his delegation wished to know what factors had prevented Puerto Rico from becoming a state. Perhaps one reason was the division of opinion among Puerto Ricans themselves. The island's Hispanic heritage might also be a factor.

11. Mr. ADAMES (Al Frente) said that discrimination against Hispanics was one obstacle to Puerto Rican statehood. Another was use of the Commonwealth option as a political ploy, obscuring the essential similarity of the Commonwealth and statehood positions. A third obstacle was the existence of commercial interests that were reluctant to lose the advantages they currently enjoyed. Yet Puerto Ricans had always served in the United States armed forces and, since they had sacrificed their lives for the United States, Puerto Rico deserved to be a state, and the United Nations should urge the United States to make an offer of statehood.

12. Mr. Adames withdrew.

13. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Vargas (Concerned Puerto Rican Americans) took a place at the petitioners' table.

14. Mr. VARGAS (Concerned Puerto Rican Americans) said that, in August 1998, the Special Committee on decolonization had reconfirmed Puerto Rico's right to full sovereignty and independence. The Special Committee should be aware that the United States Administration was bent on the genocide of the Puerto Rican people and the destruction of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth and Constitution. In the plebiscite that had been held in December 1998 in violation of the 1952 agreements and the Puerto Rican Constitution, the statehood option had once again been defeated.

15. If the United States Congress failed to pass the bill on the emancipation of Puerto Rico, which had been proposed by Concerned Puerto Rican Americans, the General Assembly should take a number of actions. First, it should convene an emergency session to accuse the United States of violating General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and Special Committee resolutions and decisions concerning Puerto Rico. Secondly, it should call for a 72-hour economic embargo against

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the United States. Thirdly, it should admit Puerto Rico as a member of the General Assembly with full voting rights. Fourthly, it should recognize Puerto Rico and the United States as two separate countries bound together by an agreement of free association, under which Puerto Rico would have full sovereignty over its land, sea and air. The Assembly should call upon States Members of the United Nations to invite Puerto Rico to open embassies in their countries. Lastly, it should adopt a resolution calling for presidential elections in Puerto Rico in the year 2004; the elections would be supervised by the Special Committee.

16. Mr. Vargas withdrew.

17. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Rivera (Estadidad 2000) took a place at the petitioners' table.

18. Mr. RIVERA (Estadidad 2000) said that he represented an organization in New York City dedicated to promoting Puerto Rican statehood. Statehood was the only form of government that would enable Puerto Ricans living on the island to enjoy full citizenship. Under the current Commonwealth arrangement, Puerto Ricans could not vote in presidential elections and lacked representation in the United States Congress, except for the Resident Commissioner, who was a non-voting member of the House of Representatives.

19. Moreover, the Commonwealth arrangement did not include national sovereignty. No bilateral agreement existed between Puerto Rico and the United States. At the time the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act (Public Law 600) had been enacted, the Governor of Puerto Rico and the Resident Commissioner for Puerto Rico had both recognized that the bill, which provided for local self-government, did not change the fundamental status of Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory nor did it alter the authority of the United States Congress over the island under the Treaty of Paris of 1898. Thus, even after the creation of the Commonwealth of 1952, and despite General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) of 27 November 1953 allowing the United States to cease reporting on the status of Puerto Rico, the island had retained its colonial status and was subject to the Territorial Clause of the United States Constitution.

20. In the 1993 plebiscite, over half of the voters had rejected colonial status in favour of statehood (46.3 per cent) or independence (4.4 per cent). In 1998, a bill had been introduced in the United States Congress to hold a plebiscite offering the options of statehood, independence or free association; the bill had passed in the House of Representatives but not in the Senate. Nonetheless, a plebiscite had been held in December 1998 without the authorization of Congress. Originally, the voting options had included only the three recognized by the United Nations as decolonizing: integration on the basis of complete equality, independence or free association. Proponents of the status quo had urged the inclusion of the Commonwealth option but, dissatisfied with the definition, then insisted on a fifth option, "None of the above". The largest number of votes had gone to the fifth option, so that the results of the plebiscite were unclear, since fifth-option voting in some cases reflected dissatisfaction with government policy, while in others it indicated support for

an improved Commonwealth arrangement that would combine United States citizenship and subsidies with national sovereignty.

21. In view of this situation, the Special Committee should urge the United States Congress to hold a plebiscite on self-determination, for the good and honour of the peoples of Puerto Rico and the United States, and the international community as a whole.

22. Mr. Rivera withdrew.

23. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Lebrón (Puerto Rico, Mi Patria) took a place at the petitioners' table.

24. Ms. LEBRÓN (Puerto Rico, Mi Patria) said that, since 25 July 1898, Puerto Rico had been a military colony of the United States of America, whose Congress had complete authority over the political future of Puerto Rico. The colonial system sought to destroy Puerto Ricans' desire for freedom, suppress their identity and subject their children to a foreign educational system. Many Puerto Rican families had been forced to deny their national identity and to live in fear and submission. The climate of political repression was manifested by the 17 Puerto Ricans imprisoned by the United States Government for seeking to liberate their country; the prisoners were serving sentences far longer than those meted out for serious crimes.

25. The United States military presence was so thoroughly established that it was using the Municipio islands for battlefield training with no regard for the lives of their inhabitants or for the environment. The United States Navy had invaded Culebra and Vieques, with disastrous results for their environment and development. Uranium and other toxic substances were being stored on Vieques, where the incidence of cancer and other diseases was on the rise. The inhabitants of Vieques were forced to live in constant fear of explosions and bombardments, a situation which had culminated on 19 April 1999 with the death of a guard, David Sanes, and the wounding of four other civilians. The Governor of Puerto Rico himself had announced the findings of the commission to investigate the incident and had declared the United States Navy must withdraw from Vieques, return all the land it had taken and rehabilitate contaminated sites.

26. She denounced the United States Navy for storing nuclear weapons and other war matériel at the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba and for leasing the training ground on Vieques island to the navies of other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Latin American countries, and also to private enterprises for weapons testing. That dirty business, which involved the massacre of human beings, was enriching the United States Treasury.

27. During her 25 years in prison, to which she had been sentenced for attacking the United States Congress, God had given her the message that all nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction must be removed from the face of the earth. God was offended at the sin and wickedness of Governments and societies, and called upon them to repent. He desired to give humanity a new heart, a heart not only of flesh but also filled with the Spirit of God, to

raise humanity to the level of Divine Grace, where all could live together in peace and freedom as one human family.

28. Mr. BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba) said that it appeared that all sectors of Puerto Rican society agreed that the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico was colonial and that the Committee must take action to change that relationship. He requested Ms. Lebrón to expound on the reasons for the current unity among the Puerto Rican people with regard to the need to change the island's colonial status, obtain the release of political prisoners and ensure the withdrawal of the United States Navy from Vieques island.

29. Ms. LEBRÓN (Puerto Rico, Mi Patria) said that men were not born to be slaves but had the right to be free as children of God. The situation in Puerto Rico was one of domination of the powerful over the weak. Many Puerto Ricans walked with their heads bowed before the oppressor. Although the United States had tried to buy their dignity with material things and force them into dependence, Puerto Ricans had the ability, courage and desire to govern themselves and would not bow to any foreign power. The United States must end its occupation of Puerto Rico and pay compensation for what it had stolen from the Puerto Rican people.

30. Ms. Lebrón withdrew.

31. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Ramos (Asociación Americana de Juristas) took a place at the petitioners' table.

32. Ms. RAMOS (Asociación Americana de Juristas) said that many of the conflicts in the Latin American and the Caribbean region had their origins in the interventionist policies of the United States Government. In 1998, after years of postponement, the Committee had adopted a resolution recognizing the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence and deciding to keep the question of Puerto Rico under continuing review. The just demands of the Puerto Rican people included the right to self-determination, protection of their human rights, cessation of United States military exercises in their territory and release of Puerto Ricans serving prison sentences for their struggle for independence.

33. The recent death of David Sanes in an accident caused by the United States Navy on Vieques island had led to a resurgence of popular protest among all sectors of Puerto Rican society against the United States naval presence. The Special Commission established by the Governor of Puerto Rico to investigate the incident had recommended a permanent and immediate halt to all military activities on Vieques island, the return of all expropriated land and an epidemiological study of the incidence of cancer among its population.

34. In conclusion, she said that her organization hoped that the Committee would give its full support to a true process of self-determination in Puerto Rico in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

35. Ms. Ramos withdrew.

36. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Pabón Cintrón (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.

37. Ms. PABÓN CINTRÓN (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) said that, since its founding in 1948, her organization, which was a branch of the Masons, had advocated Puerto Rican self-determination and independence. Over the years, Puerto Rico had shown solidarity with many of the countries represented in the Committee; now it was in need of their support and understanding in its struggle to overcome 101 years of imperialism. She therefore called upon the members of the Committee to give their unconditional commitment in order to achieve peace and harmony in Puerto Rico.

38. Ms. Pabón Cintrón withdrew.

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

40. Mr. MURIENTE PÉREZ (Nuevo Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that two important events had taken place in Puerto Rico in 1998: a demonstration had brought together thousands of people to protest against the privatization of the telephone company, and the centenary of the United States military invasion of Puerto Rico had been commemorated. A year later, the United States Congress still appeared to be unwilling to allow the Puerto Rican people to exercise its right to self-determination. The colonial Government's holding of a "creole plebiscite" had made a mockery of international law, especially General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The results of the plebiscite were not in any way binding on the United States Government; on the contrary, the plebiscite had served as a means of furthering the interests of the colonial Government.

41. A year after the plebiscite, the people of Puerto Rico had once again taken to the streets to demand an immediate halt to the bombing on Vieques island and the withdrawal of the United States Navy from that part of Puerto Rico. In that regard, the Special Commission on Vieques, which had been established by the Governor of Puerto Rico, had recommended a permanent and immediate halt to all military activities on Vieques and the rapid return of land in the possession of the United States Navy to the people of Vieques.

42. The use of live ordnance on Vieques had polluted the soil and atmosphere, endangering the health of the island's population. The Puerto Rican people was demanding the immediate release of all Puerto Rican political prisoners who had been languishing for years in United States prisons. On the eve of a new century and a new millennium, the Puerto Rican nation was still struggling for the exercise of its legitimate rights. The members of the Committee should therefore support Puerto Rico's aspirations to self-determination and independence.

43. Mr. TANOH BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) asked what the petitioner meant by halting the bombing of Vieques island and what the targets of such bombing were.

44. Mr. MURIENTE PÉREZ (Nuevo Movimiento Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that Vieques island was a municipality to the east of Puerto Rico. Three

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quarters of the island had been occupied by the United States of America since the early 1940s. In addition to serving as a military base, Vieques was also used by the United States Navy and Air Force 200 days a year for military exercises. The use of bombs and other war matériel endangered the lives of the island's civilian inhabitants. The activities of the United States military for almost half a century had stunted the social and economic development of Vieques, caused serious environmental pollution and the salinization of the island's freshwater resources, and had even led to a kind of "ethnic cleansing" of the island, since many natives of Vieques had fled to other islands of Puerto Rico or to the United States. The island, which had once been a leading producer of sugar cane, meat and fish products and had tremendous potential as a tourist destination, was in shambles. The people of Vieques called for a halt to the gradual destruction of their island, so that they could live in peace and harmony and achieve full development.

45. Mr. Muriente Pérez withdrew.

46. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Rivera-Arvelo (United States Statehood for Puerto Rico, Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.

47. Mr. RIVERA-ARVELO (United States Statehood for Puerto Rico, Inc.) said that the United States presence had had a profound impact on Puerto Rico's society and economy. Many Puerto Ricans had emigrated to the United States of America, or had been born there or lived there for many years. There were currently more Puerto Ricans in New York City than in San Juan, and the Puerto Rican population of Chicago, Newark and Hartford exceeded that of most cities on the island.

48. With the exception of taxes, Puerto Rico was like a state in terms of its relationship with the United States Government. While Puerto Rico received assistance under United States federal programmes, such assistance was far less than that authorized for states of the Union owing to the special limitations imposed by Congress. On the other hand, the United States Government also derived considerable benefits from its relationship with Puerto Rico. The United States had a number of important military bases in Puerto Rico. The United States private sector had invested billions of dollars in Puerto Rico, and trade between the United States and Puerto Rico exceeded \$6 billion a year. Puerto Rico was the world's fifth largest offshore customer for United States goods and services, and a major share of expenditures on the island flowed back to American farmers and other participants in the production and distribution chain. Puerto Rico also had mineral deposits and great potential for offshore oil production. Moreover, the island's strategic geopolitical situation in the Caribbean was of great importance.

49. Only Puerto Ricans could decide on the island's political status. During the most recent plebiscite, the people of Puerto Rico had ridiculed the notion of independence for Puerto Rico, and the United Nations could not impose that option on Puerto Ricans without their consent. In his view, statehood was the best solution for Puerto Rico.

50. Mr. Rivera-Arvelo (United States Statehood for Puerto Rico, Inc.) withdrew.



51. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Koppel (Socialist Workers Party in the United States) took a place at the petitioners' table.

52. Mr. KOPPEL (Socialist Workers Party in the United States) said the fact that Puerto Rico was a United States colony had devastating consequences for the inhabitants of the island. Independence was in the interest not only of the Puerto Rican people but of the overwhelming majority of the people of the United States. Working people in the United States and the Puerto Rican people faced the same exploiters, whose headquarters were in Washington. Independence for Puerto Rico would deal a powerful blow to that common enemy, by showing that it was possible to stand up to the most brutal capitalist class in the world and to break its domination.

53. The economic crisis of world capitalism was leading increasing numbers of workers and farmers in the United States to resist the employers' offensive on their wages and their social and political rights. The same economic crisis was fuelling working class struggles in Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans were subjected to systematic racist discrimination, and the United States' colonial domination of Puerto Rico reinforced racism and every reactionary force in United States society. Many Puerto Rican patriots had been imprisoned in the United States. In that regard, the Socialist Workers Party called for the immediate release of all 17 Puerto Rican political prisoners. Such steps were in fact part of its measures to curb the rights of workers and farmers.

54. Puerto Rico had historically been used for launching attacks on other countries, and its youth had served as cannon fodder in all imperialist wars of the twentieth century. Many pilots of United States aircraft that had bombed Yugoslavia had been trained on Vieques island. Every aspect of that foreign policy harmed the interests of working people in the United States. In the name of combating "terrorism", Washington was currently moving towards establishing a continental military command for North America.

55. The socialist road taken by the workers and peasants of Cuba was the only one that had proven capable of leading to genuine independence and dignity. The difference between that road and the prospects under United States colonial rule had been brought into sharp relief by the social catastrophe sparked by the hurricanes that had swept through the Caribbean and Central America in 1998. Nine months after Hurricane Georges had battered Puerto Rico, hundreds of working people were still living in shelters. Cuba had mobilized its small, modest resources not only to protect the lives and livelihood of the Cuban people but also to offer selfless aid to the affected countries in Central America and the Caribbean.

56. The fate of Puerto Rico and that of Cuba had always been inseparably linked. The example of revolutionary Cuba continued to point the road forward for Puerto Rico and working people worldwide. The Special Committee's condemnation of Washington's colonial rule of Puerto Rico would serve the interests of the vast majority of United States citizens and people fighting everywhere for national self-determination and the future of humanity.

57. Mr. TANOHO-BOUTCHOÛÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the petitioner had urged the Special Committee to condemn United States colonial rule of Puerto Rico and he

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wondered why the United States Government had not taken steps to change the status of Puerto Rico, if that was what the majority of the Puerto Ricans wanted.

58. Mr. KOPPEL (Socialist Workers Party in the United States) said that the Special Committee's condemnation of United States colonial rule of Puerto Rico would serve the interests of the vast majority of the people of the United States and those fighting everywhere for national self-determination. The workers and farmers of the United States of America, a large majority of the population, faced the same problems, enemies, exploiters and future as the people of Puerto Rico because the United States Congress did not represent the interests of the vast majority of people in the United States. The United States Government at every level represented the interests of a small number of billionaire families whose interests were in complete contradiction with those of the majority.

59. Working people in Puerto Rico and in the United States responded in the same way to deteriorating wages and living standards and job cutbacks, to attacks on the most fundamental social gains that working people had made in the past half century, and to the increased use of the police, courts and federal grand juries to punish fighters for the working class and for Puerto Rican independence. Workers had begun to act in their own interests by demanding recognition of their unions and by organizing strikes. A growing network of workers and farmers were beginning to forge links with one another in order to chart a path independent of the ruling minority and its political parties.

60. Mr. Koppel withdrew.

61. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Zoe Lugo-Mendoza (Vieques Support Campaign) took a place at the petitioners' table.

62. Ms. LUGO-MENDOZA (Vieques Support Campaign) said that, on 6 February 1978, a group of Vieques fishermen, armed only with stones, slingshots and a willingness to risk their lives, had confronted NATO warships at sea. That had not only been a desperate act of self-defence; the fishermen had also sought to draw attention to the fact that the situation in which they were living was so abusive and oppressive that they were willing to risk everything to make it stop. They had to an extent succeeded: over 30 war manoeuvres had been halted. However, it had only been after the death of a civilian as a result of United States bombing that their message had spread to the whole island of Puerto Rico which, along with Vieques, was demanding a halt to United States bombing of Puerto Rico and the withdrawal of its Navy from Vieques.

63. During the 60 years of the United States Navy's occupation of the 52-square-mile island the over 9,300 inhabitants of Vieques had witnessed the seizure of their lands and resources; they had been systematically disempowered and their environment had been destroyed. The unemployment rate exceeded 25 per cent. The United States Navy provided only 120 jobs. Fishing was the only economically viable industry since the Navy had expropriated the island's most fertile land. When the Navy entered fishing waters, the ships' propellers destroyed the buoys marking the location of the nets, leaving the nets to continue trapping and destroying fish for up to a year.

64. The bombing of Vieques had led to the destruction of its delicate ecosystems. Moreover the explosions and military manoeuvres also left toxic residues: a report issued in the 1970s by the United States Environmental Protection Agency had revealed unhealthy levels of particulates in the air and abnormally high concentrations of iron in the soil. The Navy had admitted to using napalm and munitions containing depleted uranium. According to the Puerto Rican Department of Health, the incidence of cancer among the inhabitants of Vieques had been 26 per cent higher than the rest of Puerto Rico between 1985 and 1989, and there had been a documented increase in the incidence of very rare diseases.

65. The recent death of a civilian, for which the people of Vieques held the Navy responsible, had unleashed the strongest opposition yet to the Navy presence. Two days after the incident, a group of people had entered the bombardment zone and set up camp. Since then, four more camps had been established. The most diverse sectors of Puerto Rican society - unions, religious groups, cultural institutions and so forth - were coordinating their activities and seeking international support in order to exert pressure on the United States Government to return Vieques to its people. The Special Commission established by the Governor of Puerto Rico had stated that the Navy's activities over the past 60 years had caused more damage than any other single agent in Puerto Rico's history, and the Government of Puerto Rico had called for the closing of the weapons training facility on Vieques. The United States Government's appointment of a panel to consider the matter had been received with some suspicion and cynicism by the Puerto Rican community since the panel was composed of people directly linked to the United States Navy.

66. It was the duty of the Special Committee and the international community to accede to the will of the Puerto Rican people and condemn the United States Government's colonial domination of Puerto Rico. She invited the members of the Special Committee to visit Vieques island to assess the environmental devastation. The international community should use all available channels to communicate its concern to the Government of the United States and urge it to withdraw its Navy from Vieques.

67. Ms. Lugo-Mendoza withdrew.

68. Mr. MEKIDAD (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur, introducing the study, contained in document A/AC.109/1999/CRP.4, that he had prepared pursuant to paragraph 3 of the Special Committee resolution A/AC.109/2131 of 11 August 1998, said that the last time such a study had been requested had been in 1984. The current study differed from the 1984 study in that it contained a wealth of information provided by the people of Puerto Rico themselves in response to letters sent in April 1999 to a variety of organizations in Puerto Rico. Summaries of the replies from those organizations were contained in paragraphs 191 to 253 of the study. All other documentation received was available to interested delegations in the Committee's secretariat.

Draft resolution on Special Committee decision of 11 August 1998 concerning Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/1999/L.6)

69. Mr. BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba), introducing draft resolution A/AC.109/1999/L.6, said that the words "and the return of all occupied territories to the people of Puerto Rico" should be inserted at the end of paragraph 4.

70. The draft resolution took into account the Special Committee's 17 resolutions and decisions on the question of Puerto Rico that the Special Committee had adopted since 1972. It highlighted the adverse social, economic and environmental consequences of the United States Navy's occupation of three quarters of Vieques island. It also drew attention to the situation of the Puerto Rican prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons; the independence of Puerto Rico; the Special Committee's previous resolutions and decisions in that regard had so far had no tangible results. The draft resolution was the result of intensive consultations with the direct participation of representatives of diverse social and political elements of Puerto Rican society, as well as many of the Member States represented in the Special Committee. His delegation believed that it was Cuba's bounden duty once again to submit a draft resolution on Puerto Rico to the Committee, and urged all members of the Special Committee to support it.

71. Mr. SALAMANCA (Bolivia) said that, while his delegation fully supported the draft resolution, the word "territories" in the oral revision of paragraph 4 of the draft should be replaced by the word "land" in keeping with the sixth preambular paragraph.

72. Mr. BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba) accepted the proposal to replace the word "territories" with "land".

73. The CHAIRMAN invited the Special Committee to take action on the draft resolution.

74. Mr. EGUIGUREN (Chile), speaking in explanation of vote before the voting, said that his delegation had been instructed to abstain in the voting on the draft resolution and to request a roll-call vote.

75. Mr. ZAEMSKI (Russian Federation) said that his delegation had not been aware that a roll-call vote would be requested, since it had expected the draft resolution to be adopted by consensus. In the absence of instructions from his Government, he requested a postponement of the vote.

76. A procedural discussion followed in which Mr. DURING (Sierra Leone) and Mr. YUSUF (Tanzania) spoke in favour of a postponement, while Mr. SALAMANCA (Bolivia), Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba) and Mr. MEKDAD (Syrian Arab Republic) opposed a postponement.

77. The CHAIRMAN ruled that the voting should proceed.

78. At the request of the representative of Chile, a vote was taken by roll-call on draft resolution A/AC.109/1999/L.6 as orally revised.

79. Côte d'Ivoire, having been drawn by lot by the Chairman, was called upon to vote first.

In favour: Bolivia, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Fiji, Grenada, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Saint Lucia, Sierra Leone, Syrian Arab Republic, United Republic of Tanzania.

Abstaining: Chile, India, Papua New Guinea, Russian Federation, Venezuela.

80. Draft resolution A/AC.109/1999/L.6, as orally revised, was adopted by 12 votes to none, with 5 abstentions.

81. Mr. MONAGAS-LESSEUR (Venezuela), speaking in explanation of vote, said that his delegation had always supported Puerto Rico's right to independence in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). While his delegation had taken note of the broad consensus in Puerto Rican society on a number of issues, it was also aware that there was no consensus on the future status of Puerto Rico. His delegation had therefore abstained in the voting.

The meeting rose at 6.30 p.m.