

Special Committee on Decolonization Calls on United States for Puerto Rico

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Special Committee on Decolonization 6th & 7th Meetings (AM & PM). With Consensus Text, Special Committee on Decolonization Calls on United States to Expedite Process Allowing Puerto Rico to Fully Exercise Self-Determination. Also Requests General Assembly to Consider Issue Comprehensively. Calls for Release of Political Prisoners, As More Than 30 Petitioners Take Floor.

The Special Committee on Decolonization today called on the United States to expedite a process that would allow Puerto Ricans to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, requesting the General Assembly to consider the question of Puerto Rico comprehensively in all its aspects.

By the terms of a draft resolution, which was approved by consensus, the Special Committee—formally known as the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples—noted the broad support of eminent persons, Governments and political forces in Latin America and the Caribbean for the independence of Puerto Rico.

It again noted the debate in Puerto Rico on the implementation of a mechanism that would ensure the full participation of representatives of all viewpoints prevailing in Puerto Rico—including a constitutional assembly on status with a basis in the decolonization alternatives recognized in international law. It was aware that any initiative for the solution of

the political status should originate from the people of Puerto Rico. It also urged the United States—in line with the need to guarantee Puerto Ricans their right to self-determination—to complete the return of occupied land and installations on Vieques Island and in Ceiba to Puerto Ricans.

Introducing the text, Cuba's representative said that since 1972, 30 resolutions and decisions on Puerto Rico had been adopted, but in 40 years, very little progress had been made. The people of Puerto Rico were still unable to exercise their genuine right to self-determination and the United States continued to wield power over their economy.

He said the text, among other things, took note of the Special Declaration on Puerto Rico, adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas in Caracas in February 2012, which expressed strong support for the inalienable right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination and full independence. The draft also reiterated the Special Committee's request to the United States President to release Puerto Rican political prisoners serving sentences in the United States for cases relating to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico.

Making their case before the Special Committee—also known as the Special Committee of 24—some of the more than 30 petitioners decried the island's current Commonwealth status with the United States, which outlines the United States' congressional authority over the island. That status determines that Puerto Ricans living on the island do not vote in United States presidential elections, despite being United States citizens, and do not have full representation in Congress. Their interests are supported by a Resident Coordinator, who serves as a non-voting member of the House of Representatives.

Petitioners pressed the international community to recognize Puerto Rico's colonial status and place it on the list of United Nations Non-Self-Governing Territories. Bringing life to that cause, José M. López, of Compañeros Unidos para la Descolonización de Puerto Rico, said the decolonization process was carried out under international jurisdiction, a fact most Puerto Ricans did not know, as the United States had convinced them it was a domestic issue. Puerto Rico must be decolonized via the United Nations. What justification was there to leave out the most populated and oldest colony in the world?

Another part of the equation, said Juan Dalmau Ramirez, of the Partido Independista Puertorriqueño, involved placing international pressure on the colonial power by urging Latin American and Caribbean countries to express solidarity with anti-colonization efforts at the United Nations. Such claims would be an important contribution to the "convergence of will" towards the decolonization process in Puerto Rico.

Some petitioners favoured statehood for Puerto Rico, arguing that the territory already functioned as such, with an elected governor. It was just missing the declaration of statehood, which would bring it the right to vote for President, and elect two senators and seven congressmen. While some believed Puerto Rico was a free associated State, said Nilda Luz Rexach, National Advancement for Puerto Rico, the island was no such thing, as its Constitution had been tailored and authorized by the United States Congress, making it clear

that federal law would overrule that of Puerto Rico on any occasion. The Commonwealth was just a lie.

Others argued for full independence, stressing the need to liberate the Puerto Rican people and denouncing United States authority over Puerto Rican borders. The island had become a United States testing ground for genetically modified plants and other experiments, the consequences of which had been borne by the local people. Francisco Velgara, Frente Socaalista de Puerto Rico, also voiced opposition to recent attempts to impose English as an official language, pledging to defend Puerto Rican culture.

Several agreed that the issue of status would not be solved by the conduct of a referendum. They took issue with legislation adopted by the Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP) Government for a plebiscite regarding Puerto Rico's political status to be held on 6 November. The plebiscite would ask voters whether they agreed with maintaining the current territorial status and, further, whether they would prefer statehood, independence or free association with the United States as an alternative. Jan Susler, of the People's Law Office/National Lawyers Guild, said the exercise would not resolve the status question, as results would not be binding on the United States and would ignore the mandates of international law.

Integral to the status question, other petitioners said, was that of Puerto Rican political prisoners being held in United States prisons. Their incarceration was a violation of international human rights, particularly in the cases of Oscar Lopez Rivera, Avelino Gonzalez Claudio and Norberto Gonzalez Claudio, who, prior to their arrests, had joined the Puerto Rican independence movement. Their excessive sentences had made clear that "the goal was to punish them for their beliefs and not for the acts alleged by the US Government," said Benjamin Ramos Rosado, of the Prolibertad Freedom Campaign.

Their crime was one of ideas, added Carlos Alberto Torres, of Futuro Sin Fala, who had been held as a political prisoner by the United States for 30 years, from 1980 to 2010. Since United States occupation, thousands of Puerto Ricans had been jailed. Colonialism was the real crime, not the effort to resist it.

Other petitioners addressing the Special Committee today were representatives of the following organizations: Comité de Puerto Rico en Naciones Unidas, Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano, Coalición Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte, La Fundacion Andres Figueroa Cordero, Movimiento de Afirmacion Vieques, American Association of Jurists, Puertorriqueños Unidos En Accion (PUA), Alianza pro Libre Asociacion Soberana, Ithaca Catholic Workers Vieques Support Group, Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican Independence Party, Socialist Workers Party, Comité de Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico, Movimiento Unión Soberanista de Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico's House of Representatives, Frente Patriotico Arecibeño, Comite Toabajeños Contra El Gasoducto, Centro Mujer y Nueva Familia, National Jericho Movement and Taller de la Playa.

Also speaking today were representatives of Egypt, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Iran, Ecuador, Syria and Cuba.

The Special Committee on Decolonization will reconvene at 10 a.m. Tuesday, 19 June, for a discussion with United Nations specialized agencies on the implementation of the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

Background

The Special Committee on Decolonization met today to consider a report on the Special Committee's decision of 21 June 2011 concerning Puerto Rico (document A/AC.109/2012/L.13), and a related draft resolution (document A/AC.109/2012/L.7).

Prepared by the Rapporteur, the report considers Puerto Rico in light of previous such reports prepared, as well as recent political, economic and military developments on the island, and action taken by the United Nations on the matter. Puerto Rico has Commonwealth status with the United States, with the United States Congress holding plenary power over the island, which is vested with local authority over designated areas. All laws concerning the Territory's relations with the United States are in force through the Federal Relations Act.

The report says that several plebiscites have been held to determine what Puerto Ricans think the island's status should be, sometimes with controversial outcomes. According to a 1993 plebiscite, for example, 48.4 per cent wished to retain the status quo, with close to 46.2 per cent preferring statehood and 4 per cent wanting independence. In 1998, however, when a local political party introduced a "None of the above" option, 50.4 per cent of those voting supported it, prompting then-United States President Bill Clinton to create the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status, in response. The Task Force recognized only three choices for Puerto Ricans: the status quo, statehood, or independence.

Moving ahead on the political front, the report states that the press in Puerto Rico reported widely that on 2 January 2009, President-elect Barack Obama sent a message to the swearing-in ceremony for Luis Fortuño, the new Governor of Puerto Rico, reiterating his intention to resolve the colonial case of Puerto Rico during his first term. The Task Force, as constituted under President Obama, held its first meeting on 15 December 2009, expanding its focus to include matters affecting the island's economic development.

On 3 March 2010, the Task Force held hearings in San Juan, with testimony reflecting a consensus that it must first address the issue of status. The third report of the Task Force, issued on 16 March 2011, contained recommendations for an accelerated decision process regarding the status issue, whereby Puerto Ricans could express their will on status options and action would be taken by the end of 2012 or later. Options must be the constitutionally permissible choices of statehood, independence, free association and the Free Associated State.

The Task Force report specified that the United States' Congress had the authority over the admission of states; and that full independence involved a transition, including for citizenship status, which it recommended be honoured for Puerto Ricans who were United States' citizens at the time of transition. Regarding the Commonwealth option, the report stated that Puerto Rico would remain—as it is at present—subject to the territorial clause of the United States

Constitution, though its local political autonomy should not be reduced or threatened.

The Task Force further reports a “marginal preference” for a two-plebiscite process in which Puerto Ricans would first vote on their preference of becoming part of the United States through statehood or the Commonwealth, or becoming independent through independence or free association. A second plebiscite would then take place with a choice between available options, as limited by the outcome of the first. If independence were chosen, a second vote would take place between full independence and free association.

Reactions to the latest Task Force report were mixed regarding the status recommendations. According to the press in Puerto Rico, on 26 March 2011, the directorate of Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP), which favours statehood, unanimously decided to hold status plebiscites at the end of 2011, with the options of statehood, independence and free association, and in 2013, between the 2011 winning option and the present free associated State Status. No plebiscite had been taken by the end of 2011.

The PNP Majority Government now has adopted legislation so that a plebiscite on Puerto Rico’s political status may be held on 6 November 2012, the same day as the next general elections. Per that legislation, signed by the Governor on 28 December 2011, the plebiscite would ask voters, first, whether they agreed with maintaining the current territorial status, and, second, which of the following alternatives to the current status they preferred: statehood, independence or free association with the United States. A lottery was to have been held in May to determine the order in which the status options would appear on the ballot.

The report prepared by the Rapporteur also covers military and economic developments on the island, as well as previous action taken by the United Nations on the status of Puerto Rico.

Introduction of Draft Resolution

Introducing the draft resolution on the question of Puerto Rico (document A/AC.109/2012/L.7), OSCAR LEON GONZALEZ (Cuba) said that 30 resolutions and decisions on Puerto Rico had been adopted, but in 40 years, very little progress had been made and the people of Puerto Rico had not been able to exercise the genuine right to self-determination. The United States had wielded power over Puerto Rico’s economy and other areas, but given its culture and the strong will of its people, Puerto Rico had its own identity as a country.

The text took note of the Special Declaration on Puerto Rico adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas in Caracas in February 2012, which expressed their strong support for the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and full independence, and recalled that Puerto Rico is a Latin American and Caribbean nation with its own unmistakable identity and history, whose rights to sovereignty have been violated by the imposed colonial rule for more than a century.

It also stressed the urgent need for the United States to lay the groundwork for the full implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and the resolutions and decisions of the Special Committee concerning Puerto Rico. The draft also reiterated its request to the

President of the United States to release the following Puerto Rican political prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons for cases relating to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico: Oscar López Rivera, who has been serving a sentence for 31 years; Avelino González Claudio; and Norberto González Claudio, who was arrested most recently. The text, among others, also requested the General Assembly to consider the question of Puerto Rico comprehensively in all its aspects.

Petitioners

OSVALDO TOLEDO MARTINEZ, Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico, said voices of the people of Puerto Rico, which had suffered occupation by the United States, had been ignored, despite the calls of the United Nations. Legal tools had been prepared by colonists. Since Puerto Rico had been delisted, the United States denied the jurisdiction of this Committee over the issue of Puerto Rico. Despite 30 resolutions adopted on Puerto Rico, it did not find a place in the list of the world's remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. That meant 3.7 million Puerto Ricans in the territory and 4 million more in the United States were excluded and "made invisible," he said.

Mass media had been controlled by the occupying Power and members of the media did not spend time on reporting the struggle of the Puerto Rican people, he said. The law of another country governed. The United States imposed the death penalty despite the clear prohibition by the Puerto Rican Constitution. The United States had helped destroy agriculture, fishing and small businesses, and introduced subsidies, which in turn created a dependent mentality among the local people. The United States granted licenses to English-language radio stations to influence culture and language. Teaching English was also a strategy of distorting local people. Given those situations, it was not possible to freely determine Puerto Rico's political status.

JOSÉ M. LÓPEZ SIERRA, Compañeros Unidos para la Descolonización de Puerto Rico, said last year's hearing had not been broadcast on Puerto Rican television, so he started a blog to educate people about today's topic, which had thus far received more than 3,400 visitors. The motivation had been the poor attendance at the hearing. "We need to publicise and broadcast this hearing on radio and television", he said, stressing that the United States had used terrorism to perpetuate its control over the island. He cited the 1937 Ponce massacre in that regard. Decolonization was under international jurisdiction, a fact most Puerto Ricans did not know, as the United States had convinced them it was a domestic issue.

Puerto Rico must be decolonized via the United Nations, he said, urging that the island be placed on the list of United Nations colonies. What justification was there to leave out the most populated and oldest colony in the world? Puerto Ricans had the right to self-determination and independence and they must talk amongst themselves to decide what they wanted, without outside influence. Puerto Ricans had helped colonialism by allowing lies about the domestic jurisdiction and deceiving the world that they were a democracy every time they participated in Puerto Rican elections and plebiscites. The United Nations could not support democratic processes around the world if it did not enforce approved resolutions.

ARTURO GONZALEZ-HERNANDEZ, Comité de Puerto Rico en Naciones Unidas, said that,

despite the constant commitment by the Special Committee on Decolonization to Puerto Rican decolonization over the years, no progress had been made and the question had not reached the plenary of the United Nations. The General Assembly had been misled into adopting resolution 748, which took Puerto Rico off the list of colonial territories. That resolution was, however, null and void, because it had been based on misleading information provided by the United States. The question of the decolonization of Puerto Rico was clearly a matter to be dealt with by the international community through the Special Committee and the General Assembly. It was for the United Nations to provide the necessary guarantees to ensure that decolonization.

Puerto Rico had about eight million people, with 3.8 million living on the island and the rest outside. The territory had been subjected to degradation because of industrialization. Its traditional industries had been destroyed and its agriculture and fisheries shattered. It had no local bourgeoisie. Moreover, its land had been used by the United States Navy for target practice and, even though it had withdrawn following protests, it had not cleaned up the damage that had been caused. That situation was harmful to the people. Archaeological remains, which had been taken away from the island, had also not been returned. The colonialism of the island was enslavement, but the people's struggle for freedom continued. The Puerto Rican people had the moral strength to continue resisting colonization. Many patriots had given their lives in that process. Oscar Lopez had been imprisoned for 31 years because of that struggle. It was essential to wipe colonialism off the face of the world. He said that a seat should be given to those who came before the United Nations from colonial territories, so that they would be permanently present there.

HECTOR PESQUERA SEVILLANO of the Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano, said that the situation in Puerto Rico had become worse. It had been announced that beginning in August, all classes on the island would be conducted in English. That was not a matter of teaching English as a language but, instead, meant that teaching would be in English, in order to replace Spanish as the means of communication. That meant that the island was faced with assimilation fanatics, who hallucinate that, within a 10-year period, English could be used as the main language, to meet Washington's drive for annexation. Imposing English on the people of Puerto Rico was a violation of their cultural and national rights. The people of Puerto Rico considered the island to be a Latin American Caribbean nation. Judges of the United States Tribunal in Puerto Rico were increasingly assuming jurisdiction over matters that should not fall under their purview. Those included the imposition of death penalty, despite the fact that it was against the constitution of the island. Oscar Lopes had just finished 31 years of incarceration, despite not having committed any violent act. The time had come to release him, for humanitarian reasons.

He said that from the standpoint of international law, the United States should recognize that Puerto Rico had the right to be compensated for all the damage that had been done since its military invasion of the island. Further, the proposed plebiscite in Puerto Rico was fraudulent. Its net effect would be to cloak colonialist options in legitimacy. Only a free people could make the kind of decisions that were required. Regardless of the outcome, Washington D.C. would not pay attention to the position of the people. It had already warned that there had to be a strong and clear mandate, with a super majority, for the outcome to be acceptable. That was

why his organization had decried the process as a fraud and called on voters to tear up their ballots in protest. The question of Puerto Rico should be part of the agenda of Latin American States. In the same way that Argentina would not be complete without the Malvinas, Latin America would be incomplete without Puerto Rico.

EDGARDO MANUEL ROMÁN ESPADA, Coalición Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte, insisted that the application of the death penalty in Puerto Rico be considered by the Special Committee and be part of the resolution. The issue should not be an obstacle to acknowledging the historical opposition of Puerto Ricans to the imposition of the death penalty and how that matter was vital to the question of self-determination. The death penalty issue should be considered in light of international law. Its application in Puerto Rico dramatized the subjection of Puerto Ricans to foreign domination, which affected the most basic of human rights: that to life.

He requested the Special Committee to include in the resolution that Puerto Rico was the only jurisdiction in the world where citizens had constitutionally abolished the death penalty and, yet, despite that, there was United States legislation authorizing capital punishment through a judicial process in a language other than the vernacular. It also should adopt a text requiring the United States to immediately declare a moratorium on certification of cases for the death penalty and prohibit its application in judicial proceedings already before the United States District Court of Puerto Rico. The case of Puerto Rico should be referred for discussion by the General Assembly plenary.

JESUS MANGUAL CRUZ, La Fundación Andres Figueroa Cordero, said genocide had been committed in Latin America by oppressors. Genocide transpired in two stages—first, destruction of the national fabric, and, second, imposition by oppressors. He had devoted the last 40 years of his life to fighting against the oppressors. The United States used granting of United States citizenship to Puerto Ricans as a colonizing strategy, and their history books mentioned genocides occurring, for example, in Bosnia, Iraq and communist countries but not those in Latin America.

Today, 58 per cent of Puerto Ricans lived outside its national territory, he continued. United States corporations and institutions recruited talent among that population, including mathematics and science graduates and engineers who were bilingual and did not require work visas. Genocide was not accidental, but a calculated act to remove competitors. The United States had admitted genocide. Further, there was a map showing the contamination by chemicals used in genocide. The time had come for Puerto Rico to be decolonized.

BENJAMIN RAMOS ROSADO, Prolibertad Freedom Campaign, stated that his organization believed that the imprisonment of Puerto Rican political prisoners was an international human rights violation and made the case for three such prisoners.

Oscar Lopez Rivera, he noted, had served 31 years in prison and had been the victim of various forms of physical and psychological torture. In May 2011, the United States Parole Commission had denied Oscar's petition for parole, ignoring its own rules, as well as the evidence establishing that Oscar met all the criteria for parole. Oscar was the longest-held political

prisoner in Puerto Rican history. Avelino Gonzalez Claudio was captured four years ago and held in custody without trial since then. Throughout custody, he was held in solitary confinement for inhumane periods of time and denied medical attention for Parkinson's disease. At a May 2011 discretionary parole hearing, Avelino was classified at the highest danger level, the equivalent of first-degree murder, despite having a spotless record. Norberto Gonzalez Claudio was arrested in May 2011 and interviewed by the head of the FBI division in Puerto Rico, which was not standard procedure. Norberto was never read his Miranda rights and was extradited to Hartford, Connecticut to appear before a magistrate. He was kept in solitary confinement in Connecticut and later in Rhode Island. Last Friday he had accepted a plea agreement and would be sentenced on 27 September.

He went on to add that before their incarceration, the Puerto Rican political prisoners were involved in community struggles, and finding the colonial reality to be unacceptable, had joined the Puerto Rican independence movement. That was their right as international citizens, as stipulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. None of them had prior criminal records and their excessive sentences made it clear that "the goal was to punish them for their beliefs and not for the acts alleged by the U.S. Government". Their mistreatment in prisons was a direct violation of international norms. In conclusion, he stated that the prisoners were not terrorists, but "freedom fighters" like Nelson Mandela, and called for the unconditional release of all remaining Puerto Rican prisoners. "This injustice must end now," he said.

ISMAEL GUADALUPE ORTIZ, Movimiento de Afirmacion Veiguense, said that as an elected official from the municipal district covering Vieques Island, he condemned the act of colonialism, which had occurred consistently through a series of human rights violations. Those violations against the island's population and the people of Puerto Rico in general included political subjugation of language and prevention of economic development. Three branches of the United States Government had used its power to benefit its people to the detriment of Puerto Ricans, he said. In Vieques' case, those colonialist acts included six decades of military presence, which had had a negative impact on health, the environment and the economy. A poignant example of colonialism could be seen in the fact that while Congress passed laws that applied in Puerto Rico, no Puerto Rican served on that body, which in turn served a president Puerto Ricans did not and could not elect.

Chemical contamination in Vieques and the island of Culebra was another grave concern, he said, noting that Congress had prohibited in 1974 federal funds from being used for decontamination of the latter. Even though the cancer occurrence and infant mortality rates were higher in Vieques than the rest of Puerto Rico, he said the United States had claimed that those high levels were unrelated to the vast amount of chemicals dumped on or near the island. Better methodology to collect accurate data was needed, he said, noting that the United States had cited a lack of evidence when it refused to clean up decontamination and to compensate for the damage done. For all those reasons, it was time for the question of Puerto Rico to be taken up by the General Assembly.

ALEIDA CENTENO of the American Association of Jurists said that the Commonwealth status that the United States had conferred on Puerto Rico did not resolve the colonial problem there.

That status did not ensure compliance with the requirement for respecting the culture that existed on the island. Moreover, the integration of non-autonomous people was not possible without those people renouncing their identities. The United States had not complied with its obligations under various international instruments, including those that barred actions by administering Powers that precluded free political association.

Economic exploitation was also incompatible with the United Nations Charter and other international instruments, he continued. The plebiscite in Puerto Rico, as the one before, perpetuated the colonial state, added to confusion and continued to be non-binding for the administering Power. A valid plebiscite could be obtained only through a decolonization process based on international law. He requested that the colonial case of Puerto Rico be kept under review and be taken before the General Assembly.

JAN SUSLER, People's Law Office/National Lawyers Guild, stated that while the United States President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status had issued a report recommending that a plebiscite take place, it was clear that the exercise would not resolve the status question, since the result was not binding on the United States and because it ignored the mandates of international law. Meanwhile, the United States was inserting itself into Puerto Rican life on an almost daily basis, posing as "the knight in shining armour". That was a sham, as revealed by the Department of Justice's report about the "profound" and "long-standing" pattern of civil rights violations that had left the Puerto Rico Police Department, headed by F.B.I. agents for 14 of the last 20 years, broken. Further, the pro-statehood Administration "had weakened the people's trust in the judicial branch and created an unprecedented constitutional crisis".

Noting that Oscar Lopez Rivera had been behind bars for 31 years now for his commitment to the independence of Puerto Rico, she asked, "What other country holds political prisoners for such a long time?" The world's most renowned political prisoner, Nelson Mandela, was held for 27 years. The United States routinely used the release of political prisoners as a measure of other countries' compliance with human rights norms, and Secretary of State Clinton had recently stated during her visit to Burma that "one political prisoner was one too many". There should be no problem then in releasing the valiant Puerto Rican independentistas who were in United States custody.

She concluded by urging the adoption of a resolution calling for the General Assembly to consider the case of Puerto Rico and calling on the Government of the United States to immediately cease the attacks on the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, release Puerto Rican political prisoners, and formally commit to negotiating in good faith with the people of Puerto Rico a solution to the colonial condition.

MANUEL RIVERA of Puertorriquenos Unidos En Acción said that the colonial government held a plebiscite without being willing to accept its result. Puerto Rico had a large number of its people working and living outside. Those people had not left the island because they lacked interest in the affairs of the island and it was anti-people to deny them of their right to participate in the plebiscite. By excluding the Puerto Rican diaspora, the people's self-determination had been limited. That decision had been an arbitrary one. The eligibility criteria that had been used meant that foreign residents who had lived on the island for one year could participate. While

some such residents were connected to Puerto Rico, some did not feel in any way connected to the people.

He believed that Puerto Rican nationals needed to be able to participate. He added that it was unacceptable that the work of the Special Committee should be halted because of deceit. Bringing the case of Puerto Rico before the United Nations General Assembly was the only pragmatic approach to resolving the question of the colonization of the island. Puerto Ricans were being forced to live under colonialism by consent. To truly achieve sovereignty through self-determination, political prisoners in the diaspora must be released.

LUIS A. DELGADO RODRIGUEZ, Alianza Pro Libre Asociacion Soberana, said there would be a plebiscite in November. That would be an opportunity to determine Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. It was not the best mechanism, but it was an opportunity for the international community to support Puerto Rico's wish, so that the process of decolonization would continue. He asked the Committee to support, with full moral obligation, whatever the Puerto Rican people chose. The last five surveys taken by different organizations showed that 45 per cent favoured a Commonwealth status, followed by 36 per cent for statehood. The Territory should gradually move toward sovereignty. The upcoming plebiscite would be a chance to put an end to the myth attached to the legitimacy of the present colonial status. Puerto Rico would leave colonial status behind, but would maintain close ties with the United States.

MARY ANN GRADY FLORES, Ithaca Catholic Workers, Vieques Support Group, said the liberation of Puerto Rico was in the hands of the Puerto Rican people, but all had a role to play. The Committee, for its part, must make the strongest request to bring the case of Puerto Rico to the world arena through the General Assembly. Puerto Rico's freedom depended on the "spirit, strength, and power" of the Committee's words. The Committee must condemn all illegal actions committed by the United States colonial power, including the war crimes committed by the United States Navy practising with non-fissionable nuclear weapons and contaminating Vieques and its people, leaving behind an unknown legacy of death from radioactive dust.

She called on the Committee to demand compensation from the United States Navy for the increasing number of people in Vieques living with cancers caused by exposure to 60 years of weapons practice. The report by the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry had recognized the high incidence of many illnesses in Vieques, but the Federal Government had not committed resources for improving the deplorable health services. Quoting an American Iraq war veteran, she stated that radiation was a wound that got passed on to children and grandchildren.

The Navy must stop detonating unexploded ordnances in Vieques, she stated, and all hazardous materials, including radioactive depleted uranium dust and shells must be removed immediately. Further, the lands now occupied by the Department of Fish and Wildlife must be returned to the people of Vieques, who were its rightful owners, and there must be a moratorium on the sale of Vieques land to developers.

JERRY SEGARRA, Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, said the United States had colonized

Puerto Rico for 114 years, and had increasingly exploited the land and people in the area of the military, the economy and cultural interventions. In the western village of Moca, the colonial situation was worse, given the presence of the United States Department of Homeland Security and the storage of nuclear weapons. Throughout the country, 35 plants had been built to sell electricity to the Dominican Republic and other islands, he said, noting that the exploitation of natural resources was destroying land and agriculture, which was further exacerbated by industrial contamination. Energy projects also caused massive food shortages and the displacement of people.

Turning to Puerto Rico's public debt, he said the reported \$63 billion for 2012 was incorrect and that it should be investigated. Given these examples, it was in the international community's interest to end colonization in Latin America, he said, calling for a decolonization process to begin in Puerto Rico. He also called for the release of political prisoners and for an end to the blockade of Cuba and the return of the Malvinas Islands to their legitimate owner, Argentina.

JUAN DALMAU RAMIREZ of Partido Independista Purtorriqueno said that the two fundamental tasks before the organizations seeking to end the colonization of Puerto Rico were to promote expression of the decolonization claim of the people and to put international pressure on the colonial power by promoting concerted action among the Latin American and Caribbean countries to express solidarity with the anti-colonization efforts at the United Nations. He hoped that that solidarity would go beyond ideological frontiers and attract unanimity among the countries. The decolonization claims that would be voiced would be an important contribution to the convergence of will towards Puerto Rico's decolonization. He hoped that the region, which had rejected the traditional imposition of United States hegemony, would support the decolonization of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was a nation of 4 million Latin Americans.

CARLOS ALBERTO TORRES, representative of Futuro Sin Fala, said that he had been held as a political prisoner by the United States for 30 years, from 1980 to 2010, for calling for the rights of Puerto Ricans under international law. His participation in today's meeting was thanks to the work of the Committee, which had, year after year, said that the United States President should release him and his colleagues. Three men who gave their lives to the independence of Puerto Rico were still in jail, including Oscar Lopez, who had now been in jail for 31 years. Since the United States occupation, thousands of Puerto Ricans had been jailed, but none, except Mr. Lopez, for such a long time. He was now the longest held political prisoner. The United States claimed to be a democracy and called on other countries to release their political prisoners, but denied that it had political prisoners. Its claim that the Puerto Ricans it imprisoned were common criminals was in conflict with the truth and with the treatment that they had been given in prison. Their crime was one of ideas. They had been part of a clandestine organization struggling for the freedom of Puerto Rico. He said that colonialism was the real crime, not the effort to resist it, as had been recognised internationally. He and his colleagues had withdrawn from the process, but the court still proceeded to try them and find them guilty, even though they had not attacked or hurt anybody. They had been jailed for 30 to 90 years. Their treatment in prison had been worse than that of common criminals. They had been kept in complete isolation and had suffered that extraordinary condition for over 12 years. When some of his colleagues had been released, they had been well received in Puerto Rico. They were very well-respected and were still part of the movement for the independence of Puerto Rico. He had received the

same kind of warm welcome and support after his own release.

FRANK VELGARA, Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico, said liberating the Puerto Rican people was of the utmost importance. Speaking on behalf of workers and socialists, he said the United States had clearly violated international law against the vast majority of Puerto Ricans, and he called for the recognition of Puerto Rico's right to independence. That right to independence was especially relevant in light of recent "imperial abuses", he said, among them, illegal drug trafficking, which had claimed thousands of lives in 2011 alone. Puerto Rico had no control over its borders, administration or patrol to combat the flood of drugs and weapons. In addition, Puerto Rico had become the "capital" for testing experimental genetically modified plants and seeds. Further, testing pharmaceuticals, chemical weapons and weapons containing depleted uranium had also taken place, with a grave impact on Puerto Rico's population.

The combination of drug trafficking, experimentation and the absolute control over production capacities and the situation of the population constituted a "policy of genocide" against a national group, he said. Further, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation in Puerto Rico had arrested individuals fighting for independence and had branded them "terrorists", he said. Expressing opposition to a recent attempt to impose English as an official language, he pledged to continue his fight to defend the culture of the Puerto Rican people. Turning to Vieques Island, he said enormous areas remained contaminated and thousands of kilograms of explosives were detonated there during military exercises, causing grave harm to residents. A special United Nations observer mission was needed to assess the situation. The Committee had received sufficient evidence that Puerto Rico was indeed a colony under control of a foreign power. The United Nations had also declared that colonialism was unacceptable. In that vein, he insisted that the Special Committee file an urgent petition for the case of Puerto Rico as soon as possible.

DAN FEIN, Socialist Workers Party, stated that the fight for Puerto Rico's independence was also in the interests of workers and farmers in the United States, because the capitalist rulers and their Government in Washington D.C. were the common enemy. Since 1898, when the United States imperialists had seized Puerto Rico, they had used that nation as "a source of super-profits and a source of cannon fodder for their wars around the world".

He said that four years into a worldwide capitalist depression, unemployment rates were very high, especially among black and Latino workers. Wages and working conditions were declining and the 4 million Puerto Ricans living in the United States were among those who bore the brunt of it. The United States rulers were using their "cops, courts and prisons" to intimidate working people. Those increasingly brutal realities of capitalism had sparked resistance among workers around the country.

There was support among workers in the United States, he added, for the fight to free the Puerto Rican political prisoners and the battle for the independence of Puerto Rico. He called on the United States Government to release the "three independentista prisoners", as well as five Cuban revolutionaries who had been "framed and held in the United States prison system for nearly 14 years on fabricated conspiracy charges". The United States colonial masters had promoted the lie that Puerto Rico could not survive without dependence on Washington, but

Cuba had shattered that myth, and the Committee's condemnation of colonial rule in Puerto Rico would serve the interests of an overwhelming majority of the people of United States.

EDUARDO VILLANUEVA MUNOZ, Comité de Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico, said that despite unanimously adopted resolutions of the Committee, the United States had not been participating in the Committee and ignored those decisions. How could international law be respected under such circumstances? he asked. He proposed a change that would deprive the Security Council permanent members of a veto power over General Assembly decisions. The time had come to act on self-determination. The United States was part of the United Nations. As for Oscar López Rivera, a prisoner for more than 30 years, many organizations and people, including Nobel laureates, called for his release. Many letters requesting pardon and release had been sent to United States President Obama. There was a need to strengthen the legal capacity to oblige heads of States to abide by law and act in accordance with law, instead of using force. Mr. Rivera was unjustly locked up. The Committee must step up pressure against the United States in that regard.

ENRIQUE VAZQUEZ QUINTANA, Movimiento Unión Soberanista de Puerto Rico, stated that in 1917 all Puerto Ricans were given United States citizenship, an unprecedented action. No other country conquered in war had had the citizenship of the invader imposed upon it. Year after year, the United Nations had been hearing from Puerto Ricans who raised questions relating to their colonization. The United Nations had set 2000 as the year to end all colonization. But in the second decade of the century, Puerto Rico was still unfinished business.

He added that, when asked if Puerto Rico was a colony of the United States, President Obama answered that Puerto Rico was under the territorial clause of the Constitution of the United States. That was a euphemism for colonization. The Supreme Court of the United States had declared that Puerto Rico "belonged to but was not part of the United States". That was "incomprehensible" and outraged Puerto Ricans, making them feel as if they were someone's property, and not a Caribbean and Latin American nation. The United States had wrongly claimed that the status of Puerto Rico was a domestic affair and so, the question of Puerto Rico had never come out of the Decolonization Committee into the plenary of the General Assembly. Puerto Rico had been a colony of Spain for 405 years and a colony of the United States for 114 years. That was too many years of colonialism.

CARLOS M. HERNANDEZ-LOPEZ, Puerto Rico's House of Representatives, stated that he supported a non-territorial, non-colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States and that he had come to the Special Committee on a number of occasions to urge action to resolve the status of the country. While the people of Puerto Rico were beset by crime and drug trafficking, the United States controlled their coast, ports, immigration, postal service, and the air space through which drugs and weapons came in. While fathers and mothers in Puerto Rico wondered about how to feed families, the United States forced Puerto Rico to trade only with it and to use its ships for transport. American businesses had monopolies in Puerto Rican markets. While Puerto Rico rejected the death penalty, the United States, with utmost disregard, applied that in Puerto Rico. "Even the price of milk produced by our cows is controlled by the United States," he added.

He stated that there had been a distant hope that President Obama would fulfil his promise to the people of Puerto Rico. Since then, however, nothing earth-shaking had happened. The President had established a task force whose conclusions were ignored by the United States Congress and the assimilationist Government of Puerto Rico. The plebiscite did not fulfil the clear parameters on decolonization established by international law.

The United Nations, instead of sharing the outrage of the people of Puerto Rico and challenging the United States, offered yet another resolution with calls to goodwill. “You move us to an annual pilgrimage to this majestic building where the same individuals make the same speeches and receive the same response,” he stated, but the people of Puerto Rico deserved much more. With its timidity, the United Nations had been an accomplice to the colonial power. The question of Puerto Rico must be brought to the General Assembly. That was not an internal controversy of the United States but a matter of interest to the entire international community.

NILDA LUZ REXACH, National Advancement for Puerto Rico, said the fundamental problem of Puerto Rico was one of legal and moral rights that could have been solved years ago by the United States Congress. There was no moral and legal principle that could be claimed — in a “democratically implied nation” — to disenfranchise more than 3 million United States citizens. While no one could question Puerto Ricans’ contributions to the United States, they had no representation in the United States Congress, which could impose federal law on the island. Some Puerto Ricans believed in a free associated State, but Puerto Rico was not a free State and its association with the United States had been conditioned under the territorial clause of the Constitution.

Further, she said, Puerto Rico’s Constitution had been tailored and authorized by the United States Congress, making it clear that United States federal law would overrule that of Puerto Rico on any occasion. The commonwealth was just a lie, she said. The only honourable solution to the problem was statehood. The United States Congress was morally obliged to tell the people of Puerto Rico they would finally define the legal and political relationship. Statehood proponents supported Puerto Rico’s incorporation into the federation of states, with all the rights and congressional representation of which it was currently deprived. On the issue of Vieques, she blamed Congress for not preserving the health, peace and environment in that area. More effective Congressional action was needed.

JOSE ADAMES, Centro Literario ANACAONA, said he had repeated many times the reasons why Puerto Rico was a United States state. “The wheels of time have already turned around”, he said, noting that independence would mean removing citizenship from 7 million people who had been born United States citizens and about half of whom resided in the continental United States. One United States congressman had said, not long ago, that more Puerto Rican soldiers had died in United States wars than soldiers from any other United States state.

Further, the Puerto Rican government operated as any other United States state, with an elected governor, he said. It was just missing the declaration of statehood, which would bring it proper representation: the right to vote for President, and elect two senators and seven congressmen. When Puerto Ricans were declared United States citizens, the island had

become a virtual United States state. It should have been declared the fifty-first state, he said.

LEON OSCAR GONZALEZ, the representative of Cuba, on a point of order, requested that the Committee Chairman instruct petitioners to respect the manner in which the meeting had been conducted.

RICHARD LOPEZ RODRIGUEZ, of Frente Patriótico Arecibeno, said that the World Bank planned to set up a Caribbean grid, so that power could be sold to the Dominican Republic and other countries in the region. The United States had issued a White House report describing that grid and stating that Puerto Rico would be its headquarters. As a result, it had proposed adding a surcharge to electricity charges in Puerto Rico. Those actions, however, operated against the efforts to achieve sustainable agriculture on the island. The project and other such projects could expose large proportions of the people to environmental disasters.

There were also plans to irradiate natural gas as part of another project, he went on. Irradiating the natural gas would, however, mean using people as guinea pigs and the arrangements for the power projects would enslave the people to energy bills and affect their lives, water and environment. He denounced the governmental scheme designed to strengthen the United States military enslavement in Puerto Rico, and said that there was nothing beneficial in the relations between the United States and Puerto Rico. He hoped that the decisions adopted by the United Nations in New York would ask that Puerto Rico be recognized as a sovereign State.

JUAN CAMACHO, of Comité Toabajeño Contra El Gasoducto, denounced the connivance of the United States Army's Corps of Engineers and the government of Puerto Rico to the detriment of the island. That connivance included action with regard to the gas pipeline to carry natural gas across Puerto Rico. A project of that scale deserved the involvement of whole sectors. The Corps of Engineers had disregarded recommendations urging it not to proceed with the project. Instead, it had not responded to those recommendations, even though two agencies had recommended that permission not be granted for the project. The people of Puerto Rico were waiting and living in uncertainty.

IRIS ZAVALA-MARTINEZ, Centro Mujer y Nueva Familia, addressed the psychological health of the Puerto Rican community, given the chronic, pervasive and noxious impacts of 500 years of colonialism on a people's sense of self and identity. According to some literature, it was undeniable that colonialism alienated, dehumanized and disempowered the colonized through its oppressive and racist mechanism, intended to control and dominate a people and their psyche. Colonialism and cultural imperialism had plundered the country's resources, destroyed agriculture, ensured economic dependency, falsified history and imposed English as a language of instruction for over 30 years in the early 1900s. The long-standing and cumulative historical, social and psychological wounding spanned across generations, resulting in intergenerational and historical trauma.

A 2005 study had found Puerto Ricans in the United States to have higher rates of both depression and symptoms of depression than Cuban or Mexican Americans, she said. It also found that both Puerto Rican men and women were likely to have a history of substance abuse. In another study in 2007, Puerto Ricans in the United States had the highest prevalence rates of

psychiatric disorders compared to Mexicans, Cubans and other Latinos. The Committee should take note of those findings. "Decolonization starts now," she said.

Adoption of Resolution

MOHAMED SELIM (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, stated that the Movement reaffirmed its positions on the question of Puerto Rico, contained in the final Document of the Fifteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held in July 2009. The colonial question of Puerto Rico had been under consideration of the Special Committee for more than 37 years and a total of 30 resolutions or decisions had already been adopted. The Movement welcomed, in particular, the fact that over the last decade, the Special Committee had adopted its resolutions on that issue by consensus.

The Non-Aligned Movement, he concluded, called on the Government of the United States to assume its responsibility to expedite a process that would allow all the Puerto Rican people to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence and urged the United Nations General Assembly to actively consider the question of Puerto Rico in all its aspects.

MARIA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua), aligning with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement, stated that her country was committed to continuing the struggle to see Puerto Rico take its seat as a Caribbean and Latin American country. No one could prevent that day and the full sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico could not be deferred. The colonial status of Puerto Rico had been on the agenda of the Committee for three decades and the many resolutions adopted by the Committee were part of the Committee's commitment to the self-determination of Puerto Rico. Nicaragua urged the United States to begin the process of implementation of those resolutions and to put an end to the pillaging of resources and the destruction of the environment of Puerto Rico. It was only necessary to listen to the music, see the dances, look at the architecture, and taste the food of the people of Puerto Rico to understand its culture and roots.

Once again, Puerto Rican petitioners and informers from the struggle had demanded freedom for their incarcerated patriots, social and economic justice, and a clean-up of Vieques. Nicaragua stood in solidarity with the heroic people of Puerto Rico and could not help but recognize courageous comrades, such as Juan Mari Bras. Nicaragua, affirming the sovereign rights of the people of Puerto Rico, urged the Committee to adopt the resolution by consensus.

JORGE VALERO (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), endorsing the position of the Non-Aligned Movement, stated that the people of Venezuela had close and strong links with the people of Puerto Rico. On 5 August 1816, Simón Bolívar had visited Vieques Island while travelling in the Caribbean, seeking freedom for countries subjected by the Spanish empire. Bolívar dreamed of freedom and justice for the entire continent. Puerto Rico was the unfinished business of Simón Bolívar, because it was still under the imperial control of the United States.

Puerto Rico had suffered under the past 114 years of the United States' expansionist adventure

and political and social domination. Resolution 1514 had been adopted in 1960. It was now five decades since that resolution had been adopted and major victories had been achieved. Nations had been established with their own voices and they were represented at the United Nations today. But, Puerto Rico still remained under colonial control. Venezuela asked that the General Assembly review in all its aspects the question of Puerto Rico and called on the Government of the United States to release Puerto Rican political prisoners. Venezuela was co-sponsoring the draft resolution introduced by the representative of Cuba and urged the Committee to adopt it by consensus.

RAFAEL ARCHONDO (Bolivia) said that Puerto Rico had clear cultural affiliation with his country. It was a country that lacked sovereignty and which had been violated since it was put under the colonial yoke. All necessary effort, therefore, needed to be incorporated into the effort to take off that yoke. Puerto Rico had a seat reserved for it in Latin America. For 31 years, the Puerto Rican Oscar Lopez had been in jail for the crime of trying to return sovereignty to his people. For a man like him, 31 years in jail was intolerable. The time had come to free him and that possibility was in the hands of President Barack Obama of the United States. Bolivia hoped that Mr. Lopez would one day see the integration of Puerto Rico into the Latin American family.

TOFIGH SEDIGH MOSTAHKAM (Iran) said the right of people to sovereignty was guaranteed under the Charter of the United Nations. Iran believed that the adoption of the draft before the Committee by consensus would send a clear message of support to the people of Puerto Rico and would assure them that change was gaining momentum. Iran had unwavering support for the complete elimination of colonialism.

JENNY LALAMA-FERNANDEZ (Ecuador) said one of the purposes of the United Nations Charter was that self-determination was a human right. Puerto Rico had been considered by the Special Committee for over 30 years, but no concrete progress had been made on the decolonization of Puerto Rico. Ecuador supported the positions announced by the Non-Aligned Movement and would join those that had called for the question of Puerto Rico to be considered in the United Nations General Assembly in all its aspects. It also called for release of Puerto Ricans from United States jails, particularly Oscar Lopez Rivera, who had been in jail for 31 years. Ecuador was honoured to co-sponsor the resolution before the Committee and hoped that the island would enjoy the status of an independent nation in the near future.

IHAB HAMED (Syria) said that for years, the people had struggled for independence, even though that right was guaranteed by the United Nations Charter. The Special Committee had, over the years, adopted 30 resolutions and decisions on the subject of Puerto Rico. All those decisions expressed the inalienable right of Puerto Rico to independence and self-determination. They also stressed the status of Puerto Rico as Latin American. Unfortunately, despite all those efforts, the people had not been able to enjoy those rights. Syria fully supported the position of the Non-Aligned Movement on the issue of Puerto Rico. Syria urged that the resolution before the Committee be adopted by consensus as in previous years and called on the United States to implement the contents of the resolution without delay. The United States should also assume its responsibilities by creating conditions for the people of Puerto Rico to enjoy their full rights to self-determination and independence. It should, in

addition, release Puerto Rico citizens who were being held for political reasons.

The Committee then adopted the resolution without a vote.

LEON OSCAR GONZALEZ (Cuba), speaking after the adoption of the resolution, stated that his country was particularly pleased that the resolution was adopted by consensus for the thirteenth consecutive year. That was clear proof of the support of the international community for Puerto Rican freedom. For more than a century, Cubans and Puerto Ricans had been united in the struggle for the independence of that nation. The common history of the two countries went back to the conquest, deceit and barbarity which had extinguished the indigenous peoples of those countries. Their respective struggles for independence had started simultaneously in 1868. The Cuban Revolutionary Party was constituted to achieve the absolute independence of Cuba and to promote and assist the liberation of Puerto Rico. In 1948, Fidel Castro, then a young university student, organized a Latin American congress to demand freedom. Long years of struggle and sacrifice had lapsed since then and the present generation of Cubans and Puerto Ricans continued to forge that bond, which was deeply rooted in cultural identities. One hundred and fourteen years had not been enough to rob the people of Puerto Rico of their culture and the right to hope. Cuba would continue to defend the legitimate right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and would stand with them until the final victory.

PAULETTE D'AUTEUIL, Jericho Amnesty Movement, stated that her organization was a social and political movement that sought to gain recognition for all political prisoners and prisoners of war in the United States who had struggled against oppression, class bigotry, and racism. The American regime had installed an immovable military presence in Puerto Rico, absorbing the island-nation economically, politically, and administratively, making Puerto Rico a colony "that belonged to, but was not part of, the United States". Despite the ruthlessness with which the regime had crushed resistance, the Puerto Rican independentistas were fighting for national sovereignty.

The clearest example of Puerto Rico's national unity, she stated, could be seen in the campaign to free their political prisoners and prisoners of war. Oscar Lopez Rivera and the brothers Avelino and Norberto Gonzalez Claudio had been classified by the United States Government as domestic terrorists. They were combatants in the struggle for the liberation of their people, and their allies in the North American Left were in solidarity with their struggle.

Speaking about the conditions under which the prisoners lived "in the dungeons of the American Government", she added that in the 1970s, growing numbers of "social prisoners" were placed in control or isolation units within United States prisons. In an attempt to destroy the spirit of the prisoners, the Government denied them their religious ceremonies. Many states and the Federal Government had built new supermax prisons, and elderly inmate population had increased significantly because of extraordinarily long sentences. Concluding, she stated that the Puerto Rican prisoners were "to be commended, not criminalized". The Committee could validate their struggle by moving the Puerto Rican issue to the floor of the General Assembly.

ANTONIO MARTORELL, Taller de la Playa, stated that he was an artist speaking on behalf of

his country, a contradiction because a colonized country could not be “my country”. Being from Puerto Rico involved belonging to many categories. Under international law, Puerto Rican nationality was not legal, because Puerto Ricans were American citizens.

He stated that he considered himself an artist and Puerto Rican. He had not always been an artist and not always a Puerto Rican. During his education at Georgetown University, he had learned about the balance of power and how precarious freedom was. His eyes were opened to the situation of colonialism, but also to the beauty of art. It was necessary to “win over fear and recognize ourselves, not in the shrinking mirror of one who has been colonized but without any blinders on the imagination”. What used to be a dream must become real. The colonial nightmare was fed by lies of false security and dependence. As an artist who was Puerto Rican, he had thought of “some strategies to become a Puerto Rican who was an artist”. The freedom to imagine a free homeland was an art.

Speaking of various Puerto Rican political prisoners, he stated that Oscar Lopez Rivera was still in prison, where he was “painting freedom”. His work was flowers and faces and he painted them with love. He painted countrysides beyond the four walls that enclosed him. Oscar Lopez Rivera was an artist who was Puerto Rican and a Puerto Rican who was an artist.