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pagina X

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Twenty-sixth General Assembly
General Committee, 192nd Meeting
AM SUMMARY

Press Release GA/4411
23 September 1971

GENERAL COMMITTEE CONTINUES CONSIDERATION OF ASSEMBLY AGENDA

Cuban Item on Puerto Rico Not Recommended for Inclusion

The General Committee this morning recommended two more items for inclusion in the agenda of the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly, making a total of 96 so far.

One item on the draft agenda, as contained in the Secretary-General's memorandum (document A/BUR/177 and Corr.1), was not recommended for inclusion. That was item 104, entitled "The colonial case of Puerto Rico", which had been proposed by Cuba.

The vote on inscription of this item was 5 in favour (Bulgaria, Hungary, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Sierra Leone, USSR) to 10 against, with 8 abstentions (Burundi, Cyprus, Ireland, Jamaica, Nigeria, Peru, Venezuela, Zambia).

The two items recommended for inclusion in the agenda were item 102, "Proclamation of United Nations Day as an international holiday", and item 103, "Scientific work on peace research".

The Committee then began consideration of three items relating to Korea: Item 106, "Withdrawal of United States and all other foreign forces occupying South Korea under the flag of the United Nations"; item 107, "Dissolution of the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK)"; and item 108, "Question of Korea: report of UNCURK".

The United Kingdom proposed that the three items be deferred until the 1972 session of the Assembly.

The General Committee will meet again at 3 p.m. today to continue consideration of the matter and then to go on with the remainder of the draft agenda and the allocation of items to plenary meetings of the Assembly and to the seven Main Committees.

(A MORE DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE MEETING APPEARS IN TAKES 1-13 OF THIS RELEASE)

GENERAL COMMITTEE -- TAKE 1

The General Committee met this morning to continue consideration of the inclusion of items in the agenda of the twenty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly. Consideration of this matter began yesterday, and the Committee has so far recommended inclusion of 94 items in the agenda (see Press Release GA/4410).

This morning's meeting was called to order by the President of the Assembly, ADAM MALIK (Indonesia), at 10:58 a.m.

The Committee then resumed consideration of the Secretary-General's memorandum on the organization of the session, the adoption of the agenda and the allocation of items (document A/BUR/177 and Corr.1).

Inclusion of item 102, "Proclamation of United Nations Day as an international holiday", as proposed by Zambia, was recommended without objection.

The inclusion of item 103, "Scientific work on peace research", as proposed by Belgium, was also recommended.

Next came item 103, "The colonial case of Puerto Rico", proposed by Cuba.

The PRESIDENT said the representative of Cuba had asked to speak.

The Committee agreed to the request.

RICARDO ALARCON QUESADA (Cuba) said 103 years ago today the people of Puerto Rico had "proclaimed their first independent republic". Ever since then, he said, the people had been "struggling for complete emancipation".

Cuba and Puerto Rico had together fought Spanish domination, he continued, and their two peoples had close ties.

He paid tribute to the Puerto Rican patriots who had died for independence and those who were "incarcerated in metropolitan prisons" for their struggle.

Mr. ALARCON QUESADA said the people of Puerto Rico "until today are a people subject to colonial domination, denied the right of self-determination and sovereignty".

The representative of Cuba said "Puerto Rico is and always will be a Latin American nation". Puerto Ricans and all Latin Americans "must support and help Puerto Rico in its struggle for liberation", he declared.

Puerto Rico was "a colonial territory" and the memorandum submitted by Cuba (document A/8441) showed "this colonial relationship with the United States", he said.

GENERAL COMMITTEE -- TAKE 2

Mr. ALARCON QUESADA (Cuba) went on to state that the "North American Government" had exclusive jurisdiction for citizenship, foreign affairs, defence, immigration and emigration, posts and telegraphs, etc., in Puerto Rico.

He said the United States controlled completely the economy of the island. "Puerto Rico is a vast military complex", and 13 per cent of the island comprised military bases "and two of these bases have nuclear weapons", said the representative of Cuba.

The United Nations Declaration on ending colonialism applied to Puerto Rico, he continued. The United States had failed to implement it, however. Not even the United States "or the colonial regime in the island" had asserted that Puerto Rico had achieved independence, he said.

The United States Supreme Court had said "Puerto Rico belongs to, but is not a part of, the United States", declared Mr. ALARCON QUESADA. This was a succinct description of a colony. He said that, in United Nations language, the United States was "the administering Power" in Puerto Rico.

The representative of Cuba said that the United Nations "has failed in its duty regarding Puerto Rico".

Since 1965, he said, Cuba had been asking that the case be considered either by the General Assembly or its Committee of 24 on the ending of colonialism.

The 1964 non-aligned conference in Cairo, continued Mr. ALARCON QUESADA, had issued a communique by 49 Heads of State and Government, calling for United Nations consideration of the case of Puerto Rico.

The people of Puerto Rico, he declared, "will win their own struggle for independence with the support of the world's revolutionary people". The problem for the United Nations was to apply the principles of anti-colonialism equally to all cases, including "colonies of the United States", he stated.

It was the duty of the United Nations to inscribe the Cuban item on the Assembly agenda, he added. Tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans, he said, had demonstrated on 12 September against "Yankee imperialism" and the meeting of United States Governors in Puerto Rico.

GENERAL COMMITTEE -- TAKE 3

GEORGE BUSH (United States) said the United States delegation "vigorously opposed" consideration of this item at this or any other session of the General Assembly.

The United States had followed the practice of not objecting to the inclusion of items even when it did not favour them, as had happened in the case of one item yesterday, he said. However, the United States could not, in good conscience, follow that practice with regard to this "frivolous" item.

The Cuban item, he went on, was "self-serving and mischievous" and would divert the time of the delegates here from serious business.

The people of Puerto Rico had exercised their right of self-determination in 1952, he said, in a free plebiscite -- a concept which unfortunately was alien to the Cuba of today. The people of Puerto Rico had affirmed the existing relations with the United States, and had their own constitution. Adherents of the other view had won less than 3 per cent of the vote.

He urged Cuba to withdraw the item or, if it did not, the General Committee to reject it.

YAKOV A. MALIK (Soviet Union) said that, in the past, the United States had not objected to inscription of any item on the agenda. The United States liked to stress this, he added, and it would therefore be more appropriate if it did not oppose the Cuban item.

The Soviet Union supported inscription of the item, said Mr. MALIK.

MILKO TARABANOV (Bulgaria) noted that the representative of Cuba had said that the non-aligned States had urged in the Cairo Declaration that the United Nations debate the colonial case of Puerto Rico.

It might be interesting for the United Nations and the people of Puerto Rico to have such a debate and see what the views today were on this recurring problem, he said.

Neither the United Nations nor the people of Puerto Rico would have anything to lose by it.

He supported inscription of the item.

GENERAL COMMITTEE -- TAKE 4

JOSE LUIS MOLINA (Costa Rica) said he would not vote for inscription of the item. In his opinion "the people of Puerto Rico have exercised their right to self-determination."

KAROLY SZARKA (Hungary) said the Cuban delegation has provided ample reasons for the inclusion of this item in the agenda.

This matter had been discussed before in the United Nations "without a satisfactory solution", he said. It was "a clear colonial issue". The statements of the Puerto Rican pro-independence movement showed "the oppressive acts of the colonialists against the people of Puerto Rico".

The argument of the United States that this was an internal issue could not be accepted, he said. He urged inscription of the item.

Mr. ALARCON QUESADA (Cuba) noted that the representative of the United States had described the Cuban item as "frivolous". What might be "frivolous", he commented, was the United States statement. But that, he added, would be a "generous description".

He said there had been the shedding of much blood by the Puerto Ricans to this very day. Despite "the imperialist arrogance of Mr. Bush" he said the fact was that the people of Puerto Rico were denied their rights.

If the United States position was so clear and the people of Puerto Rico had exercised their right to self-determination, he said, the General Committee should ask why the United States so feared discussion that it was breaking a policy of two decades in opposing inscription of an item.

The argument that there was interference in domestic affairs, said Mr. ALARCON QUESADA, made "the United States position identical with that of Portugal and South Africa". He said that was also a correct position since the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico was the same as that between Portugal and its colonies or between South Africa and Namibia.

(END OF TAKE 4)

GENERAL COMMITTEE -- TAKE 5

The so-called "plebiscite" in Puerto Rico, continued the representative of Cuba, had been undertaken under United States military occupation and with "ferocious suppression of Puerto Rican patriots". Mr. Bush knew, said Mr. AIARCON QUESADA, it was false to say the people of Puerto Rico had exercised the right of self-determination. Separation from the United States or independence had not been a choice in the vote.

Mr. AIARCON QUESADA went on to say that Puerto Ricans did not have equal rights vis-à-vis United States citizens.

The resolution by which the United States ceased to send information on Puerto Rico to the United Nations had been adopted before the United Nations had defined colonialism in the 1960 Declaration, he said. In any case, he said, the resolution in question had been adopted while colonialism still held sway in the world, and before so many independent States, which knew what colonialism was, had joined the Organization.

ABDUL MALEK ISMAIL (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) said his delegation regarded inscription of this item as "vital and important".

It was impossible to believe that there was no "problem" of Puerto Rico, he said. It was a problem "of colonial nature".

Mrs. HELVI SIPIIA (Finland) said her delegation opposed inscription of the item on grounds that it did not fall within the competence of the United Nations.

KEITH JOHNSON (Jamaica) said that as Chairman of the Fourth Committee he should abstain on the vote, and would so do.

CORNELIUS C. CREMIN (Ireland) said the Assembly should be allowed freely to discuss any question consistent with the Charter. He said he could not accept the argument that Article 2 (7) applied in this case.

However, he said the item was proposed in a tendentious manner and he would therefore abstain in the vote.

(END OF TAKE 5)

GENERAL COMMITTEE — TAKE 6

The PRESIDENT said the Committee would now vote on the inclusion of item 104.

It was rejected by a vote of 5 in favour (Bulgaria, Hungary, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Sierra Leone, USSR) to 10 against, with 8 abstentions (Burundi, Cyprus, Ireland, Jamaica, Nigeria, Peru, Zenezuela, Zambia).

KAMAL MUSTAFA (Sudan) said his delegation had not been present when the vote was taken and wanted to put on record its view that the Cuban delegation had presented a valid case. His delegation had favoured inscription of the item.

VERNON JOHNSON MWAANGA (Zambia) said his Government was now reviewing its policy on Puerto Rico.

He had abstained in the vote because he had not received instructions from his Government, and since the policy review was still underway, he could not vote one way or the other. This abstention did not prejudice his Government's final stand on the matter.

He added that his delegation's sympathy for colonial peoples was well known. He was certain the representative of Cuba knew "where our sympathies lie".

NARCISO REYES (Philippines) said his delegation's vote had not been a vote against the right of peoples to self-determination.

His country, which had been a colony for nearly 400 years, always supported the right of peoples to self-determination. It had made its own choice for independence.

The people of Puerto Rico, given the opportunity to exercise the same right, had made their choice and done so through free elections, he said. So long as their choice stood, his delegation had to respect it. Until the people of Puerto Rico revised that choice, it would be premature for the General Assembly to consider such an item, he said.

GENERAL COMMITTEE -- TAKE 7

ANDRES AGUILAR (Venezuela) said he had abstained because the General Assembly was competent to discuss items of the kind in question. He recalled that his country had abstained on the resolution by which the United States ceased to send information on Puerto Rico to the United Nations. However, the title of the Cuban item prejudged the issue, said Mr. AGUILAR.

ZENON ROSSIDES (Cyprus) said he had abstained, not because the matter was within the domestic jurisdiction of the United States, but because the title of the item prejudged the issue. The item ignored some evidence that the situation in Puerto Rico existed with the will of its people, he said.

This did not mean that his delegation would oppose discussion under a more neutral title, he added.

JACQUES KOSCIUSKO-MORIZET (France) said he had no doubt of the capacity of the United States to guide the people of Puerto Rico in accordance with their free wishes. The item, in his view, was "pointless" and he had voted against it.

ISMAEL B. TAYLOR-KAMARA (Sierra Leone) said he had voted for inscription because the views of 20 years ago might not be the views of the people of Puerto Rico today. Having lived under colonialism, he said, he thought it was time that the decision was looked into again, because the views of one generation might not be the same as another.

He said even if only a minority was concerned their views should be heard by the General Assembly, otherwise the Assembly would be encouraging conditions of instability.

The PRESIDENT said item 105 had already been dealt with. This was the one entitled "The representation of China in the United Nations", recommended yesterday for inclusion in the agenda.