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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 1476th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 17 June 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. SAMANA

(Papua New Guinea)

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QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR (continued) (A/AC.109/2079 and Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Kauffman (Pax Christi International) took a place at the petitioners' table.

2. Ms. KAUFFMAN (Pax Christi International) said that Pax Christi International, the international Catholic peace movement, supported all United Nations efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement of the question of East Timor. United Nations investigative reports and recommendations could help to provide mechanisms to inquire about and prevent human rights abuses against the Timorese people, who had been subjected to economic injustices, inadequate social development, denial of freedom of expression, insensitive social policies, and military threats. Representatives of the Catholic Church had repeatedly called for greater respect for human rights and continuing dialogue between all parties.

3. While a long-term solution to the question of East Timor was being debated, confidence-building initiatives could provide a basis for mechanisms to deal with self-determination issues. Such initiatives might include a reduction in the troop presence in the Territory; the honouring of human rights commitments; unhindered and regular access by United Nations Special Rapporteurs and international human rights groups; dialogue with Governments, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations; and implementation of all international human rights instruments. United Nations-sponsored dialogue should continue, but any serious proposal must include the East Timorese people.

4. Ms. Kauffman withdrew.

5. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Clark (International League for Human Rights) took a place at the petitioners' table.

6. Mr. CLARK (International League for Human Rights) said that the International League for Human Rights had emphasized the illegality of Indonesia's actions in invading East Timor and purporting to annex the Territory, its flagrant breaches of the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolutions, its use of force, and its disregard for the principle of self-determination.

7. With regard to the legal obligation not to recognize Indonesia's unlawful acquisition of territory, the League deplored media references to the resistance movement in East Timor as a "secessionist campaign" or as a "rebellion". In considering the Timor Gap case in 1995, the International Court of Justice had noted Portugal's assertion that the right of peoples to self-determination had an erga omnes character, which meant that all States Members of the United Nations had an obligation to support the self-determination of the East Timorese people.

8. The Indonesian policy of resettlement whereby populations were transferred from densely to sparsely populated areas constituted another assault on the

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self-determination of the East Timorese people. When that influx was considered together with the massive loss of life dating from the invasion, the possibility that the Timorese would become a minority in their own land looked increasingly real. The "transmigration" policy also contravened the Plan of Action for the Full Implementation of the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples contained in resolution 35/118 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

9. In recent years the Special Committee on decolonization had shied away from adopting a substantive resolution on the question of East Timor. Other organs of the United Nations had found the political will to address the matter. The time was ripe for a strong resolution reiterating the right of the East Timorese to self-determination and insisting on a United Nations-sponsored referendum to achieve that right before its exercise was rendered meaningless by Indonesia's transmigration policy.

10. Mr. Clark withdrew.

11. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. de Menezes (Associação Socialista de Timor) took a place at the petitioners' table.

12. Mr. de MENEZES (Associação Socialista de Timor) said that the Association was fighting against the integration of East Timor into Indonesia, in an attempt to win the right to self-determination and eventually independence. The sheer number of General Assembly resolutions pertaining to East Timor demonstrated the legitimacy and legality of the East Timorese people's appeals.

13. An official representative of the Association should be invited to participate in all meetings sponsored by the United Nations which involved representatives of the Timorese resistance. The United Nations should reject any solution to the question of East Timor that would involve the concept of "special autonomy", the expression used by the occupying Power to officialize the Territory's integration into Indonesia. Moreover, the United Nations must also reject any proposal to reconsider its position on East Timor; on the contrary, it should establish conditions leading to a genuine process of self-determination in the Territory.

14. The Association endorsed the return of East Timor to the former colonial administering Power so that the process of decolonization which had been interrupted by the Indonesian invasion and annexation could be completed.

15. Mr. de Menezes withdrew.

16. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Scharfe (Parliamentarians for East Timor) took a place at the petitioners' table.

17. Ms. SCHARFE (Parliamentarians for East Timor) said that her organization had been established to draw the attention of policy makers to the ongoing human rights violations of the people of East Timor, who had never been allowed to exercise their right to self-determination.

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18. Since its thirty-eighth session, the General Assembly had repeatedly deferred consideration of the question of East Timor, but the appointment of the new Secretary-General had brought renewed hope that progress would be made on the issue. The appointment of Jamsheed Marker as the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for East Timor and the strongly worded resolution on East Timor adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights were also welcome developments.

19. The Special Committee should state for the record that it continued to consider East Timor to be a Non-Self-Governing Territory, since no valid act of self-determination had ever taken place there. The Committee should also urge the Government of Indonesia to withdraw its troops immediately from East Timor. All of Indonesia's rights and privileges on the Committee should be suspended until it complied with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. Finally, the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly and the Secretary-General that the time was ripe for an act of self-determination in East Timor, and that the Committee could use the remainder of its mandate concerning East Timor to implement a plan to achieve that goal. That plan should provide for a United Nations presence in the Territory to observe and supervise the final stages of the decolonization process.

20. Ms. Scharfe withdrew.

21. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Pintea-Austin (London University) took a place at the petitioners' table.

22. Ms. PINTEA-AUSTIN (London University) said that the geopolitical situation in 1975 had made the Indonesian annexation of East Timor inevitable. Western Governments at the time had noted that the people of Portuguese Timor were in no condition to exercise the right to self-determination, and that there were very strong arguments for integrating the Territory into Indonesia. Despite repeated appeals, which had gone unheeded, the Portuguese had simply marched out of East Timor leaving a vacuum which had subsequently been filled by Indonesia.

23. Since then there had been a change in people's perception of East Timor as the result of a media campaign which peddled an alleged "truth" about the region in the absence of any explanation or comment from the Indonesian side. Lack of overt support from Western Governments for Indonesia's orchestrated involvement in East Timor had left the field open to interpretation. Western public opinion tended to be sceptical of government pronouncements and supportive of freedom fighters. In addition, the lack of a referendum and the high number of casualties resulting from Indonesian intervention had become major obstacles to the Western public's acceptance of the annexation.

24. It was essential for all interested parties to recognize the facts surrounding the annexation. Those facts could not be changed. The media would undoubtedly continue to play a central role in the question of East Timor. While it was right for the media to question government actions, it was also important to give credit where credit was due. It was not hard to appreciate the Indonesian Government's view that good news about Indonesia was no news as far as the Western press was concerned. Likewise, the Western media had deliberately played down the communist ideology espoused by the Timorese

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resistance fighters so as to make their cause more palatable to Western audiences.

25. If the West persisted in making Indonesia into a scapegoat for its political interests, it would simply drive Indonesia away from the negotiating table. The result would be a period of unprecedented instability in South-East Asia.

26. Ms. Pintea-Austin withdrew.

27. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Abecasis (Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party (Parliament)) took a place at the petitioners' table.

28. Mr. ABECASIS (Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party (Parliament)), speaking as the representative of a Portuguese parliamentary committee monitoring the situation in East Timor, welcomed three important developments which had taken place over the past year in respect of East Timor: the appointment of the new Secretary-General, who in turn had appointed a Personal Representative for East Timor; the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the East Timorese leaders Bishop Belo and José Ramos Horta; and the appointment of a new bishop of Baucau reporting directly to the Pope.

29. Indonesia had attempted to justify its invasion and annexation of East Timor by trumpeting its economic achievements in the Territory. In reality, however, the figures in respect of key indicators such as income per capita, illiteracy, infant mortality, average life span, and number of schools and hospitals clearly pointed to underdevelopment, even when compared to identical figures pertaining to Indonesia as a whole. While it was true that the Indonesians had built a number of new hospitals, schools and roads, those achievements had been dearly bought in terms of life and liberty. He calculated that each hospital had been bought at the price of 42,000 lives, and 1,100 people had paid with their lives for each elementary or high school. Each polytechnic school was the equivalent of 125,000 innocent victims, and the price of each kilometre of road was 125 deaths. It was scandalous to justify oppression and death by talking about development; there could be no true development without respect for human rights.

30. Mr. Abecasis withdrew.

31. Mr. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia), speaking on a point of order, said that the petitioner had exceeded the time allowed.

32. The CHAIRMAN said that he would attempt to give petitioners adequate time in which to speak.

33. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Barbosa de Melo (Social Democratic Party) took a place at the petitioners' table.

34. Mr. BARBOSA de MELO (Social Democratic Party) said that despite repeated denunciations of Indonesia's genocidal policies towards the East Timorese people, made both in the United Nations and elsewhere, the situation in East Timor had continued to deteriorate. The recent report submitted by the

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Government of Portugal - which had had to be based on information collected by Amnesty International and other reliable sources as the Indonesian Government had sought to obstruct its preparation by denying the Portuguese authorities access to East Timor - detailed numerous human rights violations perpetrated by Indonesia, including illegal imprisonment, torture, detention without trial, random violence, public profanation of Christian religious symbols, and mass immigration policies aimed at changing the cultural and religious identity of the population.

35. During the past year, attitudes had changed with regard to East Timor. The increased concern of the international community was reflected in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Bishop Belo and José Ramos Horta, international spokesman for the Timorese cause; the hope expressed by the Pope that a just and internationally acceptable solution would be found to the question of East Timor, a solution which satisfied the aspirations of the people for recognition of their cultural and religious identity; and the appointment by the Secretary-General of the United Nations of Ambassador Marken as his personal representative for East Timor. Those were positive signs that the conflict had not been forgotten.

36. Mr. Barbosa de Melo withdrew.

37. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Castanheira (Socialist Party) took a place at the petitioners' table.

38. Mr. CASTANHEIRA (Socialist Party) said that Indonesia's invasion and conquest of East Timor constituted acts of war. Within the Territory Indonesia was pursuing a genocidal policy some evidence of which had been caught on camera. In the modern era of communications it was important to have an international monitor stationed in East Timor, so as to keep the world informed of what was going on. East Timor was one of the last remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories.

39. Indonesia's violations of the human rights and dignity of the people of East Timor was now again on the international agenda, as had been made clear by the Nobel Committee's award of the 1996 Peace Prize to Bishop Belo and José Ramos Horta. He noted that Indonesians themselves appeared to be eager for change and seemed to understand what East Timor was going through. The resolution of the conflict in East Timor would depend in large measure on the process of democratization in Indonesia itself.

40. Mr. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia), speaking on a point of order, said that the petitioner had exceeded the time allowed. Moreover, his reference to issues beyond the mandate of the Committee was not justified.

41. The CHAIRMAN invited Mr. Cavaco Castanheira to conclude.

42. Mr. CASTANHEIRA (Socialist Party) said that in Portugal, the issue of East Timor was viewed not as a matter of party politics but as a moral issue. Since East Timor was also the most densely populated Portuguese-speaking Territory in the Far East, it was also a strategic issue. In the past 20 years the United Nations had passed many resolutions affirming the inalienable right of East

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Timor to self-determination and condemning Indonesia's invasion. Those resolutions must be implemented.

43. Mr. Castanheira withdrew.

44. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Macedo took a place at the petitioners' table.

45. Mr. MACEDO said that it was time Portuguese politicians stopped spreading lies in an attempt to conceal the manner in which Portugal had carried out the decolonization of several of its colonies. Most such colonies' power had been handed over to political parties with strong ties to Communist forces. In East Timor the population had rebelled against the handing over of power to FRETILIN and a violent civil war had ensued; fortunately, it had lasted only a few months. Since then, tremendous economic development had taken place in the Territory.

46. Reviewing the events which had preceded Portugal's withdrawal from East Timor, he said that following the revolution in Portugal the Governor of East Timor had been replaced by a colonel with strong ties to those who had helped install a communist regime in Portugal. Indeed, all the military sent to East Timor had had ties with the Portuguese Communist Party and had therefore been sympathetic to FRETILIN. When the military authorities began making preparations to hand over to FRETILIN (Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente), East Timor became destabilized. Despite the political, military and social instability Portugal had started reducing its military presence - from 3,000 troops in 1974 to 200 in 1975 - and building up its armaments there. The police commander of Dili had denounced what was happening, saying that he would not permit the handing over of armaments to FRETILIN. He had subsequently been captured and executed by FRETILIN forces. No Portuguese politician or military official had ever called for the assassins to be brought to trial, even though it was common knowledge who they were.

47. On 29 August 1975 the Governor and Portuguese military officials had handed over armaments to FRETILIN and fled to the island of Atauro. The leaders of the East Timor political parties had radioed the Governor and the Portuguese Government in Lisbon demanding that Portugal return to the Territory but had received no response. João Carrascalão, the current president of the Timorese Democratic Union, had at the time written letters to the President of Indonesia asking him to accept the integration of East Timor into Indonesia. That was the same man who was now calling for a referendum.

48. On 29 November 1975, FRETILIN had unilaterally declared the independence of East Timor and hoisted the flag of the new Democratic Republic of East Timor. Portugal had not complained. The only reason Portugal was raising the problem of East Timor was in order to call attention to itself. It was clear that it was not concerned about the people of East Timor. One Portuguese politician had stated at various times on television that everything Portugal had said thus far about East Timor was merely propaganda; the former Governor of Macau, speaking about East Timor, had said that former Portuguese colonies in Asia had been integrated to nations in that area because they had previously been part of those nations.

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49. The Indonesia-Portugal Friendship Association, of which the petitioner was President although he had been persecuted for that by the Portuguese authorities, had conducted various activities in Indonesia. Indonesia had made initiatives but Portugal had made none. He considered that East Timor had not been annexed but had been reunified with West Timor after centuries of separation from it under colonial rule, much in the same way as East and West Germany had been reunified.

50. Mr. Macedo withdrew.

51. Mr. NEVES (Portugal), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the petitioner's reference to Portuguese politicians had been disrespectful to the Committee and was unacceptable. The claim that he had been persecuted was a blatant lie; Portugal supported freedom. The petitioner was entitled to his opinions, but not to lie to prove his point.

52. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Tavares (SOS - Associação de Defesa dos Angolanos) took a place at the petitioners table.

53. Mr. TAVARES (SOS - Associação de Defesa dos Angolanos) said that he represented an Angolan non-governmental organization whose headquarters were in Portugal and which sought to promote and defend human rights, democracy, human solidarity and the cultural values of Angolan citizens. On the basis of those principles, his organization wished to demonstrate the solidarity of the Angolan people with the long-suffering people of East Timor. The ordeal experienced by the Timorese people and the physical and cultural genocide to which they had been subjected were well known. The United Nations resolutions on the question of East Timor, which had been ignored by Indonesia, were also well known. In addition, the international community was aware of the increasingly alarming human rights violations that were taking place in East Timor. Accordingly, he called upon the community of Portuguese-speaking countries to increase their support for the struggle being waged by the East Timorese people.

54. The United Nations and the Special Committee should exert pressure on Indonesia to ensure that it complied with the resolutions on the self-determination of the people of East Timor and should support the continuation of the dialogue between Portugal and Indonesia, with the participation of the East Timorese resistance parties, in the search for a peaceful and just solution.

55. Mr. Tavares withdrew.

56. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. de Mello (retired Portuguese Air Force General) took a seat at the petitioners' table.

57. Mr. de MELLO said that Indonesia's presence in East Timor was not due to a military invasion, but had been in response to a request by the four East Timorese non-Communist parties, which represented the great majority of the population. Since East Timor's integration into Indonesia, the civil war had ended and the people had returned to their origins. Considerable cultural and economic development had taken place. Dozens of new schools, a university, and a polytechnical institute had been built. There were modern hospitals and miles of new roads. Bridges and housing units had been constructed. Today, the

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people of East Timor could look hopefully into the future thanks to the years of peace and progress that they had experienced as part of Indonesia.

58. Mr. de Mello withdrew.

59. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Soares (East Timor Students Movement) took a seat at the petitioners' table.

60. Mr. SOARES (East Timor Students Movement) said that before integration into Indonesia, East Timor had merely been one of Portugal's colonies, all of which had been underdeveloped, neglected and oppressed. After integration, all aspects of life in East Timor had improved through economic development. East Timor had achieved independence through integration into Indonesia and its people were free to express themselves and develop as they wished. There was no need for a referendum in East Timor since the people there had expressed their right to self-determination by choosing to become part of Indonesia.

61. Portugal and its surrogates continually waged a negative campaign to deceive world opinion and foment opposition to the integration of East Timor into Indonesia. Following integration, the East Timorese had gradually transformed themselves into a modern community and become a prosperous and free people. The literacy rate and number of university graduates had greatly increased. Nevertheless, the struggle to improve the social and economic situation in East Timor was not yet over. East Timorese living abroad and supported by the Portuguese Government continued to try to influence young people in East Timor to destroy the progress made in recent years. The younger generation, however, was a product of the Territory's integration into Indonesia and believed that they could build a better, more prosperous and peaceful future for the East Timorese as part of that country.

62. Mr. Soares withdrew.

63. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Soares took a seat at the petitioners' table.

64. Ms. SOARES said that history showed that Portugal had failed to carry out the decolonization process in East Timor and had jeopardized the lives of hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants by instigating a civil war through its support for FRETILIN (Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente).

65. From the outset, Indonesia had respected Portugal's role as the sole legitimate authority in East Timor and had sought to bring about the smooth completion of the decolonization process. Nevertheless, with the unilateral proclamation of independence by FRETILIN, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the people of East Timor had concluded that Portugal had abdicated its responsibility by abandoning the Territory in a disgraceful manner and creating a vacuum of authority. Portugal, together with the Communist-oriented FRETILIN, had plunged the people of East Timor into a destructive civil war, in which thousands of innocent people had lost their lives. She appealed to the international community to assess the situation in East Timor objectively. The East Timorese people alone had the right to determine their own fate and categorically rejected interference by any party, especially Portugal. East

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Timor must be allowed to live in peace and build a brighter and more prosperous future together with the people of Indonesia.

66. Ms. Soares withdrew.

67. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Sarmento (ETADEP) took a seat at the petitioners' table.

68. Mr. SARMENTO (ETADEP) said that he represented a local non-governmental organization which had been carrying out rural community development activities in East Timor since 1982. The era of Portuguese colonization had been the darkest period of East Timor's history. After more than four centuries of exploitation and cruel oppression, Portugal had simply turned its back on the people of East Timor in 1975, without completing the decolonization process. The East Timorese people had been abandoned at the height of a civil war, which had devastated the entire territory and left thousands of victims.

69. As part of Indonesia, East Timor had had the greatest opportunity to preserve and develop its own rich culture, which had almost been eradicated by hundreds of years of Portuguese colonial rule. It was irresponsible for Portugal and members of the international community to continue to encourage East Timorese to use violence in order to oppose integration into Indonesia. The people of East Timor sought to defend the achievements and objectives of integration: development, prosperity, social justice and peace. Mistakes had, indeed, been made in the process of integration; they should be corrected. Instead of inciting the people of East Timor to fight integration, it would be better to focus efforts on building lasting peace in East Timor, Asia and throughout the world. The people of East Timor shared the concern of those who stood for respect for human rights, social justice, peace and prosperity. He called upon the international community to uphold those values and help build a better and brighter future for all the East Timorese in unity with the Republic of Indonesia.

70. Mr. Sarmento withdrew.

71. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. de Assunção (COVALIMA) took a seat at the petitioners' table.

72. Mr. de ASSUNÇÃO (COVALIMA) said that he was the regional secretary of COVALIMA, one of the thirteen districts of East Timor. Since integration into Indonesia, the people of East Timor had recognized that sustainable development was the only way to promote their fundamental rights, namely to food, housing, education, and health care, of which they had been deprived during the four hundred years of colonial rule. At the current time, there were many more hospitals and village health centres and all East Timorese children attended school. The number of schools had grown substantially and illiteracy had been sharply reduced. After East Timor had gained independence through integration into Indonesia, the economic infrastructure had drastically improved. The province received large government grants and its economy was experiencing an annual growth rate of 10 per cent, which was higher than that in the other Indonesian provinces. Considerable efforts were being made to create jobs. Twelve domestic investment projects had been approved by the Indonesian

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Government, with a total investment value of approximately \$150 million; and foreign investment projects would be operating in the industrial services sector. Those projects aimed to combat unemployment in East Timor.

73. Since integration, the number of new churches had increased to 800, compared to 100 at the end of colonial rule, and the percentage of Catholics had grown from 27 per cent in 1972 to 92 per cent in 1994. In view of all those positive developments, there was no basis for the claim by the former colonial Power that it was the Administrating Authority. Portugal had abandoned East Timor to a tragic fate in the midst of a bloody civil war. Lastly, he stressed that it was time for the handful of agitators who were still active to halt their campaign of disinformation, if they were truly interested in promoting the well-being of the people of East Timor.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.