

**Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate
Washington DC**

**Statement by the Hon. Rubén Berríos Martínez
President Puerto Rican Independence Party**

May 19, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

The people of Puerto Rico have an inalienable right to self determination and independence. We are now in the 21st century, and yet Puerto Rico is still colony of the United States, or as you prefer to call it, an unincorporated territory. It is up to our people to decide how and when we should exercise our right of self determination. But the United States has the legal and moral obligation to respect self determination which is, under your Constitution, part of the supreme law of the land.

Congress has repeatedly refused to facilitate a process for the exercise of the right to self determination. Moreover, Congressional inaction forces us to live under a colonial straitjacket which has pushed Puerto Rico to economic, social and moral bankruptcy. These are not just words. Right now, in Puerto Rico our people are in the streets, expressing their frustration, despair and indignation. That is the shameful reality of the territory after 112 years under U.S. sovereignty.

And the U.S. House of Representatives responds with H.R. 2499, which is now before you. Cynically entitled the Puerto Rico Democracy Act, the bill purports to advance the principle of self determination. Yet, it proposes the continuation of the colonial status of unincorporated territory – not once but twice – as an alternative to the problem of territorial subordination, even against the original purpose of the proponents of the bill.

H.R. 2499 adds insult to injury.

Of course, it could have been worse. Instead of including the present territorial relation, someone might have thought of including, instead of or in addition to, some

cosmetically modified form of commonwealth along the lines of what Senator Bingaman has characterized in the past as “free beer and barbecue”.

Colonial rule, consented or not, constitutes a denial of the elementary principle of democracy which requires participation of the governed in determining the laws under which they live. There is no such thing as a democratic colony. It is a contradiction in terms, at best, a gilded cage. Slavery or apartheid would not have been less abominable had they enjoyed popular support, because it would have been presumed to be the consequence of manipulation, intimidation and deception. Likewise consent to colonialism is by definition only apparent, for it is the product of collective coercion.

The territorial status of Puerto Rico still stands simply because such has been the will of the United States. For many years you have shunned and criminalized independence. Now you cringe at the mere thought of a petition for statehood because granting statehood to a Latin American and Caribbean nation like Puerto Rico is incompatible with your national interests. Therein lies the reason behind the contradictory nature of H.R. 2499. The United States is not, and does not aspire to be, a multinational state; multicultural maybe, multinational never.

Those of us in Puerto Rico who respect ourselves and believe in democracy and self-determination repudiate this fraudulent maneuver designed to perpetuate colonialism and allow Congress to avoid facing its decolonizing obligation. We will denounce this hoax in Puerto Rico and before the international community.

What should Congress do? It should simply declare its intention to put an end to colonial rule in Puerto Rico by disposing of the territory, and commit itself to receive and act upon a proposal for decolonization formulated by the people of Puerto Rico through a procedural mechanism of its choice, among alternatives recognized by international law.

Puerto Ricans – and I am sure I speak for the great majority of our people – are sick and tired of the condescending and cavalier attitude of the U.S. government so crudely reflected in H.R. 2499. Enough is enough.

More than one hundred years of colonialism have not broken our national spirit nor diminished our profound sense of identity as a Latin American and Caribbean nation. Regardless of your decision concerning H.R. 2499, you will never admit Puerto Rico as a state because we are a separate nation. And precisely because we are a separate nation, in the end, freedom for Puerto Rico will prevail and we will be masters of our own destiny.