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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 9th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 2 July 2001 at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué. (Côte d'Ivoire)

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In the absence of Mr. Hunte (Saint Lucia), Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. The Chairman invited the Special Committee to adopt the agenda subject to the deletion of the question of New Caledonia, which would be considered at the next meeting.

2. *The agenda was adopted.*

Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations (A/56/65; A/AC.109/2001/L.11)

3. **The Chairman** drew attention to the report by the Secretary-General (A/56/65) and to the draft resolution (A/AC.109/2001/L.11) on the agenda item.

Hearing of the representative of the Territory

4. The Chairman informed the members of the Committee that the representative of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands had requested to make a statement on the item and also on the item entitled "Draft report on the Caribbean regional seminar". Subject to the consent of members of the Committee, he suggested, in accordance with standing procedure, that the request be granted.

5. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Corbin (Government of the United States Virgin Islands) took a place at the Committee table.*

6. **Mr. Corbin** (Government of the United States Virgin Islands) said that his Government considered the question of United Nations assistance to Territories to be one of the major items on the Special Committee's agenda. The issue involved not only assistance itself but also the direct participation of Territories in the work of the United Nations system.

7. During the 1990s, resolutions had been adopted in which various programmes and measures devoted to the sustainable development of small island States had been interlinked and which had emphasized the relevance of activities for the development of Non-Self-Governing Territories. The outcome of a review of

14 specialized agencies in 1998 had made it clear that seven agencies had changed their rules of procedure to permit Non-Self-Governing Territories to be given the status of full or associate members, or observers. However, since then, that figure had not increased. The delegations of several specialized agencies, particularly in the Economic and Social Council, had stated that they did not regard the implementation of the Declaration as part of their mandate. The recommendations adopted from year to year, in particular those contained in paragraphs 6, 7, 10 and 16 of General Assembly resolutions 54/85 of 6 December 1999 and 55/139 of 8 December 2000, were not being adequately implemented.

8. A mechanism should be worked out to ensure that the specialized agencies took a more responsible approach to the implementation of adopted recommendations. As a start they might address the Special Committee on the subject of their activities geared to the relevant tasks. Unfortunately, the seats reserved for the specialized agencies during the deliberations of the Committee were habitually unoccupied. He appealed to the members of the Committee, through their representatives in the relevant agencies, to call the attention of their governing bodies to the question of assistance to Non-Self-Governing Territories.

9. The medium-term plans of the Department of Political Affairs for 1998-2001 and 2002-2005 contained measures such as the provision of assistance by specialized agencies and international organizations associated with the United Nations to the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. It was not clear how that department of the Secretariat carried out that function. It was also difficult to understand how the secretariat of the Special Committee could coordinate assistance to Governments with which it had no official contacts. It would be preferable to focus on seeking the resources necessary for carrying out the research and analysis which had already been requested in the first International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism and for preparing of the reports referred to in those General Assembly resolutions. Coordination of the assistance provided by the United Nations system as a whole should be entrusted to organs of the system such as the United Nations Development Programme, the regional commissions, and so forth. In that connection, the outcome of the forthcoming consultations between the Special Committee and the

Economic and Social Council would be awaited with interest.

10. One of the positive improvements in the participation of the Territories in the work of the United Nations system was exemplified by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The United States Virgin Islands had been an associate member of ECLAC since 1984 and could confirm the important contribution made by the Commission to the development of many Non-Self-Governing Territories in the Caribbean. The Special Committee should consider the long-established practice whereby the Governments of Non-Self-Governing Territories that were associate members of regional commissions participated in their work in the same capacity as other Governments (apart from the right to vote). They could be accorded the same status in the Special Committee.

11. Such a step was now even more urgently required since, beginning with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Non-Self-Governing Territories which were associate members of regional commissions had been given observer status at world conferences and special sessions of the United Nations. That improvement had taken place at the initiative of the Territories themselves, which had achieved such status without reference to the Special Committee. For example, at the special session of the General Assembly on the Habitat Agenda held in June 2001, the Government of the United States Virgin Islands had described how natural disasters affected the sustainable development of habitats in the Caribbean. As Chairman of the working group of non-independent Caribbean countries, the Government of the United States Virgin Islands was grateful to the Caribbean and Pacific States, the Group of 77 and China and the administering Powers which had far-sightedly supported the Non-Self-Governing Territories in their efforts to participate in world conferences and special sessions devoted to issues of great importance for their socio-economic development.

12. At the same time, arrangements for the participation of Non-Self-Governing Territories in conferences could not be described as equitable. For example, the Territories were not sent any information concerning the nature of the meetings of preparatory committees, and merely received an invitation from the Secretary-General. Staff in the Department of General

Assembly Affairs and Conference Services who were responsible for the Special Committee could do much to assist Non-Self-Governing Territories by drawing the attention of their colleagues servicing world conferences and special sessions to the difficulties faced by those Territories in receiving information about meetings in which they had long been entitled to participate.

13. Given the increasing pace of globalization, which threatened to marginalize Non-Self-Governing Territories in the world economy, those Territories should enjoy direct access to the most varied programmes and institutions of the United Nations system which, in turn, should expand its work with small island developing Territories irrespective of their level of constitutional and political development.

14. **Mr. Ovia** (Papua New Guinea), referring to the comments of the previous speaker concerning the participation of Non-Self-Governing Territories in the work of the Special Committee as observers, asked what would be the financial consequences of such a step and who would meet the cost of their participation in world conferences and special sessions.

15. **Mr. Corbin** (Government of the United States Virgin Islands) said that, in most cases, the question of the funding of the participation of Non-Self-Governing Territories in meetings held at the regional level was resolved satisfactorily. As far as world conferences and the preparatory activities for them were concerned, the question was resolved on a case-by-case basis, without any particular system. It would be desirable for the Special Committee to transmit an appropriate recommendation on that matter to the General Assembly. That raised a broader question, namely how the Special Committee interacted with the Governments of the Territories themselves. The proposal that had been made was not a new one and went back as far as the first International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. The Non-Self-Governing Territories were ready to discuss it in the future.

16. **Mr. Sattar** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the budget of the Special Committee envisaged only payment of the expenses of petitioners in connection with their participation in its work. Anything else would require a specific decision by the Committee, which would then have to be confirmed by the General Assembly.

17. **Mr. Naidu** (Fiji) said, with reference to the question of funding, that the administering Powers should make specific commitments with respect to the participation of representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories in the work of various organs. If the administering Powers were to make such commitments, the Special Committee, the Fourth Committee and the General Assembly would be able to give further consideration to solving that problem.

Adoption of the draft resolution

18. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2001/L.11 was adopted without a vote.*

19. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of the agenda item.

Draft report on the Caribbean Regional Seminar
(A/AC.109/2001/CRP.1)

20. **The Chairman** drew attention to the draft report of the Caribbean Regional Seminar (A/AC.109/2001/CRP.1).

Hearing of the representative of the Territory

21. **Mr. Corbin** (Government of the United States Virgin Islands) drew the attention of the members of the Committee to the main recommendations contained in the report of the Caribbean Regional Seminar. For example, recommendation 5 drew attention to the important link between decolonization and human rights. Recommendation 9 introduced a new element related to discussion of the unilateral authority exercised by the administering Powers. Recommendations 10 and 12 considered the role of the United Nations in the process of monitoring and observing the evolution of Territories to self-determination. Recommendation 15 reflected the consensus achieved at the Seminar with respect to the need for the Special Committee to embark on a public awareness campaign to make clear to the peoples in the Territories the options available to them. Recommendation 28 suggested that United Nations information centres should disseminate information on decolonization to the Territories.

22. Recommendation 23 emphasized the desirability of maintaining the regional nature of seminars as a crucial element in their success. It was not clear to what extent there would be a case for holding future seminars in New York. The evaluation of the outcome of the first International Decade for the Eradication of

Colonialism had regarded the holding of regional seminars as an important aspect of activities. He also wondered why the proposed research concerning the Territories had not been carried out and how the Committee could make informed recommendations with respect to the future of Territories without access to the findings of such research.

23. The establishment of an international group of experts on decolonization questions would be conducive to the dissemination of information on the Territories and would provide a forum for the submission and discussion of expert opinion concerning the Territories. He supported the establishment of such a group whose activity would make the population of the Territories better informed about the political options available to them.

24. **The Chairman**, speaking as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire, said that the seminars had become an important method of work for the Committee, enabling it to get information at first hand. Regrettably, the question of moving them to New York was being raised. He was convinced that holding the seminars in the regions was of the utmost importance.

25. Regarding American Samoa, the Committee had announced previously that the programme of work had been sent to all the administering Powers and that the relevant meeting was being held with the participation of representatives of that Territory. He had been surprised to hear from one representative of that Territory that he had not been informed of the programme of work with respect to the Territory.

26. **Mr. Corbin** (Government of the United States Virgin Islands) said, in response to the comment by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire, that he too was surprised that the representative of American Samoa had not been aware of the programme of work with respect to that Territory. The relevant guidelines should be issued as official documents and disseminated in the Territories, so that their inhabitants were aware of the relevant processes. The Territories must be given real assistance with the attainment of self-determination, rather than simply being removed from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

27. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had perhaps not disseminated the programme of work among the population of the Territories sufficiently widely, which had probably not allowed all the interested parties to receive the necessary information

on the Committee's new approach. The meeting at which the question of American Samoa had been considered had not been a formal United Nations meeting, although representatives of both the United States and the Territory had been present.

28. *Mr. Corbin withdrew.*

Adoption of the draft report

29. **Mr. Ovia** (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation fully supported the idea of holding regional seminars in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. However, many in the United Nations continued to criticize the Committee for holding seminars in those two regions on the grounds that doing so entailed significant expenditure for the Organization, that the range of participants was limited and that those who took part did not use their time effectively.

30. One response to those questions would be to hold a seminar in New York on a trial basis, so as to evaluate the cost of that arrangement and the number of likely participants. Regarding participation by Non-Self-Governing Territories, that question too could be addressed in the course of such a pilot seminar. It would be necessary to ascertain at that point whether the Committee could fund the participation of a representative, if only of one Territory.

31. As to discussing the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories on an individual basis, that procedure would represent a real departure from tradition. It should be noted that the people of the Territory concerned could not under any circumstances be excluded from the discussions. One might cite by way of illustration the participation of the Ulu O Tokelau in the discussion on the question of Tokelau, which had been of the utmost importance. The administering Power, New Zealand, had also played an important role in the discussion. That had been the first example of the application of the aforementioned new approach.

32. Even if the administering Power was not prepared to sit down at the negotiating table, innovative methods remained possible. For example, in the case of American Samoa, his delegation believed that there was a need to involve the representatives of the people of that Territory in the discussion by using visiting missions. With the help of such missions, it was possible, notably, to ascertain the attitude of the people

towards maintenance of the status quo in the Territory. The same was true of the United States Virgin Islands.

33. If the Committee did not approach the matter creatively, using unconventional methods, it risked dragging out the discussion of those questions for a very long time to come.

34. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur, introducing the report of the Caribbean Regional Seminar, thanked the Government and people of Cuba, where the seminar had been held, for their hospitality and their interest in that event, noting that a broad range of issues had been freely debated at the Seminar. A record number of countries had participated in the work of the Seminar, necessitating much hard work on the part of the Secretariat, and he wished to express the delegation's gratitude to the Secretariat for those efforts.

35. The Seminar had heard addresses from the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly, which had given added impetus to its work. The delegation of the Committee, in formulating the report, had taken into account all the ideas and views expressed by its members. He expressed appreciation to the Chairman of the Special Committee for his capable direction of the work of the delegation and proposed that, taking into account the foregoing, the Committee should adopt the report.

36. **Mr. Ovia** (Papua New Guinea), noting the comprehensive nature of the report of the Seminar, said that the fact that it had been presided over by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia and the interest manifested in it by the Government of Cuba had increased the prestige of that event.

37. His delegation did not wish to block the consensus on the report, which it approved in general with the exception of paragraphs 50 and 51 on Puerto Rico.

38. **Ms. Fricot** (Saint Lucia) said that the report of the Seminar was one of the most important outcomes of the work of the Committee, because it contained a broad range of opinions and recommendations by experts and representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. It should therefore be adopted by the Special Committee.

39. The Chairman suggested that the Special Committee should adopt the report of the Caribbean

Regional Seminar and include it as an annex in its report to the General Assembly.

40. *The draft report was adopted.*

41. **Mr. Amorós Núñez** (Cuba) expressed gratitude to the previous speakers for the warm words addressed to his country and its leadership.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.