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Honorable Members of Congress:

My name is Liliana Laboy. I am a retired civil servant who worked for more than 30 years in different positions in the government of Puerto Rico. I am a mother of a very intelligent young woman who is a devoted English teacher. I have been a labor and community leader. I am also an ardent defender of Puerto Rican independence.

I have a story to tell. But first, I want to congratulate you for holding this briefing. Although the full Committee should have called it officially, this briefing can be the means to inform those of you who are unaware of what really happens in Puerto Rico, my nation and homeland. In these terrible times not many people are willing to hear dissenting voices. But hearing us, who have suffered for so many years the persecution of the same agencies that supposedly should guarantee the civil and human rights described in the United States Constitution, is part of the responsibilities every Congressman and Congresswoman has to discharge on behalf of the people of your country. We hope we will be heard not only by you, but also by your constituents and fellow citizens also. And that is very important to us.

It is to them, the people of the United States, to whom I want to address my words to call their attention to the terrible situation that their government is imposing, not only in a place so far away as Iraq, but in a small country -- Puerto Rico -- very near their shores.

This is my story:

The morning of Friday, February 10, 2006, started as usual with the sounds of traffic and people going to their schools or workplaces. The peaceful and sunny morning and its routines, were suddenly interrupted by the roar of helicopters and the movement of many heavily armed men that invaded the 444 De Diego Condominium in which I have lived for 30 years.

It was around 10:00 AM. I received a phone call from somebody that identified himself as Agent Lezcano, of the FBI. I cannot be sure if this is the correct name because he did not show any identification, and neither he nor any of the other agents had name tags on their vests.

This agent told me that they had a warrant to search my home and that I was to open the door immediately and get out of my apartment. I told him that I had to call my lawyer but he said there was no time to do that and that I had to do as he had told me. I opened the door and to my astonishment there were several military looking men with assault weapons and in combat position, to each side of my door. Several others were in the

hallway. I told Agent Lezcano that I needed to see the warrant and to call a lawyer. He did not have the warrant with him and had to ask for it from somebody else who was not in the hallway. My request to call my lawyer was denied until, at my insistence, he called his supervisor on the phone to ask for his permission for me to do it. At this point I was in the hallway as Agent Lezcano and another agent whose name I do not know, did not allow me to stay in the apartment. Agent Lezcano told me that there was not an arrest warrant and that I could go wherever I wanted. I told him that that apartment was my home and I was not to leave it open and with them inside.

They took me to the fire escape that in my building is an interior stair, and I was seated in one step with Agent Lezcano in a step above and another agent who speaks fluent Spanish he said he learned in Spain, standing in front of me.

I was held in the stairs for more than two hours. I cannot be certain of the time. After 12:00 PM Agent Figueroa, who identified himself as the agent in charge, came and said that my lawyers had arrived. I told him to let them come to me but he said no. He said as I was not arrested I could go to the street where they were to talk to them. He also said that there were many people outside and the journalists were also there, in his words, "like vultures." I insisted in talking to my lawyers and finally they escorted me to the lobby. There, Agent Lezcano said the lawyers could come behind the building, in the parking lot.

My lawyers insisted that they and I should be observing the search but the FBI agents told them it was not possible. My lawyers and I had to talk to each other by murmuring in the ears of one another because several agents were around us within hearing distance.

During my conversation with my lawyers, other heavily armed men, including some with their faces covered like ninjas, entered the building. In the parking lot, which is behind the building, there were an astonishing number of these men in combat attire and attitude. The residents were not permitted to enter the building and many were in the parking lot in solidarity with my plight. They know me for my contributions to the community and my peaceful way of life so they were amazed at the unnecessary show of force set out to search the home of a woman who is not more than five feet tall and who lives alone.

When finally they finished the search, I was asked to sign a supposed inventory of what they took with them. I signed it because one of my lawyers told the FBI agent that I was only certifying that I had received the supposed inventory and not that I was in agreement with what it said.

The supposed inventory identified the documents that they took as "miscellaneous documents" so I cannot say which documents they took. I know they took my tax records from almost 30 years, but they are not listed. The cd's and books are not identified either. And there are things they took that are not listed, like a red portfolio that contained more than \$700.00 that belong to Puerto Rico Pa'lante, an organization in which I am the treasurer.

In front of my building there were many students, teachers, university professors, workers, men and women and even some children, protesting the operative. They were there to accompany and protect me because nobody in Puerto Rico trusts the FBI. They are abusive and arrogant, and after the assassination of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, nobody feels safe when there is a bunch of FBI's around.

There also were the journalists doing their jobs. Their only "weapons," as usual, were their cameras, recorders and microphones.

The FBI operative was much disorganized. There was not a police security perimeter established around the building. The agents were in the parking lot and the maintenance workers, the security guard and the administrator were not permitted to do their work. When my daughter arrived she was not permitted to enter the building until someone she does not know opened the pedestrian gate. She was very distressed because she did not know what had happened to me. She asked the agents about me, but they did not respond.

I did not witness the incident with the journalists, but undoubtedly the agents were not happy with their presence, since agent Figueroa described them as "vultures."

Beyond the aggression that the journalists suffered and what that means in terms of the freedom of the press and the right of the people to be informed, there is something of equal, if not more importance at play here. This is the persecution that for almost a century has been suffered by those who believe and strive for the Puerto Rican sovereignty and independence.

What happened on February 10, 2006, in my opinion and that of other fellow independentistas, was just part of the saga of our struggle for freedom, justice and independence in Puerto Rico. I hope that this investigation, although unofficial, can open the eyes not only to the injustice that for so many years has been done to my country, but also to what is happening in your country. Where are the great achievements of the American Revolution? Where are the beautiful words of the declaration of Independence that are read every 4 of July? Where is the Bill of Rights? They have been replaced by the so-called Patriot Act. As my home and several others were invaded, as our privacy is violated, so is the privacy of many citizens in your country. Wake up before is too late. Perhaps it is already too late.