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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 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 12 February 2002, at 10.30 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Ms. Frechette (Deputy-Secretary-General)

Chairman: Mr. Huntley (Saint Lucia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Opening of the session by the Deputy-Secretary-General

1. **The Temporary Chairman** said that since 1961, the Committee of 24 had played a central role in keeping the principle of self-determination on the agenda of the United Nations. In May 2002, East Timor would join the ranks of sovereign States, ending a long period of suffering and marking another major achievement of the decolonization movement, which had brought about one of the signal transformations of the twentieth century. The Special Committee would continue to review the political, social and economic situation in the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, paving the way for General Assembly resolutions aimed at protecting the interests of their peoples.

2. The Special Committee had also sought to remind both the administering Powers and the territorial peoples that Non-Self-Governing Territories could be said to have reached a full measure of self-government if one of three options had been achieved — free association, integration or independence — and that none of those options was to be imposed, but rather must be the result of the freely expressed wishes of the territorial peoples, as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

3. She expressed the hope that the administering Powers would respond to the efforts of the Committee to find creative and constructive ways to address the long-standing issue of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, and urged them to move forward in finding appropriate arrangements with the full participation of the people of each Territory. In recent years, the Committee had tried to engage all the administering Powers in a practical dialogue on the future of the Territories. It had called for programmes of work to be established so that each Territory could freely determine its political status and pursue its economic, social and cultural development.

4. She also hoped that in that new century it would be possible to close, once and for all, and in accordance with the principles of the 1960 Declaration and all relevant resolutions, a chapter that truly belonged to a previous era. She wished the Committee every success in its work.

Adoption of the agenda

5. *The agenda was adopted.*

Election of officers

6. *Mr. Huntley (Saint Lucia) was elected Chairman, Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué (Côte d'Ivoire) and Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) were elected Vice-Chairmen, and Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

7. *Mr. Huntley (Saint Lucia) took the Chair.*

8. **The Chairman** said that while progress had been made with regard to decolonization in the 1990s, during the First International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the new millennium had dawned with that process not yet complete. Some 17 territories remained under the Committee's review, and the General Assembly had continually reaffirmed the mandate of the Committee, and of the wider United Nations system, to foster the political, socio-economic and constitutional development of those Territories. The time had come therefore for the international community to accelerate its efforts during the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, according to the plan of action adopted by the General Assembly.

9. In order to succeed in its mission, the Special Committee must seek to bridge the information gap on those Territories, where often complex administrative arrangements had been established over time, whose intricacies the Committee had been unable to seize. In that regard, the regional seminars provided the best opportunity for Member States and the United Nations as a whole to benefit from the perspective of the representatives of the Territories, civil society and regional experts on their respective decolonization processes. Their unique understanding of the contemporary colonial dynamic as it existed in their Territories, coupled with the applicability of international law and the principles of decolonization, should serve as the primary guides for the Committee's work. In order to move that process forward, the resolutions must reflect the particularly lucid recommendations of the people of the Territories themselves, as contained in the various regional seminar reports and in their statements to various United Nations bodies. Repetitive language in resolutions should be avoided when the texts could be updated in the light of new developments. That would

make the work of the Special Committee more relevant to the people in the Territories concerned, and would show them that the United Nations remained vigilant with respect to their political future.

10. As an ambassador of a small island State, he was aware of the difficulties that small countries encountered in trying to make their voices heard in the din of increasing globalization, and of the need to help Non-Self-Governing Territories, encumbered by their colonial condition, in their quest for full and absolute political equality. If the United Nations succeeded in assisting those Territories in achieving their full measure of self-government — either through independence, integration with full political rights, or free association — it would succeed in other, more difficult areas. The Special Committee could give valuable assistance to territories fighting for self-government if it made a concerted and sustained effort to implement the resolutions and decisions already adopted by the General Assembly, and if the necessary expertise and resources were devoted to a critical analysis of the current dependency arrangements, particularly in the small island territories.

11. In order to attain those goals, it would be important that all of the administering Powers resume their participation. He would seek to re-activate the dialogue between the Special Committee and the administering Powers on individual Territories with the critical addition of the territorial representatives. That informal process could not be viewed as an adequate substitute for the formal participation of all stakeholders in the Committee's work, since the resumption of the tripartite dialogue between the Committee, the administering Powers and the territorial governments would serve to further reduce the existing information gap. Some of the pending issues should have disappeared long ago from the world agenda. The Special Committee could only resolve those issues if it faithfully applied its mandate, based on the Charter of the United Nations which spoke to self-determination as a fundamental human right.

Organization of work

12. **The Chairman** drew attention to documents A/AC.109/2002/L.1 and A/AC.109/2002/L.2 on the organization of work. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Special Committee approved the proposed organization of work for the current session.

13. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

14. **The Chairman** said that, as in previous years, the Special Committee would strictly apply the decision of the General Assembly whereby meetings would be convened without the presence of the quorum required under rules 67 and 108 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. However, the presence of a majority of the members would be required for any decision to be taken.

15. **Mr. Donigi** (Papua New Guinea) said that he was confident, with the beginning of a new Decade, that the Special Committee would complete its work and fulfil the aspirations of the peoples of all the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories on the United Nations list. Although the record in the First Decade had been somewhat lacklustre, he was optimistic that with the full cooperation of all the administering Powers, the Special Committee could move quickly to complete the case-by-case work programmes for each of the remaining 16 Territories during the new Decade. Most of the remaining 16 Territories, although small, presented unique problems, given in particular their size, remoteness and small populations. The Special Committee needed to change its perspective and method of work to better assist the peoples still under the yoke of the administering Powers.

16. As the body entrusted with the task of eradicating all forms and manifestations of colonialism, the Special Committee had worked hard and achieved much success for the United Nations, whose membership had grown from 40 to 189 in half a century. In May 2002, the Committee would witness another milestone with the attainment of independence by East Timor. It must thus pursue its work in the cooperative spirit shown by all the administering Powers, especially New Zealand and France. He hoped that the two major administering Powers, the United States and the United Kingdom, would display a similar spirit with regard to all the remaining Territories under their respective jurisdictions. He welcomed the good will shown by the Government of New Zealand with regard to Tokelau, and hoped that progress could be made in the cases of American Samoa and Pitcairn Island in the Pacific region and the small island territories in the Caribbean region. He welcomed the work on New Caledonia, East Timor and Western Sahara.

17. His Government supported the development of a work programme for each Territory on a case-by-case

basis. That method was not only innovative but forward-looking. If done well, with transparent consultations between all the parties, especially the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the individual work programmes could pave the way for the peoples of the Territories to determine their own future without any duress from the administrative Powers, the United Nations or any other actors.

18. He welcomed the decision of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session to declare the period 2001–2010 the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. That would give the Special Committee and the administrative Powers much needed time to complete their work. In that respect, no distinction should be made between the remaining Territories, and the work programmes must be developed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the particular circumstances of each Territory.

19. **Mr. Lewis** (Antigua and Barbuda) said it was regrettable that there were no women members of the Committee. He then said he wondered whether colonialism might not be re-emerging within the Special Committee itself, for at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, when his delegation had cited data from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other institutions associated with the United Nations, it had been suggested that it should refer only to studies carried out by the United Nations. However, an administering Power had not been criticized for citing the same references in its statement to the Fourth Committee. If the Special Committee did not take into account the conclusions of think tanks and of regional groups outside the United Nations, such as the South Pacific Forum or the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, it might limit the impact of its work. The Special Committee must therefore be completely objective and recognize that its sole and unique goal was to help individuals in their just struggle for freedom.

20. Within the United Nations system, the Special Committee bore the main responsibility for the self-government and decolonization of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Most of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories were small island developing countries in the Caribbean and Pacific, resembling Antigua and Barbuda, which was well placed to understand their needs and aspirations as they progressed towards a political status which would afford them full and

absolute equality through independence, free association or integration.

21. In 2001, the Fourth Committee had referred to the information deficit regarding the situation on the ground in the Territories themselves. That problem must be addressed seriously if the Special Committee wanted to fulfil its mandate and make appropriate recommendations to assist those Territories in their development process. One solution would be to re-establish the former Subcommittee on Small Territories, which had been abolished during the United Nations reform process of the 1990s. The Subcommittee had provided a forum for a detailed discussion of political and economic developments in each Territory and had enabled Member States to examine new information which had subsequently formed the basis of the resolutions.

22. His delegation wished to reiterate the importance of implementing the plan of action for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and in particular of completing the studies and analyses carried over to the Second Decade. The Special Committee should study ways of completing those studies, as a matter of urgency, and his country would fully support its work.

23. **Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla** (Cuba) said that the Committee had reached a crucial phase in its work and should not underestimate the scope of the task ahead, on the one hand because colonialism had not yet been eliminated and some peoples were still denied the right to self-determination, and on the other because the current international situation further complicated the work of the Organization, which already had much to do with regard to the problems of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The success of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism depended on the participation of all Member States.

24. **Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué** (Côte d'Ivoire) welcomed the progress achieved in East Timor, which should soon accede to independence. The United Nations had adopted instruments which would facilitate its work, in particular the Millennium Declaration and General Assembly resolution 55/146 proclaiming the Second International Decade for the Elimination of Colonialism, not to mention the work plan of the Committee, which allowed all partners — administering Powers, representatives of the Territories

and Committee members — to examine the political, economic and social situation of each Non-Self-Governing Territory. The United States and the United Kingdom had for two years been following the path recommended by the Committee, the former with American Samoa, the latter with Pitcairn. The Committee awaited the reaction of those two administering Powers to the work plan submitted to them. He noted with satisfaction that New Zealand and the representatives of Tokelau had adopted the working method recommended by the Committee, with encouraging results. The existence of a working method accepted by all should encourage all the administering Powers to follow the example of New Zealand. The existence of genuine political will was essential if progress was to be made with regard to decolonization.

25. **Mr. MacKay** (New Zealand) said that Tokelau had made progress towards self-government. Constructive consultations had been held in June 2001 between the Ulu, the Administrator of Tokelau and the Working Group on Non-Self-Governing Territories. Since then, the representatives of New Zealand and Tokelau had discussed a draft work programme and a decision should be reached on that subject when the members of the new General Fono (Council) of Tokelau met. New Zealand continued to provide Tokelau with substantial funding. It remained fully committed to working with the Special Committee, and would abide by the wishes of the people of Tokelau and support them as they moved towards self-determination at their own pace. It welcomed the trust and respect that existed between the various partners.

26. **Mr. Sun Jiwen** (China) said that much progress had been made with regard to decolonization but much remained to be done. He called upon the administering Powers to collaborate with the Committee and invited the members of the Bureau to engage in more frequent consultations with the Committee. The Committee should attach greater importance to the regional seminars, which made it possible to collect valuable information and work more effectively to achieve decolonization.

27. **Mr. Stanislaus** (Grenada) said it was the Committee's mission to give the Non-Self-Governing Territories the means to exercise their right to self-determination, but it could not coerce them into doing so. Before the end of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, all the Non-Self-

Governing Territories would have had an opportunity to take a decision on their status. He observed that the absence of disagreement did not necessarily mean that agreement had been reached.

28. **Mr. Blanco** (Venezuela) said that the Committee's work had led to recognition of the right of colonial peoples to self-determination, but much remained to be done. The Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism represented an enormous challenge and Venezuela would cooperate with the Committee with a view to ensuring that decolonization became a reality.

29. **The Chairman** emphasized that the Committee would continue to give priority to regional seminars, which were one of the most efficient ways of ascertaining directly the views of the representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories, and said that in 2002 the seminar would be held in the Pacific region.

30. **Mr. Naidu** (Fiji) said that it was important to embark without delay on the work to be done within the framework of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. He welcomed the fact that East Timor was on the verge of becoming a fully-fledged State and urged all the administering Powers to join the Committee and cooperate with it so that other Non-Self-Governing Territories could likewise accede to independence. He stressed that the latest seminar, held in Cuba, had been very profitable, and announced that Fiji offered to host the next regional seminar.

31. **The Chairman** suggested that the invitation of Fiji should be accepted.

32. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.