Statement by Fernando Martín
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Puerto Rico is the only nation of even remotely comparable population where the most fundamental and important laws regulating its collective life are made by the legislature of another country, and are administered and enforced by the government of the other country, without the participation of the people who are thus governed. Even local laws enacted by Puerto Rico's Legislative Assembly –as well as municipal ordinances and administrative regulations— must conform to the constitution and laws of another country, the United States.

This indefensible and unacceptable condition of subordination and political servitude has existed for more than one hundred years since the United States, having demanded and obtained Puerto Rico as booty of war from Spain in 1898, first organized a civil government for its newly acquired possession through the Foraker Act of 1900.

That such an anacronic and mutually demeaning state of affairs has persisted until the present requires explanation. Two fundamental policy considerations in the US have sustained colonialism in Puerto Rico during the 20th century. The first has been the determination to exercise absolute control over Puerto Rico for military, strategie and geopolitical reasons. The first and second world wars reinforced this overarching motivation while the subsequent era of the Cold War made the need for such control even more acute.

In other circumstances such long range national security considerations would have led to annexation as a territory followed by eventual statehood. Here is where the

second bedrock explanation for the persistence of colonialism comes into play; for in contrast to Hawaii where by 1898 the native Hawaiians were already a small minority overwhelmed by an immigration process which rapidly Americanized the new arrivals, and with an anglo-saxon elite firmly in control of politics and the economy, Puerto Rico presented a totally different situation.

Here was a full blown Latin American nation densely populated, Spanish speaking, intensively proud of its cultural identity, mature in its cultural manifestations – not only in folklore but in high culture— and possessing its own indigenous and entrenched political and economic elite. It did not take William Howard Taft's colonial, political and judicial experience to recognize (as he did in Balzac, the culmination of the Insular Cases) that it was inconceivable that Puerto Rico could ever be a state of the union because it was in fact, a different nation. It was obvious then, as it is today, that Puerto Rico is a non compatible donor to the historical project of American federalism. After all, if Puerto Rico were a real candidate for statehood, why not Jamaica or Guatemala? Many desperately poor in these countries might perhaps support it, as in Puerto Rico, for the wrong reasons.

This is why the imposition of US citizenship in 1917, together with the reaffirmation that such a step did not incorporate Puerto Rico, is such a paradigmatic manifestation of the underlying basis of the US policy toward Puerto Rico. United States citizenship was at the same time, both an attempt to close off the path towards independence while not opening the one that might lead to statehood. This left only the option of reforms within the status of non incorporated territory. No doubt remained as to what US policy would be towards Puerto Rico thereafter: it was to be a colony

indefinitely. And so it continued to be until it has recently been brought into question in the United States by the profound geopolitical and military consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

The armed forces of the United States no longer have any significant presence in Puerto Rico. That other traditional lobbying ally for colonialism, the 936 companies, are now a mere memory of the time when any change in political status would have meant the end of their federal tax privileges (which under 936 applied only if the profits were generated in a possession).

The only reason remaining for the US to support continued colonialism would be if this were the only way to ward off forever the possibility of an embarrassing statehood bid. Yet the truth is to the contrary; continued colonialism will only breed evermore statehooders.

Furthermore, international opinion, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean will increasingly demand that Puerto Rico be recognized its independence. The United Nations Committee on Decolonization, for example, has been approving resolutions unanimously during the past five years recognizing Puerto Rico's inalienable right to independence and our party is presently engaged –together with the most representative political forces in Latin America and the Caribbean—in a campaign that will culminate in similar resolution by the General Assembly. The Decolonization Committee has consistently called for the Government of the United States to take the necessary steps that will promote the exercise by the People of Puerto Rico of their right to self determination according to international law.

Only a process that will lead to a serious and responsible offer of independence that must begin by putting an end to the colonial option, and will inevitably require considerable straight talking on the part of Congress as to why statehood is not an alternative that could be acceptable to the US in the foreseeable future, will finally put an end to this failed and discredited colonial experiment that has gone on for far too long to the detriment of both our nations.

The proposal put forward earlier today by the President of the PIP, Rubén Berríos, if approved in its essential components will undoubtedly put in motion a process that can only lead to decolonization and independence.

For the first time in more than one hundred years there are no fundamental contradictions between your interests and ours as far as political status in concerned. It is up to Congress to seize this opportunity without delay.