UNPO Welcomes New Member, District of Columbia

Brussels, 9 November 2015 - UNPO is delighted to formally announce the decision taken by the UNPO Presidency at its XX Session in Brussels, Belgium, to welcome the District of Columbia as a member of the organization. Washington, DC, as it is commonly known, serves as the Capital of the United States, but is seeking to become a formal U.S. State known as "New Columbia”.

The residents of the District of Columbia represent over 658,000 disenfranchised citizens of the United States. Within a distinct boundary of 68.3 square miles, these people are denied any meaningful participation in the national legislature. In particular, the lack of voting representation in the US Senate, which under the US Constitution has exclusive authority to ratify international treaties, and confirm the appointments of Diplomats and Ambassadors, means that by direct extension, DC’s residents are not adequately represented at the United Nations and other international organizations. DC’s residents pay full federal taxes, local taxes, and bear all the normal responsibilities associated with citizenship. However, they remain without voting representation in the US Congress.

Furthermore, the residents of DC are denied self-determination rights because they are forced to seek approval for all local legislation and internal government spending directly from this same Federal legislature which denies them representation. Additionally, DC’s participation in US Presidential elections evidences a further lack of political equality for DC, because under the US Constitution’s 23rd Amendment, the number of Electoral votes accorded to DC can be disproportionately light because it is based on the population of another US State and not the specific population of DC.

In view of these circumstances, the resident population of DC have voted, pursuant to a democratic election, to seek equal political rights through admission as the 51st State of the United States under the name “New Columbia”. Under the DC Statehood legislation now pending before the US Congress, the non-residential portion of the District of Columbia would remain a "Federal enclave", consistent with the existing boundaries of the current National Capital Service Area, the land within the District of Columbia principally operated by the federal government. As Senator Paul Strauss, who was invited to the most recent UNPO Presidency meeting to present DC’s membership application, put it, “The denial of voting representation and self-determination faced by the District of Columbia is a historic wrong that our Federal government refuses to correct. If we cannot get the U.S. Congress to address our lack of political equality, is time to bring this injustice to the attention of the international community.”

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The UNPO Presidency considered the application of the District of Columbia, alongside that of two other prospective members. Only the DC application was found to meet the formal requirements for membership at this time. In recognition of its lack of self-determination, lack of voting representation in the national legislature, and potential unequal weight in Presidential elections, District of Columbia was admitted as a member of UNPO through a vote by the Presidency Members.

Although DC’s petition for membership demonstrated that as US citizens they do not generally face the same harrowing human rights violations that many other UNPO members do, the UNPO Presidency ruled that, in accordance with the organization’s Covenant, this does not invalidate their membership. UNPO finds that their struggle for equal political representation is valid and justified, and they clearly qualify as an unrepresented territory, i.e. one that is “not adequately represented in international forums, such as the United Nations”.

Commenting on the admission of the District of Columbia and DC’s lack of democratic representation, UNPO General Secretary Mr Marino Busdachin said, “UNPO is honoured to admit the District of Columbia as a Member to the organization. The District of Columbia is one of many unrepresented territories around the world where there is a clear lack of democratic rule; the people of DC should be entitled to representation in the US Congress.”

The UNPO Presidency has reached the conclusion that Statehood for the District of Columbia is right and just, as currently Washingtonians do not enjoy the full privileges of democracy in America. Congressional representation in the Senate and House of Representatives brought about by Statehood would mean independent control of the District of Columbia’s governmental affairs in line with all the other fifty States.

UNPO would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly admitted Member and looks forward to fruitful cooperation with the District of Columbia, who will be represented within UNPO by its popularly elected Statehood Congressional Delegation, working in conjunction with the “New Columbia Statehood Commission”, an entity of the District of Columbia government.

Marino Busdachin
UNPO General Secretary
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