

8186:12/90

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON SELF-DETERMINATION FOR PUERTO RICO***

In Isaiah 1:16-17 a clear set of commands is given by God: "Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the orphan, plead for the widow." In Isaiah 58:6 the piety God desires from the people of God is seen in action: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" As part of our faithfulness to the word of God we are to support efforts to correct oppression, which includes enabling peoples to exercise their right to self-determination regarding liberty and governance.

For almost 500 years Puerto Rico has been a colony of larger powers, first Spain then the United States. At the time of the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico during the Spanish American War, Puerto Rico had been granted a state of autonomy by Spain. Following that war the colony was ceded to the U.S. Though there is a limited amount of self-governance in Puerto Rico, the U.S. exercises power over the military use of land, judicial system, banking systems, citizenship, currency, immigration, communications, wage laws, labor relations, environmental laws, health standards, internal security, and a host of other spheres of public policy and life. The people of Puerto Rico have no voting representatives to advocate for their concerns at the Federal level in these matters.

The time has come for removing the yoke of colonization from the Puerto Rican people. Around the world we have been moved by the spirit of freedom surging among peoples as they have claimed and sometimes achieved their right of self-determination. The United Nations has asked for the establishment of a process for the Puerto Rican people to exercise that right. In 1989 President George Bush asked for a plebiscite for Puerto Ricans to choose their political destiny. Currently legislation is being drawn up in the U.S. Congress to implement such a plebiscite. With 1992 marking the anniversary of the beginning of the colonial process in the Western Hemisphere, now is the time to let the world's oldest colony choose its political future.

The main impetus for exercising the right of self-determination comes from the Puerto Rican people themselves. Though the U.S. media gives it little coverage, the fervor regarding the political status of Puerto Rico is very intense. Eighty percent (80%) of eligible voters do vote, a far higher level of political participation than found in the U.S. All three leading parties have urged the establishment of a process for selecting the political status preferred by the people, which has prompted President Bush and the Congress' current efforts. Furthermore, the Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico in their 87th Annual Assembly, March 2-4, 1989, passed a resolution affirming the right to self-determination of the Puerto Rican people and calling their churches to take steps supporting the exercise of that right.

THEREFORE, we urge the American Baptist Churches to:

1. Support the convictions and the educational and prophetic ministries of the Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico regarding their call for self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico;
2. Express its support to the U.S. Congress of a process which affords genuine and thorough exercise of the right to self-determination;
3. Inform member churches and individuals about the issues regarding Puerto Rico's political status and the ministry and concerns of the Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico in this matter;
4. Seek to correct any of the vestiges of colonization and reaffirm the rights of all peoples to political self-determination;
5. Request the U. S. Congress to honor those decisions, made by the people of Puerto Rico, that are expressed through the plebiscite.

*Paragraphs 1-4 were adopted from the resolution passed by the Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico as cited in Paragraph 4 of resolution.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1990
165 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstention
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1992
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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic human rights and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

11. The right of citizenship in a nation, to participate in the political process, to form political parties, to have a voice in decisions made in the political arenas...

SUPPORTING POSITIONS

American Baptist Resolution on Self-Determination:

We express our belief in the principle of self-determination (self government) for the peoples of the world and urge our government to stand by this principle in its international relations.

American Baptist Resolution on the Role of the United States in World Affairs:

The desire for national self-determination is a strong force in the shaping of the world today. Nationalism can be anti-western without being pro-communist. Therefore, we urge strong support for the freedom of all nations to determine their own affairs.
