

Resolution on NLG Solidarity with Puerto Rico

WHEREAS, since the U.S. invasion and occupation in 1898, the United States has subjected Puerto Rico, its largest colony, and the people of Puerto Rico, to U.S. law and courts and the ongoing assault on their cultural, political and social institutions, controlling the economy and repressing and criminalizing Puerto Rico's legitimate movement for self-determination and independence.

WHEREAS, the NLG has a long history of working with the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, and the International Committee makes an annual report to the U.N. Decolonization Committee hearings on Puerto Rico.

WHEREAS, the U.N. Decolonization Committee this year passed its 30th annual resolution reaffirming the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence in conformity with General Assembly Resolution 1514(XV), recognizing Puerto Rico as a Latin American and Caribbean nation, requesting the General Assembly to consider the case of Puerto Rico, and calling on the U.S. to, *inter alia*, release the political prisoners held for over 30 years in U.S. prisons, and clean up the toxic contaminants left by the U.S. Navy on the island of Vieques.

WHEREAS, in March of 2011, the U.S. President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status — of which there is not a single Puerto Rican member — issued a report proposing methods purportedly designed to resolve the status question, acknowledging that “status remains of overwhelming importance to the people of Puerto Rico,” but nowhere expressly acknowledging the colonial status or the application of international law or recognizing that there can be no resolution of Puerto Rico's “status” other than by the people of Puerto Rico in a sovereign Puerto Rico.

WHEREAS, in September of 2011, President Obama made a four-hour stop in Puerto Rico, where he encountered mass demonstrations comprised of diverse groups, with placards and banners reading “Obama, Go Home!” and calling for an end to U.S. colonial control, independence, and the release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners, particularly Oscar López Rivera.

WHEREAS, since January of 2009, the pro-statehood colonial administration, aligned with the extreme right-wing of the U.S. Republican Party, has been waging concerted efforts to eliminate and repress all forces and institutions in Puerto Rican society which promote human rights and the defense of the legitimate aspirations of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination, with major attacks against sectors such as the legal profession, workers, housing activists, cultural workers and defenders of Puerto Rican culture, and supporters of quality free and public education.

WHEREAS, the colonial administration has waged an all-out assault on the Puerto Rico Bar Association (Colegio de Abogados) for its advocacy and defense of the rights of the citizens of Puerto Rico, of Puerto Rican culture and the process of decolonization. Pro-statehood legislators punitively attempted to destroy the Colegio, converting it from mandatory to voluntary membership, withdrawing critical sources of funding, and prohibiting it from speaking out on public issues. Pro-statehood lawyers and judges punitively litigated to completely dismantle the Bar Association, jailing its president and ordering it to pay extraordinary damages.

WHEREAS, the long-standing fraternal relations between the National Lawyers Guild and the Colegio de Abogados have been fortified since the NLG International Committee's delegation to Puerto Rico in March of 2010, as demonstrated by the campaign of promoting honorary membership of NLG members in the Colegio and support for amicus efforts in the face of the legal attacks on the Colegio.

WHEREAS, the students, faculty and non-teaching staff of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) have waged valiant battles against the plans of the colonial administration to privatize public higher education, interfere politically with academic freedom, gear education towards the needs of its corporate backers and unduly interfere with the curriculum, and the government has responded by vicious attacks against protesters, by arresting students and by prohibiting all exercise of free speech on the UPR campus.

WHEREAS, the colonial administration laid off some 30,000 government workers, abrogated hard-fought collective bargaining agreements in the public sector, and maintains one of the few economies in the world with negative growth. These neo-liberal policies have resulted in a net loss of close to 200,000 jobs in the last two years, unemployment at close to double the rate in the United States and the planned mass exodus of talented Puerto Rican workers, scholars, health care providers, and teachers.

WHEREAS, in the past year, the human rights crisis on the island has burgeoned. The superintendent of police, a former FBI agent, oversaw and applauded an unending wave of violent attacks on people protesting the policies of the colonial administration, particularly on striking students at the UPR. Police violence has attracted the attention and condemnation of Amnesty International in London, and even the U.S. Department of Justice is investigating.

WHEREAS, the colonial administration packed the Supreme Court, increasing the number of justices from seven to nine, in a transparently partisan effort, accelerating the nomination and confirmation process. The expansion has been criticized as unnecessary and a power grab by the governor's pro-statehood party, with the criteria for appointment favoring strong pro-statehood credentials over legal and judicial experience.

WHEREAS, the colonial administration is imposing construction of a 92 mile-long "Via Verde" natural gas pipeline to cross the 100 by 35 mile island near homes, workplaces, schools and densely transited freeways. The pipeline fails to comply with regulatory standards and

procedural safeguards and is opposed by the vast majority of the population. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is currently considering permits that would allow the project to proceed.

WHEREAS, the island of Vieques, a U.S. Superfund site, has been shamefully left to abandon after 60 years of military occupation polluted its land, air and water and consequently gravely damaged the health of the people and their economy.

WHEREAS, Puerto Rican political prisoners are in prison in the United States for their commitment to Puerto Rican independence: Oscar López Rivera, who has served over 30 years behind bars, wrongfully denied parole, with presidential commutation the sole remedy to obtain his release before his outdate of 2023; Avelino González Claudio, with a release date of 2012; and Norberto González Claudio, facing a possible sentence of 275 years.

THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED:

* The NLG reaffirms its support for efforts to end to U.S. colonial control of Puerto Rico and to obtain the independence and self-determination of the Puerto Rican people;

* Colegio de Abogados: the NLG encourages NLG members to become honorary members of the Colegio de Abogados and to assist financially and through amicus briefs, in litigation in support of the Colegio de Abogados; the NLG also encourages local U.S. Bar Associations to pass resolutions in solidarity with the Colegio de Abogados;

* Gas Pipeline: the NLG supports the campaign for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to deny requests for permits, hold public hearings and require a thorough environmental impact statement;

* Vieques: the NLG advocates for complete clean up of the pollution left by the U.S. Navy's 60 year occupation;

* Political prisoners: the NLG supports the campaign for the release of the remaining political prisoners, particularly seeking presidential commutation for Oscar López Rivera.

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Submitted by Susan Scott, Jeanne Mirer, Azadeh Shahshahani, Co-Chairs of the International Committee; Judy Somberg, Chair of the Task Force on the Americas; and Judith Berkan, Jan Susler and Natasha Bannan, Co-Chairs of the Puerto Rico Subcommittee.

To be implemented by: Task Force of the Americas, International Committee