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Chair: Ms. Joyini..... (South Africa)

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

Agenda item 58: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (continued)

Hearing of petitioners (continued)

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

Question of New Caledonia (continued) (A/C.4/78/4)

2. **Ms. Wateou**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that three referendums had confirmed the will of the majority of New Caledonians to maintain their status within the French Republic. It was unacceptable that part of the population had been unable to express itself; that the weight of a vote depended on the voter's location; and that the institutions of New Caledonia were unrepresentative. New Caledonians had rejected the independence project of the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste (FLNKS) and had called for a new status and model of governance that did not prioritize certain rights or ethnic groups over others. Those who did not support independence were committed to adhering to the will of the people of New Caledonia and to engaging in dialogue with all political parties.

3. Inequalities persisted in New Caledonia, not for want of skills or resources, but because its leaders failed to show responsibility. The political history of New Caledonia over the previous 30 years had led to its current state of deadly introversion. While autonomy allowed New Caledonia to pass its own laws and to set up its own development mechanisms, support from France also enabled such measures to be made more equitable and effective. New Caledonia was at a crucial turning point in its history, and must face up to its responsibilities.

4. **Ms. Darras** (Union calédonienne) said that during the referendum process, New Caledonians had hoped for a peaceful exit from the Nouméa Accord. Instead, they had faced the imperialist arrogance of the French Government, which had stolen the third referendum by unilaterally opening the electorate to newly arrived citizens. In doing so, it had ensured the demographic expansion of its colony, maintained power for its representatives and entrenched its economic model. Moreover, while the Nouméa Accord had recognized the political autonomy of New Caledonia and the principle of shared sovereignty, it had not delivered in terms of paying the social debt or resolving the colonial issue.

The current situation made it impossible to achieve the political, economic, social and cultural objectives set out in the Nouméa Accord.

5. The amendments to the French Constitution of March 2003, which no longer recognized the rights of the peoples of the overseas nations, together with attempts to ignore the international standards recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples, were destroying the good will of the New Caledonians and complicating the implementation of public policies for economic development and environmental protection. The archipelago was also affected by climate change, with many buildings at risk of flooding. Land usurpation policies constituted an attack on the dignity of the Indigenous population, and unresolved issues related to land and identity caused conflict between communities. New Caledonia must find adequate solutions to those issues in partnership with the States in the region.

6. **Ms. Tingal** (FLNKS) said that the French Government had methodically trampled on the Nouméa Accord, together with the hopes of the Kanak people. Such measures had included the imposition of the third referendum in 2021, which had deliberately sabotaged the path towards independence, as participation had been limited due to the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. During his most recent visit to New Caledonia, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, had clearly demonstrated a will to reverse the decolonization process, even claiming to offer protection from other invasions in doing so. However, it was France itself that had provoked pointless geopolitical tensions in that Pacific region.

7. Against a backdrop of global challenges, some of which had been caused by colonization itself, the decision had been made to seek solutions through the decolonization of Kanaky. France had a duty to assuage the fears of the communities that had arrived along with colonization, with a view to building a nation free of old colonial divisions. France was undertaking a recolonization process while ignoring the legitimacy of pro-independence sentiment as expressed at the ballot box. Consequently, the FLNKS would bring the matter before the International Court of Justice and called for support to ensure that justice was delivered.

8. **Mr. Trenyiwa** (Les Loyalistes) said that New Caledonians had been pressured to boycott the third referendum in order to prevent them from expressing their will and to buy time. Kanaks had nevertheless participated in that referendum, at some personal cost, and had affirmed their values as Kanak, New Caledonian and French people. The French Government provided support and protection to the populations of

New Caledonia as it faced sea-level rise. Independence therefore should not be considered as a way forward.

9. The new statute to be drafted should take into account all the specificities of New Caledonia, giving its youth every opportunity to peacefully build an inclusive society. It should bring an end to the uncertainty that prevented New Caledonians from planning for the future. New Caledonia had always been a place of welcome, as a multicultural French territory. The concept of decolonization was irrelevant to him as a 20 year-old New Caledonian. Attention should instead be turned towards combating inequality and climate change and providing access to health care.

10. **Mr. Wamytan** (Congress of New Caledonia) said that since the referendum of 12 December 2021, considered as illegitimate by the FLNKS, the authorities had sought to align themselves with the anti-independence movement with a view to defending their strategic and economic interests in the region. That position had marked a historic shift away from the impartiality provided for in the Matignon and Nouméa Accords. Despite that biased and unjust decision, the FLNKS had agreed to resume dialogue with the administering Power with a view to concluding the decolonization and emancipation process. The draft agreement that had emerged from bilateral meetings was unacceptable and merely illustrated the neocolonialism of the 2021 referendum, in which only the pro-French minority had participated, and almost 57 per cent of the New Caledonian population, including almost all Kanaks, had been absent.

11. The French Government, in its own interests, had taken a biased approach that could definitively close the door to decolonization and emancipation. That decision had led to a period of significant uncertainty for the future of New Caledonia. His people were peaceful and willing to continue bilateral discussions, but not under conditions that negated the pro-independence claims. The French Government should come to its senses and renounce its illusion of once again becoming a major global power. Otherwise, United Nations-led mediation would be necessary in order to preserve peace in the country and region.

Question of Western Sahara (continued) (A/C.4/78/6)

12. **Mr. Pureza**, speaking in his national capacity, said that crucial similarities existed between the cases of Timor-Leste and Western Sahara: both peoples had bravely resisted occupation in defence of their historical and political identities. In both cases, the United Nations had condemned the occupation as a violation of international law, human rights and the principle of

permanent sovereignty over natural resources. In both cases, the occupiers had attempted to obstruct referendums on independence, citing plans of so-called special autonomy. After exercising self-determination, Timor-Leste had created a climate of cooperation with Indonesia; Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) had undertaken to follow suit with Morocco. The current failure to allow the exercise of the right to self-determination had created instability and insecurity throughout the region. The United Nations must therefore assume its responsibilities by organizing the referendum on self-determination for Western Sahara, which was the only legitimate way forward.

13. **Mr. Israel Herrera** (Autonomous University of Campeche, Mexico) said that the use of children and adolescents by armed groups such as the Frente Polisario was a matter of increasing concern, and was a clear violation of international law and fundamental humanitarian principles. Such heinous practices had been denounced by the United Nations and Amnesty International. All Member States should work to strengthen legal systems with a view to ensuring that the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts were classified as war crimes and were properly investigated. The international community should condemn armed groups in the region, including the Frente Polisario, which should be recognized as a serious threat to political stability and the future of local children. The Government of Morocco needed greater support as it endeavoured to improve living conditions in the Moroccan Sahara and to promote peace in the region, particularly through educational projects.

14. **Mr. Latif Aidara** (CISPAIX paix et sécurité) said that the host country of the Tindouf camps was fully responsible for the ongoing dispute over the Moroccan Sahara. That country had created the Polisario and provided it with military, diplomatic, financial and logistical support. It had delegated authority over part of its territory to the Polisario in violation of international law, and refused to participate in the political process conducted under the exclusive auspices of the United Nations. It had also expressed its opposition to Security Council resolution 2602 (2021).

15. The host country of the Tindouf camps claimed to be a mere observer, but its actions showed otherwise. For example, it continued to host the Polisario and to offer it assistance and protection, while mobilizing all of its institutions against the territorial integrity of Morocco. Furthermore, it had suspended its friendship treaty with Spain after the latter had declared its support for the Moroccan autonomy initiative. It was thus clearly the main party to the dispute. It should assume

its responsibilities by engaging in good faith with the round-table process.

16. **Mr. Besnard** (AUSACO) said that the Polisario was a serious threat to peace, stability and development in the Sahel. It was a separatist group that had been created, financed and armed by the host country of the Tindouf camps, whose sole objective was to impinge on the territorial integrity of Morocco and fuel its aspirations for regional hegemony. The host country of the Tindouf camps had devoted significant funds to arming the Polisario, while granting it authority over the Tindouf camps in violation of international humanitarian law. It had deliberately created a situation of lawlessness and impunity, which was conducive to the proliferation of criminal activities. Women and children, who were the main victims, had no means of recourse.

17. The host country deported hundreds of children abroad as part of an ideological indoctrination process, before enlisting them in the armed militia of the Polisario, further destabilizing the Sahel. The refusal of the host country to participate in the United Nations political process had prolonged the status quo and emboldened the Polisario. All Member States must support the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was the only realistic and pragmatic solution.

18. **Ms. Erb** (Erb Law, PLLC) said that the majority of those living in the Tindouf camps had been torn from their land by the Polisario and were being used to fuel an endless conflict created by the host country for political purposes. They were under the rule of a corrupt leadership whose priority was to acquire wealth and power. The remote location of the camps was an asset to the Polisario, which insisted on maintaining complete control with little to no outside interference or accountability, enabling the mistreatment of refugees, corruption and mass diversion of humanitarian aid.

19. Unlike other refugee camps under United Nations supervision, the Sahrawi camps were under the full control of one military group, with no accountability. The host country was both morally and legally responsible for the disaster taking place on its territory. For almost 50 years, humanitarian aid had been donated to the Tindouf camps based on inflated numbers. The policies of the camp leadership demonstrated a lack of transparency and created serious credibility gaps. Outside agencies should therefore conduct an accurate census and ascertain the views of the residents.

20. **Ms. Thomas** (Global Directives LLC) said that the autonomy proposal of Morocco was merely an attempt to maintain the status quo under the guise of granting self-rule to the Sahrawis. Under the proposal, Morocco

would maintain its army in the Territory, and the Constitutional Court of Morocco would have the final say in all legal matters. The local population would be subject to the Constitution of Morocco, under which the King of Morocco exerted ultimate authority, with unlimited powers.

21. Most of the wealth of Western Sahara was in the hands of Moroccans or foreigners, rather than Sahrawis. It was unlikely that the property rights of the King and major stakeholders would be relinquished. Rather than being a serious, realistic and credible way forward, the autonomy proposal was therefore no more than a disingenuous vehicle to maintain the status quo. Moreover, there was no evidence that the Sahrawis wanted an autonomous region. Instead, they should be granted the rights to which they were entitled.

22. **Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco), speaking on a point of order, said that when a representative of a Member State requested to speak on a point of order, that request should be granted promptly, rather than waiting until the end of a petitioner's statement. Petitioners were welcome to address the issue under discussion, even if many of their comments were pure lies. However, attacks on the institutions of Member States were unacceptable. The previous petitioner had referred to the Constitution of Morocco and attacked Moroccan institutions. When such a point of order was requested in such a situation, it should be granted, and the petitioner in question should be stopped from attacking a Member State.

23. **Mr. Koudri** (Algeria), speaking on a point of order, said that ensuring decorum in the work of the Committee was the prerogative of the Chair, for whom his delegation had full support and respect. Meanwhile, all petitioners had the right to express themselves. At many meetings, the representative of Morocco had disturbed the decorum that he claimed to uphold when requesting to speak on a point of order. Meetings of the Committee were not the right context for such behaviour.

24. **Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco), speaking on a point of order, said that petitioners were expected to refrain from attacking Member States or their institutions. His delegation had full respect for the prerogative of the Chair. However, any representative who witnessed a petitioner or indeed another Member State diverging from the rules of procedure had the right to raise the issue. The representative of Algeria should respect that right, which was consistent with the rules of procedure and the practice of the Committee.

25. **Ms. El Mekaoui** (National Council for Humanities, Sciences and Technologies (CONAHCYT))

said that, although the Sahara was rich in renewable energy resources, ongoing regional conflicts were hindering its development. Regional stability was essential for global peace, and the resolution of those conflicts could be a key factor in advancing the decolonization process. Morocco had implemented various programmes that promoted comprehensive development in the Sahara; however, guaranteeing peace was essential to enabling the region to reach its full potential, which would have a significant impact across the entire African continent. The transition towards sources of clean energy and the growth of a diversified and sustainable economy in the region would also enhance the economy at all levels, strengthen trade relations, combat climate change and promote energy democracy. Mexico had faced similar challenges in relation to autonomy, and the implementation of autonomy plans had been an effective tool for achieving peace. The international community should support the autonomy initiative put forward by Morocco, which represented a rational, just and lasting solution, reflecting the commitment of that country to regionalization and progress in the Sahara.

26. **Ms. Naranjo Lizano** (Universidad de la Tierra) said that the Sahrawi people had the right to exercise self-determination and thus complete the decolonization process in Western Sahara, which had been illegally occupied by Morocco for over five decades. Morocco had systematically postponed the referendum on self-determination to which the Sahrawi people were entitled. The Fourth Committee should strongly advocate compliance with international human rights standards to support the Sahrawi people, particularly women, children, activists and political prisoners. The human rights violations committed by the Moroccan Government were condemnable, and its attempts to illegally appropriate Western Sahara directly contravened all relevant legal standards. Compliance with all relevant United Nations resolutions was key, and the Organization should act as a guarantor of the rights of the Sahrawi people.

27. **Mr. Belmeddah**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Sahrawi people faced a harsh reality. In 1975, Morocco and Mauritania had agreed to share Western Sahara between themselves. Three years later, Morocco had fully occupied the Territory. Upon the establishment of the ceasefire in 1991, the Sahrawi people had placed their trust in the United Nations. However, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) had been prevented from organizing a referendum on self-determination; instead, Morocco had used delaying tactics while appropriating the national resources of the

Sahrawi people. The United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council, must enable the Sahrawi people to exercise their right to self-determination, which was clearly recognized in international law. The question of Western Sahara could be definitively resolved only through a free and transparent referendum under the auspices of the United Nations.

28. **Ms. Njapau** (Women Investment Network (WIN)) said that women in the Moroccan Sahara enjoyed all the freedoms provided for by the Moroccan Constitution and international human rights law. Women in the Moroccan Sahara had participated massively in the elections held in September 2021. Women made up 25 per cent of the members of parliament in Morocco and were strongly represented in the regional councils in Laayoune and Dakhla. They were thus able to fully participate in the planning and implementation of the new development model, which had a budget of \$10 billion.

29. There were numerous women-led businesses and civil society organizations in the Sahara. In the Tindouf camps, however, Polisario was holding thousands of women hostage and subjecting them such abuses as exploitation, human trafficking and slavery, with no means of redress. The international community should intensify efforts to protect Sahrawi women in the camps. Only a solution based on autonomy would enable them to live in dignity and to enjoy their human rights.

30. **Mr. Boutin** (University of Caen Normandie) said that the Moroccan autonomy initiative was a political solution to the regional dispute that was based on compromise. It included substantial provisions for regional institutions, including a regional parliament and a high court with significant powers in the areas of the economy, education and health. It had the support of the Security Council and nearly 100 States. It was based on consultations at the national level, including with the local population and political parties, as well as at the international and regional levels. It provided a compromise between independence and integration, was consistent with the right to self-determination, and recognized the attachment of the people in the region to the Moroccan identity and democratic project. Moreover, it entailed significant investments in necessary infrastructure and resources. The principle of advanced regionalization had been incorporated in the Moroccan Constitution, and Morocco had undertaken to introduce a statute on the autonomy of the Sahara region. However, the host country of the Tindouf camps refused to participate in the political round-table process, in violation of Security Council resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#). All States, particularly France, should therefore help to end the long-standing dispute and

renew their support for the Moroccan autonomy initiative.

31. **Mr. Bousif Hammou**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that over the previous decade, accelerated development in southern Morocco had attracted national and foreign investments, which had led to prosperity for the Sahrawi people. Particular benefits had been seen in the field of education, notably in the region of Dakhla-Oued Ed Dahab. Development progress was also apparent in the emergence of modern cities in the region. Meanwhile, however, the social and economic conditions in the Tindouf camps were deteriorating. Women and youth were particularly affected by the poor living conditions, which were the responsibility of Algeria and stemmed from the failed leadership of the Polisario, which traded in humanitarian aid. The Sahrawis had been able to overcome the multiple challenges in the Sahara, which had become a stable region thanks to its return to the homeland of Morocco and the promotion of urbanization and the rule of law.

32. **Mr. Boulon**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that all Sahrawi tribes shared historical and legal ties with Morocco and had always been part of that country, as acknowledged through international agreements that stretched back over centuries, predating the creation of the Polisario Front. Moreover, being part of Morocco was not only a political arrangement, but also a conscious choice based on historical, cultural and legal realities. Allowing the aspirations of a few individuals outside the Moroccan Sahara to obstruct the will of the majority was profoundly unjust.

33. Significant progress had been made in the Sahara provinces, where the Sahrawi population ran their own affairs and had been granted autonomy, actively participating in decision-making processes. Such progress had brought tangible benefits, including improved infrastructure, education, health care and economic development. Morocco had demonstrated an unwavering commitment to human rights, as reflected in its autonomy initiative, which provided for a peaceful and mutually beneficial solution guaranteeing both local self-governance and Moroccan sovereignty. The autonomy initiative represented a concrete step towards regional stability, providing a framework for lasting peace, respect for human rights and the establishment of prosperity for all Sahrawi people.

34. **Mr. Díaz de la Vega García** (Banco de Alimentos) said that since the decolonization of the Moroccan Sahara in 1975, Morocco had made gargantuan efforts to promote the socioeconomic development of the Moroccan Sahara. Since 2015, Morocco had invested over \$10 billion as part of an ambitious programme that

included major construction works in the region and projects led by democratically elected regional councils. Voter turnout and development indicators in the Moroccan Sahara were the highest in all Morocco, and the local population enjoyed all of their civil, political, socioeconomic and environmental rights. The Security Council had commended the progress made.

35. The Moroccan autonomy initiative, aimed at resolving the regional dispute, was supported by over 100 States, 30 of which had opened consulates in the Sahara. The international community should therefore support the rights of Morocco and its vision for the future, and recognize the facts on the ground, by supporting that initiative as the only lasting solution to the artificial dispute.

36. **Mr. Lygeros**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Moroccan character of the Sahara was indisputable and had been widely accepted by the international community, as demonstrated by the opening of consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla and the explicit support of over 100 States for the autonomy initiative. Those developments reflected both the historic rights of Morocco over the Sahara and the irreversible momentum on the ground, particularly the implementation of the new development model in the southern provinces. Most Member States did not recognize the so-called Sahrawi Republic and considered the United Nations political process to be the sole way forward. The pseudo-Republic represented only the hegemonic agenda of the host country of the Tindouf camps, and did not constitute a territory, a population or a Government.

37. The majority of the Sahrawi population lived in the Moroccan Sahara and participated actively in democracy and regional development. The Polisario had no legitimacy, and its sole preoccupation was to commit human rights abuses. The United Nations must take action to end that situation.

38. **Mr. Rosemarine** (International Law Chambers of Andrew M. Rosemarine) said that the autonomy initiative of Morocco could solve the conflict under discussion by ensuring the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. The devastating earthquake in Morocco should lead to a focus on the practical needs of all in the region. Numerous States had opened consulates in the Sahara, demonstrating their concrete recognition of the sovereignty of Morocco, and many more had expressed support for its autonomy initiative. The autonomy initiative was fair and flexible, as it provided for the self-determination of the Sahrawis, with an emphasis on negotiations. It was also far-sighted in its aim to build a modern, democratic society.

Morocco could be trusted to deliver on the plan, as it was democratic, had a growing economy and was a world leader in producing green energy, and its Constitution provided for enhanced local government, including in the Sahara. Moreover, Morocco had demonstrated its ability to cope with extreme conditions during the recent devastating earthquake.

39. **Mr. Syedibrahim** (World Humanitarian Drive) said that without peace, there could be no development or implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was the only serious, credible and realistic solution to the long-standing problem. Historically, all the dynasties that had ruled Morocco had come from the Sahara, and the majority of so-called Sahrawi people were Moroccan and had considered themselves to be so for many centuries. Much of the international community was in favour of the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which satisfied all the requirements established by the Security Council. Violence could be overcome only through peace and mutual understanding; but the Polisario was an armed rebel gang. Any solution to the dispute should be based on compromise, in line with the Charter of the United Nations. The United States, together with many of the most powerful countries in the world, had recognized the full sovereignty of Morocco over its southern provinces, including Western Sahara. The question of the Moroccan Sahara had thus been settled in favour of Morocco.

40. **Ms. Ramos** (American Association of Jurists) said that Western Sahara was illegally occupied by Morocco. The Sahrawi people had the inalienable right to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#). The exploitation of natural resources such as phosphate and fish pursuant to agreements between Morocco and other States or multinational companies was illegal. Moreover, the Committee should immediately address the human rights violations and inhumane conditions suffered by the Sahrawi political prisoners and the humanitarian situation of the 170,000 Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps. The international community should protect the Sahrawi human rights defenders, journalists and political prisoners whose lives were endangered by the occupying Power as a result of the resumption of the armed conflict between Frente POLISARIO and Morocco in November 2020. During that conflict, Morocco had committed war crimes by using drones against the population.

41. An observer mission comprising human rights experts should be sent to Western Sahara, and the Security Council should reject any resolution that did not clearly indicate the need to organize a referendum

on self-determination, including the option of independence. The United States Government should revoke the decision made by the Trump Administration, which had recognized the sovereignty of Morocco over the Non-Self-Governing Territory. Frente POLISARIO was the sole legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people.

42. **Mr. Seillan** (Fondation France Maroc) said that the Moroccan autonomy initiative was supported by the Security Council and by over 100 States, 30 of which had opened consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla. The international community should put pressure on the host country of the Tindouf camps, both at the United Nations and on the ground, to commit to a resumption of the round-table process. Such a process was the only way to reach a political solution to the regional dispute and the sole model for peace and development.

43. The host country of the Tindouf camps, which sought to maintain the status quo, was imperilling the future of the populations confined there, as well as the prosperity and stability of the Sahel. Its position was not realistic, pragmatic, sustainable or based on compromise. Given the economic, social and environmental growth in the Moroccan Sahara, the Moroccan autonomy initiative was the most credible way forward. The new development model for the southern provinces, which had a budget of \$10 billion, laid the groundwork for the population confined in the Tindouf camps to regain a dignified life. The international community, particularly France, should give further momentum to those efforts towards peace and development.

44. **Mr. Ordóñez** (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) said that the dispute over the Sahara had resulted from the cold war and the opportunistic interpretation of the right to self-determination by a Government seeking to justify its rivalry with Morocco and to instrumentalize an unrepresentative political organization. The dispute was ultimately artificial, and the misleading calls for decolonization had led to an impasse that endangered security in north-western Africa and western Europe. The party that had instigated the issue, in whose territory the Polisario faction was currently based, should assume its responsibilities in accordance with Security Council resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#).

45. In 2007, Morocco had proposed an autonomy initiative whereby the inhabitants of the former Spanish Sahara would fully manage their own affairs through executive, legislative and judicial bodies with the necessary powers and funding. The international

community should show honesty and political realism by supporting that initiative unreservedly.

46. *Ms. Rendtorff-Smith (Denmark), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

47. **Mr. Satigui Sidibe** (Institut sahélien de recherche et d'analyse pour la transformation des conflits (TIRAC-Sahel)) said that it was imperative to support the efforts of the Security Council to reach a solution to the conflict in the Sahara. The round-table process between Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario should resume with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable political solution based on realism, pragmatism, compromise and sustainability. The Moroccan autonomy initiative met the requirements set out by the Security Council and had received significant support from the international community, including such major powers as the United States.

48. The opening of consulates in the Sahara by 30 States, most of which were African, was a testament to their recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the region, not to mention the region's role in the policy of South-South cooperation promoted by the King of Morocco. In the light of such widespread international support, all other parties should abandon the dangerous and unrealistic aspirations of the Polisario leaders, which risked destabilizing North Africa and the Mediterranean. The Polisario had connections with criminal groups, to which it diverted humanitarian aid destined for Sahrawis in the Tindouf camps. Repression, hardship and ethnic discrimination made the camps fertile ground for armed groups and drug traffickers to recruit young Sahrawis.

49. **Mr. Mezzetti** (Rete Saharawi) said that for 50 years the Sahrawi people had been divided between their own territories and refugee camps in Algeria, pending a resolution to the Western Sahara issue. The prolonged wait was unacceptable, especially as Morocco, the occupying force, was illegally exploiting the resources of Western Sahara, in violation of the international resolutions that supported the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people. The Sahrawi population had a legitimate claim to those resources, but had instead become reliant on increasingly scarce international aid.

50. MINURSO should have full access to the Territory in order to conduct the self-determination referendum, and its mandate should include a human rights component. Political delegations and international media should be able to document the living conditions and use of resources in the region. The Territory was divided by a wall built by Morocco, on the other side of which Sahrawi refugees lived in increasingly harsh conditions. Maintenance of the status quo would create

unsuitable conditions for the entire Sahrawi population. The breach of the ceasefire by Morocco had undermined international norms and the work of the United Nations. Appropriate measures should be taken in response, and displaced persons should be recognized as such.

51. **Ms. Bongini** (Hurria – Saharawi Solidarity Association) said that many individuals and institutions were calling for a definitive solution to the question of the last African colony. As was outlined in numerous United Nations resolutions, the Sahrawi people should be allowed to exercise self-determination. Owing to the delay in that process, individuals and economies were plagued by uncertainty and reliance on humanitarian aid. Various United Nations agencies had reported on the challenges faced by the civilian population of the refugee camps. Those agencies should renew their commitment to the issue, and a definitive intervention should be undertaken to resolve the conflict and ensure that the Sahrawi people had the opportunity to exercise self-determination.

52. **Mr. Tessouh**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the right to self-determination was enshrined in numerous resolutions of the United Nations. Frente POLISARIO, which had been established in 1973, was the sole legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people. Under General Assembly resolution 34/37, it should be a party to any negotiations towards a solution. In its advisory opinion of 16 October 1975, the International Court of Justice had found no tie of sovereignty between Western Sahara and Morocco or Mauritania. The partition of Western Sahara between those States pursuant to the Madrid Accord clearly contravened the will of the Security Council. Despite the establishment of MINURSO in 1991, Western Sahara remained under occupation, its resources were being appropriated, and the rights of its people were violated on a daily basis. The United Nations must fulfil its obligation to end colonialism in Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa.

53. **Mr. Adjissa**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara had not been recognized by the European Union, the African Union or the United Nations. In its judgments of 21 December 2016 and 27 February 2018, the Court of Justice of the European Union had found that Western Sahara was distinct from Morocco. Numerous international organizations had criticized Morocco for violating the civil, political, economic and social rights of the Sahrawi people. Morocco was committing abuse and torture, persecuting journalists and appropriating natural resources in full view of the international community. On 13 November 2020, Morocco had violated the 1991 ceasefire by attacking civilians who

had been protesting against the opening of an illegal crossing to Mauritania.

54. The opening of sham consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla and the organization of cultural and sporting events in occupied Western Sahara contravened international law. The imposition of de facto annexation was a dead end, and would ultimately increase tension across the region. The United Nations must fulfil its responsibility to protect Sahrawi civilians, provide MINURSO with a human rights mandate, and enable the Sahrawi people to exercise the right to self-determination.

55. **Mr. Ouakli**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the question of Western Sahara was undeniably one of decolonization. In resolution 621 (1988), the Security Council had authorized the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative for Western Sahara. In resolution 658 (1990), it had approved the settlement plan for Western Sahara. In resolution 690 (1991), it had established MINURSO. However, some petitioners appeared to believe that the construction of infrastructure could be invoked to override the inalienable right of peoples to exercise self-determination and exploit their own natural resources.

56. On 2 August 1990, the international community had mobilized against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. On 6 November 1975, when Morocco had invaded Sahrawi territory, the Security Council had called on it to withdraw immediately; but no armies had mobilized, and the United Nations had done nothing to enforce its own resolutions. That situation undermined the Organization's standing and credibility. His own country, Algeria, supported the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people in accordance with the doctrine of the United Nations and the African Union. It called for genuine negotiations between the two parties to the conflict, namely Morocco and Frente POLISARIO, without preconditions, leading to a free and fair referendum under United Nations auspices.

57. **Ms. Lenz** (Eastern European Org.) said that she had first visited the Sahrawi refugee camps in 1999. The referendum which was being organized at the time had still not taken place. Instead, Morocco continued to exercise brutal power over a land that did not speak its language or share its history, stories, customs or traditions. In her 20 years of visits to the refugee camps, she had yet to meet a resident who wished to belong to Morocco. A third generation of Sahrawis were being denied their history, culture, language and identity. The Committee had the power to address that tragic injustice and enable them to choose their own future.

58. **Mr. Ahmed** (Sahrawi Association in the USA (SAUSA)) said that many petitioners had appeared before the Committee claiming to know what was best for the people of Western Sahara and extolling the benefits of the Moroccan occupation. Those petitioners were the paid agents of a propaganda machine. It was disgraceful that a committee on decolonization should give a platform to individuals using the very same language that had once been invoked to legitimize apartheid. If the Committee genuinely cared about the Sahrawi people, it should send a fact-finding mission to Western Sahara in order to ascertain what they actually wanted. The United Nations should equip MINURSO with a human rights mandate and organize a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara.

59. **Mr. Taleb Aomar**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Moroccan authorities in occupied Western Sahara committed daily human rights violations, including the repression of peaceful demonstrations, denial of freedom of expression, arbitrary detentions and beatings of women and children. On 13 November 2020, in violation of the 1991 ceasefire, Morocco had attacked civil society activists near the berm which it had constructed in the 1980s to divide the Sahrawi land and people. For the first time, it had used drones and smart weapons against Sahrawi nomads and Algerian and Mauritanian citizens travelling on commercial routes east of the berm. Dozens of people, including minors, had been killed or injured, and numerous civilian vehicles had been destroyed or damaged. Extensive damage had been done to the environment, not to mention the significant landmine contamination in the area. The United Nations must put a stop to those war crimes.

60. **Mr. Fall** (Collective of Defenders Sahrawi of Human Rights in Western Sahara (CODESA)) said that Morocco continued to commit human rights violations in the occupied Western Sahara. In the absence of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and despite the presence of MINURSO, it continued to abduct Sahrawi civilians including, most recently, Lahbib Aghrishi. Sahrawi land and property were being expropriated and given to Moroccan and foreign investors. Settlers had been introduced to the Territory in order to change its demographic composition. Sahrawis were now a marginalized and impoverished minority on their own land, and many young people had left for neighbouring States. In the occupied area of Guerguerat, Morocco had repressed demonstrators who had done no more than call for a dignified life. The international community should assume its responsibility to eliminate colonialism, secure the release of Sahrawi political prisoners, and enable the

Sahrawi people to exercise their full rights and exploit their own natural resources.

61. **Mr. Souvi**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that Western Sahara had been recognized as a Non-Self-Governing Territory in 1963, when it was still under Spanish control. Instead of completing the process of decolonization, Spain had violated its obligations and allowed Morocco and Mauritania to invade and occupy the Territory. That invasion had taken place despite the advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice on 16 October 1975, in which the Court had found no tie of sovereignty between Western Sahara and Morocco or Mauritania. Morocco had then waged a brutal war against the Sahrawi people, during which it had committed numerous atrocities. In 1991, it had agreed with Frente POLISARIO, the sole legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people, to allow a referendum on self-determination. However, aided by a media blackout and the failure of the United Nations to monitor the situation, it had been able to continue violating human rights and plundering the Territory's natural resources, including phosphates and fish. Moroccan settlers had now become a majority, displacing the indigenous Sahrawi population. The United Nations should set a date for the referendum and put an immediate stop to the appropriation of natural resources.

62. **Mr. Breid Eleil**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that he was a Mauritanian citizen from the city of Nouadhibou, near the conflict zone between Frente POLISARIO and the Moroccan occupation authorities. The question of Western Sahara was not merely a local matter; it had repercussions for the entire world, but especially for neighbouring States. Mauritania, for example, relied on the occupied border crossing of Guerguerat for access to basic commodities.

63. Many Sahrawis in the occupied part of Western Sahara were held in jails that did not meet international human rights standards. They were often detained on spurious charges and subjected to physical or psychological torture. The economic situation was indescribable; many families lived on less than 200 euros a month. Sahrawis often lost their jobs for failing to endorse the views of the occupiers. Women were particularly vulnerable to such arbitrary measures. The only solution was to hold a referendum, in which the Sahrawi people would inevitably reject any presence of Moroccan occupiers on their land.

64. **Mr. Tualumru**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Moroccan occupation authorities had continued to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity in the occupied part of Western Sahara,

especially since the resumption of hostilities on 13 November 2020. They maintained an intense police, military and intelligence presence in numerous cities and towns across the Territory. Demonstrations against the occupation were banned, and participants were beaten, detained, dismissed from their work or subjected to other systematic reprisals. International observers and activists were prevented from visiting the Territory and speaking to civilians. Against that backdrop, the Sahrawi people still looked to the United Nations for support in their endeavour to exercise the right to self-determination. Their sole legitimate representative continued to be Frente POLISARIO.

65. **Mr. Troch** (Austrian Parliament) said that the instability in the Sahel was a cause for growing concern. Criminal groups and foreign mercenaries were taking advantage of the deep crisis caused by the conflict in northern Mali, the civil war in Libya and the Boko Haram revolt in the Lake Chad Basin. The Sahel was now a route for trafficking in drugs, weapons and human beings. Conditions in the Tindouf camps were unbearable, and the inhabitants had little hope of a normal life. There were indications of a rapprochement between terrorist groups and desperate youth in the camps. In successive resolutions, most recently resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#), the Security Council had called for a realistic, practicable, enduring and mutually acceptable political solution based on compromise. In the long run, terrorism and extremist views were never defeated by military means; development, stability, education and socio-economic prosperity would be needed. Accordingly, in 2007, Morocco had proposed an autonomy initiative which the Security Council had described as serious and credible. In view of its own successful experience in negotiating the autonomy of the South Tyrol Province, the Government of Austria considered that initiative to be a possible outcome to the process undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations.

66. **Mr. Moctar** (Fédération mondiale des amis du Sahara marocain (FEDMASAMA)) said that Morocco had been occupied in stages; France had taken the centre of the country, and Spain the north and south. Its decolonization had also taken place in stages; the south had been recovered from Spain only in 1975. The subsequent regional dispute was a legacy of the cold war.

67. The advanced regionalization programme launched by King Mohammed VI of Morocco was intended to involve the local population in decision-making and in building their own sociopolitical and economic prosperity as Moroccans. Some 80 per cent of Moroccans in the southern provinces had taken part in

the most recent regional and local elections, thereby confirming that they remained fully committed to defending their territorial integrity through full integration into Morocco. The population had understood that regionalization would allow them to determine their own future and gain access to strategic and financial support for relevant projects.

68. **Mr. Cameron** (World Action for Refugees) said that abuse, repression, extreme poverty and malnutrition were rife in the Tindouf camps. Humanitarian aid intended for the camps, including food for children, was systematically embezzled and sold by Polisario officials, with the active complicity of host country officials. Those practices had been documented by the European Anti-Fraud Office and by the World Food Programme. That shocking situation was a result of the host country's failure to allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to register the population held hostage in the Tindouf camps. The Human Rights Committee had repeatedly expressed grave concern at the host country's illegal devolution of authority, and the Secretary-General had echoed those concerns. The international community must act swiftly and decisively to end the humanitarian disaster. The only solution lay in the safe, dignified return of the population, in accordance with the Moroccan autonomy initiative.

69. **Mr. Chrif** (Commune of Smara) said that he had been elected in free and fair elections to serve as chair of the commune of Smara. Along with other Saharans, he was working to deliver public policy that met his constituents' aspirations, and refused to let the region's future be decided by geostrategic calculations made abroad. The same parties that had hampered the search for a solution under the auspices of the United Nations were now shirking their responsibility for prolonging the dispute. In the meantime, Morocco remained committed to the United Nations process. However, the dispute could be resolved only with the genuine involvement of the party that had manufactured it by funding and arming the separatists. For their part, the enemies of Moroccan territorial integrity were making desperate attempts to hamper development in Morocco in order to pursue their own petty political agendas and distract from their domestic crises.

70. Separatism would never gain a foothold in the southern provinces, which were becoming an economic hub open to the entire world. Autonomy was the only solution to the artificial dispute, and the only way for Saharans in the camps of southern Algeria to return and enjoy a dignified life in the Moroccan Sahara.

71. **Mr. Esparza Machin**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Polisario had been established only as late as 1973. Since that time, it had changed its positions to suit the interests of the former Libyan leader, Muammar Qadhafi, and the patron of the Polisario at the time, namely the former President of Algeria, Houari Boumediene. It had been unknown at the time of the struggle for the liberation of the Sahara, which had been led by Moroccan patriots, many of whom had been killed by the French and Spanish authorities. The Polisario was an armed militia modelled on single-party Soviet lines, with no room for dissenting views. It served the interests of the host country, which appointed its leaders. By preventing UNHCR from registering the population of the Tindouf camps, the host country enabled the Polisario to embezzle humanitarian aid while its own population was chronically malnourished.

72. The Polisario could not claim to represent Saharans; its monopoly had been broken by the establishment of the *Movimiento Saharaui por la Paz*, and most Saharans chose their representatives through elections held in accordance with the Constitution of Morocco. The large electoral turnout demonstrated their commitment to their Moroccan identity and to the territorial integrity of Morocco.

73. **Mr. Tate**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the people of Western Sahara had been colonized and their resources were being ruthlessly plundered by Morocco. For decades, their lives had been defined by the occupation and their cry for freedom had been met with indifference. Families had been torn apart, communities shattered, and lives lost. The phosphates and fisheries of Western Sahara were being exploited by Morocco while the people were left impoverished and marginalized. The international community must demand that the people of Western Sahara be given the opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination and exploit their own natural resources.

74. **Ms. Ezaoui** (African Forum for Research and Studies in Human Rights) said that she had been born and raised in the Sahara, had studied in public schools in Laayoune, and had trained in Rabat to become a renewable energy engineer. She was now actively involved in managing strategic investment programmes for the region. Renewable energy now accounted for one third of the investments made by Morocco in its southern provinces. Some 80 per cent of energy consumed in those provinces came from renewable sources. As part of an integrated development programme, some 1,600 km of high-voltage electric network was being installed along the Agadir-Laayoune-Boujdour-Dakhla axis. The Moroccan

company OCP Group was investing \$13 billion in clean energy and desalination programmes, including the construction of a green ammonia production complex in the Laayoune region, which would be powered by a solar and wind farm. Those projects would create jobs for young Sahrawis, enhance local entrepreneurship and contribute to broader socioeconomic development initiatives. A subsea cable was being constructed in order to provide green electricity to 7 million households in the United Kingdom by 2030. Sahrawis were involved in those investments at all levels, from strategic leadership to operations on the ground.

75. **Mr. Moraga** (Derechos Humanos Sin Fronteras) said that children in the Tindouf camps were being given military training and brought up with a mentality of hatred. Accounts had emerged of the daily crimes committed on Algerian territory by the armed Polisario group, which had become a criminal gang. Former members of the group had spoken out against the rapes, embezzlement of humanitarian aid, torture and enforced disappearances. Their allegations had been confirmed by former senior Polisario officials. The Government of Algeria was ultimately responsible for the crimes committed on its territory. The United Nations should intervene to ensure that Algeria fulfilled its obligation to ensure that entities on its territory upheld human rights, prevented the abuse of minors and refrained from repressing dissent. By doing so, the Organization could bring an end to the suffering and ensure that the victims were heard.

76. **Mr. Bouaziz** (Algerian Youth Academy) said that the rights of the Sahrawi people, which had been recognized by the international community, were routinely violated. It was essential that the African Union and the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, continue working towards the resumption of direct negotiations between the two parties to the dispute, namely Frente POLISARIO, as the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people, and the Moroccan occupation authorities, with a view to enabling the Sahrawi people to exercise their inalienable and imprescriptible right to self-determination. His organization condemned those Member States that had opened consulates on occupied Sahrawi territory. It denounced the Moroccan occupation authorities' unilateral declaration that their exclusive economic zone included the territorial waters of Western Sahara.

77. Human rights defenders in Western Sahara were subjected to assault, torture, lengthy detention and killings. Such acts of terrorism clearly amounted to violations of international human rights law. Restrictions were placed on journalists who sought to uncover those crimes. The question of Western Sahara

remained one of decolonization and would be resolved only once the people of Western Sahara could freely exercise its will.

78. **Mr. Edabadda** (Rotary Club de Boujdour) said that he was part of a generation of young entrepreneurs who had benefited from the new economic model launched by King Mohammed VI in 2015, on the basis of a sustainable compact between the State and local actors. More than \$10 billion had been invested in infrastructure and 120,000 jobs had been created. Access to local resources was granted fairly, and tax breaks were available to boost competitiveness and human development. Vocational training schools were being opened to create a highly-trained local workforce. In particular, the City of Trades and Skills in Laayoune was training specialists in such areas as renewable energy, fisheries manufacturing and agriculture. Unlike individuals who were far removed from the region, Saharans were best placed to describe those developments on the ground.

79. **Mr. Adda**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that he was one of hundreds of Saharan youth who had fallen victim to the Polisario. A former official under the Qadhafi regime, Abu al-Qasim al-Zway, had recently revealed that the first leader of the Polisario had been murdered by its current leadership after rejecting separatism. The clique that had controlled the Polisario since 1975 used systematic torture and extrajudicial killings to silence any dissent. It had perpetrated an ethnic cleansing campaign against people of Moroccan Saharan descent, instead flooding the camps with people from neighbouring countries at the behest of the host country.

80. Along with some other young people from the camps, he had sought to break the silence and press for human rights. He had been detained for 64 days in the Errachid detention centre, where he had been tortured before being deported to Mauritania. Many other young activists, including Mahmud Zaydan, Mulay Abba Buzid and Al-Fadil Abrikah, had suffered a similar fate. The leaders of the Polisario, supported by the host country's security forces, were subjugating the camp residents in order to prolong the dispute for material gain and to serve their own political agendas.

81. **Mr. Sahel** (Algerian Council of the Nation) said that the right of all peoples to self-determination was clearly established in United Nations doctrine, including General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The persistence of colonialism posed a threat to international peace and security and undermined the primacy of the rule of law. By fulfilling the noble goal of decolonization, the United Nations would strengthen

public confidence in its institutions and in its own position as the safety valve of the multilateral order. For anyone who supported the struggle of colonized people, it was therefore tragic that no progress had been made towards organizing a referendum on Western Sahara.

82. **Mr. Ennas** (Centre de la paix pour les études politiques et stratégiques) said that he had previously been a high-ranking member of the Polisario; but after realizing that its claims and objectives were spurious, he had returned to his homeland, as had thousands of Saharans. There was no longer room for doubt concerning the origins of the Polisario or the identity of its backers. As had recently been admitted by Abu al-Qasim al-Zway, the Polisario had been created by Qadhafi to hobble Morocco at the height of the cold war. Al-Zway had quoted Boumediene as saying to Qadhafi, “You created the Polisario, then you sent it to our country”. In a research report dated 16 December 1977 and prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the United States of America, it was stated that a large percentage of those Saharans grouped in camps in Algeria were not from the Sahara; that many members from Mauritania, Algeria and Morocco made up the backbone of the Polisario leadership and rank and file; that large numbers of Polisario soldiers appeared to have been recruited from Saharans who were not originally from the Sahara; and that the motives of the host country went beyond a concern for the rights of the Saharans to self-determination. The report revealed how separatism had been fomented by parties intent on hindering development across the region.

83. **Mr. Shaibata**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Polisario armed group posed an imminent threat to peace and security in the region. There was a convergence of interests between the group’s separatist aims and the activities of terrorists and smugglers across the region. The Polisario took advantage of the availability of weapons, and its members were joining terrorist organizations to implement their anti-Moroccan agenda. Polisario leaders had led cells of Da’esh, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram; examples included Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui and his deputy Abdelhakim al-Sahraoui. Those events had taken place in a climate of impunity, as Algeria delegated its authority to the armed group.

84. As had been documented by the World Food Programme, the Polisario embezzled and sold food aid. It was able to do so because the population of the camps had never been registered, despite repeated requests made by the Security Council, most recently in resolution 2654 (2022). Children were systematically recruited to the Polisario militia, sexually exploited and indoctrinated. The Polisario had no democratic mandate

to represent the population of the Sahara, which was peaceful and committed to the integrity of Morocco. Two thirds of Sahrawis lived in the southern provinces, where they chose their own representatives in free and transparent elections.

85. **Mr. Giménez** (Escuela de Gobierno y Políticas Públicas Norberto Bobbio) said that, since 1975, numerous Moroccans of Saharan origin had been living in subhuman conditions in the Tindouf camps. The Government of Algeria and Frente POLISARIO had consistently refused to register them or provide them with identity documents. Most had known no other life. The camps were located in the Algerian desert, in one of the most inhospitable places on earth. Owing to climate change, temperatures could reach 60°C in the summer. There was no educational or health-care infrastructure. Because agriculture and animal husbandry were impossible, the population depended on humanitarian aid from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Malnutrition was widespread, as Frente POLISARIO systematically embezzled humanitarian aid with the assistance of corrupt Algerian officials. The European Anti-Fraud Office held Frente POLISARIO directly responsible for those activities.

86. Morocco had proposed a realistic and practicable solution to the artificial dispute. The region would enjoy autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations and the interests of the population of the territory. The initiative was now supported by several influential States.

87. **Ms. Hamudi**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that detailed historical research had found no sign of a Moroccan presence in Western Sahara before 1975. In that year, Morocco had forcibly occupied the Territory, expelled its people and separated families in full view of the world. Had the Territory genuinely been Moroccan, Morocco would not have needed to resort to ethnic cleansing using napalm, phosphorus, torture and repression. The question of Western Sahara was thus one of decolonization.

88. The Sahrawi people had embarked on their struggle with only the support of Algeria, which had given them safe haven. Contrary to the claims of several petitioners, the residents of the camps were not suffering. She was herself a camp resident, and only one thing caused her to suffer, namely Moroccan colonialism. The Sahrawi people were proud of their struggle and their leaders. They would either exercise full sovereignty over their country or die in the attempt.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.