

PUERTO RICO'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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Address by the Hon. Luis Muñoz Marín, Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, at the Inaugural Session of the ICA Conference of Mission Directors and Program Staff of Latin American Area.

San Juan, January 27, 1958

Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen:

It is a source of deep pride and satisfaction to us in Puerto Rico to be hosts during this week to the Conference of Mission Directors and Program Staffs of the Latin American Area, sponsored by the International Cooperation Administration. We welcome you not only as fellow-citizens and friends, but also as good partners in a common undertaking which is very close to the hearts of our people: the Technical Cooperation Program.

We have worked together over the years in making Puerto Rico a training and observation center for thousands of visitors from all parts of the free world. Ever since Puerto Rico took the initiative in 1950 of suggesting that the island become a laboratory for the United States Technical Assistance Program, we have joined our efforts and resources in making available the Puerto Rican experience as a useful tool in furthering the great humanitarian objectives of the program.

It was in that same year, 1950, that the compact on which the Commonwealth is founded was initiated in the Congress of the United States by our Resident Commissioner, Dr. Fernós. That and the intensive development of our attempt to defeat extreme poverty in Puerto Rico within the life span of the present generation, combined to make of Puerto Rico a peculiarly fitting society for demonstrating to the world the deep significance of United States democracy.--Its capacity for aiding peoples of different origins in their hopes and aspirations, while respecting and furthering their cultural values and their ideas as to how they want their development to work out. Puerto Rico is characterized by the fact that it has created, in collaboration with the United States Congress, a new concept of political liberty and political association, by its rapid transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy with a minimum of the stresses

that so often accompany such change, by the fact that it is eclectic as to the economic forms of waging its fight against want, by its deep and unswerving insistence that, under whatever economic form, human freedom and dignity must at all times receive paramount respect. In the Commonwealth, unstinted support has been given to this undertaking by all parties and by the people in all walks of life. If our financial contribution has been modest, our faith in the program has been boundless.

This faith stems from a basic conviction, rooted in our vigorous struggle to emerge out of extreme poverty and make freedom a tangible reality. We believe that the cause of human solidarity can only be permanently advanced if we share generously our skills and wisdom with other peoples, to promote human betterment in a free society. We do not conceive it as an emergency measure to face a troubled period in world affairs, nor as a stopgap remedy to gain support for strategic aims. We do not see it as a reaction to the insidious and powerful menace of Russian totalitarianism. Sharing the technological treasures of our civilization has values of its own, far transcending the cold war or the dramatic rush to hit the moon.

Military security for our way of life is a must, and no effort should be spared to hold our protective shield with strong, powerful and well trained arms. And neither are we to fail in the field of scientific ingenuity as man prepares to leave this baffled planet behind and be, for the first time in history, a pioneer of cosmic space. The Russians and their allies will always find us willing to enter into any competitive bidding, with a resolution and a strength far surpassing any external hesitation, any momentary failure of our hopes, any transitory weakening of our concerted action.

But our true battleground does not lie in the limitless fields of space. It lies in the recesses of the mind, in the inner spring of our views of man, on society and the concept of the good life. It stretches through the intangible horizons of freedom and justice and the yearning, as old as the world for some measure of dignity and security and self respect.

Our fight is to show that the human creature can best express himself in terms of freedom.

This is not a fight against a power oligarchy and a despotic system. Dictatorship and despotism are ephemeral riders on the crest of history. But the stubborn enemies are extreme poverty, ill health, ignorance--and hopelessness, the worst of them all. They have been with us throughout the centuries, festering the minds and plaguing the bodies of countless millions, as the totalitarian rulers have risen to their hey-day only to go down to defeat and oblivion. The stubborn enemies, on the other hand, have been everywhere at all times. Only within our generation have we begun to have the tools and arms and skills to match their universal hold.

Here in Puerto Rico we have shown how the stubborn enemies can be licked. We have used different approaches, different weapons in the stiff fight. Provided a basic respect for freedom and human rights is always there, we have not hesitated in using a complex of social and economic innovations. This is not a struggle in which one type and only one type of ideological weapon can be mustered. We have used the power of government to release and direct energies. We have encouraged private enterprise to do a job. We have experimented with cooperatives for healthy group action and improved distributive social justice.

A basic requirement in the battle against want is the rejection of any set

doctrine which would commit us to mere imitation of what the richer countries have done. If the peoples of the underdeveloped areas are to find a way in freedom, they will undoubtedly use their creative courage to develop their own indigenous solutions.

I think that the Puerto Rican contribution to the United States Technical Assistance Program lies precisely in this quality of our experience. We have not been afraid to experiment with an open mind and a resolute heart. What our friends from so many countries and cultures discover in our island is this spirit of self-reliance, this creative energy to do a job well and fast enough in the face of hard odds, and this conviction that only in freedom can the goal be achieved. And they see that this is done with United States encouragement and support, with no strings attached, save the strings of mutual trust and respect. This is the acid test of United States attitudes regarding colonialism and economic imperialism, and the whole big problem of how to deal with a people from a different culture, emerging out of an agrarian economic. This is a show-window for United States intentions.

The success or failure of our experiment is a measure of the success or failure of United States policies towards the countless millions from the underdeveloped areas. The stakes are great and thus we stand in Puerto Rico ready to expand our contribution and strengthen our partnership with your organization, in the crucial adventure of making available to other peoples, whatever in our experience may be useful to their purposes or encouraging to their hopes.