

Copronu: Puerto Rico update!

Escrito por Olga I. Sanabria Dávila / Presidenta de Copronu
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Comité de Puerto Rico en las Naciones Unidas

The scenario in Puerto Rico for a status plebiscite planned for 11 June of this year has completely changed. The Pro Independence Party of Puerto Rico, the National Hostos Movement for Independence and important pro sovereignty sectors had tentatively announced that they would participate in the plebiscite, but at present the majority of voters will boycott the exercise with the exception of pro annexation supporters who want Puerto Rico to become the 51st state of the United States.

On 17 May 2017 Puerto Rico begins its celebration of the release and lifting of all restrictions on Oscar López Rivera!

One-day work stoppage in Puerto Rico, pg. 4. Students on strike, pg 4.

Total change regarding the 11 June 2017 plebiscite

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The present colonial governor, Ricardo Rosselló Nevares of the pro annexation New Progressive Party, availed himself of his majority in the Puerto Rico Senate and House of Representatives to adopt a law signed on 3 February 2017 for holding a plebiscite on 11 June. The options to be presented on the ballot were to have been 1) Statehood, and 2) Free association/independence. If a majority voted for option 2, a consultation between Free

Association and Independence would take place on 8 October. The plebiscite was not binding.

Pro-independence and pro sovereignty organizations had announced that they would vote and favor option 2 in the 8 June plebiscite if there were no unacceptable changes to the process. The cost of the plebiscite was estimated at five million dollars and the government expected 2.5 million of that amount to come from the United States Department of Justice as a 2014 U.S. law stipulated this allotment on the condition that that department determine the options to be presented and the education campaign.

However, the Department of Justice communicated to the governor that the present Free Associated State formula, which is colonial and territorial, had to be included in the plebiscite options. The governor immediately succumbed. He pushed through the Puerto Rican legislature and signed a new law which now presents as options in the plebiscite: Statehood, the territorial condition, and independence.

The Popular Democratic Party, the architect of the Free Associated State formula, objected the omission of that formula, as some in that party maintain that this is not a colonial status especially with some changes toward “an improved Free Associated State”. Omission of this option and the inclusion of the territorial status in its stead caused an assembly of the Popular Democratic Party to decide to boycott the plebiscite. Meanwhile, pro-independence and pro sovereignty organizations had already made their decision to boycott the plebiscite. They argued that they cannot participate in a plebiscite that includes the colonial status as an option although its stated purpose is to decolonize. (It should be noted that the 2012 elections in Puerto Rico included a plebiscite where in response to the first question, 54 per cent of the electorate voted against continuation of Puerto Rico’s present territorial status.)

The governor of Puerto Rico had set a deadline for the U.S. Department of Justice to respond to the Governor’s letter where he reports the new options to be included in the plebiscite as per its instructions. When the deadline passed, he announced that the plebiscite will proceed with local funds. Thus, the exercise which is not binding and does not recognize international law, has continued to lose credibility.

These developments are in the context of the imposition of a Fiscal Control Board over the government of Puerto Rico, its budget and fiscal matters. The scenario calls into question the possibility that the plebiscite will take place as the governor Rosselló insists. If it takes place, due to the boycott, the 11 June plebiscite would only lead to an orchestrated and artificial majority for his party and the statehood option.

The convergence organized to favor the free association/independence option in the plebiscite is now organizing in favor of the boycott of the plebiscite, which has also been announced by the Popular Democratic Party.

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