

**U.S. House of Representatives
In the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs
Committee on Resources**

**Statement submitted by
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President
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Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Subcommittee and other Members of Congress:

Today I speak before you, not only as president of the PIP, but also as member of the Latin American Committee for Puerto Rican Independence representing 33 leading political parties of the region, fifteen of which are in government, as is the case, for example, of Chile, Argentina and Brasil.

I quote the Honorable Martín Torrijos, President of Panamá and Secretary General of the governing party in his keynote address to the Latin American Congress in support of Puerto Rican Independence held last November and which elected the Latin American Committee.

Puerto Rico is the only Hispanic American nation that remains under a colonial regime. For Latin Americans, correcting this anomaly must be a matter of principle and a priority of continental proportions. What remains is to agree on whatever is necessary to concrete the Puerto Rican right to constitute an independent republic...to agree as soon as possible on a transition schedule that will –once and for all– solve the problem in a dignified and efficient manner for all involved. Latin America can offer its good offices, promote that agreement, and guarantee compliance and the durability of that schedule.

Puerto Rico's colonial status constitutes a problem of hemispheric dimensions that must be confronted and overcome.

Congress is presently considering H.R 900 and H.R 1230.

Any bill that, like H.R.900, proposes a referendum that includes statehood is doomed to failure. Statehood is a poison pill. Even though you may not publicly admit it, you know that Congress –and particularly, the Senate– will not approve a law that implicitly promises statehood to Puerto Rico.

H.R 1230, on the other hand, is fatally ambiguous as to the nature of the existing relationship. How can you decolonize if you are not willing to recognize the existence of the colony? Moreover, the potential efficacy of H.R. 1230 hinges on the uncertain outcome of the next general election of the Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican Independence Party proposes a consensus alternative.

First: A yes or no referendum on the following question:

Do you want Puerto Rico to have a non colonial, non territorial, fully democratic sovereign political status instead of the present or any other territorial status?

This first step –contemplated H.R 900– is absolutely necessary, since territorial commonwealth is the problem that must be discarded in order to arrive at a solution. Commonwealth is the problem and thus it cannot be the solution. We must unambiguously put an end to ambiguity.

Second: Congress should express its commitment that once the territorial option is discarded, it will respond promptly to the status option that is chosen by the people of Puerto Rico through a sovereign constitutional convention convened under the laws of Puerto Rico among alternatives recognized by international law. By definition, such alternatives exclude not only the present status but also any form of modified territorial status. Needless to say, the Puerto Rican people have an inherent right to convene a constitutional convention without the prior approval of Congress; and if the choice were independence, Congress must not only respond but is obligated to grant such a request.

Third, if within a period of six months after the referendum a sovereign constitutional convention is not convened in Puerto Rico, the President of the US, in consultation with

representatives of the Puerto Rican people shall, within an additional six month period recommend fast-track legislation to Congress. In this legislation Congress would be required to discharge its obligation so that the people of Puerto Rico can exercise their inalienable right to self determination and independence. The presidential recommendation could include, among others, one or several referenda in which one or various alternatives would be presented.

In 1950-52, the United States engineered a process of consent to colonialism through a yes-or-no referendum in order to justify and legitimize territorial status. Now, as then, your interests dictate your policies; but now US interests in Puerto Rico have changed and “Commonwealth,” an undemocratic, bankrupt status, serves no useful purpose to anyone. Moreover, Commonwealth breeds dependency and statehooders; and congressional inaction regarding Puerto Rico’s territorial status will inevitably lead to an unwanted statehood petition, sooner rather than later. Now you must undo your own deed. Now is the time to dispose of the territory. Now you need a process to end colonialism.

To summarize: the first referendum proposed in H.R. 900 is a critical step in the right direction. It is the essential element contained in both the Serrano bill and in the White House Task Force recommendations; after all, the White House also knows that a bill that promises statehood has no future.

Approval of a consensus bill along the lines we have proposed will do justice to the Puerto Rican people and constitute a gesture of good will towards Latin America that could contribute to bring about an era of mutual understanding in our Hemisphere.

Appendix: The Unanimous Official Pronouncement, or “Proclamation,” of the **Latin American and Caribbean Congress in Solidarity with Puerto Rico’s Independence** (November 18-19, 2006, Panama City, Panama) is appended here to, and made part hereof.

