



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
19 July 2019

Original: English

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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 4th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 17 June 2019, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. McGuire . . . . . (Grenada)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

1. **The Chair** said that the delegations of the Dominican Republic and Ukraine had indicated their wish to participate in the work of the Committee as observers.

#### **Question of Gibraltar (continued) (A/AC.109/2019/8)**

##### *Hearing of petitioners*

2. *At the invitation of the Chair, Mr. Matthews (Self-Determination for Gibraltar Group) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

3. **Mr. Matthews** (Self-Determination for Gibraltar Group) said that the Gibraltar that Spain had ceded to Great Britain no longer existed. That village had become a thriving, cosmopolitan community, thanks to the hard work of its ancestors, who had given up their liberty and lives to fight in two world wars. Some had returned to their homes after evacuation only to endure a political siege by Spain that had culminated in a closed border.

4. It was ridiculous for Spain to want Gibraltar to be handed back more than 300 years after giving it up forever. Indeed, prominent Spaniards had advised successive Spanish Governments that, if the case were taken to an international court, the right of the Gibraltarians to determine their own future would prevail. For that reason, Spain rejected any proposals to take the case to an international court.

5. The incongruity of the position taken by Spain had recently been demonstrated when the Government of Spain had agreed a tax treaty with Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar that, at least indirectly, recognized the legal existence of Gibraltarian institutions. Spain could not be allowed to rely on certain principles only when it was convenient to do so.

6. Spain used Gibraltar as a smokescreen for its many internal problems. During the Brexit negotiations, it had used all its political leverage to ensure that Gibraltar was referred to as a colony in one of the Brexit documents, without regard for the difficulties that would create for the Brexit negotiation process and ignoring heavy criticism from various member States of the European Union. In effect, Spain could not be trusted. It was not a country that made proposals in good will or sought amicable solutions; rather, it was a bully that sought to force its will on a people.

7. If Spain was seeking to extend the hand of honest friendship to the people of Gibraltar, while respecting their democratically expressed wishes, they would grasp it. The people of Gibraltar did not seek confrontation and were not secessionists. They would be happy to live

in harmony with their neighbours. However, they would staunchly defend their right to self-determination. The sacrifices of successive generations of Gibraltarians must not be in vain and their children must be the sole arbiters of their destiny.

8. *Mr. Matthews withdrew.*

9. **The Chair** proposed that, in accordance with its established working methods, the Committee would continue its consideration of the question of Gibraltar at its next session, subject to any directives which the General Assembly might wish to give at its seventy-fourth session. To facilitate consideration of the item within the Fourth Committee, all relevant documentation must be transmitted to the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly.

10. *It was so decided.*

#### **Question of Tokelau (A/AC.109/2019/14)**

11. **The Chair** drew attention to the working paper prepared by the Secretariat on Tokelau (A/AC.109/2019/14).

##### *Hearing of representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territory*

12. **The Chair** said that, in line with the Committee's usual practice, representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territory would be invited to address the Committee and would withdraw after making their statements.

13. **Mr. Kalolo** (Ulu-o-Tokelau), titular head of the Territory, said that self-governance was distinct from self-determination. Tokelau continued to practise self-governance and refine a governance model that was based on its own culture but also incorporated elements of Western models. Tokelau may deviate from the governance structure chosen by the Cook Islands and Niue, since there were some differences in traditions and social conditions.

14. Tokelau and New Zealand were working together to build greater local capacity. New Zealand had been strengthening infrastructure in Tokelau by maintaining and increasing energy capacity; constructing schools, hospitals and homes; and improving connectivity through a new inter-atoll vessel and a new telecommunications cable. Tokelau, for its part, had begun relocating senior officials in the national public service from Samoa to Tokelau, which would lead to a greater integration of traditional and modern knowledge that was characteristic of its emerging governance model.

15. All of the above were exciting developments. However, Tokelau was also living the reality of climate change. While perhaps not significant for Committee members who came from mountainous or landbound countries, rising sea levels and sea acidification presented serious problems for Tokelau.

16. Tokelau appreciated the opportunities provided by New Zealand, the United Nations and other countries and donors, which had given the people of Tokelau more confidence to consider self-determination in the future. However, failure to mitigate the risks would result in a loss of confidence.

17. **Mr. Ardern** (Administrator of Tokelau) said that the partnership between Tokelau and New Zealand was strong. He had visited Tokelau five times over the past 12 months and further trips were planned in the coming months. Leaders from Tokelau had visited New Zealand in September 2018 and March 2019. The nature of the relationship and questions of governance and self-determination were guided and determined by the people of Tokelau. His role was to provide support and guidance so that Tokelau could realize its vision and aspirations and provide its people with a better quality of life.

18. New Zealand had consistently sought to devolve its administrative powers to Tokelau and support the development of its own governance institutions. The current arrangements reflected the Territory's unique characteristics and would continue to evolve. It was the role of New Zealand to support Tokelau in developing a governance model that recognized those characteristics while also drawing on other models it considered would serve it well. The growing sense of unity between the three atolls was an important aspect of the governance journey and must be nurtured. The women's organization in each village already played a vital role in their communities and every effort should be made to amplify women's voices, since their contributions would strengthen leadership and governance at the village and national levels.

19. Development assistance from New Zealand had recently been expanded and around 86 million New Zealand dollars would be used over three years for the Territory's advancement, including to strengthen the governance and management of its public services, finances and infrastructure. In response to a review carried out in 2013, New Zealand had contracted professional support for Tokelau schools and was helping the Tokelau Department of Education to build leadership capacity and improve education services. A follow-up review in 2018 noted that early childhood and

primary education had improved, but secondary education required further attention.

20. Primary health care was available in every village in Tokelau; secondary and tertiary care was generally provided in Samoa and New Zealand. A new hospital was close to completion on one atoll. At the request of Tokelau, New Zealand had commissioned an independent review of health services and patient referrals.

21. Connectivity was a lifeline for isolated communities. The new inter-atoll vessel would enable people to receive more specialized health services. Increased Internet connectivity was on track to be delivered in the fourth quarter of 2021. New Zealand and Tokelau were contributing 22.2 million and 7 million New Zealand dollars, respectively, to the project, which would bring benefits for public services.

22. Climate change was a real challenge. Small places like Tokelau, which had contributed the least to climate change, would suffer the full force of a warming planet. New Zealand was committed to supporting the Territory's voice on the international stage, including by facilitating the attendance of its representatives at regional and international forums alongside New Zealand representatives. New Zealand was supporting the efforts of Tokelau to adapt to the changes that the atolls were already experiencing. The national climate change strategy focused on integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in village decision-making. New Zealand had increased technical assistance to incorporate climate change adaptation and disaster resilience into village planning. An international firm was developing a coastal hazard reduction plan and would help village representatives to identify and assess options for mitigating such hazards.

23. **Mr. Rai** (Papua New Guinea), speaking also on behalf of Fiji, said that the draft resolution on the question of Tokelau, which was sponsored by Papua New Guinea and Fiji, should reflect a number of important developments since June 2018.

24. The first was the election of Kelihiano Kalolo as Ulu-o-Tokelau on 12 March 2019, which would be the last change of leadership in the Territory before a new General Fono was elected in January 2020. The preparations and conduct of that election should be closely monitored to ensure that the self-determination aspirations of Tokelauans were respected.

25. Second, the launch of the greenhouse gas inventory for Tokelau on 11 April 2019 was pivotal for the Non-Self-Governing Territory. The inventory built on the 2017–2020 integrated national climate change

strategy and its first five-year implementation plan. Climate change was a serious concern for Tokelau and it was making concerted efforts to reduce carbon emissions, which was a commendable contribution to international efforts to secure an effective outcome for the upcoming Climate Action Summit 2019.

26. Third, the road map of the 2016–2020 national strategic plan and the joint statement of the principles of partnership between Tokelau And New Zealand represented a shared vision that had fostered stronger governance and more effective management of public service finances and infrastructure, which merited recognition. It was pleasing to note the greater emphasis accorded to good-quality health care and education and to enhancing inter-atoll connectivity through strengthened transport infrastructure, among other examples of cooperation.

27. Lastly, Tokelau continued to engage in regional and international cooperation in support of its economic and political aspirations, which deserved support. The former Ulu-o-Tokelau had participated in the forty-ninth Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in September 2018.

28. In conclusion, the progressive partnership between the Non-Self-Governing Territory and the administering Power, as well as all other stakeholders, testified to the resolve to work constructively to promote the well-being of the people of Tokelau. The Committee should build on that exemplary mutual understanding and constructive engagement. Fiji and Papua New Guinea renewed their commitment to facilitating the self-determination aspirations of the people of Tokelau.

#### **Question of Western Sahara (A/AC.109/2019/17)**

29. **The Chair** drew attention to the working paper prepared by the Secretariat on the question of Western Sahara (A/AC.109/2019/17).

30. **Mr. Rivero Rosario** (Cuba) said that numerous resolutions of the General Assembly, Security Council and African Union had confirmed the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination. His delegation supported efforts to find a lasting solution to the question of Western Sahara and urged the two parties to continue negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations, without preconditions and in good faith, consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. The international community, for its part, must commit to implementing all United Nations resolutions and decisions on the question of Western Sahara, including the right of the Sahrawi people to benefit from the exploitation of its natural resources.

31. Cuba had supported the Sahrawi people since 1976. A total of 2,046 Sahrawi students had graduated from Cuban educational institutions, while Cuban medical staff and teachers were working in the Tindouf camps. Cuba stood in solidarity with the Sahrawi people in its fight to exercise its legitimate rights and would continue to support efforts to reach a just and lasting solution on the question of Western Sahara.

32. **Ms. Sulimani** (Sierra Leone) said that her delegation remained committed to the decolonization process, which could be accelerated through constructive and solution-oriented engagement. It commended the international community and Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) on their commitment to the negotiations in Geneva. It also commended the Committee for inviting participants from the Sahara region to speak, since their participation would guide the Committee in finding a lasting solution to the impasse. The Moroccan autonomy initiative of 2007 was consistent with international standards and the Charter of the United Nations, took into account the specificities of the region and gave the people of the Sahara the right to enjoy full civil and political liberties.

33. The human rights achievements of Morocco were commendable but the situation of the people in the Tindouf camps was a concern. Her delegation appealed to all stakeholders to coordinate to ensure proper registration in accordance with international humanitarian law and the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

34. While regular visiting missions to the Non-Self-Governing Territories were crucial to the successful execution of the Committee's mandate, such a visit would be untenable in the case of Western Sahara. A political process was already under way and the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) had been extended to 31 October 2019. The United Nations was therefore fully briefed on the status quo and a visiting mission would jeopardize those efforts.

35. There was an urgent need to find a practicable solution to the longstanding dispute. Her delegation would continue to lend its full support to the efforts of the stakeholders at the Geneva talks on the situation in Western Sahara.

36. **Ms. Williams** (Grenada) said that her delegation supported the ongoing political process and the round-table meetings in which Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the Frente POLISARIO had participated. It also firmly supported Security Council resolution 2468

(2019). The autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007 was a viable proposal to put an end to the dispute, and had been described by the Security Council as serious and credible. However, the refugees in the Tindouf camps must be registered in order to protect and promote their human rights.

37. **Mr. Moriko** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the United Nations was the appropriate forum in which to pursue a realistic, pragmatic and enduring political solution based on compromise. Thanks to the determination, personal commitment and good offices of the outgoing Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, two round-table meetings had been held in Switzerland in which all stakeholders had participated. Côte d'Ivoire awaited with great interest the appointment of his successor.

38. Regional peace and stability and greater cooperation among the countries of the Arab Maghreb Union depended on finding a lasting solution to the question of Western Sahara. He invited the parties and neighbouring States to take a pragmatic approach in order to find points of convergence. Côte d'Ivoire firmly supported the autonomy initiative, which appeared to be a pragmatic and realistic approach that was likely to lead to a lasting solution, and commended Morocco on the development programmes it was implementing aimed at achieving political, social, economic and cultural autonomy for the Saharan people.

39. Security Council resolution 2468 (2019) extended the mandate of MINURSO and called for the military agreements reached with MINURSO to be respected. His delegation urged the parties to cooperate with MINURSO so that its mandate could be fully executed, most importantly with regard to the ceasefire. Lastly, his delegation invited all stakeholders to respond favourably to the call of the United Nations to participate in the next round-table meeting and encouraged them to display realism and a spirit of compromise throughout the political process. Ownership of the process would be beneficial to a lasting settlement of the dispute.

40. **Ms. Bannis-Roberts** (Dominica) said that her delegation supported the Secretary-General's efforts to move the political process forward with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution to the dispute.

41. Dominica welcomed the holding of two round-table meetings in Geneva, with the participation of Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the "Polisario", and urged all participants to seize the momentum created to discuss points of convergence. Security Council resolution 2468 (2019) reaffirmed the seriousness and

credibility of the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which her delegation believed would bring an end to the long-standing regional dispute and would allow the people of the Sahara to enjoy all their rights.

42. Morocco had made commendable efforts to promote and protect human rights and enhance regional and subregional cooperation. However, the population of the Tindouf camps must be registered in accordance with international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Resolving the dispute would lead to greater stability and security in the region.

43. **Mr. Condor** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that his delegation supported the ongoing political process aimed at reaching a negotiated, amicable and mutually acceptable political solution and welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 2468 (2019). It also welcomed the holding of the two round-table meetings and the engagement of Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the "Polisario" in the process in a spirit of compromise and realism. It hoped that the third round-table meeting would result in renewed energy and positivity and would provide a framework for the stability of the region. The autonomy initiative was an appropriate framework and a sound basis for a solution based on compromise.

44. The achievements of the Kingdom of Morocco in the promotion and protection of human rights in the area were extremely encouraging. However, his delegation renewed its call for the population in the Tindouf camps to be registered by UNHCR, in accordance with international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

45. **Mr. Rai** (Papua New Guinea) said that a mutually acceptable and lasting solution to the question of Western Sahara must be found. Inclusive dialogue at all levels was important for developing mutual understanding and building bridges. It should be based on practical realities and a spirit of good faith and negotiated compromise, as articulated in the Moroccan autonomy initiative and as recognized by the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. His delegation supported the ongoing political process under the auspices of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy; it was heartened by the recent political dialogue between Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and "polisario" and wished to encourage that positive momentum.

46. His delegation urged all stakeholders to keep in mind the crucial importance of improving the lives and livelihoods of the people of Western Sahara and achieving peace and security. The sustainable development efforts being undertaken by Morocco in

the Sahara region were commendable, but the human rights situation in the Tindouf camps must be addressed and UNHCR must be permitted to register the population in the camps, in accordance with international humanitarian law and all relevant Security Council resolutions.

47. **Ms. Joseph** (Saint Lucia) said that her delegation was in favour of a realistic political solution and welcomed the meetings that had been held in Mauritania. The Moroccan autonomy initiative should be given serious consideration.

48. **Mr. Reyes Hernández** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the international community could and must do more to eradicate colonialism. As established by Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations, the administering Powers must transmit information regularly to the Secretary-General relating to economic, social and educational conditions in the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

49. Venezuela noted with satisfaction the work carried out by the visiting mission to New Caledonia and the invitation from the Premier of Montserrat to the Committee to visit that Territory in the future. Visiting missions were an effective means of evaluating the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. His delegation supported the Committee's efforts to continue implementing the plan of action and urged administering Powers to cooperate fully with the United Nations in providing visiting missions with access to Territories under colonial rule.

50. In order to expedite the decolonization process, more information must be disseminated on international efforts to eliminate colonialism. That would require better positioning of the issue in the media, which would raise awareness among the public and inspire new actors to contribute. Venezuela therefore supported the activities of the Department of Global Communications on decolonization and urged it to continue and expand its activities both within and outside the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

51. His delegation was pleased that the question of Western Sahara was being given renewed impetus following the second round-table meeting in March 2019. Venezuela supported the process of inclusive dialogue that had been accepted by the parties, since a political solution based on cooperation between the member States of the Arab Maghreb Union would increase the stability and security of the Sahel region and provide more opportunities to its peoples. His delegation would thus contribute to the work of the Committee with a view to finding a just, lasting and mutually acceptable solution to the question of Western

Sahara, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and within the framework of the Organization's mandates.

52. **Mr. Jiménez** (Nicaragua) said that his country supported the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and independence, in line with relevant General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960 on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples, and the Charter of the United Nations. A negotiated political settlement must provide for a referendum on the Territory's status.

53. **Ms. Imeur-Chanduru** (Observer for Namibia) said that the credibility of the United Nations was at stake in Western Sahara and called for the implementation of all its relevant resolutions, the decisions of the African Union on the matter and the United Nations settlement plan of 1991, with a view to allowing the people of Western Sahara to hold a free and fair referendum. Their right to self-determination and independence was consistent with the Constitutive Act of the African Union and backed by the declaration of solidarity with Western Sahara issued by the Southern African Development Community in March 2019.

54. Her delegation welcomed the two round-table meetings between Morocco, the Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania, which had been held in December 2018 and March 2019 in line with Security Council resolutions 2414 (2018) and 2440 (2018) and at the initiative of the then Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Horst Köhler.

55. **Mr. Alhakbani** (Observer for Saudi Arabia) said that his country welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts to relaunch negotiations between the parties in line with Security Council resolution 2468 (2019) and encouraged them to follow through with a third round-table meeting.

56. The Moroccan autonomy initiative would allow the people of the southern regions to participate effectively and without discrimination in the economic, social and cultural development of the Moroccan people. Moreover, it took into account the regional particularities of the people of Moroccan Sahara and would grant them broader powers, and was consonant with international law, United Nations resolutions and the principle of self-determination. His country welcomed the participation of elected officials from Moroccan Sahara, for the second year running, in the deliberations of the Committee.

57. His country welcomed the \$8 billion development programme that Morocco had launched in Moroccan



Sahara in 2015 to improve living standards there and help local people to benefit from the region's natural resources. It also welcomed the progress that Morocco had made on human rights and the role of the regional branches of the National Council on Human Rights in Laayoune and Dakhla. Saudi Arabia opposed any encroachment on the interests, sovereignty or territorial integrity of Morocco.

58. **Mr. Petchezi** (Observer for Togo) said that the Moroccan autonomy initiative was a constructive step towards resolution of the impasse and all parties should engage in further round-table meetings in a spirit of compromise. Morocco had cooperated fully with the relevant international bodies on Western Sahara and its efforts with regard to development of the region and human rights were commendable. The populations of the Tindouf refugee camps must be registered in accordance with international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

59. **Mr. Bessedik** (Observer for Algeria) said that it had been clearly established that Morocco had no sovereignty over Western Sahara in all United Nations resolutions on the matter, as well as in an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, an advisory opinion of the African Union on the exploitation of natural resources in Western Sahara and decisions of the European Court of Justice.

60. The conflict could be resolved only by allowing the people of Western Sahara to freely express its will in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). In its resolution 2468 (2019), the Security Council had reaffirmed its commitment to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, based on compromise, which would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The Council had also renewed the mandate of MINURSO, one of the main tasks of which was to organize a referendum on self-determination. The African Union also had a vital role to play in reconciling the positions of Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

61. The human rights situation in Western Sahara, which required an international monitoring mechanism, and the plundering of its natural resources were matters of grave concern. Attempts to call into question the status of the Territory through selective and misleading readings of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions were equally disturbing. It should be emphasized that Algeria was not a main party to the conflict but rather a neighbouring country and observer.

62. **Mr. Soumah** (Observer for Guinea) said that the two round-table meetings had brought the parties and

neighbouring States together to find common ground on the basis of realism and compromise, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Guinea encouraged the participants to continue those important consultations with a view to overcoming the challenges hindering the stability, security and sustainable development of the subregion.

63. Morocco had undertaken major institutional and economic reforms in line with its autonomy initiative, which Guinea supported on account of its realism and credibility and as a framework for compromise. The reforms included the consolidation of the role of the national human rights council and its regional commissions; the election of representatives of the Sahara region in democratic, free and transparent communal and legislative elections in 2015 and 2016; and the implementation by Morocco of an ambitious structural development programme for the benefit of the territories. It should be noted, however, that both the Security Council and UNHCR had called for the refugees in the Tindouf camps to be registered in order to improve their human rights situation.

64. The Republic of Guinea was in favour of a negotiated political solution to disputes and supported the right of peoples to self-determination. The recent progress had demonstrated that serious, respectful and constructive commitment on the part of the participants were the keys to success. Perseverance would be another key factor. Guinea therefore called on the parties and neighbouring States to remain committed to participating in a third round-table meeting. Preserving the positive momentum of the political process would help restore a stable and secure environment that was favourable to sustainable development.

65. **Mr. Tiare** (Observer for Burkina Faso) said that his delegation supported Security Council resolution 2468 (2019) and the ongoing political process to achieve a realistic, practicable and enduring political solution to the question of Western Sahara. It also called on all countries in the region to assist in that process, the successful conclusion of which would contribute to stability and security throughout the Sahel. His country supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative and welcomed its development programme for the Sahara and progress on human rights there. By contrast, the situation in the Tindouf refugee camps was dire. Their populations must be registered in conformity with international humanitarian law, the mandate of UNHCR and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

66. **Mr. Hilale** (Observer for Morocco) said that the Declaration of Principles on Western Sahara (Madrid Accord), concluded between his country, Spain and

Mauritania in 1975, had marked the completion of decolonization; at stake today was the territorial integrity of Morocco. If Algeria, as it claimed, was merely an observer, then why did it arm, fund and provide a base for the “polisario”, and why had it ceded control to that non-State armed group of part of its territory, in which civilians from the southern provinces of Morocco had languished for 40 years in the camps of Tindouf? Without the aggressive interference of Algeria, there would be no “polisario” and no Sahara question.

67. Algeria applied pressure to diplomats from other States to support its stance on the Sahara and sowed hatred for Morocco among pupils in Algeria with claims in school curricula that the Arab Maghreb Union would not become a reality until the Sahara was “independent”. In 2001, Algeria had proposed the partition of the territory, which was the antithesis of self-determination. For 40 years, it had ignored international appeals to register the population of the refugee camps. It also continued to cover up the misappropriation of humanitarian aid meant for those people, which had been the subject of a recent report by the European Anti-Fraud Office.

68. Increasingly, the international community had come to realize that the position of Algeria was baseless. Only two days earlier, the Government of El Salvador had dropped its support for the so-called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, expressed support for his country’s territorial integrity and backed its autonomy initiative, which was the only viable means of resolving the dispute. The two round-table meetings that had been held thus far had been attended by democratically elected representatives of the two regions of Moroccan Sahara, who had underscored the socioeconomic and political advances that had been achieved there.

69. In resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#), the Security Council had called upon Algeria and Morocco, as parties equally involved in the dispute, to contribute to its settlement. The Sahara would always be an integral part of his country. The dispute could be resolved only under the auspices of the United Nations, on the basis of the autonomy initiative and with respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Morocco.

70. **Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez** (Observer for Uruguay) said that the fate of the Sahrawi people, especially those living in the camps and young people, was a source of grave concern. The parties to the conflict should work with the United Nations to ensure the respect of human rights in Western Sahara and the refugee camps. His country welcomed the aid furnished to the refugees by UNHCR, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the World Food Programme and the recent efforts of

Mr. Köhler. Ultimately, the mandate of MINURSO must be fulfilled to ensure that the people of Western Sahara determined its own fate.

71. **Ms. Maisoon Aldah** (Observer for United Arab Emirates) said that the Secretary-General had the task of achieving a negotiated and mutually agreeable political solution to the question of Moroccan Sahara. Her country encouraged the parties to follow up their two recent round-table meetings with a third one and commended Morocco for its unstinting efforts and constant engagement with the United Nations in the search for a just and sustainable political solution. Her country stood for the territorial integrity of Morocco and supported that country’s autonomy initiative.

72. **Mr. Sithole** (Observer for South Africa) said that Western Sahara was the last remaining colony in Africa. Resolving the long-standing impasse required sincere negotiations between Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

73. His country was perturbed by continuing reports of human rights violations in Western Sahara, including the use of excessive force against and the detention and torture of protesters and restrictions on the right of peaceful assembly. Equally worrying were the ill-treatment of Sahrawi prisoners by the Moroccan authorities and the restrictions placed on access to Western Sahara by human rights defenders, researchers, lawyers and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

74. The sustainable fisheries partnership agreement between the European Union and Morocco raised questions about the exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara. The building by the armed forces of Morocco of sand walls at the north and south ends of the berm constituted a violation of military agreement No. 1. In March 2019, South Africa had hosted a conference of the Southern African Development Community on solidarity with Western Sahara. International solidarity would help the people of Western Sahara to achieve freedom and independence.

75. **Mr. Dieng** (Observer for Senegal) said that his delegation welcomed the commitment of the parties to participate in a third round-table meeting, as called for in Security Council resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#), and supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative. The progress made by the Government of Morocco in terms of the promotion of human rights, democracy and socioeconomic development in Western Sahara was laudable. His delegation urged the member States of the Arab Maghreb Union to intensify their cooperation and thereby contribute to the stability and security of the Sahel.



*Hearing of interested bodies and individuals*

76. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with the Committee's usual practice, bodies and individuals granted a hearing would be invited to take a place at the table and all would withdraw after making their statements.

77. **Mr. Abba** said that he was speaking in his personal capacity as an elected Sahrawi representative in Laayoune-Sakia Al Hamra in Western Sahara. The region had experienced significant socioeconomic changes. It had been the first to apply advanced regionalization through the implementation of a new development model, which had given the people the means to administer their own affairs and realize their potential. Socioeconomic development had been promoted through the use of material, natural and human resources, structured programming, and the establishment of strategic objectives to strengthen competitiveness and decentralize administrative matters.

78. To implement the model, the region had committed to activating the regional development programme and mobilizing the necessary technical and financial resources. Among other goals, the programme aimed to strengthen infrastructure, create human and social development projects, improve access to health and education services and increase employment opportunities for young people. It also aimed to make the best use of natural resources and consolidate mechanisms for using Sahrawi patrimony as a lever of development. The 2016–2021 programme spanned various sectors and had created 600 jobs a year.

79. One of the major objectives of the local council to which he had been elected was to double gross domestic product through job creation so that the Sahara population could benefit from their own resources. Representatives like him were legally and democratically mandated to listen to the people and promote their welfare: they were therefore legitimate representatives of Moroccan Sahara in the region.

80. **Ms. Bahiya** said that she was speaking in her personal capacity as a Sahrawi elected member for the region of Dakhla-Oued Eddahab. As a young woman, she was representative of the 30 per cent of women and 20 per cent of young people who had been elected to the regional council, illustrating the participation of those groups in the political life of the Kingdom of Morocco.

81. Significant socioeconomic progress had been made thanks to the 2015–2021 development programme for the southern provinces, through which 700 projects were being implemented with a total budget of

\$8 billion. The programme rested on four pillars: revitalized economic growth; inclusive human development; sustainable territorial development; and culture as a lever of development. The achievements to date made the autonomy plan more likely to succeed and the financial commitment was significant: in 2019, 93 projects had been launched with a budget of \$1.7 billion. The majority of the flagship projects announced were already being implemented.

82. The progress made in the region was sustainable and irreversible; it benefited the local population and aimed to establish the region as a platform for trade and as an intra-Africa link and with the rest of the world. The projects were also intended to prepare the ground for Sahrawi brothers and sisters to return to the motherland, Morocco, with dignity and respect for their rights and able to enjoy democracy, prosperity and socioeconomic freedom.

83. **Mr. Omar** (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO)) said that the Frente POLISARIO was the sole legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara. The United Nations did not recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the occupied parts of Western Sahara. It had been made clear in General Assembly resolutions [34/37](#) and [35/19](#) that Morocco was an occupying power. In 2002, the then Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs had stated in an advisory opinion that the Madrid Accord “did not transfer sovereignty over the Territory, nor did it confer upon any of the signatories the status of an administering Power” ([S/2002/161](#)). Essentially, Morocco wished the international community to accept the occupation and annexation of parts of the Territory as a *fait accompli*. Instead, the people of Western Sahara should be given the opportunity to exercise its right to self-determination and independence.

84. **Mr. Sghayer** (Sahrawi Association in the USA (SAUSA)) said that thousands of young people had fallen victim to the illegitimate Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara and that the whereabouts of hundreds of people who had been abducted over the previous 40 years remained unknown. Human rights violations, including torture, detention in secret prisons and the imprisonment of political detainees, continued unabated in the Territory. Many young Sahrawis also faced discrimination in employment and some chose to flee the Territory by sea. The mandate of MINURSO should be broadened to include monitoring of the human rights situation in Western Sahara and the Committee should send another fact-finding mission to the Territory.

85. **Mr. Rodríguez Martínez** (International Student Committee) said that students around the world were

questioning why the issue of Western Sahara remained unresolved after so many years and for how long economic interests would continue to take precedence over human rights.

86. Self-determination should apply in the case of Western Sahara, given that it had a territory, a population and political organization. Despite its name, MINURSO referred only to a consultative referendum. The Special Committee existed to provide a diplomatic and political solution to such issues but United Nations mechanisms must not be used as a means of avoiding finding solutions.

87. The International Student Committee had decided to fund the university studies of young people from Western Sahara, whose fundamental right to an education was currently limited. If the Special Committee was unable to find an effective solution that would prevent more deaths and the imprisonment of innocent people who were only asking for the freedom to choose, the next generation would have to take action.

88. **Ms. Hmyene** (Association for the Freedom of Women Sequestered in the Tindouf Camps) said that the refugee camps of Tindouf had been subjected to a wave of repression between March and May 2019, provoking protests against arbitrary restrictions imposed by the Frente POLISARIO on the movement of vehicles and persons in and out of the camps. That raised questions about the responsibility under international law of the host country for shielding the Sahrawi people present in its territory from rights violations perpetrated by the Frente POLISARIO and the duty of care of UNHCR.

89. The restrictions had led to a reduction in the movement of vehicles within and outside the camps of more than 70 per cent and the arrest of many opponents of the Frente POLISARIO who had attempted to escape. Groups of camp residents had responded with strikes and protests. One such protest in the camp of Rabouni had been put down by armed soldiers with excessive violence. Numerous people had been wounded and arrested as a result. Some of the latter had been tortured in a prison 13 km from the camp. Journalists, bloggers and protesters in the camps were subject to intimidation and threats to family members. Some had been abducted.

90. **Mr. Bendriss** (Association for the Support of the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative) said that the Security Council had repeatedly welcomed the Moroccan autonomy initiative as a serious and credible means of achieving a definitive solution to the dispute. The initiative, which was fully compliant with international law and largely open to negotiation, would allow the people of the Moroccan Sahara region to manage their

affairs with their own democratically elected legislative and executive bodies, under the sovereignty of a united Morocco. Any outcome other than autonomy would risk instability and prolong the suffering of the people living in the Tindouf camps.

91. **Ms. Kriska** (Organization for Ending Human Rights Violations in Tindouf Camps) said that people, especially women, living in the Tindouf refugee camps were exposed to egregious human rights violations, including abduction, sexual abuse and torture. The armed militia of the Frente POLISARIO controlled the camps, to which NGOs and members of the free press were denied access. No census had ever been taken of the camp populations. International aid meant for them was being seized by the Frente POLISARIO, sold in regional markets and used to enrich POLISARIO officials. Slavery was rife and children were abducted for military training. The international community must put a stop to the crimes against humanity being perpetrated in the camps.

*The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.*