



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Prepared Statement (Delivered in Spanish)
U.N. Special Committee on Decolonization
June 23, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am Puerto Rico's representative in the United States Congress and president of the New Progressive Party, which supports Puerto Rico becoming a state of the United States.

I come before you again today on behalf of those:

- who demand equal civil and political rights;
- who refuse to accept being second-class citizens of a nation to which they have contributed so much;
- who understand that Puerto Rico's political status is the root cause of its serious economic problems and population loss;
- and who proudly carry the Puerto Rico flag in one hand and the American flag in the other, knowing that their love for Puerto Rico and their loyalty to the United States complement—rather than contradict—one another.

In my testimony before this Committee one year ago, I made two important points.

First, I told the Committee that, in November 2012, Puerto Rico held a vote on its political status. The results demonstrate that 54 percent of voters reject the current territory status. The results further show that, among the three internationally recognized alternatives to the current status, 61 percent of voters support Puerto Rico's integration with the United States through statehood. Finally, the results reveal that, for the first time ever, there are more voters in Puerto Rico that want Puerto Rico to become a state of the United States than to maintain the current political status. In short, the statehood movement has become the predominant political force in Puerto Rico.

Second, I told the Committee that I would do everything within my power to ensure that the President and the Congress of the United States respond to this historic vote in an appropriate manner.

I am now pleased to report that the U.S. government has taken unprecedented action.

Last year, at my urging, President Obama asked Congress to provide \$2.5 million to enable Puerto Rico to conduct the first federally-sponsored plebiscite in its history in order to “resolve” the territory's status. Earlier this year, Congress approved that funding with bipartisan support, despite objections from pro-status quo forces.

Although the federal law approved by Congress and signed by President Obama does not prescribe how the ballot should be structured, it does require the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that any option on the ballot is compatible with the U.S. Constitution, U.S. law and U.S. public policy. Accordingly, the ballot will not contain non-viable options that cannot be implemented.

Now that the U.S. government has discharged its duty, the Puerto Rico government has a moral responsibility to act.

I have proposed that the available funding be used to conduct a vote on Puerto Rico’s admission as a state of the United States. This approach is reasonable and even-handed, since those who support admission can vote “Yes” and those who oppose it can vote “No.”

This approach is straightforward and would yield a definitive result. It is the same approach followed by Alaska and Hawaii, the last territories to become states. Finally, this approach enjoys broad congressional support. I introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives that proposes to structure the federally-sponsored vote in this format. My legislation has obtained 131 cosponsors and an identical bill has been introduced in the U.S. Senate.

Unfortunately, the current government in Puerto Rico is controlled by a party that has perfected the cynical art of talking about how important it is to resolve the problem of Puerto Rico’s status, while doing absolutely nothing. It is clear that their inaction is rooted in their fear that a majority of the electorate will once again vote in favor of Puerto Rico’s admission as a state of the United States.

This Committee has criticized the U.S. government for not doing enough to ensure that Puerto Rico achieves a dignified and democratic status. Consistent with this principle, the Committee should now call upon the Puerto Rico government to hold the proposed plebiscite as soon as possible.

Thank you.