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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF
INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1484th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York
on Friday, 6 February 1998, at 11 a.m.

Temporary Chairman:

Mr. ANNAN
(Secretary-General of
the United Nations)

Chairman:

Mr. SAMANA

(Papua New Guinea)

CONTENTS

OPENING OF THE SESSION BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

COOPERATION WITH INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES

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The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking as Secretary-General, said that the Special Committee on Decolonization had made a lasting contribution to the guiding principles of international law concerning the inalienable right of peoples to self-determination. Two important steps had been accomplished over the past year: the consensus reached with the administering Powers on the resolution on small Territories; and the agreement with the European Union on the resolution on economic and other activities.

2. For almost four decades, the Committee had contributed to the independence and right to self-determination of many peoples. Those efforts had consistently upheld the highest principles of the Charter, and had enhanced the commitment of the United Nations to ensure respect for human rights all over the world.

3. The remaining 17 Territories in the Committee's agenda represented complex challenges to the United Nations. Some had advanced economically and socially and were enjoying constitutional rights. Others were constrained by lack of development, or had suffered from natural disasters.

4. The goal of eradicating colonialism by the year 2000 should continue to guide the work of the Special Committee. The main task of the United Nations was to live up to the trust bestowed upon it and to assist both the peoples of the Territories and the administering Powers in fulfilling their common aims.

5. The right to self-determination had been established as the right of peoples to choose to be independent, to be associated with another State, or to integrate with another State. Therefore, there was no formula which should be imposed. However, the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories should be assisted in their selection of what was best for their future. He earnestly hoped that the specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system would step up their assistance to the peoples of those Territories.

6. He wished to draw particular attention to the needs of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in the execution of its mandate with regard to Western Sahara, as the largest Territory that remained on the Special Committee's agenda.

7. He was pleased to note that in 1997 the Special Committee had demonstrated a practical and flexible approach to its work. The changes in the Special Committee's structures had brought about efficiency in its work and streamlining in its functions and procedures. As part of the United Nations family, it had had to adapt to a new era, where a reformed and revitalized Organization would better serve the interests and ideals of its Member States.

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ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

8. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

9. Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

10. Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea) took the Chair.

11. Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Ouane (Mali) were elected Vice-Chairmen by acclamation.

12. Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

13. The CHAIRMAN said that, on the thirty-eighth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and as the culmination of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism approached, the Committee looked forward to working out ever more realistic and effective solutions to the problems of decolonization. Acting within the limits of its mandate, through collective efforts, it would strive to produce tangible results. The Committee would continue to provide encouragement and support to the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to freely determine their future political status. It would not flinch from its responsibility of monitoring political, economic and social developments in the Non-Self-Governing Territories and their contribution towards the exercise of the legitimate right to self-determination of those peoples. It would maintain the same thorough and in-depth approach it had always adopted, convinced that, in the process of decolonization, there was no alternative to the right of self-determination.

14. Following the attainment of independence by the great majority of colonies, the traditional concept of colonialism had been relegated to second place. Nevertheless, there were still 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, most of which were small islands which suffered handicaps because of their size, remoteness, geographical dispersion, vulnerability to natural disaster, limited natural and human resources, and migration. However, those factors must not serve as a pretext for depriving the peoples of the remaining Territories of their right to self-determination in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV). Those 17 Territories remained the responsibility of the Committee and of the United Nations. As long as there were Non-Self-Governing Territories and peoples who had not had an opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination, the Committee's task remained unfinished and the not so subtle suggestion that the era of colonialism was over could not be accepted. The Committee would therefore continue to seek appropriate solutions to the specific situations in each Territory, paying particular attention to any problems which might hinder their development and impede their progress towards self-determination.

15. The Committee would continue to hear petitioners, assist in the dissemination of information on decolonization and make suggestions and recommendations to the General Assembly and Security Council, as appropriate.

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It would keep its approach and method of work under constant review in order to adjust to changing circumstances and improve its efficiency, as a natural corollary to the rapid changes in international relations and the global political climate. In recent years, the Committee had demonstrated a practical and flexible approach to its work, as evidenced in its report to the General Assembly. In 1997, the Committee had continued its dialogue with the United Kingdom and the United States and its discussions with the European Union; that exercise had proved to be useful.

16. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly had been able to adopt the resolution on small Territories without a vote. The compromise text of the resolution on activities of foreign economic and other interests which impeded the implementation of the Declaration in Territories under colonial domination, which was a result of consultations with the European Union, had been supported by an overwhelming majority of Member States. The Committee was ready for continued cooperation and consultations with interested Member States, but would not lose sight of the interests and welfare of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, which would always remain paramount.

17. To that end, the Committee would continue to seek the cooperation of the administering Powers; it firmly believed that their full and formal cooperation would greatly enhance the decolonization process. In conformity with their responsibilities under the Charter, the administering Powers must submit regular and timely information on the Territories under their administration, invite United Nations visiting missions to evaluate the situation in the Territories, and facilitate the participation of the elected and appointed representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories in the Committee's deliberations. Regular contacts and consultations between the Committee and the Permanent Missions of the administering Powers in New York would further expedite the work of decolonization.

18. He urged the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system, in collaboration with regional organizations, to formulate programmes that would promote economic and social development of peoples conducive to facilitating the exercise of their legitimate right to self-determination.

19. In the context of the current financial situation of the United Nations, the Committee would do its utmost to achieve economy in its activities, without damaging the interests of the peoples concerned. Meetings needed to start on time, and as many informal consultations as possible should be held to reduce the number of regular meetings.

20. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly had expressed overwhelming support for the decolonization programme and the Committee and, by a vast majority, had reaffirmed the political nature and substance of the decolonization programme. Under the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, three Professional posts of the Decolonization Unit would be allocated to the Department of Political Affairs, and technical services would be performed by two Professional staff members in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. The Committee would consult the Under-Secretaries-General of the two departments in the context of the decision of the General

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Assembly relating to the rearrangement of resources within the respective departments and consider how best to coordinate those resources to serve the work of the Committee in order to enhance the discharge of the mandate pertaining to the decolonization process.

21. The SECRETARY-GENERAL assured the Committee that the decisions which had been taken with regard to the servicing of the Committee would be fully implemented. The implementation of the General Assembly resolution in question was the responsibility of the Secretary-General; he hoped that there would be no attempt to micromanage the Secretary-General and the Secretariat.

22. The CHAIRMAN assured the Secretary-General that there would be no attempt by the Committee to micromanage the Secretariat; a common understanding needed to be reached so as to work in cooperation to meet the objectives sought.

23. Mr. POWLES (New Zealand), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that over the past year his delegation had appreciated the Committee's constructive cooperation with the Territory of Tokelau. The people of Tokelau valued the Committee's interest in their future and New Zealand pledged its willingness to cooperate fully with the Committee.

24. Mr. STANISLAUS (Grenada) said that of the many remarkable contributions made by the United Nations in the social, economical, cultural and geopolitical spheres since the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the United Nations record on decolonization was preeminent, for it had changed forever the geopolitical landscape of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and indeed the world. The 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories must be given the opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination by freely choosing their future political status in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant General Assembly resolutions. The administering Powers had an obligation to facilitate that process through education and by other means.

25. The Secretary-General's commitment to the decolonization programme must be transformed into concrete action to create a unified support structure among Member States, United Nations bodies, the specialized agencies and, most importantly, the Secretariat. The Chairman's letter dated 21 January 1998 addressed to the Secretary-General, in document A/53/59, expressed correctly the Committee's wish that the Secretary-General should take early appropriate action to assign the Secretary of the Committee and his assistant to the Decolonization Unit in the Department of Political Affairs, where by nature, by mandate and by mission the Unit belonged. The technical servicing of the Committee would be limited to an officer at the P-3 level in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. The full implementation of those agreements would ensure that the Committee received adequate Secretariat support to perform its functions effectively and economically without controversy between the Secretariat and the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, of which the Committee was an integral part.

26. His delegation was concerned that in some quarters the notion persisted that the Committee was irrelevant and anachronistic. Nothing could be further from the truth. In proclaiming the International Decade for the Eradication of

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Colonialism, the General Assembly had made it clear that the Special Political and Decolonization Committee still had unfinished business, namely the eradication of colonialism by the year 2000.

27. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) said that over the past year the Committee had achieved much progress in the elimination of colonialism; his delegation pledged its continued cooperation.

28. Mr. HU Zhaoming (China) said that his delegation was confident that the Committee would achieve further success; it hoped that the Secretariat would provide better service than in the past. China had always supported the just cause of decolonization and would cooperate actively for the achievement of the objective of decolonization by the year 2000.

29. Mr. AL-ANBUGE (Iraq) said that, as one of the founding members of the Committee, Iraq had always worked to achieve the Committee's objectives. His delegation affirmed the need to keep the Decolonization Unit in the Department of Political Affairs, and supported the Chairman's letter in document A/53/59.

30. Mr. WEHBE (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country had participated in the Committee since its establishment, and would continue to support its work until the objective of full decolonization was achieved. His delegation agreed that the Committee had not infringed on the prerogatives of the Secretary-General; it would support action by the Secretary-General to promote progress in its work.

31. Mr. MÁRSICO (Observer for Argentina) welcomed the re-election of the Chairman and the Bureau and pledged his delegation's full support for the Committee's work.

32. Mr. SALAMANCA (Bolivia) said that the re-election of the Committee's officers reflected a sense of continuity and augured well for United Nations efforts to eradicate colonialism by the year 2000. Bolivia, which had actively participated since the early 1970s in efforts to eradicate colonialism, would continue to fully support the Committee's endeavours.

33. Mr. GAMITO (Portugal), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that the presence of the Secretary-General at the opening of the session demonstrated his commitment to the decolonization process. Noting the remarkable role played by the United Nations in general and the Committee in particular over the previous three decades in bringing about the self-determination of peoples throughout the world, he pledged his delegation's continued cooperation with the Special Committee in carrying out its mandate in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

34. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the note by the Chairman on organization of work, in document A/AC.109/L.1870, and to the note by the Secretary-General on relevant resolutions and decisions, in document A/AC.109/L.1871.

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35. Mr. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia) said that the people of East Timor had already exercised their right to self-determination and had achieved their independence through integration with Indonesia in compliance with General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV), 1541 (XV) and 2625 (XXV). That fact notwithstanding, since 1983, Indonesia had been cooperating fully with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his efforts to find a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor. In that regard, the tripartite talks being held between Indonesia, Portugal and the United Nations had entered a new phase. Working-level talks had continued between senior foreign ministry officials of both Indonesia and Portugal under the chairmanship of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on the question of East Timor. It was imperative to sustain the talks in order to achieve progress in finding a just solution to the question. Since the General Assembly had once again deferred consideration of the item during its fifty-second session, his delegation objected to the inclusion of the item in the Special Committee's agenda, which could only undermine the tripartite talks.

36. Mr. GAMITO (Portugal), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman and in exercise of the right of reply, said that he wondered why Portugal and Indonesia were engaged in talks under the auspices of the Secretary-General if the people of East Timor had exercised their right to self-determination. East Timor was a Non-Self-Governing Territory as established by the General Assembly in its resolution 1514 (XV), and by virtue of that status the question of East Timor had always been on the Committee's agenda. The postponement of the debate on the question of East Timor at past sessions of the General Assembly and of the Committee had never led to the removal of the item from the agenda. The Committee had included the item in its agenda as in previous years; the item was included in the provisional agenda for the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, and the Committee was to prepare a report for consideration at that session.

37. Every year, the Secretary-General requested his Government to provide information in accordance with Article 73 e of the Charter. His Government had always complied with that request, which confirmed its status as the administering Power of East Timor even though it was being impeded from effectively exercising its administration.

38. At a time when talks were proceeding under the auspices of the Secretary-General, any alteration of the framework of the talks would interfere with the exercise of the mandates entrusted to the Secretary-General and to the Special Committee.

39. Mr. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Portugal continued to overlook the historical facts of the situation in East Timor. Portugal had abandoned the Territory and had thus relinquished its right as an administering Power. That decision had led to civil war and strife. The ensuing decolonization process had culminated in the independence of East Timor and its integration with Indonesia. Since their integration with Indonesia over two decades earlier, the people of East Timor had reaffirmed their wishes in a most resounding manner in every consecutive national election. His delegation categorically rejected the inclusion of the item in the Committee's agenda.

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40. Mr. GAMITO (Portugal), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman and in exercise of the right of reply, said that the decolonization of East Timor had not been completed because one Member State had illegally occupied that Non-Self-Governing Territory in violation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Portugal was firmly committed to contributing to the success of the negotiations on East Timor under the auspices of the Secretary-General, and would make every effort to help the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to find a comprehensive, just and internationally acceptable solution to the question.

41. Mr. SCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that the re-election of the Chairman and of the entire Bureau testified to the efforts to continue the positive changes that had occurred in the Committee. His delegation endorsed the idea of replacing the Working Group by an open-ended Bureau. However, it must be ensured that members would receive early information on and notice of dates for the meetings of the Bureau. Such a practice would not only promote transparency but also enable members to participate in the meetings of the open-ended Bureau when important issues were being discussed.

42. The CHAIRMAN said he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the proposed organization of work for 1998, as reflected in document A/AC.109/L.1871 and taking into account the comments made by members of the Committee.

43. It was so decided.

44. The CHAIRMAN noted the substantial progress made thus far by the Committee with respect to curtailing its documentation requirements and requested members to continue cooperating fully with the efforts of the Organization in that regard.

45. Drawing attention to paragraphs 9 and 10 of document A/AC.109/L.1871, relating to the utilization of conference-servicing resources, he said that he intended to convene Committee meetings on time, and he was relying on the full cooperation of members in that regard.

COOPERATION WITH INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES

46. The CHAIRMAN, referring to invitations extended to the Committee to attend meetings of certain bodies, said that he wished to suggest that the Committee should authorize him to hold consultations, as appropriate, concerning its participation or otherwise in those and other meetings, and concerning the level of representation.

47. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.