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TO : THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD
TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE
GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES
AND PEOPLES.

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

His Excellency Abdul Koroma, Chairperson

FROM: The Ecumenical Committee on the Future of Puerto Rico - USA

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FOREWORD

In its edition of April 1983, the well-known and highly regarded magazine National Geographic (Vol. 163, No. 4, pp. 516-542), published a leading article on Puerto Rico entitled "The Uncertain State of Puerto Rico". Its author, Bill Richards, in an extensive tour of the island, through interviews with political leaders and informal conversations with people representing different sectors of Puerto Rican society, comes to the conclusion that the major issue facing Puerto Ricans is that of the future:

"Yet during weeks of criss-crossing the Cordillera Central, the mountainous crown of this bullet-shaped island, and exploring miles of its reef-combed Atlantic and Caribbean coastlines, I heard the same doubts repeated with impatience. After nearly five centuries of absentee direction, first by Spain, and then by the United States —Puerto Ricans are wrestling with themselves to resolve, in their own way, the uncertainties of the future."

As stated by the author, quoting from the famous national song "Lamento Borincano", in the inner fabric of the Puerto Rican person, the words of this epic song ring with greater force today than ever before:

"What will become of Boriquen
My dear God
What will become of my children
of my home."

This document will explore this same questioning in light of the colonial crisis that Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, (both in the island and residing in the United States), experience as we move into the twenty first century.

As a Puerto Rican 'jibaro' born and raised in a coffee farm in its Cordillera Central, who has ministered to its people in the major urban metropolis, San Juan; as one who has lived in Chicago and New York and has had the opportunity to participate in all sorts of cultural and political events; — it is my conviction too that "What will become of Boriquen", is the major and most critical question confronting the island and Puerto Rican people.

Puerto Rico experiences today a crisis of colonialism which needs to be recognized as such by the two parties involved: Puerto Rico and the United States. It revolves around the unresolved political status of Puerto Rico. The sooner the status issue is resolved, the sooner will Puerto Rico be able to engage all its energies in tackling and seeking solutions to the many and difficult social, economic, cultural and spiritual problems it faces as a result of this colonial crisis.

I believe that at the heart of the status issue stands more than just the future of a piece of land, small as it is, or who has sovereignty over it and its resources. At stake, of fundamental importance, is also the identity of a people who for centuries have known ourselves as Puerto Ricans.

In the cry "What will become of Boriquen" hangs the destiny of a people, of a culture, of nationhood, of belonging to a wider community with which we have a common cultural heritage—the Latin American community of nations and peoples.

Who are we? Who do we want to be or become? What sort of social, political, economic society do we want to shape for ourselves and future generations? All these are vital questions as we face this uncertain future.

In 1982 the Ecumenical Committee on the Future of Puerto Rico was organized to explore these questions and issues. A project of Public Hearings was developed and implemented in Puerto Rico and the United States during 1982 and 1983, to receive oral and written testimonies concerning the colonial crisis which Puerto Rico experiences and about its impact in the lives of Puerto Ricans in the island and residing in the United States. This process was organized by a group of Christians and church leaders who are concerned about the difficult situation facing Puerto Rico and its people and the unresolved nature of its political status and its impact upon their lives.

On behalf of the Ecumenical Committee on the Future of Puerto Rico, of those who participated in the Public Hearings and the Forum held in Washington, D.C., the many others who testified or submitted written testimonies and those who served in the panels for the hearings, I am privileged as a Puerto Rican to present this document with the personal hope and the shared concern that, "What will become of Boriquen", will find a prompt answer in terms of the rights and aspirations of our people, who as God's children aspire to full freedom and self-fulfillment.

J. Antonio Ramos, Author of Report
Former Episcopal Bishop of Costa Rica
July 25, 1983

**REPORT ON THE FINDING AND CONCLUSIONS
OF THE PUBLIC HEARINGS PROJECT ON THE
COLONIAL CRISIS OF PUERTO RICO**

I. Introduction

The Ecumenical Committee on the Future of Puerto Rico, (heretofore referred to as the Ecumenical Committee), was created in 1982 at the initiative of the Episcopal Publishing Company, whose Chairperson is the Rt. Rev. Coleman McGehee, Jr., Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Michigan.

It grew out of the concerns of the members of the Board of Directors and many other individuals, in Puerto Rico and the United States, about the impact that the policies of the U.S. Government were having in Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican communities in the United States; the growing sense of powerlessness by broad sectors of the Puerto Rican community; the underlying colonial nature of the island's relationship to the United States; the increasing repression against Puerto Ricans; and the increasing use by the United States' government of the grand jury process to subpoena Puerto Rican advocates of Independence and sentencing of some of them to prison terms for their refusal to testify before the grand jury. These factors, together with the increasing clamor by many sectors of the Puerto Rican and the international community for an end to the status quo of Puerto Rico and a prompt resolution of its political status, led to the creation of this Ecumenical Committee on the Future of Puerto Rico with membership both from Puerto Rico and the United States.

In consultation with a broad sector of the Puerto Rican community, the Ecumenical Committee developed and implemented a Public Hearings Project to gather information regarding the political, social, economic, cultural and religious situation in Puerto Rico and of Puerto Ricans residing in the United States; to determine the impact of the status in their lives; and to communicate the findings of the hearings before national and international bodies, especially, before the United States Congress and the United Nations, where legislation or action could be taken to resolve the existing state of affairs in Puerto Rico.

In the planning, organization and implementation of the Public Hearings Project participated representatives of the churches; religious, political, cultural, civic and labor organizations; the academic community; grass-roots movements and advocacy groups; experts and concerned individuals, from Puerto Rico and the United States. Three Public Hearings were held:

- Puerto Rico on September 27-30, 1982
in the city of San Juan and the rural
town of Adjuntas;

- New York City on April 8-10, 1983;
- Chicago on May 13, 1983.

The three Public Hearings were presided over by panels consisting of Puerto Rican and United States citizens representing different sectors of the community and professional fields. The panel in Puerto Rico included such persons as the Rt. Rev. Francisco Reus Froylan, Bishop of the Episcopal Church; Dr. Luis Nieves Falcon, Sociologist, Professor at the University of Puerto Rico; and Dr. Karl Gregory, Economist, Professor at the University of Oakland, Michigan. The hearings were publicized through the media, posters and flyers, and invitations were sent to government officials, civic, political and religious leaders. A report of each of the hearings was prepared based on the oral and written testimonies. The three hearings were conducted in Spanish and English to allow for the maximum participation by witnesses both from Puerto Rico and the United States.

In addition to the Public Hearings, a Forum was held in Washington, D.C., on May 23, 1983 to make public the findings and conclusions of the hearings. Additional testimonies were given by experts on the issues considered in the hearings and about the reality of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the United States. Invitations to the forum were sent to government and congresspersons.

Both the Public Hearings and the Forum focused on the colonial crisis of Puerto Rico and its impact on the lives of its people. They covered such issues as the Status question; the prevailing economic, social, religious, cultural conditions; militarism, repression and the plight of Puerto Ricans in the island and in the United States.

In carrying out the Public Hearings Project and issuing this Report of its findings and conclusions, the Ecumenical Committee expresses its deep concern about the colonial crisis affecting Puerto Rico and its people.

The Ecumenical Committee is of the conviction that God is the Lord of all creation, of all peoples and nations; that the biblical witness proclaims God's concern for and deliberate participation in the liberation of peoples from slavery, domination and oppression. As members of the Christian community, the Committee affirms the Church's commitment to freedom, justice and peace; to the defense, protection and promotion of Human Rights, including the rights of persons and nations to freedom and self-determination, and their pursuit of well-being and fulfillment. The Ecumenical Committee affirms that these principles are of fundamental importance for Puerto Rico and its people as they seek to overcome the crisis of colonialism which they experience and to determine their own future and destiny.

II. Summary Findings and Conclusions

The following is a summary of the most important findings and conclusions which the Ecumenical Committee wishes to share with the peoples of Puerto Rico and the United States, and the international community; especially, the United Nations, its Decolonization Committee and its General Assembly.

A. On the basis of the political, social, economic, cultural and religious data gathered in the hearing and the research made for this Report, the Ecumenical Committee is of the opinion that Puerto Rico is experiencing a colonial crisis which is of concern not only to the two parties involved, Puerto Rico and the United States, but also the whole international community.

B. The Ecumenical Committee is of the opinion that this crisis is the direct result of the long-standing colonial history of Puerto Rico and of the unresolved political status.

C. The Ecumenical Committee is of the opinion that under the present Commonwealth status of a Free Associated State, Puerto Rico has achieved a greater degree of Self-Government in its internal affairs; however, the Committee considers that the present status has not resolved the colonial nature of Puerto Rico in its relationship to the United States. As defined by the United States Supreme Court in 1901, Puerto Rico remains a "non-incorporated territory which belongs to, but is not part of the United States".

D. The evidence provided in the oral and written testimonies indicate that the United States has not transferred to Puerto Rico powers and functions which are essential for the free and full exercise of autonomy. Even with the adoption of Public Law 600 of 1950 by the United States Congress and the subsequent approval by Puerto Rico and congress of the commonwealth status as a Free Associated State, the ultimate power of decision was not transferred to the people of Puerto Rico and its legislature, but continued to reside within Congress and the President of the United States.

E. It was quite evident to the Ecumenical Committee that the various political parties in Puerto Rico which advocate for a given status alternative (statehood, Independence, and commonwealth), recognize the unresolved nature of Puerto Rico's political status and the prevailing colonial conditions.

The New Progressive Party supports statehood being of the conviction the the only alternative for its supporters is that of full incorporation as a State of the United States. For them, the commonwealth status is 'neither fish nor fowl', nor represents a definite resolution of the status issue.

The various political parties and movement which advocate for Independence, (the Puerto Rican Independence Party, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, and the Socialist League), are of the conviction that the only alternative is the establishment of Puerto Rico as a free and sovereign nation. The present status is colonial for them.

On various occasions since the adoption of the commonwealth status, the Popular Democratic Party had recognized the limitations of the present status. Efforts have been made to strengthen it seeking additional powers from Congress. Both the Fernos-Murray Bill of 1959 and the "Compact of Permanent Union between Puerto Rico and the United States" of 1975 were not acted upon by Congress. Such repeated refusals indicate the unwillingness by the United States to grant Puerto Rico more autonomy and its intention to keep Puerto Rico as a non-incorporated territory under its direct jurisdiction. Within the leadership of the Popular Democratic Party there are those who favor the full transfer of powers to Puerto Rico, as required by the United Nations Resolution 1514, prior to any final decision on the status question whereby Puerto Ricans would be free to choose any of the alternatives, including the commonwealth one.

F. The Ecumenical Committee is therefore of the opinion that Puerto Rico remains under colonial status as defined by the United Nations' Resolution 1514 of 1960 and as reported since 1972 by its Decolonization Committee.

G. The Ecumenical Committee is of the conviction that the question of the colonial status of Puerto Rico should be included in the agenda of the United Nations and that the United Nations should require of the United States to end its colonial rule over Puerto Rico acting in conformity with said Resolution 1514 of 1960.

H. Given the long history of colonialism in the life of Puerto Ricans; the psychological conditioning to which they have been submitted (including the propaganda to fear freedom); the repressive measures being applied against advocates of Independence, the Ecumenical Committee concurs with those who testified in the hearings in favor of a 'decolonizing' process as an urgent need to enable the exercise of free self-determination. This, together with the immediate cessation of armed actions and all repressive measures, would assist in creating the necessary conditions and climate in Puerto Rico for the free exercise of the right to self-determination as specified in Resolution 1514.

I. Although Puerto Rico experiences a serious economic, social and cultural crisis, the Ecumenical Committee is of the opinion that this should not be used as pretext for delaying self-determination and an end to the colonial status.

J. Finally, the Ecumenical Committee is of the opinion that the prevailing colonial conditions are having serious effects in all aspects of Puerto Rico's life and the lives of its people in the island and in the United States. In this summary it underlies the following:

- (1) the dependent nature of Puerto Rico's economy; its vulnerability and the attitudes of powerlessness that it is generating;
- (2) the intolerable levels of unemployment and social disruption;
- (3) the increasing emigration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, where already around two million Puerto Ricans live marginalized, under conditions of poverty and discriminated against as a minority;
- (4) the increasing militarization of Puerto Rico and its role in the Caribbean and Latin America as a military base of the United States;
- (5) the increasing repression against Puerto Ricans in the island and in the United States and the use and abuse of the grand jury process;
- (6) the increasing disappearance of Puerto Rican culture, values and identity;
- (7) the increasing damage to the ecology of the island by the industrial development pursued;
- (8) the need to protect Puerto Rico's natural resources in the island and its territorial waters as a patrimony of the people of Puerto Rico.

The above summary findings and conclusions are discussed in detail in the following sections of this report which include a brief history of Puerto Rico's political development and its colonial heritage.

III. A Colonial Heritage

A brief survey of the history of Puerto Rico shows that, to this day, Puerto Rico has been under colonial rule and domination. Originally called "Boriquen" by its native Indian inhabitants, Puerto Rico shares with the rest of the Caribbean Islands the legacy of colonialism; except that, in most instances, the other islands have achieved their political Independence.

Puerto Rico has suffered a double yoke: first, four hundred years of colonial rule by Spain, harsh and cruel which exterminated its Arawak and Taino Indians. The second, eighty-five years of United States' domination which is threatening the very soul and identity of Puerto Rico, its personality and culture.

Christopher Columbus discovered the island in 1493, during his second trip to the New World. In 1508 Spaniards arrived in the island to conquer and occupy it on behalf of the Spanish Crown. By mid-sixteenth century, they had enslaved the island's Indians. When many rebelled they were slaughtered. Being left without a labor force to exploit the mines and the fields, the Spaniards imported slaves from Africa. The growing Spanish population, the remaining Indians, and the Black slaves started mixing with each other and what is known as the Puerto Rican person and nation emerged, with its own culture and patterns of social organization, conscious of its separate and distinct characteristics. By the nineteenth century Puerto Ricans had become restless of Spanish rule and domination, and eager to affirm their own sovereignty and nationhood.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Spain experienced the growing disintegration of its colonial empire, fueled by the movements of liberation and Independence of its colonies. In the early years of the nineteenth century, rebellion against the colonial rule of Spain had begun in the Hispanic West Indies, with Simon Bolivar, the Liberator of the continent, assuming personal leadership and commitment for the Independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

On September 23, 1868, the first major insurrection took place in Puerto Rico, in the famous "Grito de Lares revolt. In Lares, a small town in the heart of the island, an aborted insurrection took place in which Puerto Rico, for the first time in its history, was declared a Republic. As a result of the growing unrest in the islands, the weakening of its empire and power, and the desire of Puerto Ricans for autonomy, Spain granted Puerto Rico a large degree of autonomy in the Charter of Autonomy of November 25, 1897. Under it Puerto Rico elected deputies to the Spanish Courts; acquired the right to trade with other nations; and was able to exercise the powers and prerogatives of self-government in its internal affairs. Spain also agreed that the newly gained status could not be modified without the consent of the Puerto Rican Parliament. Soon afterwards, such gains in autonomy were unexpectedly and violently banished.

On July 25, 1898, as a result of the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico was invaded and occupied by United States' troops and a few months later it was ceded by Spain to the new ruler as "spoils of war." In the Treaty of Paris of December 10, 1898, Puerto Rico (together with Guam), was ceded to the United States "as compensation for the losses and expenses occasioned by the war." In the same Treaty, Cuba was granted Independence and the Philippines were purchased by the United States.

This sudden turn of events aborted the process of autonomy and Independence already under way in the island; abolished the gains in self-government and the international recognition which Puerto Rico had achieved seven months earlier. The United States immediately established a military government and dissolved the Puerto Rican Parliament.

Because in the Charter of Autonomy it had been agreed that Puerto Rico's status could not be changed without the consent of Puerto Ricans, the cession to the United States as "spoils of war" has been challenged and condemned repeatedly as a violation of that agreement, and considered, therefore, questionable and illegal. That argument was invoked by one of the patriots of the time, Eugenio Maria de Hostos:

"Puerto Rico is a legal entity and
could not be stripped of any of its
prerogatives as a nation by war not
of its making"

The same argument was made years later by Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Nationalist Party, before the United States' Supreme Court:

"The Treaty (of Paris) is null and void insofar as it concerns Puerto Rico. Spain could not cede Puerto Rico because Puerto Rico was a non-negotiable entity. Puerto Rico became a sovereign nation by virtue of the Charter of Self-Government which Spain could not amend without the consent of Puerto Rico."

During 1898-1900 Puerto Rico was ruled by a military government and in 1900 the United States Congress approved the Foraker Act which institutionalized its control over Puerto Rico. It established an Executive Council of eleven members appointed by the President; a Chamber of Delegates; the dollar was established as the official currency. The judicial system and other functions and power were kept under United States' control. The Governor of Puerto Rico became an appointee of the President of the United States, (all of them Americans until 1948 when a Puerto Rican was appointed). In 1901 the Supreme Court of the United States defined Puerto Rico as a 'non-incorporated territory which belongs to but is not part of the United States'. Puerto Rico, which had aspired to become a free and sovereign nation, had become a real estate, a colonial possession, under the ownership of the United States to be governed by and for the United States. Very similar to what the American colonies had been in relation to England prior to 1776.

In 1917 Congress approved the Jones Act which granted United States' citizenship to Puerto Ricans, something which they had opposed in 1913, in a memorandum of the House of Delegates to Congress:

"We hold firmly and loyally our opposition to being made, against our expressed consent, citizens of any country, other than the beloved land to which God gave us an inalienable right."

This action, coming during the First World War, forced upon Puerto Ricans a citizenship not desired. Those who chose not to become citizens lost their political rights and became aliens. It was obvious that one of the intentions behind such action was to make Puerto Ricans subject to compulsory military service, which immediately happened and prevails today under commonwealth status.

The Jones Act provided also for a Bill of Rights, an elected Puerto Rican legislature, but with veto power over all legislation by the United States' appointed Governor. The United States continued to exercise control over all other aspects of Puerto Rican affairs such as trade, immigration, defense, customs, etc.

This state of affairs prevailed until 1947 when President Harry S. Truman, pressured by the legislature of Puerto Rico and the growing forces of the Independence Movement on the need to resolve the status issue, instead granted Puerto Rico the right to elect its own Governor and appointed Jesus T. Pinero as the first Puerto Rican Governor since 1898.

In the general elections of 1948, Luis Munoz Marin, whose father, Luis Munoz Rivera had been one of the founders of the Unionist Party, and who had been a staunch advocate of Independence, became the first elected Governor of Puerto Rico. A new chapter in the political life of Puerto Rico opened.

Luis Munoz Marin had been educated in the United States. During the 1930's he had become, together with Pedro Albizu Campos, an advocate of Puerto Rican Independence. He had been also a close friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt whose New Deal policies to deal with the great depression in the United States had attracted Munoz Marin. In 1939, with his great charisma and abilities to communicate with the 'jibaros' of Puerto Rico, Munoz Marin embarked in a new political adventure establishing the Popular Democratic Party.

In 1940 his party won the elections and he became its leader in the Senate. Eager to apply the principles of the New Deal to Puerto Rico, then a pauperized society, Munoz Marin put the question of status aside, placing top priority on the solution of the economic and social problems facing the island. By 1948, when he was elected Governor, he had modified his stance concerning Independence returning to the position which his father had earlier advocated of autonomy within the American system. With the electoral mandate which he received in 1948, he launched into the immediate task of shaping what came to be known as the commonwealth status. Disappointed and betrayed by Munoz Marin, that same year, the leadership of the Independence forces, which had grown substantially during the 1940's, decided to create their own parties; among these, the Puerto Rican Independence Party and the Pro-Independence Movement (today the Puerto Rican Socialist Party).

In 1948 a significant strike took place at the University of Puerto Rico under the leadership of Albizu Campos who had been released from prison. It became violent and the status question became again a heated issue. At the urging of Munoz Marin and concerned about the increasing violence and pressures for the resolution of the political status, President Truman signed Public Law 600 on July 4, 1950, which became the foundation for the creation by Munoz Marin of the commonwealth status which he had proposed as a new alternative to resolve the status question.

IV. The Status Issue: Confrontation and Violence

The question of the political status has remained a constant and volatile issue in the political life of Puerto Rico. It was an explosive issue during Spanish rule, with outbreaks of violence and insurrection. The cession to the United States, at a time when a large degree of autonomy had been achieved, did not quash the efforts and struggle for the resolution of the political status. On the contrary, over the first eighty-five years this issue has become a highly emotional and divisive one, and often the cause of violent confrontation. It has been debated in the political arena, led to acts of insurrection and violence, and to increasing levels of repression against those advocating

for Independence; both against those who have used violent and non-violent means to end United States military presence in Puerto Rico and its islands of Culebra and Vieques. Early in its new colonial situation, the debate on the status question developed along the three alternatives which today are being debated.

These three political positions were then represented by various leaders who are acknowledged today and honored as heroes by the respective political sectors in Puerto Rico which hold those positions.

Santiago Iglesias, a labor leader who in 1899 founded the Free Labor Organization, an admirer of Samuel Gompers and with close ties to the American Federation of Labor, is honored by the advocates of statehood, whose principal leader is Carlos Romero Barcelo, the present Governor of Puerto Rico.

Jose de Diego, who led the pro-Independence forces in the Union Party, is honored by the advocates of independence.

Luis Munoz Rivera, Munoz Marin's father, who argues for autonomy within the American systems, is honored by the Popular Democratic Party whose founder, Luis Munoz Marin, became the promoter and architect of the present commonwealth status.

Early in this century various attempts were made to resolve the status question, but this only led to the legislation already referred to: Foraker Act of 1900 and the Jones Act of 1917. In 1922, the Union Party, founded by Jose de Diego and Luis Munoz Rivera, declared itself in favor of a 'Freed Associated State'. This led to its split and a new party was born -- the Nationalist Party -- which became the leading advocate for the establishment of the Republic of Puerto Rico. Its leader was Pedro Albizu Campos. He felt that the only means to end the colonial status was to make its case known internationally and exert pressure through direct confrontation. During the 1930's, with the support of labor, he organized various strikes. In 1935, four Nationalists were killed during a rally at the University of Puerto Rico and in reprisal a U.S. police captain was assassinated. On April 6, 1936 Albizu Campos and some of his followers were arrested and later he was sentenced to ten years in prison for conspiring to overthrow the government; violence did not subside but increased. On March 21, 1937, while the Nationalist Party held a march in the City of Ponce, the police fired and 20 persons were killed and close to 200 were wounded. Because of the abusive and pre-meditated action by the police, this violent event has been referred to as the Ponce Massacre and condemned as such. These violent actions led to greater repression of the Nationalist Party followers.

In 1950, when Public Law 600 was approved, another island-wide insurrection took place under the leadership of Albizu Campos, who had returned from jail. It resulted in many deaths and arrests, including the jailing of Albizu Campos again. A day after he was arrested, October 30, President Truman's residence, the Blair House, was attacked. In 1954, four Nationalists attacked Congress to bring to the attention of the American people and the world that 'Puerto Rico is not free'. In 1979, their sentences were commuted by President Carter.

The violent struggle for the Independence of Puerto Rico has taken place not only in the island, but also in the United States. Today eleven Nationalists, who consider themselves 'prisoners of war' are serving long sentences in U.S. Federal prisons; others are under arrest for alleged terrorist acts. In Puerto Rico and the United States many of those advocating Independence suffer repression and harassment and some have been sentenced to jail terms or are in the process of being sentenced because of their refusal to testify before grand juries called by the United States government.

These events clearly demonstrate that Puerto Rico's status remains a volatile question and will remain so until resolved. These violent events and actions to bring an end to colonial rule and domination cannot but recall that the Independence of the United States was achieved through violent confrontation because of the unwillingness of the English Crown to recognize the legitimate claims of the colonies to self-determination and freedom. Many Americans were caught between "Loyalist" or "Revolutionaries", traitors and insurrectionists. The goal of Independence for the new United States was achieved violently with much death and destruction. Those events leading to 1776 and the violence experienced in Puerto Rico and by other peoples of the world must remind the nations of the world, which exercise dominion over others, that 'the process of liberation is irresistible and irreversible and that, in order to avoid serious crises, an end must be put to colonialism' through peaceful means to avoid unnecessary violence, which only leads to destruction and human suffering.

V. Is Puerto Rico a Colony?

One of the major questions addressed in the Public Hearings was that of the political status of Puerto Rico: Is it a colony or has the status issue been resolved?

Most of the testimonies were of the opinion that the political status is unresolved; that under the commonwealth status Puerto Rico, as a Free Associated State, is still a colony, since the legal definition given by the Supreme Court in 1901 is still binding.

The commonwealth status has provided greater self-government to Puerto Rico in its internal affairs; however, major powers necessary for autonomy remain with the United States Congress and its President. Puerto Rico is still 'a non-incorporated territory which belongs to, but is not a part of the United States' (Supreme Court 1901). The seat of power resides in the Congress and not in the legislature of Puerto Rico or its people. Under Public Law 600 of 1950, the United States reserved for itself the right, under the 'territorial clause' of its Constitution, (Article IV, Section 2, Paragraph 2), to derogate any law approved by the Puerto Rican legislature, including Public Law 600.

Since 1952, various attempts have been made to enlarge the powers of the commonwealth status but without success. The Fernos-Murray Bill was presented in 1957 and the New Compact in 1970; but the United States Congress did not act upon any of these requests made by the proponents of the Free Associated State. At present, Puerto Rico does not have control over the following areas which are essential for self-government and full autonomy:

- a) Foreign and international relations
- b) Trade
- c) Communications
- d) Air and marine transportation
- e) Immigration and emigration
- f) Trips to the exterior (other than the U.S.)
- g) Customs laws and tariffs
- h) Currency
- i) Postal system
- j) Defense and control of the territory under U.S. military control
- k) Military service
- l) Banking system
- m) Social Security
- n) Environmental laws
- o) Ports
- p) The judicial system is subject to review by the Federal District Court, the Court of Appeals of Boston, and the U.S. Supreme Court
- q) Internal security

The lack of power over such important areas and the enforcement in Puerto Rico of other congressional legislation demonstrate the limited nature of the 'self-government' that Puerto Rico has.

The congress and the United States President can impose actions contrary to the will of the people of Puerto Rico, its governor, or its legislature. One of the most evident cases of this type of unilateral actions was the recent situation regarding Haitian refugees, relocated from Miami to Fort Allen, a refugee center opposed by the people and its government.

Dr. Trina Rivera de Rios, a prominent Puerto Rican social worker, presented the following definition of a colony, taken from the Dictionary of the Social Sciences:

"A territory subordinated in various forms, political, cultural or economically, to a country more developed. The dominant country retains the supreme legislative power and a good part of the administration."

The panel which reported on the hearings held in Puerto Rico concluded that Puerto Rico fits that definition. The other two hearings also agreed that the status is still unresolved and that Puerto Rico at present is under a colonial status. Puerto Rico, therefore, falls under the requirements of Resolution 1514 of the United Nations, as recommended by its Decolonization Committee in 1972 and in subsequent reports. It was also the consensus of the hearings that the case of Puerto Rico be placed in the

agenda of the United Nations General Assembly and that the United States be required to act in accordance with the stipulation of Resolution 1514 which mandates its members to take immediate steps "in Trust and Non-self- governing territories or all other territories which have not yet attained Independence to transfer all powers to the peoples of those territories..."

VI. The Impact of the Status on the Lives of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans

The colonial heritage and history described previously and the unresolved status, have created what was referred to in the hearings as 'a crisis of colonialism' which has affected all aspects of life in Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the island and those residing in the United States. The following are the most important ones covered in the various testimonies:

A. Economy

When the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, Puerto Rico had developed an agricultural economy which provided for the exportation of certain commodities and met the basic food needs of its population. The economy was based primarily on coffee, tobacco and sugar; 32% of the land was used for edible foods and Puerto Rican farmers owned 93% of the farms. It was then substantially a self-reliant economy. The few mineral available resources (like gold) had been exploited by the Spanish rulers. The new political situation in 1898 changed this rapidly.

By 1910, four United States-owned sugar mills had been established and gradually the island became a 'foreign-owned, foreign-run plantation'. Today, eighty-five years later, Puerto Rico's economy has become a dependent one. The island imports 90% of what it consumes; over 50% of the population receives some kind of subsidy (food stamps or cash) due to the impoverished conditions of large sectors of the population. Because agriculture has been severely reduced, Puerto Rico imports most of the edible products (like plantains, tomatoes, vegetables) which it once produced. Its production is oriented towards the demands of United States capital enterprise and not towards meeting the basic needs of the people:

"Puerto Rican economy is oriented towards the needs and preferences of the metropolis: an outward pattern of growth geared towards exports and consumption; and not focusing on the needs and convenience of Puerto Rico and its people... The economic dependence upon the United States is forever increasing. The importation of capital and technology from that country, and the orientation of production towards its market demands, have turned the Puerto Rican economy into an appendage of the United States. Puerto Rico produces that which it does not consume; and consumes that which it does not produce."

Puerto Rico's economy is not only dependent, but has become also a very vulnerable one, artificially sustained, with a weakened private sector and an increasing unproductive labor force. Its government bureaucracy has had to absorb the potentially unemployed working force. This model of dependent capitalism has created serious structural problems, with increased social repercussions, such as idleness; high levels of crime, drug addiction and alcoholism; chronic and increasing unemployment (officially 23% but its real estimate at 40%); deterioration of health, housing, educational services; higher levels of mental pathology; and a lowering of the standards of living. Since 1970, the public debt has increased at a level of 28% annually (from \$1,658 million in 1970, to \$7,511 million in 1981). Today the economy survives because of United States' subsidies.

The general public in the United States is not aware that their tax dollars are sustaining Puerto Rico's economy, while the beneficiaries of the consumption patterns of Puerto Rico and of its exports is the private sector of the United States economy.

Because of this dependent, artificially-sustained economy, the recent cuts by the Reagan administration in Federal assistance programs have further endangered the survival of the economy and created serious hardships for Puerto Rico and its people. Puerto Rico has had to borrow more and its people, once again, after this trend had been reversed, have had to emigrate to the United States seeking for jobs and new opportunities. An economic model praised before as "the showcase of development" in the Caribbean, has become a "showcase" of a colonial, dependent, artificially-sustained economy. The New York Times in its editorial of August 10, 1982:

"The scale of Puerto Rico's misfortunes is easily documented. The average annual income of 3.2 million islanders is half that in Mississippi, the poorest state. Unemployment on the mainland is a record 9.8%; on the island it is 24% -- meaning 250,000 jobless..."

The situation in July, 1983 is worse and the future bleak, if the colonial crises persists.

B. Emigration

These economic conditions created during the last eighty-five years have been responsible for the large emigration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, especially since the 1940's. David Weinberg in an article in Rolling Stone, November 25, 1982, entitled Island of the Damned, Puerto Rico, U.S.A., states the following:

"The island was called 'the poor house of the Caribbean' then, but if the jibaros had become poor it was partly because America's businesses have made them so. Large corporations began buying up farmland and establishing huge sugar centrales and tobacco plantations, which were managed from the mainland. A lot of small and medium-sized Puerto Rican farms were driven out of business. The land gradually slipped away from the jibaros."

This economic model imposed on the island, with the increasing pauperization of the population, together with the various depressions in the United States' and world economies in the 1930's, the 1970's and at present, the subsidized nature of the income of the majority population, have created the conditions which forced Puerto Ricans voluntarily or involuntarily to emigrate to the United States in large numbers, many encouraged by the government itself as "escape valve" to these conditions. Close to two million live today in different parts of the United States, the majority suffering the same hardships: poverty, poor housing, political powerlessness, prejudice and racism. Both the hearings in New York and Chicago dwelt on these conditions and the difficulties which Puerto Ricans find as they attempt to affirm and protect their identity and culture in an environment which is often hostile and violent. For them, the status question remains their plight and their cause as they also voice the same question, "What will become of Boriquen, My dear God."

C. Immigration

While thousands of Puerto Ricans have emigrated to the United States seeking jobs and new opportunities, thousands of non-Puerto Ricans have migrated to Puerto Rico, with the government of Puerto Rico powerless to control such an influx of foreigners, since those powers remain in the hands of the United States government and its immigration officials stationed in the island.

Over 200,000 non-Puerto Ricans reside in Puerto Rico (including United States-American residents) wielding a great deal of economic and political influence -- especially U.S. residents and naturalized citizens who vote in the elections. They are and can be a deciding factor in any regular election or in any referendum or plebiscite which might be held in the future regarding the status question. For example, in the 1980 elections (considered to have been highly irregular), the Governor, Carlos Romero Barcelo, was re-elected by a small margin of less than four thousand votes. It was quite evident that U.S. residents and naturalized foreigners, the majority of whom are pro-statehood, were a significant factor in that situation. In a vote regarding the status question, this group would be a decisive element if allowed to vote on such an important issue. Both commonwealth supporters and advocates of Independence are of the opinion that the issue of the status should be a matter restricted to the decisions of Puerto Ricans in which non-Puerto Rican residents should be excluded in any plebiscite. It is quite possible that such an action by the Puerto Rican legislature would be challenged in the Federal Courts and possibly declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court. The powerlessness of Puerto Rico to control immigration matters and who can vote in its elections are additional examples of its colonial nature and crisis.

D. Culture

One of the major areas of Puerto Rico's life affected by the colonial crisis, and by any of the future status alternatives, is that of Puerto Rican culture. Professor Margot Arce de Vazquez warns of the effects of the colonial situation:

"From 1898 until today Puerto Rican culture has suffered aggression from American culture, an inevitable aggression because of the colony-empire relationship that we have with the United States."

In the historical section of this report it was singled out that Puerto Rican culture and identity developed during the process of colonization under Spain, as distinct and separate entities. This is also affirmed by Professor Arce, a prominent university educator and highly respected in cultural matters:

"I would like to make clear that I believe there exists a Puerto Rican culture with its own characteristics resulting from the fusion of Indian, Spanish, African and Antillian elements. I consider it desirable and necessary to preserve these elements since this means nothing less than our survival as a national entity."

This same position was affirmed in the Public Hearings which warned of the same dangers and the ultimate consequences that the status quo or statehood would have on Puerto Rico's culture and Puerto Rican identity. It would accelerate the process of transculturation which has already taken place with the active displacement of Puerto Rican culture by North-American culture. Professor Arce defines this process as follows:

"It is, generally speaking, the action or effect of cultural change. It is not influence; rather it deals with much deeper effects, like those that occur through aggression against or penetration of one culture by another."

This process of transculturation has taken place through different forms of colonial rule and domination. Until 1948 all of the governors appointed were North Americans, alien to, and more often than not prejudiced against, Puerto Rican culture and values, and motivated by the Manifest Destiny view of 'civilizing' Puerto Rico, its people and its institutions.

Language is the vehicle of culture. English became the official language and replaced Spanish until 1948 as the vehicle of instruction in the public school system. The introduction of church institutions from the United States and of private schools and universities; the transformation of the economy and the banking system into U.S.-owned; the incorporation of Puerto Ricans into the armed forces; the Americanization of the patterns of consumption and of the public media; all these and many other factors

have assisted in this process of transculturation. Puerto Rican culture and values are being replaced by North American values, which, considered by many Puerto Ricans as superior and to be possessed or imitated, are rapidly resulting in the loss of Puerto Rican culture and identity.

With the establishment of the commonwealth status in 1952, the large emigration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, the affirmation of the common citizenship and permanent union, sought more diligently by the supporters of statehood, the process of transculturation and assimilation has accelerated. Today it is being officially encouraged and implemented through the dismantling of those institutions and organizations which affirmed Puerto Rican culture and values and through the further Americanization of society and the structures of government.

Because of these factors resulting from the colonial crisis that Puerto Rico experiences, the status issue will be determinative in the re-affirmation and survival of Puerto Rican culture and identity, or its disappearance. The findings from the Public Hearings clearly indicate that the status quo or statehood would lead to the latter and that the only alternative is that of national affirmation and the recovery of Puerto Rican sovereignty over its life and affairs.

E. Militarization

Prior to its occupation in 1898, Puerto Rico was looked at by the United States as a strategic fortress in the Caribbean region. Its geographic location was considered of strategic importance to defend and protect the recently built Panama Canal and for military control and surveillance in the Caribbean and Latin America. Today Puerto Rico plays a major role as a military base for the United States, with major air force, army and naval facilities for training purposes; and, if necessary, available for immediate use by the United States.

From 1898-1900, Puerto Rico was governed by a military government. In 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship and forced to serve in the United States armed forces. Since then, the presence of the United States armed forces has become overwhelming. According to testimonies offered in the Public Hearings, the Navy and the Marines hold seven installations throughout the island; the Army eleven and the Air Force three. The various bases occupy a substantial portion of Puerto Rico's territory, especially in the island of Vieques-36,000 acres in Ceiba and Vieques by Roosevelt Roads Naval Base, one of the largest Navy bases held by the United States. It is the headquarters of the Naval Command for the South Atlantic.

This military presence has been objected to and resisted, especially in the islands of Culebra and Vieques. Due to pressure, the base in Culebra was removed; however, Vieques continues to be the site of military exercises and maneuvers. Puerto Rico's National Guard is also at the disposal of the United States.

The militarization of Puerto Rico, its geopolitical importance for the United States, is seen as an important obstacle to the solution of the colonial crisis, since the United States will resist any efforts to decolonize Puerto Rico. Indeed, trends in recent months indicate an increasing use of Puerto Rico as a training center for Latin America with the proposed transfer to Puerto Rico of the school for training military personnel which has been operating in Panama. It is feared that such a role and its strategic value for the United States will increase both the control of internal and regional politics.

F. Repression

The Ecumenical Committee on the Future of Puerto Rico is extremely concerned about the state and dramatic increase of repression in Puerto Rico and against Puerto Ricans. This was made highly visible in the Public Hearings, especially by witnesses who have been the victims of such repression or by their relatives. In those testimonies repression was described as a mechanism to enforce the status quo in Puerto Rico, directed against different sectors of Puerto Rican society who protest the existing economic and social conditions, or against those who advocate an end to the colonial status and Independence.

Among the examples cited of repression by the police force were the incident in the student strike at the university last year and the forced and violent evacuation of the residents of Villa Suin Miedo, a community of 2,650 families which had occupied lands belonging to the government because of the serious lack of housing in Puerto Rico — for the poorer sectors of society. In both cases, police brutality and abuses were highlighted.

Special attention was given to those who have become the victims of repression because of their commitment to a political position favoring Independence for Puerto Rico. The use of the grand jury to subpoena persons of such political persuasion was singled out. Various persons have been subpoenaed and sentenced to jail terms in contempt of Court, because of their refusal to testify before the grand jury.

In this particular matter, church leaders from the United States and Puerto Rico, in April 1983, addressed letters to the Hon. Charles P. Sifton, a United States District Judge in the Federal Court in Brooklyn, who presided in a case involving five persons found in criminal contempt of Court because of their refusal to appear before the grand jury. In those letters these religious leaders denounce 'the abuse of the grand jury process which cheapens the administration of justice' in the United States. These leaders advocated an end to such abuses and asked for leniency in the sentencing of those persons.

The issue of the use of violence and terrorism as a means to achieve Independence for Puerto Rico was also a matter brought out in the Public Hearings. Reference was made concerning the eleven Puerto Ricans serving long prison sentences because of their alleged participation in terrorist acts. These cases and the violence used by some who seek the liberation of their country from colonial domination, make obvious the need to seek a prompt resolution of Puerto Rico's colonial crisis through political non-violent means. It is quite clear that the question of status is a volatile and explosive one which needs to be resolved as soon as possible and under conditions which could lessen the possibilities of polarization and the use of violent means to resolve the status question.

The United Nations Resolution 1514 warns its member nations and the world community about the dangers of the use of such violent alternatives and 'of the increasing conflicts resulting from the denial of or impediments in the way of freedom of such peoples, which constitute a serious threat to world peace'.

The same resolution issues a call for an end to all armed actions or repressive measures. The Public Hearings affirmed this call of the United Nations:

"All armed actions or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete Independence, and the integrity of their national territory shall be respected."

It is essential that repression and the use of grand jury processes be terminated against those who advocate the end of a colonial situation and for a political alternative which is acknowledged to be a legitimate and a rightful one.

G. Ecology and Natural Resources

Serious concern was expressed in the hearings about the effects which the industrialization process has had on Puerto Rico's environment and ecology, about the irreparable damage which the proposed mining projects in the Utuado-Adjuntas region would cause to the island's agriculture, its fauna and traditions.

Public Hearings sponsored by the churches were held in 1974 in opposition to exploitation of the copper mines in the region by multi-national companies. Since then, it has been discovered that Puerto Rico abounds in other mineral resources such as manganese, and that there are large deposits of petroleum in its territorial waters.

Given Puerto Rico's colonial situation, it lacks control over its own environment and over its own resources, and is subject to economic dealings which are unfavorable to the best interest of the people who are kept uninformed about contractual dealings with those multi-national companies.

If Puerto Rico is to be able to create a model of economic and social development which gives priority to the well-being of its people, which protects and affirms its traditions and values, its health and the future of its forthcoming generations, it is essential that the status question be resolved in such a manner that gives the people of Puerto Rico the powers and the freedom to exercise sovereignty over their patrimony.

VII. Conclusions

This Report has attempted to communicate the most important findings and conclusions of the Public Hearings Project sponsored by the Ecumenical Committee on the Future of Puerto Rico. Many other issues and concerns were discussed which could have been included in this Report. The testimonies received in the hearings and in the forum held in Washington, together with the reports of each of the hearings, are available to the government officials of Puerto Rico and the United States and their respective legislators and agencies, and to the United Nations and the public for their examination.

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