

B ' N A I B ' R I T H

T O M M Y P . B A E R , I N T E R N A T I O N A L P R E S I D E N T

November 7, 1997

The Honorable Pedro Rossello
Governor of Puerto Rico
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00901

Dear Governor Rossello:


In 1790, before the Bill of Rights had been adopted, George Washington wrote to the Jewish community of Newport, Rhode Island, to express the young country's commitment to tolerance and diversity. Speaking of the founding of the United States, he said that "It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights." It is with this letter in mind that I write to express our support for the proposed plebiscite in which the people of Puerto Rico will have the opportunity to redefine their relationship with the federal government.

Puerto Rico has, for the last 100 years, been a proud part of the United States. As full American citizens, the people of Puerto Rico have served in the military and participated in our political process. For the first time, however, they will have a congressionally supported referendum to define their relationship with the federal government. In the highest tradition of American democracy, the people of Puerto Rico will be able to choose statehood, independence, or a continuation of the commonwealth.

While we support this referendum process, we hope that the process will be untainted by extraneous factors. For instance, there have been suggestions that the referendum bill will be amended in the United States Congress so that certain choices will include conditions such as a mandate of the English language. In addition to polluting the process and tainting the choices, we believe that such an amendment would run counter to the ideals of tolerance and inclusion upon which this nation was founded and through which the diverse ethnic and religious groups composing the United States have thrived.

Whatever the outcome of the referendum, we look forward to seeing Puerto Ricans have the right to choose their destiny in a free and unpolluted process. Thank you for your commitment to these ideals which we share.

Sincerely,


Tommy P. Baer
International President