



Hon. Alejandro García Padilla upon taking the oath of office as Governor of Puerto Rico

Inaugural Address

January 2, 2013

San Juan, P.R.

My fellow Puerto Ricans,

With the ocean, the land, and the sky of Puerto Rico as witnesses, standing before you who represent the people of Puerto Rico around the world, and in the eyes of a beneficent God, with humility of spirit and firmness and strength of will, I assume today the responsibility for governing this island.

I do so in full awareness of the size and seriousness of the problems that beleaguer us, but with the equally full conviction that those problems are no match for our will as a nation, that the ability and determination of the Puerto Rican people is stronger than the problems that we face.

High rates of unemployment and public debt—higher than we had thought—, the unprecedented downgrading of our credit, and appalling statistics on crime and social fragmentation have sometimes caused Puerto Rico to look at itself and not recognize itself. Sometimes the homeland seems to be a foreign country.

In the past, the situation has been seen as an illness and the cure as pills in a bottle that we have to take, on doctor's orders, and swallow hard.

But illness is not the image that should define this great country's agenda; paralyzing concern, constant worry, cannot be our response to this state of affairs. The solution is not to be found on the shelves of some distant pharmacy. The solution is in us; we are the patient and the doctor as well; the strength is in us; the strength is in our own country.

It is time to move from worry to work. To see our country as what it is: a land of talent, dedication, hard work, great deeds, with the ability to imagine futures and the will to translate them into realities. A land of solidarity more than conflicts, a place of convergences; a people

able to build on the great things that unite it more than quarrel over the little things that divide it. A people that works to create wealth, not for wealth's sake alone, but rather for the opportunity to build with it, for all our people, democratic access to education, health, and prosperity.

Will, perseverance, dedication are qualities that run in the veins of Puerto Rican men and women. That is why Puerto Rico has faith in itself. These are qualities that cannot be improvised; sometimes they dim or fade, but they are always alive, always strong, and deep within our identity. They have not left us. They are qualities that are tested especially in hard times. They are qualities that will be tested now.

There have been many times when, through perseverance, we have come out of a hard situation and moved forward proudly, our heads held high, seizing the opportunity of the bad times to shake ourselves off and pick ourselves up and move on, a better nation for the test.

When the Great Depression and two terrible hurricanes sowed hunger and hopelessness in our towns and countryside, the same Puerto Rican men and women who had no roof over their heads, no food to eat, plowed the land again and planted seeds. They fought despair with work, uncertainty with determination, and they looked not back, at what they had lost, but forward, to the dawn that heralded a new day, a nobler day than the one they had lost.

They traded grief for hope, frustration for faith. Devastation became part of the past—in fact, it became the prologue to a great transformation. With that strength, with that determination, Puerto Rico emerged from its backward state, recovered its lost confidence, pulled itself up by its bootstraps and became a modern, democratic society that won the admiration of the world.

We did that ourselves. We moved from a single-crop agrarian economy to light industry, the clothing industry. When our level of development no longer allowed us to compete in the clothing industry, we built a powerful scaffolding for chemical production, and when geopolitical forces made that industry unfeasible, we created one of the highest-density areas in the world for the manufacture of medicines and medical equipment. We were successful. And we are going to be successful again.

We have labored with the tenacity of a hardworking people that won't give up, won't back down, won't quit. We have prospered under our own power, with solidarity and sacrifice. We have done it many times and now circumstances force us to do it again. Another dawn is possible; another emergence from the darkness is achievable.

From the outset, we have to be honest. If we are not honest and transparent, we're off to the wrong start. The problems are very, very serious. We must not minimize them or conceal them. The island is aware of them, and suffering from them. What's important now is to not repeat them, but to set about overcoming them. Given our falling rates of economic growth and human development, this is not a time for seeking refuge in self-pity. Nor, given the statistics on crime and social uncertainty, can we afford to lock ourselves behind the iron bars of indignation. This is a time to act, to step up, to create solutions, to exercise leadership in the definition of better paths to follow.

The first test on the road to a new beginning was the creation of a cabinet. We have passed that test. As we began to form our cabinet and put together our administration, excellent men and women of every political persuasion came forward to join the ranks of public service in key positions. They have agreed to serve. They have put aside comforts and high incomes to put their shoulders to the wheel in implementing a difficult agenda.

This is no time for pessimism. Puerto Rico is on its feet. Teachers ready to begin a new semester, health workers ready to give their all in hospitals, guards standing watch over our natural resources, the fine officers who put their lives on the line for our public safety, the judges and others who impart justice, men and women in the arts and culture—all these people make up an invincible army of service to Puerto Rico. They have wagered on our recovery. I am wagering on their sense of duty and their talent. Puerto Rico is joining in on that wager.

But Puerto Rico's recovery goes beyond government. It will depend on strengthening industrial and commercial activity, on increasing cultural production; it will depend on the expansion of markets. It will require us to strengthen our sense of solidarity as citizens in every sphere of island life. Moving Puerto Rico forward will take everyone. We Puerto Ricans show our solidarity with one another in times of hardship and disaster; we show our solidarity with one another in the victories of our athletes, the triumphs of our artists, our communities.

And we will show our solidarity with one another in this new purpose: to make a better nation. That is what we must set about doing now.

Solidarity—pulling together, making common cause, joining in a great agenda—will enrich us as individuals and as a people. We build when we join together, when we join together behind our heroes and heroines, behind those who have set goals of excellence for themselves and have achieved things that make Puerto Rico a shining example for the world. Behind Javier Culson and Joseph Acabá, behind José Ferrer, Rita Moreno, Benicio del Toro, and Jaime Espinal, behind Ricky Martin, Justino Díaz, and Calle 13, behind Sor Isolina and Kiria Tapia, behind Francisco Rodón and Arnaldo Roche, Rosario Ferré and Luis Rafael Sánchez. Behind their triumphs and those of so many others like them, we can channel the island's strength.

We are going to multiply those triumphs. Multiply them in more graduate students in careers and professions, in more men and women joining the labor force, in our natural, built, and artistic patrimonies conserved and respected by all. We are going to win medals by triumphing over inertia and indifference, over the prejudices that exclude and over party divisions. All that, without disdain for difference. The Puerto Rican identity is not a straitjacket, which limits and excludes. Puerto Rico is a rich mosaic of distinct talents, of widely different profiles and vocations, of complex opinions and perspectives, but united by shared values, by a common way of saying things, by traditions, and by struggles that we have been through together. Just as we are a bigger nation when we strengthen what unites us, so we are a bigger nation when we respect plurality. The Puerto Rican flag is a flag of alliances, of coalitions, of convergences because it is the flag of us all, without distinction. It is the symbol that unites us.

Finally, let us acknowledge without trepidation that recovery is a road to be walked with a firm and steady step, and without rest. Getting there takes time. Our problems will not be solved overnight. In many areas, the situation will require more time, in others, less. The important thing is to set the agenda of reconstruction in motion now, immediately, and to follow it without respite, with no tolerance for hesitation or attempts to derail it.

What does the country expect from this new administration? What do we expect from ourselves? We know what we want. We have heard the voice of the people, institutions, and communities.

The country wants our economy to be put back on track, and wants jobs generated. Puerto Rico has great opportunities before it, despite the negative scenario we see today. We must reactivate the economy. In the short term, we must act quickly to create urgently needed jobs. In the long term, we must ensure that our economy is strengthened and diversified.

The country wants an agriculture that will take Puerto Rico to higher levels of agricultural security. It wants an assurance that new technologies that stimulate innovation and create sources of jobs are utilized to the maximum.

The country wants quality in its schools, wants gaps in educational achievement to be closed, and wants the educational needs of special students to be well and efficiently addressed.

The country needs its young people to complete their university education without obstacles, or to receive technical and vocational training that meets the needs of today's society. Education is the most important tool for creating a Puerto Rico in which there is respect and appreciation on the part of its citizens for the environment and culture. The country wants a university with democratic access yet demanding of its students and professors and their work, a university that is a vital center for debate, the generation of knowledge, the encouragement of professional and cultural talent, without anachronistic interventions that compromise its fundamental role in the life of Puerto Rico.

The country wants physical, mental, and emotional well-being that will allow its citizens to develop their talents, abilities, and vocations to the maximum. Health is a right for all people; it is a central element of social justice and human rights. We can ensure that universal access to health services with cost-efficiency is no longer a contradiction in terms. We are going to promote health while we control the cost of health services.

The country wants to recover peace on the streets and in its houses. It wants the atmosphere of impunity to be done away with, and wants those who break the law to be held responsible. The country wants a health-centered treatment of addiction and an effective justice system that halts the criminal. The country wants an end to violence against the most vulnerable—our children and the elderly—and an end to gender-based abuse. The country wants towns and cities with public spaces that are cared for—restful, calming, beautiful spaces containing art, spaces that encourage displays of creativity.

The country wants to feel proud of its history, its natural landscapes, and its cultural

patrimonies. It wants to love its own culture and live in productive interaction with the cultures of the world. It wants more sports played, and a healthier lifestyle pursued. The country wants to strengthen its ties to the large community of Puerto Ricans in the United States and the world, and to ensure that their talents, too, are recruited for the nation-building project that we set out on today.

Today, we are honored by the dignitaries who are visiting us. Let this be the beginning of many educational and cultural exchanges, and of the expansion of our networks of cooperation. Because we can learn from the best of the rest of the world, the best of the United States, the best of our sister-countries in the Caribbean, and can offer all of them the best of ourselves.

The country wants an administration that is responsible and transparent, that shows no tolerance for corruption and that in its actions is respectful of merit. An administration with solid financial foundations, prudent in the management of its finances but socially sensitive, which is what makes it democratic and distinguishes it from those who care only about the money.

An administration that thinks big but is also sensitive to the day-to-day, the basic, in furthering its goals.

The country wants an administration that is inclusive, with its arms held out to ideas and actions that emerge from the communities, from academia, from institutions committed to Puerto Rico.

The country wants political parties to fulfill their public purpose nobly. It wants them to stop imposing their rivalries and their mean-spiritedness on the life of this society. Our party politics must overcome the hindrances created by an antiquated tribalism and instead learn to generate an understanding and convergence of civic values. Puerto Rico's problems will not be solved by the noise of politicians engaged in deafening shouting-matches all year long. If that once served as entertainment, the country no longer finds it amusing. Our problems will instead be solved through a responsible interactive coalition between politics and the island's citizens. That is the best political tradition of Puerto Rico and the world. It is the tradition that the country wants to return to.

My fellow Puerto Ricans:

It is time to begin a new administration. Now that the candidates' banners have come down and the electoral ads have been filed away, and now that emotions have cooled, Puerto Rico faces a complex but possible, difficult but essential task: We must move this country forward. And we are going to do it.

The countries that achieve true greatness are not those with more wealth or power than others, they are those who have the largest quota of dignity, the largest quota of tenacity; they are those who emerge from crises with the greatest force of spirit. That is where greatness lies!

Today, with the ocean, the land, and the sky of Puerto Rico as witnesses, standing before you who represent the people of Puerto Rico around the world, and in the eyes of a beneficent God, I call you to the greatness of our country. The greatness that lives inside every Puerto Rican of good will. With our people, with faith in our strengths, we will recover Puerto Rico, we will make it once again a country of progress and peace, a country respected by the world and by the conscience of each one of us.

I am counting on you!!!

Puerto Rico is counting on us!!!

May God bless Puerto Rico!!!

May God bless you all!!!