

Oral Testimony presented by Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz Soto
Hearing of the Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington DC

June 24th, 2015

I want to thank the Chairman and members of this sub-committee for today's invitation to share my views regarding Puerto Rico's political status and economic outlook. My name is Carmen Yulin Cruz Soto and I currently serve as Mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico has enjoyed a Commonwealth status responsible for catapulting our economic development. But the world has changed; that which once made us successful now lacks the necessary tools to handle today's reality. Ultimately, any viable political status must provide the necessary economic tools to engage in sustained and equitable economic growth while strengthening our democracy.

Puerto Rico has been denied these tools far too long and as long as our options are defined by the powers of this Congress, we will always be at your mercy. The measure of our success will always be limited by the vastness of your control over our affairs.

I admit, our current financial situation has a healthy dose of shared responsibility. For years, we engaged in chronic patterns of unhealthy indebtedness, while you deny us- or have taken away - the few tools we have at our disposal. Sir Winston Churchill once said: "Give us the tools to win this war". Have no doubt we are in the midst of an economic war. It is profoundly evident that our political status, will determine the tools we have at our disposal to wage and win that war.

Far too long you have benefitted from our inability to reach a consensus in the status question. No more: you can no longer use that as an excuse to neglect your responsibility. Paraphrasing Gandhi: "the time has come for you to recognize that you are masters in somebody else's land". The time has come for you to put in motion a true self-determination process which ensures all voices and all options have equal access to the formulation and implementation of the status resolution issue.

I come before you as one of the 454,768 Puerto Ricans who on November 2012 voted to transform the present Commonwealth relationship into a non-territorial, non-colonial Free Associated State to request that Congress includes said option in any status defining process in a manner that is distinguishable from the present territorial Commonwealth, as well as from statehood and independence.

Said new status is based on the recognition of the sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico and our inalienable right to choose whichever form of government we see fit.

The ELA SOBERANO will be forged on a compact of association in accordance with International Law. The definition presented to voters on 2012 stated that "(s)uch agreement would provide the scope of the jurisdictional powers that the People of Puerto Rico agree to confer to the United States and retain all other jurisdictional powers and authorities." We aspire, as the majority of Puerto Ricans, to guarantee, for present and future generations, the common bond of U.S. citizenship.

Any serious self-determination process will take time; however there are matters which may be addressed immediately:

- 1- Ensure Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi's bill to include Puerto Rico in Chapter 9 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Law is swiftly approved so that we have the legal capability to restructure our obligations and pay them in a manner consistent with the well-being of our people. We recently tried to deal with this issue and the Federal Court ruled against us. I fully support this bill.
- 2- Give us the authority to enter into commercial agreements with other countries as well as partially or fully exempt us from the yoke placed upon us by the Jones Act.

You have the power to help Puerto Rico now; exercise it! You have the moral obligation to end the trite pilgrimage of Puerto Ricans looking for the status question to be resolved; move forward.

I assure you, you will be met by an alliance of relentless people who know how and will in the future once again to overcome authority.

Thank you.