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Political status of Puerto Rico

Add to the Book of Resolutions

Financial Implications: None

MARCHA (Methodist Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans)

The United States Congress and other entities of the United States government have long been studying the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. This topic is a hot and divisive issue in Puerto Rico with many diverse and strong opposing views. The Church enters into this discussion because of its mandate to be a prophetic voice that intends to assist in finding ways that are in accordance with the values of the Reign of God. There are certain principles that need to be emphasized:

1. We believe that all human beings are God's creatures and therefore of equal value and dignity.
2. We recognize that the church must take into consideration the following historical facts as it develops its theological thinking regarding the political status of Puerto Rico:
 - a. Puerto Rico officially came to be subject to the United States of America as result of the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898 through which Spain surrendered its colonies to the United States. At that point Puerto Rico starts to be governed by United States military authorities.
 - b. The Foraker Act approved by the US Congress on 1900 puts an end to the US military government of Puerto Rico. The President of the United States appointed a governor of Puerto Rico and the administration of the island came to be under the U. S. Department of the Interior.
 - c. In 1917 the Jones Act was approved by the United States granting United States citizenship to all Puerto Ricans.
 - d. In 1947 the United States Congress approved a law allowing the people of Puerto Rico to elect their own governor.
 - e. The United States authorities have persecuted and acted against the Puerto Rico pro independence movements al along. There was even a period when it was forbidden to raise the Puerto Rico flag or to display the shield of arms that served as an emblem of Puerto Rico or to speak advocating for the independence of Puerto Rico.
 - f. The people of Puerto Rico, as permitted by the appropriate United States authorities, approved in 1952 the constitution of the "Commonwealth of Puerto Rico" known in Spanish as "Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico". The relationship is described as a pact. The people of Puerto Rico continue to be subjugated to the authorities of the United States of America.
 - g. Several proposals are being discussed in the U.S. Congress (2007) intending to address the problem caused by the political subordination of the people of Puerto Rico to the United States of America (see: H.R. 900, Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2007, and H.R. 1230, the Puerto Rico Self Determination Act of 2007). Representatives of different political parties in Puerto Rico participated in public hearings in reference to the aforementioned law projects.

The present status of Puerto Rico as a non incorporated territory of the United States, with a clear subordination to the United States, move us to take the following position from a moral and ethical perspective according to the traditions and teachings of our church:

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1. We firmly believe in self determination for all peoples. Clearly Puerto Rico is a country with its own idiosyncrasy, cultural expressions and that treasures its Spanish language which has survived under the remnants of a colonial system.

2. We believe that Puerto Rico's political problem is not just a problem for Puerto Ricans; but also a problem for the people of the United States of America, and therefore, the United States should act to facilitate a real self determination process that is in agreement with criteria accepted by the international community. The active participation of different social and political entities in the United States is needed to solve the problem.

Therefore we call upon the churches to be educated about the political situation of Puerto Rico without promoting a particular political partisan perspective. We affirm that truth will set us free. We affirm that God has created us equal and with the same dignity. The subordination of a people by another people is contrary to our church's teachings.

As a church we confess that for too long we have kept ourselves uninvolved in this and other important issues for the sake of avoiding conflicts and divisions. Now we recognize that this is contrary to the prophetic tradition of our faith.

We call upon the authorities of the United States government to foster a true process of self determination for the people of Puerto Rico in which the United States Congress participates in working out alternatives and definitions that achieve a non territorial formula. The United States government should clearly define which are the vested rights of Puerto Ricans as United States citizens that will not change regardless of the political formula selected to solve the territorial problem.

We also call upon the United States government to free the Puerto Rican political prisoners in United States prisons and to drop pending charges against other persons related to their struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico. It is important for the United States to show that the era of persecution has come to an end and that we are at the beginning of a new journey where there will be space for dialogue with all the groups representing different ideologies.

Submitted by MARCHA

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