Mr. Chairman and Honorable members of this committee.

My name is Oreste Ramos. I am a three-term senator in the Puerto Rico Senate (District of San Juan), Minority Whip and am now beginning to serve my second term as the first Vice-Chairman of the Republican Party of Puerto Rico which, as you probably know, has been headed during the last 40 years by former Governor Luis A. Ferre. I am also a practicing attorney.

First of all, let me point out that there is great concern and even apprehension in Puerto Rico with respect to the report which this Committee will eventually have to file.

I do strongly recommend that the following facts be taken into consideration in the drafting of said report:

1. The New Progressive Party (an Island-wide coalition of pro-statehood republicans and democrats) has won 3 out of the last 5 elections held on the Island (1968, 1976, 1980). We fell short of winning the 1984 election as a direct result of a dissidence within the party which produced a splinter group. Most of the members of that splinter group are now back in the NPP and hold important positions within the party. Therefore, it is very, very probable that the pro-statehood party will win the next election which is just a couple of years away. If we win that election we will most probably be holding a yes-or-no referendum on Puerto Rico's petition for its admission as a
State of the Union as soon as possible following said election.

2. The pro-commonwealth (that is pro-territorial or pro-colonial) Popular Party is an electorally decadent organization whose electoral force has been steadily dwindling from 66% in 1952 to about 48% in 1984, whose members are mainly concentrated in the rural areas of the Island and in the age group composed of people over 65 years of age. Had it not been for the now cured split in the pro-statehood party it would have been impossible for it to accidentally elect the current governor in 1984.

3. The pro-independence party is a tiny minority which garnered around 4% of the vote in 1984.

4. The future economic development of Puerto Rico is and will be inextricably intertwined with the political development of the Territory. With these easily ascertainable facts, I strongly urge you:

(a) To refrain from recommending any change in the current territorial relationship between Puerto Rico and the Congress which fails to consider the will of the more than 3.5 million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico. I specifically and strongly call on you to exclude from your report anything which might be construed in Puerto Rico or elsewhere to the effect that the U.S. Government is steering the Island towards either independence or towards the establishment of a neo-colonial arrangement similar to that adopted with respect to the former Trust-territories of the Pacific.
(b) To include in your report a recommendation to the effect that the Congress be ready to, with all deliberate speed and through the appropriate legislation, implement whatever status alternative the people of Puerto Rico chooses in a referendum, especially statehood, which would probably be the winner in such a referendum.

Said legislative action should cover the economic transition to the political solution finally chosen by the people of the territory.

The reasons for these two recommendations based on first hand knowledge of the facts previously stated are the following:

1. Should this Committee fail to grasp the reality that almost all politically aware Puerto Ricans (including the leaders of the ruling Popular Party) are profoundly dissatisfied with the status-quo it would be unwittingly fomenting a potential crisis between the U.S. Government and whatever party wins the next election in Puerto Rico. Suffice it to say that in Puerto Rico it is considered obvious that the three political parties are committed to addressing the status question as soon as possible after the 1988 elections. The dissatisfaction and the apparent commitment should be noted in the report to be filed by this Committee.

2. Should this Committee file a report which could be construed as a recommendation to steer us towards an arrangement similar to the one adopted in relation to the
former Trust territories of the Pacific, it would probably be (also unwittingly) planting the seeds of a serious political confrontation with not less than 85% of us Puerto Ricans, who are very strongly opposed to that neo-colonial arrangement. Also, the Committee would be overlooking an insurmountable constitutional obstacle. The Pacific Trust Territories were never U.S. territories within the meaning of the territorial clause. Therefore, the Congress did not have to dispose of these territories before entering into a compact of "free association" with them. Contrarywise, Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory within the framework of Article IV, Sec. 3, Clause 2 of the Constitution. Therefore, the Congress would have to dispose of the territory (which would entail full-independence) before attempting to enter into a compact of "free association" with Puerto Rico. That, of course, would entail the negotiation and ratification of a treaty between Puerto Rico and the U.S. after such disposal has been effected. The long, tedious, and uncertain process of ratification may very well result in a quagmire worse than the one now confronted. It could also very well result in a political and economic vacuum which could create a crisis similar to the one to which I will refer below: one composed of two elements: (a) a massive and sudden migration to the mainland and (b) the putting in jeopardy of the economic, geopolitical, and strategic importance of Puerto Rico to the U.S. interests in Central America and the Caribbean.
3. Should this Committee fail to address the importance of solving the political status problem it would be misleading the Congress into believing that Puerto Ricans are contented with the present political relationship with the U.S., a conclusion that would be utterly false and which would undoubtedly result within the next 3 or 4 years, in Congress being uninformed and unaware of the facts and maybe even unable to implement the will of the Puerto Rican electorate. Should that possible scenario become a reality as a result of this Committee's failure to make the present and future congresses aware of the imminence of a Puerto Rican petition for statehood a very serious crisis would probably ensue from the clash between an unstoppable force (the petition for admission) and an unmovable object (the Congress).

I feel that I cannot adequately express how strong our faith in American institutions is, how steadfast our loyalty to American ideals has been, how strong our faith that admission will be granted upon request becomes with each passing day. As a direct result of the magnitude of that faith, the Puerto Rican statehood movement would become so frustrated upon Congress' unwillingness or inability to act in a positive and swift fashion to grant statehood and to facilitate the economic transition to that status, that a backlash movement may ensue and the two political branches of the federal government may find themselves with what may now sound as an absurdity to some of you: the very same people who have provided the necessary
leadership to obtain a majority vote for statehood would probably choose to proclaim unilateral independence through the Island's official organisms. The reasons for that are obvious to Puerto Ricans. The statehood movement has a history going back to 1898. These past 88 years (91 by 1989) have consumed tremendous efforts and a lot of personal sacrifices to four generations of Puerto Rican leaders who would have finally attained the goal of making our people aware of the political and economic advantages of statehood. That pro-independence backlash would obviously result in the massive, sudden and constitutionally unstoppable migration of about 2 million Puerto Ricans to the mainland. The political, economic and fiscal consequences of such migration at the local, state and federal levels of government, will, I think, be obvious to you. Obviously, the backlash could have other implications with respect to National defense. But, that backlash would, ironically, be as much in keeping with our traditional Hispanic values of dignity and honor, as with our learned American sense of fair play. It has happened before in American history when the decision-makers have failed to respond to petitions for fair-representation or equality under the law. I am sure you remember the words: "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary..."

A 10, 5 or 4 year delay in granting admission to a petitioning territory was justifiable, perhaps unavoidable, in the horse-and-buggy times when distances were "longer" and news
traveled slowly. It would be unwarranted in this age, when information, political and economic events, and even time itself seems to be made of a different substance.

In recapitulating, I strongly urge this committee to file a report making Congress aware of:

A. The fact that there is now a deep dissatisfaction in Puerto Rico regarding its present relationship with the federal government; the fairness of letting us decide on our political destiny and the probability that a status referendum may be held soon after the 1988 election.

B) The probability that said referendum will produce a request for Puerto Rico's admission into the Union and the necessity for Congress to be prepared to respond swiftly and positively to implement the will of the 3.5 American citizens of Puerto Rico through the necessary economic and political measures.

Thank you very much.