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

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 18 February 2000, at 10.30 a.m.

Temporary Chairman:

Ms. FRECHETTE
(Deputy Secretary-General)

Chairman:

Mr. DONIGI

(Papua New Guinea)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION BY THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN said that, in the final year of the International Decade of Colonialism, the Special Committee on decolonization would have particularly important work to perform, as it assessed progress and charted the course of its future work to support the aspirations of the peoples of the 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. The General Assembly had stressed the importance of the participation of the administering Powers in the work of the Special Committee and had noted with satisfaction that some administering Powers were already participating, while others had agreed to work informally with the Committee, a welcome sign that should give renewed impetus to its efforts. With good faith shown by all parties, it should be possible to develop a programme of work for each Non-Self-Governing Territory before the end of the year and to make lasting progress towards implementation of the Declaration on decolonization.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

2. Mr. Donigi (Papua New Guinea) was elected Chairman, Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué (Côte d'Ivoire) were elected Vice-Chairmen and Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

3. Mr. Donigi (Papua New Guinea) took the chair.

4. The CHAIRMAN said that the Special Committee had made significant advances in 1999. It had carried out a critical review of its work, discussed informal papers on its conceptual framework, objectives and activities and made constructive recommendations to improve results. It had also begun holding informal meetings with the administering Powers, some of which had not been participating in recent meetings of the Special Committee. The delegations of the United Kingdom and the United States of America had expressed their desire to continue an informal dialogue with the Committee. The challenge for 2000 was to create a better environment for the administering Powers to participate actively and formally in the work relating to the Territories under their administration.

5. The Special Committee would continue to review developments in each Territory, with special attention to the problems of small island Territories. The most important challenge, as mandated by the General Assembly, was to develop a constructive programme of work on a case-by-case basis for the Non-Self-Governing Territories before the end of 2000. The Special Committee had identified specific Territories on which to begin and had established guidelines to follow. He would advocate beginning work as soon as possible on American Samoa and Pitcairn. The Committee looked forward to constructive engagement by the administering Powers and the representatives of the Territories. The programme of work for each Territory would be the first step towards enabling the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories to exercise their right of self-determination with complete knowledge and awareness of the full range of political options available to them.

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6. Other important activities during the year would be the Pacific region seminar to be held in May 2000 to pinpoint specific issues pertaining to Non-Self-Governing Territories in the Pacific region and to hear the concerns of representatives of the Territories and the views of experts and academics. The Special Committee would also be planning and, if time permitted, would hold a joint meeting with the Economic and Social Council during the year to consider measures for coordinating policies and activities with the specialized agencies and other bodies of the Council to implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions. In the final year of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the Special Committee should bear in mind the initiatives recommended in the plan of action for the Decade.

7. Ms. AKBAR (Antigua and Barbuda) said that her delegation regarded the work of the Special Committee as vital to the future political and constitutional development of the remaining, mostly small island, Non-Self-Governing Territories.

8. The Special Committee's ongoing consultations with the administering Powers in order to advance the process of self-determination must not cause it to overlook the need to engage the people of the Territories themselves. It was clear that existing modalities, including outmoded guidelines for assistance to territorial representatives in their participation in the work of the Special Committee, fell well short of what was required. Her delegation was of the view that the Special Committee already had a mandate for a more extensive dialogue with the people of the Territories. The Committee should offer observer status to the Governments of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, many of which already enjoyed associate member or observer status in other United Nations bodies and agencies.

9. On repeated occasions, the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda had stressed that, while the international community must remain flexible in its approach to assisting the Territories as they progressed, it must also ensure that their political status options remained in conformity with the legitimate choices of equality identified in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV). As a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), her delegation stood firm with the regional position in that regard and looked forward to working with the other members of the Special Committee in devising strategies to bring a full measure of self-government to the people of the remaining Territories under the purview of the Committee.

10. Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) said that his delegation was grateful to the African Group for supporting its candidacy and would do everything in its power to fulfil the Group's expectations and to assist the Chairman.

11. Mr. EGUIGUREN (Chile) said that the last year of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism was a critical one for the work of the Special Committee. It was disturbing to note that the historic process of decolonization under the auspices of the United Nations had lost its momentum since 1984. Recently, however, some important steps had been taken.

12. It was also a hopeful sign that the Special Committee had undertaken a critical review of its work the previous year and had invited the administering

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Powers to participate. The review had resulted in an informal agreement on a plan of action, the main outlines of which were reflected in General Assembly resolution 54/91. In particular, the General Assembly had requested the Special Committee to develop a constructive programme of work on a case-by-case basis for the Non-Self-Governing Territories before the end of 2000 and had called upon the administering Powers to cooperate fully with the Committee in that task.

13. The Committee was taking the challenge seriously, but could not achieve real progress without involving the administering Powers and without ascertaining the wishes and interests of the peoples of the Territories. It was a positive sign that a dialogue had been opened with some of the administering Powers, so that the Committee could keep informed of their views and, when helpful, present its vision of the approach to be taken with a given Territory. The experience of developing programmes of work for some of the Territories in the year ahead should help the Committee to plan its work for coming years.

14. Mr. DURING (Sierra Leone) said that his delegation was greatly appreciative of the manner in which the Chairman had led the Special Committee in the past and was committed to working with him again for a successful year 2000.

15. Mr. STANISLAUS (Grenada) said that leadership consisted more in persuasion than in preachment. His delegation welcomed the Chairman's uncontested re-election, so that he could exercise his persuasive, diplomatic and communicative skills to arrive at a good and just resolution to the impasse that had developed between the Committee and some of the administering Powers.

16. Mr. HUGHES (New Zealand) said that the Committee should be assured of his delegation's full cooperation in developing a constructive programme of work for the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Tokelau, for which his Government was responsible.

17. Ms. JOSEPH (Saint Lucia) said that, as a former Non-Self-Governing Territory, Saint Lucia recognized the importance of vigilance in assessing the intricacies of dependency arrangements. Rather than encourage mere "colonial reform", which might have the unintended effect of legitimizing modern-day colonial arrangements, the Committee must assist the Territories in their quest for full internal self-government through an act of self-determination, in which the United Nations should play an active part. It must not stray, for the sake of expediency, from the long-standing principle of complete equality for the people of the Territories, as called for in General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV).

18. Where the political education of the people of the Territories was deficient, the Committee should address the "democratic deficit" by raising their awareness of the available options of political equality and the tools for achieving it. Where economic and technical assistance was needed, the Committee should seek to involve other United Nations bodies and agencies to foster sustainable economic development. Full self-government for the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories was achievable, and Saint Lucia stood ready to work with the other members of the Committee to attain that goal.

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/AC.109/2000/L.1 and L.2)

19. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to a note by the Secretary-General (A/AC.109/2000/L.1) listing the resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly relevant to the work of the Special Committee and to a note by the Chairman (A/AC.109/2000/L.2) setting forth a tentative programme of work and timetable for 2000, prepared on the basis of past practice and consultations with all parties concerned. By concluding its work by 7 July 2000, as planned, the Special Committee would enable the Secretariat to make all the Committee's reports available to the General Assembly on schedule in the six official languages.

20. Mr. THEYAB (Indonesia) noted that in the list of pending matters for consideration by the Special Committee during 2000 in the note by the Chairman (A/AC.109/2000/L.2), the relevant General Assembly resolution (54/194) for East Timor had been omitted.

21. The CHAIRMAN said he took it that, with that correction, the Committee was prepared to adopt the proposed organization of its work for the current year.

22. It was so decided.

OTHER MATTERS

23. The CHAIRMAN said that, in strict compliance with General Assembly rules, Special Committee meetings would proceed without a quorum but would not take decisions. With regard to informal consultations, he suggested that they should be conducted as early as possible to continue the critical review begun the year before and to develop a plan of action for the Committee's work beyond the year 2000. He also intended to convene one or two informal meetings to consider issues related to the organization of the next regional seminar, including dates and venue. He also suggested that the Committee should authorize the Chairman to hold consultations concerning invitations and the level of representation in case of acceptance. In accordance with established practice, the Chairman would consult with the officers of the Committee, who in turn would consult with Committee members from their respective regional groups, and the Chairman would consult directly with those members whose regional group was not represented among the officers. The principle of rotation would also be taken into consideration.

24. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.