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September 20, 1999

VIA FACSIMILE AND AIR MAIL

Honorable Congressman Dan Burton
 Chair, Committee on Government Reforms
 2185 Rayburn House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Chairman Burton:

We hereby petition the Committee on Government Reforms to hold hearings on the unsettled issue of the political status of Puerto Rico. We believe that your present hearings on the President's clemency toward the Puerto Rican political prisoners focuses on the symptom, rather than the fundamental problem that this Congress has failed to address – the ultimate political status of Puerto Rico.

As you well know, this is not a new issue. Ever since Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States as a result of the treaty of Paris in 1898, Congress has acted on a number of issues pertaining to Puerto Rico. For instance, in 1917, Congress began to exercise its powers under the Territorial Clause of our Constitution to provide United States citizenship to persons born in Puerto Rico. In 1950, Congress prescribed procedures to institute self-government in Puerto Rico. Subsequently, in 1980, the United States Supreme Court held that the establishment of self-government in 1952 did not alter the status of Puerto Rico as an unincorporated US territory.

The Puerto Rican leadership on the island and on the continental United States has spoken on the need to resolve the status of Puerto Rico on many occasions. Case in point was the letter signed in 1989 by the presidents of the three main political parties in Puerto Rico, formally advising the United States that since 1898 the Puerto Rican people have never been consulted as to their choice for their ultimate political status. That same year, during his State of the Union address, former President Bush urged Congress to authorize a process allowing the people of Puerto Rico to vote by referendum recognized by Congress, to determine the final status of Puerto Rico.

Today this Congress is holding hearings on the issue of clemency for the Puerto Rican political prisoners. You must also hold hearings on the United States' use of the Vieques municipality for live ordinance training exercises. These are but some of the symptoms of the larger unresolved status issue. The headlines have continually changed over the years and will continue to do so until this Congress addresses the plight of the four million United States citizens living in Puerto Rico. These are the very same U.S. citizens who have repeatedly come to Congress asking for a process by which to determine a definitive status and have obtained no results.

We urge you to take action now.