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2 **IN SUPPORT OF THE RELEASE OF PUERTO RICAN**
3 **POLITICAL PRISONERS**
4 **A Resolution of Witness**
5

6 **Submitted by the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries**
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8 **SUMMARY**
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10 This resolution describes the UCC's long history of support for Puerto Rican men and
11 women incarcerated for acts and beliefs in favor of the independence of Puerto Rico, and
12 calls for the release of Oscar López Rivera and Avelino González Claudio.
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14 In 1991, the Eighteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ called upon the
15 President and the Congress to "grant immediate and unconditional amnesty to all Puerto
16 Rican prisoners of conscience (as defined by Amnesty International) and political
17 prisoners" (91-GS-85, "Self-Determination of Puerto Rico and Amnesty for Prisoners of
18 Conscience"),
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20 This resolution was preceded by General Synod resolutions adopted in 1977 (77-GS-77,
21 "Grand Jury Abuse"), 1979 (79-GS-87, "The Release of Four Puerto Rican Nationalist
22 Prisoners), 1985 (85-GS-71, "Discriminatory Treatment of Prisoners of Conscience"),
23 and 1989 (89-GS-89, "Ministry to Prisoners of Conscience") pertaining to the issues and
24 treatment of and ministry with political prisoners.
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26 This same resolution was followed by dozens of similar statements by the Baptist Peace
27 Fellowship, the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church,
28 the Episcopal Church of Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican (Catholic) Bishops' Conference;
29 labor unions; municipalities; and international human rights figures, including
30 Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Coretta Scott King, and Rigoberta Menchu.
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32 Throughout the 1990s, the United Church of Christ participated actively in the effort to
33 obtain the release of these prisoners, including a 1995 delegation by United Church of
34 Christ President Paul Sherry, United Church Board of Homeland Ministries Executive
35 Vice President Thomas Dipko, and Council for Hispanic Ministries President Linda
36 Jaramillo in conjunction with the Twentieth General Synod in Oakland, California to the
37 Federal Correctional Institution in Dublin, California, where three of these prisoners were
38 then held.
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40 The expected outcome of this resolution is the General Synod's statement of support for
41 the release of these prisoners
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43 **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE**
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45 Jesus commands us to remember the imprisoned, saying, "I was in prison and you visited
46 me," (Matthew 25:36).

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Jesus also proclaimed “release to the captives” as central to his ministry (Luke 4:18c).

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, in 1999, President Clinton released eleven of the fifteen prisoners for whom the UCC had advocated; and

WHEREAS, between 1999 and 2009, two of the remaining prisoners were also released from prison, and

WHEREAS, throughout this period, the released prisoners successfully re-integrated into and have been contributing positively to civil society, and

WHEREAS, in July, 2010, one of the two remaining prisoners, Carlos Alberto Torres, was also released from prison, receiving a hero’s welcome both in Chicago and Puerto Rico, and

WHEREAS, the one remaining prisoner of the fifteen for whom the United Church of Christ had advocated, Oscar López Rivera, has now served more than a decade more in prison since the release of the others, is now the longest-held political prisoner in Latin America, and on May 29, 2011, will have been imprisoned 30 years, and

WHEREAS, as a father and grandfather, Mr. López Rivera has watched from behind bars as his daughter and grand-daughter have grown up without him, and

WHEREAS, Mr. López Rivera’s legacy of work for positive social change and community-building is amply attested in the many organizations in Chicago’s Puerto Rican neighborhood of Humboldt Park that trace their origins to his work as a community organizer, and

WHEREAS, Avelino González Claudio was arrested in 2008 and recently sentenced to seven years for his involvement in the Puerto Rican independence movement, and is now suffering from Parkinson’s Disease,

WHEREAS, many members of the United Church of Christ have participated in this ministry with political prisoners throughout these years,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the United Church of Christ is a church called to speak against the inhumane treatment in U.S. prisons, including the injustice of long sentences, lack of compassion, and lack of medical care these cases represent, that the Twenty-eighth General Synod affirm its support for the release of Oscar López Rivera for humanitarian reasons and Avelino González Claudio for compassionate reasons , and

91 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Synod directs the General Minister
92 and President to write to the President of the United States and request the release of
93 these prisoners.

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95 **FUNDING**

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97 Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the
98 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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100 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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102 Justice and Witness Ministries is requested to implement this resolution.