

The Honorable Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico and President of the New Progressive Party  
Prepared Statement (Delivered in Spanish)  
U.N. Special Committee on Decolonization (Committee of 24)  
*June 22, 2015*

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am the president of the New Progressive Party, which wants Puerto Rico to become a state of the United States. I am also Puerto Rico's delegate in Congress, called the Resident Commissioner. I am the only sitting Resident Commissioner ever to address this Committee, and this is the third straight year I have testified. I will speak in any forum about Puerto Rico's status, because it is my personal and professional passion. I entered public life to resolve this issue, and I do not intend to exit public life until I do.

In 2013, I reported to this Committee that, in a local plebiscite held in 2012, my constituents rejected our status as a territory of the United States and expressed a preference for integration through statehood. I told the Committee that it was incumbent upon the U.S. President and my colleagues in Congress to respond to this historic vote.

In 2014, I returned to inform this Committee that the U.S. government, under intense pressure from me and other opponents of the *status quo*, had taken unprecedented action. Specifically, Congress enacted legislation to enable Puerto Rico to conduct the first federally-sponsored plebiscite in our history. The law requires the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that any option on the ballot is compatible with U.S. law and policy. Accordingly, I urged this Committee to call upon the Puerto Rico government to hold a plebiscite as soon as possible.

It is now clear that the governor of Puerto Rico, who favors our current political status, will not use this funding before his term in office ends next year. It is my intention to use this funding to conduct a vote on Puerto Rico's admission as a state once I have the opportunity to serve as governor. This approach is logical, because statehood won the 2012 plebiscite, and this approach is fair, since those who support statehood can vote "Yes" and those who oppose it for any reason who can vote "No."

This approach has broad support. Indeed, I introduced a bill this year in Congress that would authorize a vote on Puerto Rico's admission as a state and, if voters confirm their desire for admission, would provide for statehood within about five years. This is the most ambitious statehood bill ever filed—and it already has 109 cosponsors from 39 U.S. states and territories, and will be discussed at a congressional hearing later this week. Each cosponsor helps refute the false and cynical argument that the United States would not accept Puerto Rico as an equal member of the American family.

The lesson of history is that, if we fight for equal treatment, we will achieve it. And we must fight because Puerto Rico's current status is intolerable. It is the root cause of the current economic and health care crisis in Puerto Rico, which is driving island residents to relocate to the states in massive numbers. Once they arrive, they can vote for the President of the United States

and Members of Congress and are treated equally under all federal laws and programs. If they remain in Puerto Rico, they are second-class citizens. This should offend all men and women who believe in human dignity.

As for this Committee, every year it drafts a resolution affirming that Puerto Rico has the “inalienable right to self-determination and independence.” You and the nations you represent may want Puerto Rico to become a sovereign nation. However, the vast majority of men and women I represent do not, and this is our—and not your—decision to make. Independence is a democratic and dignified status, but statehood is no less democratic and dignified. Thus, the resolution you draft this year should state that Puerto Rico has the inalienable right to independence or integration as a state of the United States. If it does not, it will be incomplete and it will be irrelevant.

Thank you very much.