

Statement by Ms. Donna Christensen
U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Virgin Islands

I rise to speak as an elective representative of an offshore territory of the United States, by U.N. Definition, a non-self governing colony.

There have been many steps taken and supported by the U.S toward greater self government and participation in our country's governance by the US Virgin Islands and the other territories - Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. The latter only this year for the very first time has representation in the Congress of the United States. All of us serve in the House of Representatives.

However our participation is not equal to that of our fellow citizens in the states. We have no representatives in the Senate and while a major advancement was made in the last Congress to allow Delegates - as we are called - to vote when the House is meeting in committee-of-the-whole on amendments. We do not vote when the House is voting as a body on final passage of legislation.

Most importantly, even though we serve in our nation's military, we do not have the right to vote for our president.

I want to note that the people living in the territories are overwhelmingly members of racial and ethnic minorities in the US.

When Puerto Rico has attempted to seek statehood they have been subjected to a vote demanding that they adopt English as their official language. Essentially as a condition.

It is also significant to note that the only other part of the United States that does not have full voting rights in the Congress is the nation's capital, Washington, DC. The population of Washington DC is largely minority.

And therefore I would recommend that in addition to the very fine, significant and far reaching recommendations already included in the working document, that in nations that still have territories or colonies, should ensure that their citizens living there have full voting rights equal to other citizens of that country.