



**Address by the Governor
of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico**

**Hon. Rafael Hernández - Colón
on the occasion of the twenty-first anniversary
of the Commonwealth Constitution**

**July 25, 1973
San Juan, Puerto Rico**

Today we are celebrating twenty-one years of Commonwealth. These twenty-one years have witnessed remarkable progress in the democratic evolution of Puerto Rico and a consolidation of its constitutional institutions.

With a new awareness of the potential of their free will, our people have exchanged one administration for another without altering their basic democratic principles; they have transmitted political power from the generation which founded our institutions of government to a generation which was in adolescence when these institutions were created.

A new generation of Puerto Ricans has undertaken responsibility for public affairs. This generation is now being tried in the fire of an intense struggle to carry out a wholly integrated development of our community.

Thus, we have arrived at a new beginning. We have inaugurated an Era of Good Hope and we intend to create a new Puerto Rico.

INTEGRAL PROGRESS

We have begun by viewing the problems of our country as a whole. We see them as a whole and we intend to attack them as a whole.

We all know that during the twenty-one years of Commonwealth, Puerto Rico has made dramatic and noteworthy progress. The economic indicators place us among the world's richest nations. However, we are also aware that these indicators, even though economically valid, do not truly express the Puerto Rican reality or the level of satisfaction of our people.

The fact is that we find ourselves in an unusual stage of development—one which is, perhaps, the most critical. It is a stage where, on the one hand, we are confronting problems which accompany a high level of development—problems such as pollution and the breakdown of the environment, social dislocations, and drug addiction. On the other hand, we are still saddled with problems associated with underdevelopment—chronic unemployment, proliferation of slums and extreme poverty.

Our economic progress has not been equitably distributed. There is too much poverty alongside prosperity. Modern communications permit all of us to be aware of our partial prosperity even when not sharing it. This creates expectations, demands, and a sense of urgency in a large part of our community which are hard to satisfy at once.

At the same time, the growing political ability and maturity of the Puerto Ricans have fostered an awareness of the possibilities of participation in public matters. Activism is on the rise in all fields. There is concerted action toward goals in labor, student, community, and political affairs of all sorts. Puerto Rico is no longer a passive country. Instead, it has become activist, with all the related consequences.

Whoever believes that simple, rapid or improvised solutions can be found for the problems growing out of the realities of today's Puerto Rico, is mistaken. He who would offer such solutions, deceives.

The real solutions are complex. They require a complete and integrated knowledge of Puerto Rican realities. They require the sensitivity to be able to grasp what is

happening in this country. They require fusing different elements in order to produce satisfactory results. They require, moreover, imagination to conceive them and the will to carry them out. Above all, they require time and effort, for which there is no substitute.

Within our concept of an integral approach to the problems of our society, we have begun a series of reforms and programs directed toward resolving some of these problems in depth.

Tax reform for the purpose of widening our tax base and achieving a fairer distribution of wealth and income is under way. A fundamental revision of our system for providing health services has also been inaugurated. At the same time we are making progress with electoral reform which will provide a maximum of political participation for the people.

We have created new organisms, conceived with imagination and realism, to give new life to our agriculture, our countryside and our small towns. We have legislated powerful instruments to address the frightening inflation from which Puerto Rico is suffering at this moment, along with the rest of the world. We have gathered together at last, in a newly-created Department, the different programs and services for fighting drug addiction, alcoholism, and related disorders.

New perspectives for our industrial development are being opened by a deep-water port project, which is being evaluated at this moment. Consideration of this idea has been open and public, with participation of all sectors in this issue. This reflects the high level of participation in basic decisions which we wish to encourage.

We are forging ahead with reforms, programs and far-reaching projects whose results will be seen later. At the same time, we are also running the day-to-day government, rebuilding its institutions, giving it a sense of purpose and self-respect, confronting and resolving the immediate problems which cannot wait. We are taking care of the most urgent problems without forgetting the more important ones.

Thus, while we are searching for the root of our problems, and also battling on different fronts and on various levels, we have begun an Era of Good Hope. We are

keeping an overall view while we push forward in particular areas. We have a lot of ground to cover and in certain areas we haven't even begun. But we hope to generate unified progress for our country, progress which may be evaluated not only in quantitative terms, but also on the basis of its quality, so that as we create new job opportunities, we may assure ourselves that our environment does not deteriorate; so that as we construct new housing and modern communications, we may avoid turning this Island into a huge cement plantation, destroying the beauty which can alone satisfy the spirit; so that as we go on filling the basic material needs of our families we may always preserve the ties and relations of togetherness and mutual consideration which enrich life far more than mere consumer goods.

This is a battle being fought on many fronts at once; on the economic, the social, the political, the cultural, and the spiritual fronts. At one moment, we will be emphasizing one area; at another moment, another. We will always be watchful, however, so that when it comes time to weigh our achievements, we will have gained ground on all fronts with progress as evenly distributed as possible. This is our concept of integral development.

Today being the 25th of July, it is time to talk about our political development.

POLITICAL STATUS

Over four centuries of colonialism—interrupted only by a brief but honorable exception, the Charter of Autonomy granted to us by Spain in 1898—came to an end twenty-one years ago, when on a day like today the Free Associated State (Commonwealth) was established by the people of Puerto Rico in the exercise of their right of self-determination.

Today we honor that occasion as a day of freedom, a day in which the will of our people created a new political relation with the United States and gave to itself the basic instruments of self-government.

From that day on, Puerto Rico has been the ruler of its own destiny, which we have joined by our own will to the destiny of the United States of America, for the purpose of achieving the highest possible levels of civilization, while

maintaining liberty, democracy, and respect for human dignity and basic human rights.

The 25th of July which saw for the first time the flag of Puerto Rico flying alongside the American flag marked the end of a constitutional and consultative process initiated by Puerto Rico before the Congress of the United States through the bill that became P. L. 600 of 1950.

The opening words of this law lay down the philosophic principle which was to guide the whole process of the development of Commonwealth. Congress expressed it thus: *“...fully recognizing the principle of government by consent, this act is now adopted in the nature of a compact so that the people of Puerto Rico may organize a government pursuant to a constitution of their own adoption.”*

On this same principle and in the following year, the United Nations granted its recognition to the Commonwealth, expressed in a formal resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the 27th of November of 1953 to the effect that: *“...when choosing their constitutional and international status, the people of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have effectively exercised their right to self-determination.”*

Thus the Commonwealth was born. Its legitimacy stemmed from the will of the people of Puerto Rico. It was the people who created it in the free exercise of their right to determine for themselves their own political destiny. It was the consent of the people of Puerto Rico which gave legal and moral validity to the new relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States as of July 25, 1952.

Some time later, on February 28, 1955, a high official of the government of the United States addressed a joint session of the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico. He expressed himself as follows: *“To me, it seems that Puerto Rico's Commonwealth status is something new in constitutional governments. Something new in this sense: that at one and the same time, Puerto Rico is free, and in spite of the fact, Puerto Rico is associated, a free and associated state. Free because you are, and associated because you want to be.”*

In this simple but profound fashion, the essence of the self-determination which gives life to the Commonwealth

was grasped by the then Vice-President, now President of the United States of America, Richard Nixon. He likewise grasped the solid and fruitful principles of Commonwealth: liberty and association—liberty to govern our own life and our own destiny in association with the United States in such a way that we may grow, develop, and mature to the limit of our ability as individuals and as a people.

From the moment that Commonwealth was born, it was expected that future changes in the relationship would be made by mutual agreement as part of the very nature of this new relationship.

To this end, the Constitutional Convention approved Resolution 23, expressing that: "*The people of Puerto Rico reserves the right to propose and accept modifications in the terms of its relations with the United States of America in order that these relations may at all times be the expression of the agreement freely entered into between the people of Puerto Rico and the United States of America.*"

In the same spirit, the United Nations, in the resolution extending recognition to the Commonwealth, expressed their assurance that: "*... in accordance with the spirit of the present Resolution, the ideals embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, the traditions of the people of the United States of America and the political advancement attained by the people of Puerto Rico, due regard will be paid to the will of both the Puerto Rican and American people in the conduct of their relations under their present legal statute, and also in the eventuality that either of the parties to the mutually agreed association may desire any change in the terms of this association.*"

Time passed, but in spite of the Commonwealth having been founded and having demonstrated itself to be a successful instrument of self-government, the status question continued to be debated in Puerto Rican politics. In the general elections held every four years, the electorate continued to divide itself along the lines of the three possible solutions to the status problem.

Finally, the status question was dealt with in a plebiscite held on July 23, 1967, in order that the people of Puerto Rico might express their preference between Common-

wealth (with the capability for development in self-government), Statehood or Independence.

Commonwealth was overwhelmingly ratified by 60.41% of the votes, Statehood receiving 38.9% and Independence less than 1%.

The poor showing in favor of Independence in the plebiscite does not vary greatly from that achieved by its proponents in the general elections. At best, in the last four general elections, they have received some 6% of the votes.

On ratifying the Commonwealth, the people approved a mandate: "*... to develop Commonwealth in accordance with its fundamental principles to the maximum of self-government compatible with a common defence, a common market, a common currency and the indissoluble bond of the citizenship of the United States.*"

To implement this mandate, the people imposed upon the Governor of Puerto Rico the obligation of proposing to the President of the United States the joint formation of advisory groups (Ad Hoc Committees) to study the areas for development and to make pertinent recommendations to the President, the Congress, the Governor and the Legislature of Puerto Rico.

Complying with this mandate with great satisfaction, I initiated through the Resident Commissioner the appropriate steps with the White House to set up an Ad Hoc Committee which would be in accordance with the expressed will of our people. Everyone is familiar by now with the message which the President sent to me, indicating his willingness to heed the demand of our people by naming those members which it is his responsibility to appoint to a new Ad Hoc Committee.

What should be the goal of this Committee? Naturally it must be to fulfill the mandate of our people for the development of the Commonwealth. But what are the guidelines which the people have laid down in their mandate? How should the Commonwealth be developed?

In the first place, this growth must proceed in accordance with the basic principles of the Commonwealth itself.

These basic principles are:

1—Association by compact freely agreed upon by Puerto Rico and the United States.

2—Puerto Rico should be and should remain united to the United States by means of the association which the people have created.

What is the nature of the relationship established by the people?

It is a permanent union.

How and when was it created?

PERMANENT UNION

Permanent union is the result of an historical process that began with the change of sovereignty in 1898.

It was shaped by the people of Puerto Rico and the people of the United States.

In 1952, the Commonwealth compact gave legitimacy to this union—legal and moral dignity—and strengthened it by basing it on the freely expressed will of the people of Puerto Rico. But the roots of union go much deeper than its constitutional expression.

Beginning with the change of sovereignty in 1898, the slow weaving of more and more extensive relationships between the two peoples went on; bonds were formed which grew closer and tighter with the passing of the years.

Commercial ties were formed which over time have made of Puerto Rico the fourth largest market for American products, and of the United States the largest market for Puerto Rican products.

The economies of both countries were joined at a growing rate in the fields of industry, insurance, agriculture, finance, construction and in practically every kind of economic activity.

Through Operation Bootstrap, American and Puerto Rican businessmen have established heavy, medium and light industries in Puerto Rico, thereby creating hundreds of thousands of job opportunities for Puerto Rican workers. In every town on the Island the industries established jointly through this effort by the government of Puerto Rico, the American and Puerto Rican industrialist and the Puerto

Rican worker are producing for the local market and, in even greater measure, for the large market of the United States.

Over the years systems have been established and rights have been granted which bind thousands of Puerto Ricans directly to the federal government—social security for example, and veterans rights earned by Puerto Ricans for their honorable part in the various wars fought by the United States.

American citizenship was granted to Puerto Ricans, and in enjoyment of their prerogatives a great number of our fellow-countrymen began to move to the continent. This number has grown to a point where today close to two million Puerto Ricans make their home in the continental United States.

But this Puerto Rican emigration has displayed a special nature. The dream of every Puerto Rican who departs for the United States is to come home one day. This is probably true of all emigrants, but the difference in the case of Puerto Ricans is that because of common citizenship, free movement between Puerto Rico and the United States, and cheap and fast transportation between both countries, the possibility of achieving this dream becomes a reality every day for hundreds of Puerto Ricans.

The Puerto Rican in the United States clings to his identity, an identity whose integrity and development is defended by the Commonwealth. The longing to seek their roots and find their identity surges with astonishing force through the second and third generation of Puerto Ricans living in the United States. I must confess that I saw one of the finest exhibitions of Puerto Rican art that I have ever seen in the Puerto Rican district of Manhattan. I have witnessed with great emotion, in a visit to a Bronx public school, the teaching of Spanish and English to children by teachers brought from Puerto Rico; I saw the school walls hung with our coat of arms and with posters of our great leaders; I heard “La Borinqueña” (the Puerto Rican Anthem) sung in their assembly hall.

During recent decades we have witnessed a growing circular movement of Puerto Ricans going to the United States and returning to the Island. To define our people as

those who at a given moment may be residing on the Island is therefore totally unreal. The reality is that the Puerto Rican people are in a constant state of flow and movement. Hundreds of those who are here with us today will be leaving tomorrow for the United States. Hundreds of those who are today in the United States will be leaving tomorrow for Puerto Rico. If there exists a truly permanent and unbreakable bond, one which makes unchangeable the union between Puerto Rico and the United States of America, it is that coming and going, that ebb and flow of this great body of our fellow-countrymen between Puerto Rico and the United States.

In the juridical sphere, common citizenship cements the real, living and palpable union. It binds every Puerto Rican, no matter where he lives, to the United States. It is a bond of such strength that the Supreme Court of the United States has determined that Congress itself cannot deprive a Puerto Rican of his American citizenship. American citizenship—bestowing rights, but also imposing upon us responsibilities which we Puerto Ricans have honorably taken up and which we are ready to fulfill at all times.

Beyond all these factors, as the foundation or breeding ground for this permanent union, are the bonds of affection and the deep values which both peoples share. These are the things in which we both believe and in whose defense we are ready to pay any price: our faith in liberty, in the essential equal rights for every human being; respect for the majority will of the people, for the democratic system of government, and for the rule of law over the rule of men. These are the ideals which have nurtured brotherhood between Puerto Rico and the United States. Within a communion of values and principles, we have joined our countries to confront together the destiny of mankind.

Our permanent union is, then, a vital reality forged by history, maintained by the will of the people of Puerto Rico, and consecrated by the Commonwealth.

Upon this permanent union, and through the association by compact, we have built the Commonwealth. We have built it, therefore, upon the foundation of reality, which in its various forms constitutes the firm and fundamental basis for the creation of political formulas in the world.

In projecting the political development of the Commonwealth twenty-one years since its creation, there should be no doubt that our community desires that our political development be fulfilled within the scope of permanent union. This scope is defined and bounded by common defense, common market, common currency and common citizenship between Puerto Rico and the United States.

Within this framework, our people have ordained that we achieve the maximum of self-government. In an attempt to stifle the growth desired by the people, a theory has been developed which holds that any expansion of self-government for the Commonwealth, even within the bounds I have indicated, constitutes a weakening of permanent union. Those who hold this theory do not understand what permanent union is and do not share the desires of the people of Puerto Rico as expressed in their exercise of their right to self-determination.

For them, permanent union is not what we have just explained. For them, it is something else. It is the degree of authority which the federal government exercises over Puerto Rico. According to them, the more authority the federal government has, and the less self-government Puerto Rico has, the more permanent is the union. This is fallacious reasoning: it is rejected by the people of Puerto Rico.

Based on this reasoning, we would have to conclude that the union between Puerto Rico and the United States was most permanent during the time of the military government which was established by the United States in 1898. Following this reasoning, the Foraker Act (1900) which allowed Puerto Rico to elect its House of Representatives weakened the permanent union; it was further weakened, according to this reasoning, by the Jones Act (1917) which gave a Senate to our people; and later by the Elective Governor Act (1948). Still following this same mistaken reasoning, the Commonwealth Constitution (1952) and the compact of association went even further towards weakening the permanence of the union between Puerto Rico and the United States.

Obviously this reasoning is erroneous. What our history demonstrates is precisely the opposite: as the people of

Puerto Rico have acquired greater self-government and greater freedom to direct their own affairs, their union with the United States of America has gained greater strength. The truth is that the union is stronger today than at any other time. History shows that as the years have passed, the ties between Puerto Rico and the United States have been voluntarily growing closer and closer.

To those of our friends who hold such an incorrect notion of the essence of our union, we should recall the words which President Eisenhower spoke on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Commonwealth. This is what President Eisenhower said in his message to the people of Puerto Rico: *"The union which we share will endure because it is founded on freedom. Time may bring changes in its outward forms and expressions, but they shall ever be expressions of the mutual trust and the mutual friendship binding us today and always."*

My fellow-countrymen: I have wished to clarify the idea of permanent union, so that, understanding it as clearly as the people understand and desire it, we can concentrate on the self-determination of Puerto Rico and on the development of Commonwealth without making an issue out of permanent union, because it is not an issue. Starting from the basis that any development must occur within permanent union, let us examine what it is that our people desire.

THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WHICH PUERTO RICO DESIRES

The people want their own Commonwealth government brought to its fullest expression.

The people have again exercised their right to self-determination. The people propose to the United States that the Commonwealth be carried to the maximum of self-government.

This is the fundamental purpose of the Ad Hoc Committee which I have proposed to the President in fulfillment of the mandate of the people expressed in the plebiscite. Nothing less than this will satisfy the desires of the people of Puerto Rico. Nothing less than this will fulfill the stipulations of our Constitutional Convention and the

dispositions of the General Assembly of the United Nations in giving its recognition to the Commonwealth.

In defining how the development of the Commonwealth will achieve a maximum of self-government, the Ad Hoc Committee will be able to address itself to a series of immediate problems which create difficulties within the present relationship, such as the problem of air and maritime freights; the minimum wage problem; the regulation on income allocation for tax purposes by the Internal Revenue Service; the application of the regulations of the federal Environmental Protection Agency to Puerto Rico, as well as other limitations on our self-government. The Committee may also study alternate forms of participation which the people of Puerto Rico ought to consider, together with the Presidential Vote, to determine how they wish to take part in federal affairs, in harmony with Commonwealth status.

All this can and should be examined as a whole, in view of the plebiscite mandate for the development of a maximum of self-government compatible with common defense, common market, common currency, and common citizenship.

This means that the Ad Hoc Committee which we are setting up by common agreement must not be limited to a restricted area. Rather, it must include a group of problems which are interdependent among themselves and with all the rest of the problems of Puerto Rico. Otherwise, we might possibly fall into the error of artificially dividing the indivisible, of separating the inseparable.

With regard to the appointment of those fellow Puerto Ricans who will discharge a patriotic duty by representing their country on the Ad Hoc Committee, I agree with the President's view that the Committee should be broadly representative. I will endeavor to insure that the Puerto Rican members will be representative of Puerto Rico in the broadest and most profound meaning of that term. However, my appointments will be guided by the criteria on commitment to the Commonwealth, established for the naming of such persons by our Supreme Court in interpreting the law under which the plebiscite was held.

Since the beginning of the century, it has become habitual in Puerto Rican political life for certain leaders to try to win in the circles of power in Washington or in the United Nations what they have lost at the polls in Puerto Rico. By circumventing the free voice of our own civic struggles, they wish to impose their own preferences on the will of the people channeled through the democratic process for the growth of the Commonwealth.

Their partisan lobbying will not succeed, simply because the government of the United States, just as the government which I head in Puerto Rico, has a responsibility to the will of the people of Puerto Rico. This will has been repeatedly, overwhelmingly, and democratically expressed at the polls. This conviction has been endorsed by the conduct of President Nixon, as it was in the past by other presidents of whatever political affiliation. This is as it should be, and I am confident it will remain so in the future.

Neither the legitimate interests of the people of Puerto Rico as a people, nor those of the United States in relation to Puerto Rico, can depend upon transitory partisan considerations. Our relations must be conducted between governments and between countries, without consideration of casual party lobbying. This has always been my conviction.

Only because of this can we explain the good news which we are celebrating today. If it were not so, reason, justice, and the moral and political right of Puerto Rico to those powers which will make Puerto Rican life more democratic and more just, would be subordinated to considerations of petty local politics, far removed from the democratic mandate of our people.

Moreover, and very specially, the President of the United States designated to represent him here today a high federal official whose conduct in relation to Puerto Rico is the incarnation of the principle and method of reason and justice which I have just described: our friend, the Attorney General of the United States, Elliot Richardson.

In possibly his last decision as Secretary of Defense before passing to that post which he currently fills, Mr. Richardson did justice to Culebra, to Puerto Rico and to the good name of the United States.

I am very happy today to extend to him the salute and the recognition of our people on the occasion of his celebrating with us the achievement and the potential of Commonwealth.

Next week I will be meeting with other distinguished representatives of the President to define the working agenda of the Committee and to move ahead towards the development of Commonwealth.

AN ERA OF GOOD HOPE IN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Because of all that I have stated, this 25th of July is a date of Good Hope for Puerto Rico: Good Hope for its overall progress; Good Hope for its political development. We rejoice, then, in our Good Hope.

Moreover, on the occasion of the twenty-first birthday of the Commonwealth, we rejoice because we have special reason to celebrate today the undeniable historical fact that the relationship which has grown between Puerto Rico and the United States has great validity in its present form, in spite of the need for improvement. It cannot be doubted that this relationship has made possible the spectacular progress our people have achieved.

We rejoice because when the essential validity of Commonwealth has been put to the test in trying times, it has emerged successful. And today it is reason for special celebration that the President designated as his representative a man like Elliot Richardson who, with courage and determination, made a fundamental decision on a problem which put to the test the essence of our relationship.

We have, therefore, many reasons to be deeply satisfied as we honor Commonwealth Day today. Our creation is not a perfect status. It has many sensitive and delicate areas which must and will be reevaluated.

But it works. It functions well. This, above all, is what we should celebrate today. Those twenty-one years of existence have shown that a country small in population and size can unite with another people great in number and territory without losing its identity, without compromising its dignity, without hampering its right of self-determi-

nation. Those twenty-one years have demonstrated that when the life of peoples is ruled by profound ideals of freedom, of democracy, of sincere and mutual respect and a faith in justice, the most serious difficulties can be overcome and the hardest problems resolved; that where democracy and liberty exist, power in the long run is subordinated to justice and to reason; and that on these bases peoples can complement each other and can together seek their mutual happiness and the common progress of mankind.

What all this means for Puerto Rico, for the United States and for the world is masterfully set forth in the words of the Spanish philosopher Julián Marías, whom in conclusion I quote: *"If I am not wrong, Puerto Rico has created, in the reality and doctrine of the Commonwealth, one of the most original and fruitful socio-political formulas of our epoch—possibly the only alternative invented to date capable of overcoming the anachronistic 'nation-colony' dilemma. In an age of feeble political imagination this Puerto Rican creation could easily be overlooked. The possibility is so much the greater because its size keeps Puerto Rico from becoming a sounding board. Who would suspect that in a tiny island in the Caribbean there has been hammered out a concept of universal range and the greatest contemporaneity?"*

With this great potential for distilling from our experience a creative contribution of universal scope for the democratic, peaceful, and brotherly development of other peoples, Puerto Rico faces its rendezvous with destiny.