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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 8th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 25 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.

Question of Montserrat (A/AC.109/2019/10, A/AC.109/2019/L.17)

1. **The Chair** drew attention to the working paper prepared by the Secretariat on Montserrat (A/AC.109/2019/10) and to a draft resolution on the question of Montserrat (A/AC.109/2019/L.17).

2. **Mr. Romeo** (Premier of Montserrat) said that the volcanic eruption of June 1997 in Montserrat had occurred 22 years previously on that very day, killing 19 people. To speak before the Committee on that anniversary was highly symbolic, as he himself had borne witness to the start of what was an ongoing tragedy. The aftermath of that event remained a present reality for the people of Montserrat, as they continued to live with the human-caused consequences of a natural disaster.

3. In 1998, an investigation had concluded that the Governments of the United Kingdom and Montserrat had contributed to the deaths of 11 people, owing to the failure of local and British authorities to provide alternative land in safe zones for farmers; the deplorable conditions in the public shelters that had led many to remain in the danger zone; and the continued operation of the airport, located in the path of the volcano, despite elevated volcanic activity in the days preceding the eruption. It had also been noted that, despite the urgent need for land and housing in the safe zone, the response by the United Kingdom Government had been inadequate. Montserrat had been described as an imperilled society, to which the normal rules could not be applied.

4. By the time the United Kingdom Government had begun funding housing projects in the safe zone, thousands of homeless citizens of Montserrat were already fleeing the island, to Antigua and Barbuda and the United Kingdom. While the needs of evacuees to the United Kingdom had been and continued to be met, those remaining in Montserrat continued to struggle on a regime of aid that was kept at the survival level, which contributed to ongoing population losses, particularly of young persons.

5. The Government of Montserrat had consistently remained 60 per cent dependent on the United Kingdom for its recurrent budget and over 90 per cent dependent for its capital budget over the previous 20 years. Despite £500 million of aid over the years, mostly consisting of basic annual budget support, the pattern of delays to essential projects continued. Responsibility should be shared between the Governments of Montserrat and the United Kingdom, the latter having breached the legally

binding mandate of Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations. The tendency to construct inadequate, temporary and inappropriate infrastructure, such as the new airport, substandard housing and one sole secondary school compound, had engendered present and future burdens on the Government and people of Montserrat. Inadequate social welfare benefits had been put in place for vulnerable senior citizens and for a fraction of the working poor, who were often single mothers. Meanwhile, salaries for public servants had remained fixed, despite accumulating inflation, leading to a steady brain drain that mostly benefited the United Kingdom.

6. The Government of Montserrat had insufficient funds to maintain its own buildings and social housing. Year after year, spending that could address such challenges was denied, preventing his Government from fulfilling its legally binding responsibilities. The United Kingdom Government had nonetheless agreed to £30 million of funding for a hospital and health-care programme, housing and improvements to schools and infrastructure, among other measures, and had jointly funded a £21.5 million port development project with the European Union. However, that had come after a 22-year struggle and with no commitment to addressing the shortfall of other basic development needs.

7. He was grateful for the pivotal General Assembly resolution 73/114 on Montserrat and for the agreement of the United Kingdom Government to a visiting mission by the Special Committee, which would allow the unfiltered voices of the people of Montserrat to be heard. He requested that the Committee assist his Government, in coordination with the Government of the United Kingdom, in its efforts to move out of dependence and colonial rule towards democratic self-government and to establish programmes, plans and mechanisms to address the ongoing domestic challenges that Montserrat faced.

8. Volcanic activity had declined significantly, and millions of tons of sand had been harnessed through geothermal power. The natural environment of Montserrat remained as beautiful as ever. All that remained was for the Governments of Montserrat and the United Kingdom, with the Committee's assistance, to work together to turn the current tragedy into a triumph of good will.

9. Lastly, he requested that the planned visits take place in August or early September of that year. He also asked for the Committee to seriously consider visiting Montserratians located in Antigua and Barbuda and in the United Kingdom, where over three-quarters of the indigenous population resided, many of whom wished

to return, including young people who had gained skills and education.

10. **Mr. Webson** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the Committee had heard the voice of the Premier of Montserrat and respected his participation in recent years. The planned visits were a direct response to his appeal and the pleas of the people of Montserrat that he had set out would be discussed and supported. Moreover, the plight and the refugee situation of Montserratians were recognized and would be addressed in collaboration with the administrative Power.

11. Antigua and Barbuda acknowledged its relationship and sense of unity with Montserrat, having been a recipient of many of its citizens over many years; its commitment to working with that country was ongoing. The Committee, working together with the United Kingdom, the administrative Power, would heed the comments made by the Premier as part of its work towards self-determination for Montserrat and for all countries.

12. **Mr. Aleksaev** (Russian Federation) said that, with regard to the second request made by the Premier of Montserrat, a letter should be prepared and addressed to the Chair of the Committee, detailing the nature of the request and what had prompted it. It should also provide details on any action being taken by the administering Power to help resolve that issue. Consideration of such a letter by the Committee would be important ahead of discussions on the issue of Montserrat.

13. **Mr. Romeo** (Premier of Montserrat) said that he would provide the letter as requested. He thanked the Government of Antigua and Barbuda for hosting Montserratians for over 20 years, initially in their thousands. However, they currently numbered less than 500, as most had moved to the United Kingdom. A visit should be organized to Antigua and Barbuda to support its Government with the strain on their welfare services, with which his Government was unable to assist.

14. **The Chair** said that, in order to give the Committee the opportunity to consider the comments made at the current meeting, the decision on the draft resolution would be postponed to Thursday, 27 June 2019.

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

15. **Mr. Shingiro** (Observer for Burundi) said that the growing instability and lack of security in the Sahel and surrounding regions made tackling the long-standing conflict in Western Sahara a matter of urgency, especially because it was hindering the further

integration of the Maghreb that had become all the more indispensable.

16. His delegation supported the political process on Western Sahara, held under the exclusive auspices of the United Nations on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions adopted since 2007, including Security Council resolution 2468 (2019). Negotiations involved both human and political factors, and the Secretary-General should keep striving for improved relations between the two parties directly concerned. His delegation welcomed the fresh momentum created by the two round-table meetings that aimed to find a swift political solution to the regional dispute in accordance with Security Council resolutions 2414 (2018) and 2440 (2018), as well as the commitment by the four participants to meet for a third round-table meeting.

17. A definitive political solution, based on realism and a spirit of compromise, must be reached; efforts by Morocco were commendable in that regard. Enhanced cooperation between the member States of the Arab Maghreb Union would contribute to stability and security in the Sahel region. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was a compromise solution that conformed with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions. The development model for the Sahara launched by Morocco in 2015 was also encouraging.

18. **Ms. Hamad** (Observer for Bahrain) said that her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's continued efforts to resume negotiations towards a definitive solution to the question of Western Sahara on the basis of Security Council resolution 2468 (2019) and other relevant resolutions. Bahrain supported the legitimate rights of the Kingdom of Morocco over its southern regions, based on the principle of autonomy, as well as efforts by that country to find a political solution in the context of the sovereignty of Morocco and its new development model for the region. Her country would remain in solidarity with Morocco in confronting any attempt to violate its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

19. **Mr. Yabou** (Observer for the Gambia) said that his delegation welcomed the sustained, positive and constructive engagement and cooperation of all the relevant stakeholders, particularly that of Morocco, in the ongoing political negotiations. The prolonged dispute over Moroccan Sahara must be resolved through constructive political dialogue. The commitment by Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) to hold a third round-table

meeting was therefore commendable. His delegation supported the ongoing political process towards a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, spearheaded by the United Nations, and welcomed the recommendations contained in Security Council resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#).

20. The Moroccan autonomy initiative presented a viable solution that took into consideration the desire for self-determination and presented a realistic, credible compromise solution to end the dispute. That solution also took into account the fulfilment of the political, economic, social and cultural rights and aspirations of the population of the Sahara, in line with international obligations. The development model launched by Morocco in 2015 was also a clear demonstration of that country's commitment to bring investment, infrastructure and socioeconomic development to the population of the Sahara.

21. Efforts to resolve the dispute must be strengthened and involve the cooperation of all stakeholders, as the existing threats in the Sahel region must not be exacerbated. It was encouraging that Morocco had ensured that the regional commissions had remained active and impactful by working in full cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The current dialogue and commitment demonstrated by the concerned parties would increase the prospects for peaceful resolution of the dispute over Moroccan Sahara.

22. **Ms. Ngyema Ndong** (Observer for Gabon) said that Gabon fully supported the political process on the question of Western Sahara under the aegis of the United Nations, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#). The Moroccan autonomy initiative was a credible, compromise solution that was both pragmatic and essential in resolving the dispute in conformity with international law. It took into account regional specificities, ensured the involvement of local populations and was the result of an inclusive consultation process.

23. Her delegation supported efforts by Morocco to implement a development plan that would improve the quality of life of the Saharan population and would grant them autonomy and access to regional resources. The two round-table meetings held between the main parties concerned and the third scheduled meeting were all welcome, as dialogue was the only way to reach a rapid political solution to the regional dispute.

24. **Mr. Ousseini** (Observer for Comoros) said that the recurring issues of decolonization and territorial integrity continued to drive debate and lead to conflict,

to the detriment of populations and the credibility of the Organization. His delegation firmly supported the political process in Western Sahara, led under the auspices of the United Nations on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, and welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#).

25. The two round-table meetings held between Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the Frente POLISARIO were welcome, as was their commitment to a third round-table meeting, which should be based on realism and compromise. Furthermore, the Moroccan autonomy initiative paved the way for a positive resolution and was in line with international standards in terms of devolution of power to local populations through the organization of democratic local elections, underscoring the voluntary and inclusive nature of the process.

26. Development in the Sahara must be accompanied by scrupulous respect for human rights and effective management of the refugee situation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees must be able to act effectively and freely within the framework of its mandate. The situation in the Tindouf camps was particularly concerning, with refugees struggling to register themselves in accordance with their rights under international humanitarian law.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.