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Boriken and the Virgin Islands - Two Wings of the Same Bird

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U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico flags. By. GETTY IMAGES

*Cuba y Puerto Rico son de un pájaro las dos alas, reciben flores o balas, sobre el mismo corazón
... Lola Rodríguez de Tío*

The above referenced excerpt from Lola Rodríguez de Tío's poem about the kindred between Boriken/ Puerto Rico and Cuba, can be modified to describe the profoundly intimate ties that exist between Boricuas and Virgin Islanders.

In every aspect of our historical development, Puerto Rico was perceived by our ancestors as a haven for maroons (runaway slaves), a refuge for economic migrants, and a cosmopolitan Mecca for modernized services. In St. Croix, the Puerto Rican-Virgin Islands social ties are literally

familial, as so many Crucians have immediate Viequense roots and ties. Thus, we approach our political development with an understanding that our sister Caribbean society, Boriken, has a lot to share with us in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Even more, there are many areas of common cooperation and growth in our common quest for self-determination.

On May 19, 2022 in Washington DC, U.S. House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), Natural Resources Committee Chair, Raúl M. Grijalva, Small Business Committee Chair, Nydia M. Velázquez (D-N.Y.), Rep. Darren Soto (D-Fla.), Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), Resident Commissioner Jennifer González-Colón (R-Puerto Rico), and Governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro R. Pierluisi held a press conference that announced details of the Puerto Rico Status Act.

The Act was established to allow the people of Puerto Rico to determine their political future. Likewise, the Press Conference revealed that a “consensus” has been proposed. This draft legislation is yet to be approved in Congress. Similarly, it makes the groundbreaking step of providing a path forward for decolonization of Puerto Rico. In essence, the three forms of decolonization that UN Resolution 1541 provides, are now accepted by the stakeholders. Additionally, the current unincorporated status that prevails in Puerto Rico, is no longer a possible status option.

Now, why should Virgin Islanders care about this new draft bill? Similar to Guam, Samoa, and Northern Mariannas, the Virgin Islands is an unincorporated territory of the United States. If decolonization based on the principles of UN Resolution 1541 is the new priority of the current Joe Biden –Kamala Harris Administration and 117th Congress, we in the U.S. Virgin Islands must become aware and awakened.

Finally, to fulfill this mission, the Capacity Building in the U.S. Virgin Islands seeks to increase Constitutional Development, and the Self Determination Project is sponsoring a series of panels to discuss political status and self-determination. Our first panel focuses on Boricua –Virgin Islands connection, and it will feature the following panelists—Janette Millin Young, Eduardo Bhatia, Aracelis Bermudez Walcott, and Jose Julio Martinez (Papilove).

We also extend extra bienvenidos to Mr. Eduardo Bhatia, as he is a prominent leader of the Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico. Equally important, he is a highly regarded Attorney who is the John L. Weinberg/ Goldman Sachs & Co. Visiting Professor and Visiting Lecturer in public and international affairs from the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Hence, our common destiny allows us to fly.

Submitted Thursday by: Malik Sekou, professor, University of the Virgin Islands.