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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 1475th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Monday, 16 June 1997 at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. SAMANA

(Papua New Guinea)

CONTENTS

QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

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

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Fredriksson (Seeds of Hope East Timor Ploughshares Group), Mr. Ramos-Horta (Recipient, 1996 Nobel Peace Prize), Mr. Gunn (Free East Timor Japan Coalition), Mr. Pinto (National Council of Maubere Resistance), Ms. Sissons (Hobart East Timor Committee), Ms. Coon (International Platform of Jurists for East Timor), Mr. Alkatiri (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente), Mr. Ware (Auckland East Timor Independence Committee), Mr. Miclat (Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor), Ms. Jones (Human Rights Watch/Asia), Mr. Araujo (Timor Foundation for Reconciliation and Development), Mr. Pereira (Timorese Youth for Reconciliation), Ms. Neves (Kdadalak Cultural Group), Mr. Araujo (Movement for the Support of Intra-Timorese Dialogue) and Ms. Soares (East Timor Cultural and Ethnic Research Centre) took places at the petitioners' table.

2. Ms. FREDRIKSSON (Seeds of Hope East Timor Ploughshares Group) said that in East Timor, as a result of illegal occupation by Indonesia, international humanitarian laws were being breached with impunity; Governments and corporations were ignoring human rights considerations for their own strategic ends and for access to oil, gold and timber. The United Kingdom Government had sold weapons to Indonesia and was continuing to trade with Indonesia, knowing full well the horror of the repression and the human, social and environmental damage that was being done by Indonesia with the support of United Kingdom-owned transnational corporations.

3. For the past 20 years campaigners had worked hard, with little success, to persuade the international community to stop the slaughter and abuses in Indonesian-controlled territories. Against that background, four members of the Seeds of Hope East Timor Ploughshares Group had entered a factory where a British Aerospace Hawk aircraft was awaiting export to the Indonesian counter-insurgency squadron at Bandung and had damaged and disarmed the aircraft to prevent its delivery. The group had been charged with criminal damage but had been acquitted by the Liverpool Crown Court in July 1996 on the grounds that the act was justifiable, as it had been carried out in order to prevent international crime, and therefore that the damage caused was not criminal damage. The petitions and demonstrations around the trial and the ultimate decision of the jury had shown the tremendous public support for the East Timorese and their right of self-determination.

4. Indonesia had ignored or broken nearly every major law of war and law on human rights. The Indonesian armed forces had violated East Timor's right to self-determination by invading East Timor in 1975; Indonesia continued to breach international law with equipment and weapons supplied by British Aerospace. The United Kingdom Government and British Aerospace were profiting by selling Hawk aircraft to Indonesia while knowing full well that the aircraft would be used to commit war crimes; they were therefore complicit in the crimes committed by

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Indonesia. Indonesia's political and economic influence had protected it from widespread criticism over the years. Active participation by ordinary people was necessary to remind Governments and companies that people's lives must be protected and horrendous crimes must be stopped. It was to be hoped that the new United Kingdom Government would support a proper process of decolonization for East Timor and the removal of the Indonesian troops from East Timor so that the people could gain full self-determination and independence.

5. Mr. RAMOS-HORTA (Recipient, 1996 Nobel Peace Prize) said that over the past 20 years, the world had undergone many upheavals, but one truth had survived the test of time, namely, that no amount of force could crush the will and spirit of a people. Time and again it had been demonstrated that the use of force and violence could not resolve conflicts that were eminently political, economic and social, or prevent the disintegration of regimes based on fear and repression.

6. Of the Portuguese overseas Territories listed in General Assembly resolution 1542 (XV), all had attained independence with the exception of East Timor. As long as Indonesian troops remained in East Timor, no valid act of self-determination could be undertaken. He expressed appreciation to Portugal for its unrelenting efforts to discharge its responsibilities towards the colonized people of East Timor. All the parties involved must be represented, and the views of non-governmental organizations must also be taken into account. It was commendable that when the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General had travelled to Portugal, Indonesia and East Timor in March 1997 he had held extensive consultations with non-governmental organizations and had met with Xanana Gusmão, the imprisoned East Timorese leader.

7. The United Nations itself, Portugal, Indonesia, Australia, the United States of America, Japan and the East Timorese political leaders must share responsibility for the tragedy which had afflicted the people of East Timor. It served no purpose to put the blame on one side or the other. All parties must observe restraint and cooperate fully with the Secretary-General in his efforts to bring about a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the problem of East Timor.

8. He condemned all attacks on East Timorese civilians, collaborators or civil servants and all physical abuse, killing or humiliation of Indonesian civilian personnel, migrants, their families or Indonesian military personnel in non-combat posts. The best response to allegations by one side or the other was to conduct an international investigation. The escalation of violence in East Timor over the past few months, initiated by the Indonesian forces, had provoked a coordinated guerrilla attack throughout the country; there was now a spiral of violence in which the victims were always the defenceless East Timorese population.

9. Indonesian troop presence in East Timor must be reduced to a minimal level, and the remaining troops must be confined to their barracks. East Timorese resistance fighters must observe a cessation of all armed activities. A protection zone should be created in an agreed region of East Timor where the armed resistance forces and their families could assemble under international humanitarian protection. Prisoners must be released, and torture must end.

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10. A representative office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should be established in East Timor; such an office could serve as a useful bridge of communication between the local people and the authorities and could facilitate dialogue and mediate local conflicts. It should also provide training in international human rights and humanitarian law for law enforcement agents, the armed forces and the police, as well as members of civil society.

11. The East Timorese must be given the right to govern their own country. The legal status of the Territory could be determined at a later stage. Indonesia, which in its own struggle for independence had had the full support of the United Nations, must now cooperate fully with the United Nations.

12. Mr. GUNN (Free East Timor Japan Coalition) said that in urging the Committee to adopt an active and interventionist approach to the question of East Timor, he was motivated by concern that no internationally acceptable act of self-determination had occurred in East Timor, despite the Indonesian rhetoric of cooperation with the United Nations, the situation on the ground continued to deteriorate, and there was no evidence that the occupying country was loosening its iron grip. The violence surrounding the conduct of general elections inside East Timor on 29 May 1997 was indicative of the extent of the problem. It would be a travesty of truth and law if the Committee were to accept the arguments of the representative of Indonesia that self-determination had already taken place and that the process of integration of East Timor had culminated in the ceremony of 31 May 1976 in Dili. Not one step in Indonesia's attempt to integrate East Timor administratively had received the imprimatur of the Secretary-General, the Security Council or the Special Committee.

13. The Committee must set in motion the machinery to ascertain the wishes of the East Timorese as to their political future, including the wishes of those driven into the worldwide diaspora as victims of documented human rights abuses. A referendum should be organized, on the basis of the experience gained from the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, so as to tailor a United Nations presence inside occupied East Timor to match that country's language and traditions. Because of the extreme levels of militarization in East Timor under Indonesian occupation, a United Nations transitional authority would need to be established in East Timor. The Committee must re-internationalize the problem of East Timor and lend its authority to an international effort to rebuild civil society and indigenous institutions. As a first step, a permanent presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was needed, not just in Jakarta but also in Dili, as part of a broad peace package.

14. There was a tendency to ridicule defenders of East Timor as somehow ignorant of East Timor's history or unqualified to make judgements. An independent body of documented research on East Timor had emerged over the past 20 years, however. No one could be duped by the Indonesian public relations machinery and manipulation of information.

15. Mr. PINTO (National Council of Maubere Resistance) said that he had been a political prisoner in Dili, East Timor, and the organizer of the peaceful demonstration of 12 November 1991 in which over 271 people had been killed by the Indonesian army. In 1991, he had been one of the most wanted men in East

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Timor, and in 1992, he had been forced to leave East Timor and seek refuge in Portugal. He was currently the representative of the National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM) to the United Nations and the United States of America. CNRM was an umbrella organization based in East Timor; it was a unifying, non-partisan body bringing together the Timorese political forces, the Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN), the Fuerzas Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste (FALINTIL) and non-political organizations struggling for the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination.

16. The Indonesian Government had repeatedly argued that East Timor was a poor country which it was helping to develop, and that the Timorese had already had a referendum under the so-called declaration of Balibo. That declaration had been repeatedly discredited by its signatories. The East Timorese nation-State had a distinct character from Indonesia. East Timor was at the crossroads of three major cultures and religions: Melanesian, Malay-Polynesian and European. It was potentially self-sufficient in most agricultural goods and had large reserves of oil, natural gas and other minerals. If cultural values, language, religion and economic resources were prerequisites for the formation of a nation-State, East Timor had favourable conditions to be an independent country. In any case, according to General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence.

17. CNRM envisioned an independent and democratic East Timor based on the rule of law, emanating from the will of the people expressed through free elections. It also believed in a liberal international economic system. After independence, economic resources would be channelled into food production for the population. Government policies would be a result of close consultation with the people in each region, town and village. Significant investment would be made to provide free education and health care for the population. A general amnesty and national reconciliation would be proclaimed; the East Timor church would be expected to play a major role in the healing process. The issues of resettlement of displaced persons and compensation for lost property would need to be addressed. Indonesian settlers in East Timor who were willing to abide by East Timorese laws and live in harmony as members of society would be welcome to stay.

18. In connection with the right of self-determination of the East Timorese people, he noted that the Committee had discussed the conflict on more than 20 occasions since Indonesia's invasion of East Timor. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to two East Timorese in 1996 had further emphasized that right, and had also reflected the Nobel Committee's belief that by recognizing it, the Indonesian Government's violations of human rights in East Timor would end. Instead, however, the frequency of arrests, torture and other human rights violations in East Timor had increased, along with that of attacks on Indonesian police and soldiers by the Fuerzas Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste (FALINTIL).

19. The Indonesian military had retaliated with numerous arrests, but had subsequently claimed to have released most of those arrested; on the other hand, FALINTIL had reported that many more civilians had been arrested and a number of

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them had been killed by the military. Furthermore, torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners in police or military custody were routine in East Timor, and he offered a brief account of his own experiences in that regard.

20. In view of the terror and uncertainty faced by the people of East Timor, he urged the United Nations to send human rights observers there without further delay, and called for a political settlement to end human rights abuses and recognize the right of the East Timorese people to self-determination.

21. Ms. SISSONS (Hobart East Timor Committee) said that the East Timorese were suffering discrimination on grounds of race, gender and religion.

22. The delay in the international community's reaction to Indonesia's invasion of East Timor had been due to an underlying racism which assumed that the East Timorese, being non-white, did not deserve respect, and that the Indonesians, also being non-white, could not be expected to behave with restraint and decency. Moreover, the behaviour of Indonesia itself was racially discriminatory, as the East Timorese were culturally, ethnically and linguistically distinct from most Indonesians.

23. Gender-based discrimination had been a fundamental element of the process by which Indonesia had annexed East Timor, a process from which women had been completely excluded. Moreover, East Timorese women had suffered calculated abuse by the Indonesians as a direct result of the importance of their role in East Timorese society. The international community, too, had largely ignored the Indonesian policy of using rape as a weapon of terror against the population, as it had ignored the existence and problems of the resulting children. In so doing, it had effectively permitted and endorsed a gross and continuing act of discrimination against the women and girls of East Timor, which the United Nations should take active steps to rectify.

24. Although Catholicism and the indigenous animist religion of East Timor had peacefully coexisted for centuries, the Indonesians had outlawed animism following their invasion and tortured or killed people they suspected of practising it. The courage and compassion of the Catholics in providing protection to East Timor's animists were to be applauded, but should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Indonesia had engaged in serious religious discrimination against the people of East Timor.

25. Although the 1960 United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples clearly stated that all powers were to be transferred to the peoples or Trust of Non-Self-Governing Territories without any distinction as to race, creed or colour, Indonesia, with the implicit consent of the international community, had grossly discriminated against the people of East Timor on the grounds of race, gender and creed. The Committee should vigilantly and energetically ensure that the provisions of that Declaration were fully respected and carried out in East Timor.

26. Ms. COON (International Platform of Jurists for East Timor (IPJET)) said that despite the awarding of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize to two East Timorese activists, as well as calls from many quarters for the United Nations to sponsor a referendum for the East Timorese people to choose their own government, the

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repression of that people continued under Indonesian rule. IPJET was particularly concerned about the head of Indonesia's largest trade union, who had been arrested in July 1996 after expressing support for self-determination in East Timor, and who remained in detention despite his need for urgent medical care. Moreover, Indonesia had recently increased its troop strength in East Timor despite repeated United Nations resolutions calling for their withdrawal, and had reinstated a ban on visits to East Timor by foreign journalists. Reported ongoing arrests and executions there would thus go unmonitored by independent observers.

27. Indonesia had attempted to defend its occupation of East Timor by claiming that the territory had benefited from economic development, but the policies governing that development reserved its benefits for an Indonesian elite outside the territory. Indonesian migration and land acquisition were marginalizing the East Timorese, and Indonesian development in the territory was taking place largely at the expense of indigenous economic pursuits. IPJET was also concerned about the complicity of some States in the exploitation of East Timorese resources without its people's consent, and about ongoing military aid and arms sales to Indonesia by many nations. International aid should not support human rights violations and the repression of an entire people.

28. Mr. ALKATARI (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN)) said that while most of the Portuguese-administered territories formally listed in General Assembly resolution 1542 (XV) as candidates for self-determination had since gained their independence and become members of the Organization, Indonesia had interfered with Portugal's decolonization process in East Timor by invading that territory and maintaining an illegal occupation of it at great political, legal and human cost. United Nations General Assembly and Security Council resolutions had consistently called for the withdrawal of Indonesian forces from East Timor, and had continued to recognize it as a Non-Self-Governing Territory under Portuguese administration.

29. After nearly 22 years of illegal occupation, however, the international community was gradually awakening to the possibility that Indonesia's annexation of East Timor was reversible. That awakening was due in part to Indonesia's escalating violence in perpetuating its annexation, and in part to the East Timorese people's ongoing quest for a negotiated settlement.

30. Indonesia remained inflexible, insisting that East Timor's decolonization had been completed with its integration into the Republic of Indonesia and claiming that the concerns expressed on the topic by various United Nations bodies constituted meddling in its internal affairs. East Timorese resistance forces had recently carried out attacks on Indonesian security forces throughout East Timor, leading to retaliatory killings of East Timorese civilians by the Indonesians. He cited the need for an international criminal tribunal for East Timor, called on Indonesia to support judicial proceedings against all those who had planned or committed criminal acts there, and reiterated FRETILIN's willingness to engage in constructive dialogue with the Indonesian authorities.

31. Mr. WARE (Auckland East Timor Independence Committee) said that on 23 March 1997 Indonesian security forces had broken up a demonstration of students seeking an audience with the Personal Representative of the Secretary-

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General, and that excessive police violence towards the demonstrators and even some deaths among them had been reported. Moreover, in a departure from previous policy, the New Zealand Government was no longer referring to the Indonesian occupation of East Timor as "irreversible". New Zealand also supported the tripartite talks on East Timor aimed at a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement.

32. Mr. MICLAT (Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor) said that the recent admission of the ruling military cabal in Burma to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reflected a disturbing trend within that organization which directly affected efforts to promote a peaceful settlement of regional conflicts. ASEAN continued to affirm its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member States; its aversion to discussions in multilateral forums of its members' dismal human rights records showed that autocrats were alive and well in the region. For instance, prior to the ASEAN-European Union ministerial meeting held in Bangkok in February 1997, Indonesia, supported by the ASEAN foreign ministers, had threatened to withdraw from the meeting if any European Union member State attempted to bring forward for consideration Portugal's proposal to include the question of East Timor in the agenda. With rich investment and market opportunities at stake, the European Union had virtually succumbed to the bellicose threats of ASEAN.

33. Mr. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia), speaking on a point of order, requested the Chairman, in view of the speaker's repeated references to ASEAN and other extraneous matters, to remind the speaker to limit his remarks to the matter under consideration.

34. The CHAIRMAN requested the speaker to address the point at issue.

35. Mr. MICLAT (Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor) said that his remarks were relevant to the current discussion since his organization and ASEAN were both regional organizations.

36. The CHAIRMAN said that he understood the speaker's point of view and requested him to proceed.

37. Mr. MICLAT (Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor) said that the anachronistic conception of human rights held by ASEAN member States was also reflected in their treatment of activists who supported a contrary view. For instance, while visiting Indonesia to attend a United Nations conference on Palestine, a prominent Malay advocate of human rights in East Timor had been denied entry, detained and deported by Indonesian officials. Likewise, the Government of the Philippines had denied a visa to José Ramos-Horta, recipient of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, who had been invited to address the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit meeting held in Manila in 1996.

38. While such events were modest in comparison with the horrors that the East Timorese people had endured under General Suharto's genocidal military rule, they were no less important. Burma's entry into ASEAN strengthened Indonesian control over East Timor, since it meant, in effect, that the ASEAN member Governments had given each other carte blanche to indulge their authoritarian

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tendencies. ASEAN States were willing to violate their citizens' civil liberties in order to stifle public discussion of the East Timor issue.

39. Accordingly, the role of solidarity movements and the United Nations must be to exert pressure on ASEAN policy makers and to mobilize public opinion against the tyranny in East Timor and elsewhere in the region. He called upon the Special Committee to fulfil its mandate to decolonize East Timor once and for all, and appealed to the General Assembly to enforce its resolutions on the question in a decisive manner.

40. Ms. JONES (Human Rights Watch/Asia) said that she was deeply concerned at the escalating violence in East Timor, for which both the Government of Indonesia and East Timorese resistance forces were responsible. While unequivocally condemning violations of international humanitarian law and attacks on non-combatants by all parties to the conflict, she wished nonetheless to point out several policies and practices of the Indonesian Government which had exacerbated political tensions in East Timor and increased the likelihood that human rights violations would take place.

41. In the first place, the lack of accountability for past human rights abuses made it difficult to achieve any lasting peaceful solution. Indonesia had yet to make any serious effort to examine the behaviour of its troops towards East Timorese civilians in the aftermath of the 1975 invasion or during the subsequent military offensives. The round-ups and disappearance of young men which had taken place between 1979 and 1981 had fuelled deep-seated anger towards the Indonesian army that could not be appeased by the construction of schools and roads.

42. A second factor was the militarization of East Timorese youth. Each new measure to recruit East Timorese into quasi-military groups had led to an increase in human rights violations. Three such groups had been used in recent years: paramilitary gangs called "ninjas", a civilian youth militia called Gada Paksi, and an armed unit known as the "3-month army", after the length of the training that recruits received.

43. Gada Paksi had been created in 1995, primarily in order to train informants, many of whom were children of indigenous intelligence agents. Members of Gada Paksi had been responsible for a series of incidents beginning in February 1997 in which they had stoned or shot at houses in the middle of the night. They had also conducted joint patrols with the Indonesian army, during which they had intimidated passers-by, and had assaulted youths who did not wish to join their ranks. Like the "ninja", or military-backed thugs, civilian militias had a long history in areas of Indonesia wracked by civil unrest. In no case, however, had the village militias served to ease political tension, resolve conflicts or reduce human rights violations, and in East Timor, the Gada Paksi had clearly exacerbated the situation.

44. Lastly, the use of Indonesian institutions in an East Timorese setting had been highly counterproductive. In Indonesia the national vigilance posts (PKN), which had been set up in early 1997 to prevent communal conflict and safeguard the forthcoming elections, had been roundly condemned by human rights groups as a new tool for intimidating activists and restricting freedom of expression and

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association by encouraging citizens to inform on one another. In East Timor, the PKN were all that and more: another reminder of Indonesian repression and a means of exacerbating tensions among young East Timorese.

45. The 1997 elections were another example. The results in East Timor, where the winning candidate had received over 80 per cent of the vote with an 80 per cent turnout of eligible voters, were meaningless in the light of the powerlessness of the East Timorese to have a say in their own government. That they desired to have such a say had been made clear during the election campaign; however, none of the Indonesian political parties had been willing to discuss even a minor change in the political status of East Timor, let alone its independence.

46. At its 1997 session held in Geneva, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights had adopted resolution 1997/63, expressing its deep concern at the continuing reports of human rights violations in East Timor and the lack of progress made by the Indonesian authorities towards complying with their commitments undertaken at previous sessions of the Commission. She wholeheartedly supported that resolution and hoped that the Special Committee would help to ensure its implementation. She also urged the Committee to encourage the Indonesian Government to set up an independent truth commission to investigate past human rights abuses in East Timor and to suspend the practice of creating militias and other quasi-military institutions. Lastly, she called upon all parties to the conflict to observe international standards of human rights and humanitarian law.

47. Mr. ARAUJO (Timor Foundation for Reconciliation and Development), after reviewing the history of Portuguese colonialism in East Timor and the rise of East Timorese independence movement, said that the intra-East Timorese dialogue sponsored by the United Nations offered an invaluable opportunity for a sincere exchange of views among the historic leaders of the Territory. With the third millennium only a few years away, East Timor was facing both old and new challenges. While it was impossible to turn back the clock and relaunch the decolonization process by means of a referendum which both the historic leaders and the people of East Timor had rejected more than 20 years earlier, the immobilizing status quo, based on past divisions, should not be maintained. The persistence of radical positions would only lead to permanent social and political instability, mainly affecting young people.

48. A consensus was gradually emerging among the historic leaders on the need to pacify Timorese society. Without stability it would be difficult to generate other types of consensus. Efforts to safeguard East Timorese cultural and historical identity, respect for freedom of worship and religious harmony, and the promotion of human rights must figure prominently in any model of balanced and sustainable development. It must be recognized that, despite the problems of the past 20 years, the Indonesian Government had endeavoured to promote the development of East Timor.

49. He expressed support for the ongoing tripartite dialogue under the auspices of the Secretary-General and called for action on the agreements reached during the all-inclusive intra-East Timorese dialogue held in Austria in March 1996. The tripartite dialogue must not only continue; it must be effective and

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beneficial to the people of East Timor. While Indonesia had demonstrated its good intentions, many months had passed with no response from Portugal to two specific proposals of the all-inclusive East Timorese dialogue, namely, the establishment of a cultural centre in Dili and a human resources training and development programme to create new opportunities for the people of the Territory.

50. Mr. PEREIRA (Timorese Youth for Reconciliation) said that the question of East Timor had been on the international agenda for far too long. The time had come for all Timorese to move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and determination to put the past behind them.

51. While it had often been suggested that the Indonesian intervention in 1975 had thwarted East Timor's hopes of decolonization and independent statehood, the facts indicated otherwise. Portugal had fled from its responsibility to ensure a normal decolonization process; Indonesia had been requested to intervene only after it had become obvious that Portugal would not help to restore peace in the Territory.

52. East Timor was no longer what it had been under Portuguese rule, namely, illiterate, backward and engulfed in a bloody civil war. Many of its problems which had become the focus of international concern resulted from unemployment and social exclusion based, in turn, on the divisions created by the Timorese political parties.

53. He paid tribute to the four historical leaders whose efforts had attracted foreign investment to East Timor and thanked the Indonesian Government for its support of the project to build a cement plant in the Territory. Further progress depended on, first, deepening the spirit of reconciliation in order to consolidate the all-inclusive intra-East Timorese dialogue, and, secondly, settling the issue of sovereignty once and for all.

54. While many organizations had been established since the early 1980s to promote the reconciliation process, little substantive progress had been made. The first reconciliation meeting had been held in December 1993 in London, and the second in October 1994, again in the United Kingdom. In June 1995 and again in April 1996, further meetings had been held in Burg Schlaining, Austria, at which the most prominent East Timorese leaders had been present. There had been obvious tension between those who genuinely advocated reconciliation and those who wished to exploit the talks as an opportunity to confront the Indonesian Government. Nevertheless, the reconciliation talks had provided an opportunity for all parties concerned to reflect on the past and to put forward positive and constructive proposals to the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia with a view to achieving an international solution to the problem.

55. He requested the Committee's support in persuading the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia and the international community at large that the only way forward to a lasting solution to the problem of East Timor was to abandon the idea of a referendum. In no other former Portuguese colony had a referendum been used during the transfer of power. East Timor had not been administered by Portugal since 1975 and would never be again. The decision of the United Nations to continue to recognize it as the administering Power was therefore

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both unrealistic and unhelpful. The organization which he represented urged the United Nations to accept the transfer of sovereignty from Lisbon to Jakarta either entirely or on condition that the Territory be granted the status of a special administrative zone. He also urged the Indonesian Government to continue its policy of promoting reconciliation among the East Timorese people and creating the conditions for the entire population to participate in the Territory's development.

56. Ms. NEVES (Kdadalak Cultural Group) said that, since her departure from her native land of East Timor in 1975 because of the armed conflict which had resulted in the intervention of the Indonesian armed forces, she had always desired to return home one day and to promote cultural projects aimed at safeguarding the cultural identity of the Timorese people. Together with the group of young people who formed the Kdadalak Cultural Group, she saw her role in the Timorese expatriate community as keeping the East Timorese cultural and historical identity alive through traditional folk songs and dances and by disseminating information about the situation in the Territory, particularly with regard to human rights.

57. The Group had a broad repertoire of traditional music and dances, which were inspired by the suffering of the Maubere people and by their enormous confidence in the future. From the very beginning, Kdadalak had supported the spirit of reconciliation because it believed that trust among the East Timorese people could be developed only through dialogue. She herself had visited family and friends in East Timor during the previous year and had found more development and increased prosperity in the Territory than before her departure in 1975. The current development had been made possible by a vast transfer of financial resources to the education, health, public works, roads, agriculture and fishery sectors. The living standards of the population had risen and illiteracy had been eliminated among young people, many of whom had access to universities and polytechnic institutes. She did notice, however, the persistence of conflict in the heart of the society, the causes of which were to be found in both the recent and distant past.

58. She appealed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to continue his efforts to find a solution to the East Timor question which would be acceptable to all parties and would lay the groundwork for the participation of all East Timorese in the development of their Territory.

59. Mr. ARAUJO (Movement for the Support of Intra-Timorese Dialogue) said that during the march of the world's colonized peoples towards self-determination in the 1960s, Portugal had resisted changes and had clung to its empire. That lack of vision had resulted in the loss of human lives and property, and backwardness and obscurantism among both the Portuguese themselves and the colonized peoples. The 1974 revolution in Portugal had brought that country back to modern reality. During that transition period, however, the destiny of the colonized peoples had been jettisoned by a hurried and irresponsible decolonization process, the consequences of which, including the situation in East Timor, were known to all. He himself had experienced at first hand the reality of political imprisonment and the bitter taste of persecution and social exclusion, which were the inevitable outcome of those turbulent and changing times.

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60. It was now time for all concerned to acknowledge with courage their share of the blame and to look to the future with a constructive eye. The efforts made since 1982 by the Portuguese and Indonesian Governments and by the Secretary-General of the United Nations had borne little fruit. The East Timorese, who were the people most concerned by that process, had been marginalized, a situation which had given rise over the years to a radicalization of positions. He recognized that some people had taken advantage of the situation to promote hidden agendas under which the East Timorese, individually and collectively, were pitted against each other.

61. In the light of that reality, a group of East Timorese living abroad had proposed a meeting with a number of East Timorese working in the Indonesian administration. The first meeting had been held in London in December 1993 and had succeeded in eliminating from people's minds the polarizing concept of good and bad East Timorese. The second meeting, held at Chepstow in September 1994, had formulated concrete proposals as a contribution to the meetings being held between the Portuguese and Indonesian Governments. That meeting had also expressed concern at the systematic violation of human rights in East Timor and considered the release of political prisoners as an important factor in restoring peace to East Timorese society.

62. While some might say that nothing more had been done since then, various alternative roads to progress, as opposed to paralysing radicalism, had been indicated. The all-inclusive intra-East Timorese dialogue represented an attempt to confront the East Timorese problem in an innovative manner. Within the framework of the tripartite negotiations, it was for the Secretary-General to probe the dynamic aspects of the dialogue, while bearing in mind the origin of the conflict, the attitudes of those who had been involved in 1975 and the current reality.

63. During the previous 22 years, East Timorese political parties in the Territory had ceased to exist, and the bonds between leaders and people at the grass-roots level had been weakened. With its leadership fragmented, East Timorese society had splintered around figures who had played a major role in the political process in the Territory. Bringing those credible figures of East Timorese society together would be a way of drawing together aspirations and uniting efforts in search of peace. The excessive promotion of one particular figure or organization as the only representative of the majority, far from promoting consensus, led to the taking of positions that backed away from dialogue and a negotiated solution.

64. The reconciliation that was essential for East Timorese society required great political will on the part of its leaders as well as international support. It was within that context that the Movement which he represented wished to leave behind divergence and political opinions and to encourage instead an ongoing, open but realistic dialogue based on a rekindling of human relations. To do otherwise would be to perpetuate the mutual exclusion of the people of East Timor or to encourage recourse to violent methods for imposing the will of one group.

65. Ms. SOARES (East Timor Cultural and Ethnic Research Centre) said that she was a refugee who had fled East Timor in 1975 during the civil war and had been

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a supporter of the Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN) since her arrival in Portugal in October 1976. Her current concern was the cultural development of the young generation of East Timorese in Australia and the need for a concerted effort to safeguard the cultural identity of the East Timorese following two decades of turmoil.

66. She recalled the historical events that had led to the intervention of Indonesia in East Timor in 1975 and the subsequent General Assembly resolution requesting the Secretary-General of the United Nations to initiate consultations with all parties directly involved with a view to exploring avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the problem. The lives of thousands of East Timorese and the future of their Territory now depended on the outcome of those negotiations.

67. During her recent visit to Dili, she had noted with great concern the hatred and resentment that still existed among the population. She was forced to acknowledge, however, that access to education had been improved, new roads built and the general living conditions upgraded. Nevertheless, East Timor still needed more infrastructural development in order to ensure normal living conditions for the population.

68. While the representatives of East Timor had made untiring efforts during the previous two decades to find an internationally acceptable solution to the problem, it was now time to try different approaches. An alternative might lie in the reconciliation process begun in 1993 by a group of East Timorese who believed that the current situation in East Timor, particularly its cultural, social and economic development, must be urgently addressed with the help of the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia. The reconciliation process was designed to promote an exchange of views between East Timorese of all different political opinions and to create an atmosphere of reconciliation. History had shown that in newly founded countries, peace and justice were not provided by international organizations, such as the United Nations, but were dependent on the cooperation and understanding of the people concerned.

69. The reconciliation process had brought an awareness that all was not lost. Even though the new proposal had not met with wide international support, it had challenged the traditional way of conducting the diplomatic process and had not removed the question of East Timor from the agenda of the United Nations, as some groups had predicted. Indeed, there was increasing awareness within international diplomatic circles of the question of East Timor, and the issue was very much alive in international forums. During the current phase of diplomatic uncertainty, the reconciliation process should be used to complement the international diplomatic process. However, while reconciliation would provide a mechanism for bridging the gap between the diplomatic process and the reality on the ground, any final outcome depended on the efforts of the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia and on the Secretary-General of the United Nations. She therefore hoped that the United Nations in general and the Special Committee in particular would take whatever actions were deemed necessary to find an internationally acceptable solution.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

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