



# General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 3 October 2019, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Bahr Aluloom ..... (Iraq)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

#### **Agenda item 5: Election of the officers of the Main Committees**

1. **The Chair** said that the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States had nominated Mr. Benard Estrada (Guatemala) for the office of Rapporteur for the seventy-fourth session.

2. *Mr. Benard Estrada (Guatemala) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

#### **Organization of work (A/74/250; A/C.4/74/1; A/C.4/74/INF/1 and A/C.4/74/INF/4; A/C.4/71/L.1)**

3. **The Chair** drew attention to the agenda items allocated to the Committee (A/C.4/74/1), to the list of documents before the Committee (A/C.4/74/INF/1) and to the Committee's proposed programme of work (A/C.4/74/L.1). He then drew attention to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly regarding the work of the Main Committees, as contained in the report of the General Committee (A/74/250) and in Assembly decision 34/401 and resolution 49/221 B.

4. The Committee would continue the practice of holding interactive dialogues under the agenda items relating to outer space, information, mine action, peacekeeping, special political missions, the effects of atomic radiation, as well as to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

5. He took it that the Committee wished to approve the proposed programme of work (A/C.4/74/L.1).

6. *It was so decided.*

7. **The Chair** said that, as at previous sessions, the Committee would set up a working group of the whole to prepare draft resolutions for submission under agenda item 49, entitled "International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space". The working group would be chaired by the delegation of Brazil in its capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. He took it that the Committee wished to establish the group.

8. *It was so decided.*

9. **The Chair** noted that, in approving its programme of work, the Committee had decided to hold one general debate covering all agenda items relating to decolonization, namely items 55 to 59, enabling

members to speak on any or all of those agenda items at any meeting devoted to the topic.

#### **Requests for hearing**

10. **The Chair** informed the Committee that he had received 180 communications containing requests for hearing relating to the questions of French Polynesia, Gibraltar, Guam, New Caledonia and Western Sahara under item 59.

11. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) said that, since the Committee's establishment, his delegation had yet to oppose the participation of any petitioner in its proceedings, as the Moroccan tradition of respect for freedom of expression and dialogue was a time-honoured one. Indeed, Morocco defended the right to express differing views freely, provided that those views were germane to the topic of discussion. However, according to information obtained by his delegation, two of the petitioners on the list contained in the aide-memoire before the Committee, namely Karim Chana and Mohamed Hicham Radoui, were requesting to take the floor not to express their views on the agenda item at hand but instead driven by political motivations that had no bearing on the topic. In order to preserve the Committee's mandate and credibility, it must not be allowed to become a platform for topics not on the agenda or exploited for ends other than those for which it had been established. Over the previous two sessions, just such a trend had begun to emerge, with petitioners realizing that they could make use of their allotted time to say whatever they wished, even discussing the internal affairs of sovereign States. Without wishing to censor anyone, his delegation merely hoped to ensure that petitioners addressed the topics that they had signed up to address, thereby preserving a climate of calm, serenity and respect for diverging opinions. He therefore proposed that the Committee remove the two petitioners' names from the list of petitioners requesting to speak on the issue of Moroccan Sahara.

12. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that, to his knowledge, petitioners wishing to be included on the list of participants in Committee proceedings were required to attach a letter addressed to the Secretariat to their applications. However, he had recently learned that that was no longer the case. He would therefore appreciate clarification on the legal basis for the change in practice.

13. **Mr. Soumah** (Guinea) said that it was vital for the Committee to grasp fully the current situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. That said, when hearing the accounts given by petitioners, the Committee must not be led astray by debates inviting consideration of matters unrelated to those at hand. He

therefore endorsed the proposal made by the delegation of Morocco concerning the two petitioners, so as not to introduce extraneous matters or establish precedents that might affect the sovereignty of Member States.

14. **Ms. Sharma** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the process of applications from petitioners had been made electronic in 2017 in order to improve its efficiency. Prior to that switch, petitioners had submitted written applications to the Committee secretariat, accompanied by a letter to the Chair of the Committee specifying the Non-Self-Governing Territory whose situation they wished to address. That choice was now communicated electronically, with petitioners selecting the Territory in a drop-down menu in the online application, so the letter was no longer required for that purpose. Petitioners could select only one Territory. Member States had been aware of the process, which had been instituted by the Committee secretariat in consultation with the Bureau, as had the decision that year to no longer require submission of the letter.

15. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), expressing appreciation for the clarification provided by the Secretary, said that it remained his delegation's understanding that a copy of the letter addressed to the Chair of the Committee by a petitioner must be attached to the petitioner's application. He wondered how a Committee member could possibly know the content or intent of a given petitioner's contribution or oppose that petitioner's participation under the new method, in which petitioners simply selected the Territory in question online. Moreover, that change in Committee procedure, a change his delegation had not been apprised of, should have been raised in the Committee plenary meeting, not only in consultation with the Bureau as had been the case. As in any United Nations entity, the rules of procedure must be respected. For its part, his delegation had no objection, as there was no indication of the subject matter that the petitioners in question would be addressing. The appended letter was necessary in order to shed light on the nature of a particular petitioner's intervention. Dispensing with that requirement gave the appearance that something was being concealed, an act contrary to the Committee's desire to operate in a transparent manner.

16. **The Chair** said that the concerns raised by the representative of Algeria would be taken into consideration.

17. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that in the absence of letters or other materials provided in support of a petitioner's application, it would be impossible for the Committee to ascertain the content of a given

petitioner's remarks in advance and, by extension, to assess the basis for a particular delegation's objection to that petitioner's participation. The Committee must be provided with a clearer basis for such objections; otherwise, any delegation would have the right to oppose a particular petitioner's participation.

18. **The Chair** enquired whether the representative of Algeria had an objection to the proposal not to include the two petitioners in question on the list.

19. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that his delegation did not object to the proposal per se but rather to the procedural matter at hand and its implications for the future. Henceforth, any petitioner submitting an application could have it rejected. The Committee must have a way of knowing in advance what the content of a given petitioner's remarks would be in order to determine whether those remarks pertained to the agenda item he or she came to address. There were no guarantees that a petitioner would address the agenda item. The letter to the Chair of the Committee would have provided a means of clarifying the matter. At the present stage, the Committee had no information indicating that the petitioners in question would restrict themselves to the agenda item they wished to discuss or go beyond the scope of the discussion. Ultimately, it was the Chair's duty to ask petitioners doing the latter, when a delegation objected to their remarks, to either confine themselves to the scope of the discussion or risk being asked to stop speaking.

20. **The Chair** took it that the Committee agreed not to include Karim Chana, representing Democracy Instance for Citizenship and Human Rights, and Mohamed Hicham Radoui, representing Moroccan Republicans, in the official document of the Committee containing requests for hearing on the question of Western Sahara.

21. *It was so decided.*

22. **The Chair** suggested that, in accordance with the usual practice, the communications should be circulated as Committee documents for consideration at the subsequent meeting.

23. *It was so decided.*

24. **The Chair** said that he had also received communications from the President of French Polynesia, the Deputy Chief Minister of Gibraltar and the Lieutenant Governor of Guam, who wished to address the Committee under agenda item 59. Their statements would be scheduled accordingly.

*The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.*