

**Statement by Aida Díaz, President, Puerto Rico Teacher's Association (PRTA) on  
HR 900 'Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2007' and HR 1230 'The Puerto Rico Self-  
Determination Act of 2007'; March 22, 2007**

**Before the Sub Committee on Insular Affairs of the Committee on Insular Resources of the  
US House of Representatives**

Honorable Donna M. Christensen, Chair of the Sub-Committee and honorable members of this committee.

My name is Aida Díaz, President of the Puerto Rico Teachers Association (PRTA), a non-partisan voluntary membership organization of 26,000 teachers which advocates for the welfare of the Puerto Rican teacher since its foundation in 1911.

The teachers appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on the two bills introduced in Congress to provide a process to move Puerto Rico to a new political status, HR 900 and HR 1230. As educators we have to take a critical look as to which process promotes a better educational opportunity for the People of Puerto Rico to learn about the political options available to our future. Objectively, after reviewing HR 900 and HR 1230, we firmly believe HR 1230 provides for a better educational experience and a simpler process. Educating the electorate about the options are key to our future, since as Epictetus, the Greek philosopher said: "*Only the educated are free.*" And, since this process is to set the Puerto Rican people totally free, they must be well educated as to the political options available and, most importantly, as to how these options promote a better Puerto Rico.

We are prepared to endorse HR 1230 if the matters below described are included in the bill. HR 1230 promotes a Constitutional Convention in which elected delegates would debate the full extent of the political options available; choose one and have its acceptance put to a vote of the People of Puerto Rico. The format of a Constitutional Convention constitutes a process which is less complicated and thus better suited to reach a definite result within a shorter period of time. It also seems less prone to the manipulations of politicians in their characterizations of the options as presented to the people *vis a vis* a simple plebiscite with the three (3) status options. HR 1230 offers a balance approach, confers our people ample opportunity to analyze and learn in a detailed manner about the self determination options.

HR 1230 could further specified: 1. Delegates need no to be the exclusive representatives of political parties; 2. Gender representation should be addressed in order to guarantee a balance representation, since women are a majority of the electorate; 3. Congress needs to appropriate funds to share in the financing of this option; and, 4. Congress needs to put a date certain by which the Constitutional Convention is constituted.

HR 1230 calls for a process of a superior quality. The definition of the political status option shall be the product of the Puerto Rican delegates elected by the People of Puerto Rico. The chosen option would be later ratified by the Puerto Rican electorate. Under HR 900, the political options are defined by Congress not the People of Puerto Rico. It must be up to our people to decide the political formula or status under which they will be governed in the future —not Congress.

HR 900 offers a very complicated process with multiple electoral events. It pretends to limit the status options available to only two (2). There is now consensus in Puerto Rico —the present political relationship with the U.S. is unacceptable. Free Association is a recognized international status option which needs to be included. The U.S. has ample experience in this field with three relationships of Free Association presently in existence: Federated States of Micronesia; Republic of Marshall Islands; and, Palau.

So, if this Committee prefers HR 900 as the vehicle for Puerto Rico to adopt a new political status, then its needs to amend it to eliminate the first plebiscite and legislate one plebiscite with the three (3) options as recognized by Resolution 1541 (XV) of the General Assembly of the United Nations as approved in 1960: 1. Emergence as a sovereign independent state; 2. Free Association with and independent state; or 3. Integration with an independent state. Also Congress has to recognize the jurisdiction of the local courts over any plebiscite.

The remarks on HR 900 are simply to respond to the request by the Committee to comment on said bill since the Teachers Association is not endorsing said bill.

Congress also needs to consider the development of an objective educational campaign. The State Elections Commission with an advisory committee constituted of institutions such as ours would implement a campaign to address the political options and the peculiarities of each of the options objectively. This campaign could serve to clarify concepts debated by the delegates which may need further explanation. Again, this goes to further our concern to have an educated electorate.

We urge you to adopt with amendments HR 1230. Thank you.