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Statement by the Honorable Mrs. Frances P. Bolton, United States Representative, in Committee IV on Puerto Rico.

Mr. Chairman,

As we take up Item 3(b) of our agenda -- Cessation of Information on Puerto Rico -- it is my pleasure to advise the Committee that the spokesman for the United States Government and the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will be Dr. Antonio Fernos-Isern, the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico before our Federal Government in Washington.

I trust that the members of the Committee will find the discussion of this item interesting and as a result will appreciate why the Governments of Puerto Rico and the United States are so satisfied with the full measure of self-government which has been achieved by the people of Puerto Rico under the Commonwealth Constitution which came into effect on July 25, 1952. I should like to touch briefly on the main events which preceded the decision of the United States Government to cease transmitting information on Puerto Rico under Article 73(e) of the Charter.

In 1948 the Puerto Rican people held a national election in which the issue as to what kind of a government they desired was debated. Alternatives which were campaigned for by opposing political parties were whether Puerto Rico should become:

- (1) A state in our Federal Union;
- (2) An independent state;
- (3) A commonwealth associated with the United States.

By an overwhelming vote the people of Puerto Rico chose the commonwealth association with the United States.

Subsequently, the Resident Commissioner, Dr. Fernos, caused legislation to be introduced in the Congress of the United States to give effect to the will of the Puerto Rican people as expressed in the 1948 election. The result of this legislation was the adoption by the Eighty-first Congress of Public Law 600 which authorized the people of Puerto Rico to draft and adopt their own constitution.

Following the adoption of Public Law 600 a constitutional convention was convened in Puerto Rico presided over by Dr. Fernos.

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In due course the new constitution was ratified by the Congress of the United States and the Puerto Rican people, again by an overwhelming majority.

A fundamental feature of the new constitution is that it was entered into in the nature of a compact between the American Congress and the Puerto Rican people. This arrangement has been described by Senator Butler of Nebraska, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and co-sponsor of Public Law 600, as a relationship between two parties which may not be amended or abrogated unilaterally. Congressman Miller of Nebraska, speaking as Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, has said:

"Thus, Puerto Rico . . . is a Commonwealth, comparable in its political authority to any of the 48 commonwealths which we know as the 48 states that form the Union; but under the terms of compact embodied in Public Law 600 of the Eighty-first Congress 1950, the Federal Government of the United States will do for it what it does for the 48 member states of the Union, while it will not interfere in any matter not normally reserved to a federal government in a federal system."

Moreover, the United States District Court for Puerto Rico, which is a Federal Court, has ruled on this relationship as follows: "As a necessary legal consequence of said compact, neither the Congress of the United States nor the people of Puerto Rico can unilaterally amend Public Law 600 nor the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act without the consent and approval of the other party to the Compact."

This decision of the United States District Court has been upheld in the United States Circuit Court of Appeals.

Before concluding, Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a few words about my distinguished colleague of long standing in the United States House of Representatives, Dr. Fernos.

For many years Dr. Fernos has represented the people of Puerto Rico in the United States Congress and the Government in Washington. At the present time he serves as a member of the House Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs, Agriculture, and Armed Services.

While my friend, Governor Luis Munos Marin of Puerto Rico, may be described as the spiritual father of the new commonwealth constitution, certainly Dr. Fernos-Isern should be regarded as its powerful architect. As I have already noted, he served as President of the Constitutional Convention, and my Government could have no better qualified spokesman to deal with our present agenda item.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to turn over the United States chair, as we did this year in the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, to Dr. Antonio Fernos-Isern, Resident Commissioner for Puerto Rico in the United States House of Representatives.

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