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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

SUB-COMMITTEE I

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWENTY-NINTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Friday, 9 September 1966, at 3.30 p.m.

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and Add.1/Corr.1) (continued)

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PRESENT:

<u>Chairman:</u>	Mr. MALECELA	(United Republic of Tanzania)
<u>Members:</u>	Mr. KOFOD	Denmark
	Mr. THIAM	Mali
	Mr. JOUEJATI	Syria
	Mr. SAHLI	Tunisia
	Mr. SHAKHOV	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
	Mr. IOUM	United Republic of Tanzania
	Mr. JANEVSKY	Yugoslavia
<u>Also present:</u>	Mr. BROWN	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
<u>Secretariat:</u>	Mr. POLYAKOV	Secretary of the Sub-Committee

MAURITIUS, SEYCHELLES AND ST. HELENA (A/AC.109/L.279 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1)  
(continued)

At the Chairman's invitation, Mr. Brown, representative of the United Kingdom, took a place at the Sub-Committee table.

Mr. JOUEJATI (Syria) noted that, despite the clear and straightforward recommendations made by the Sub-Committee in 1965 and subsequently adopted by the Special Committee, the question of Mauritius, Seychelles and St. Helena had to be taken up once again, because the administering Power, notwithstanding its disclaimers, was not yet willing to transfer full powers to the democratically elected representatives of the inhabitants. He did not believe that the reason for the delay was a desire for a better preparation for independence and self-determination. In fact, the administering Power had made but small contribution to accelerating the process of emancipation; it surrounded the idea of independence with all sorts of conditions which cast doubt on its good faith. The reforms which had been introduced in recent years were due entirely to the initiative and toil of the indigenous Government. In reality, during 156 years of British rule, nothing significant had been done to provide for the welfare of the masses of the people, who were exposed to extremely unfavourable meteorological conditions, to spread education or to prepare in the Territories cadres sufficiently enlightened to assume the responsibilities of government, development and industrialization.

He submitted that the United Kingdom Government's motives were twofold: to assure the permanence of the privileges of the tiny minority of settlers, and to use the Territories for strategic purposes against the wishes of the people of those islands and of the surrounding areas. Syria regarded the information given by the USSR representative on the Anglo-American plan to establish military bases in the Garcia Islands as extremely serious; the Special Committee should thoroughly investigate the matter and weigh its gravity.

Why, after all, did the administering Power wish to maintain the obsolete institution of the Governor, who was foreign to the country and foreign to its culture, its outlook and its aspirations, who appointed and dismissed unbound by

(Mr. Jouejati, Syria)

the advice of the Public Service Commission, who robbed the indigenous representatives of their legitimate right to care for their own internal security and external affairs and who, while he was supposed to act in accordance with the advice of the Executive Council, was nevertheless authorized to act against its advice?

Why should more than one quarter of the national representatives be nominated by the Governor, and not elected by the people, and why should the Governor, and not the representatives themselves, select the Speaker of their Assembly? Why should he have the last say on expenditure, when the island needed large funds for development? Why should bills require his assent and, worse still, why could a bill rejected by the Legislative Council be put into effect by him if he considered it expedient?

Of course, the administering Power had a ready answer to those questions: the country was not yet independent, it was only in the experimental stages of internal self-government. Naturally, the administering Power, invoking apparently plausible reasons of balance, objectivity and reason, wanted it to be believed that the Territories were not ready for independence and self-determination. The Special Committee was very sceptical about the alleged pace of preparation undertaken by the administering Power; moreover, it firmly believed that the problems of poverty, under-development, illiteracy, cleavage between rich and poor and social injustice could not be solved by the administering Power, but would be overcome by the inhabitants themselves when they were independent and could freely decide their own future, their own form of government and the best way of meeting their own needs and when they would receive assistance from the community of nations in equality, equity and dignity. Credence should be given to the Chief Minister, Mr. Ramgoolarn, when he asserted that the country should have achieved independence by the middle of 1964, and not to the administering Power, which invoked the need for a process of constitutional progress as a pretext for the continued denial of legitimate rights to the peoples in question.

Mr. THIAM (Mali) stated that the situation in Mauritius, Seychelles and St. Helena was a subject of serious concern to his Government. In Mauritius, there was a racial problem which the administering Power had kept alive with a view to perpetuating its domination, in accordance with the principle "divide and rule". It was in obedience to that principle that the United Kingdom Government had appointed the Banwell Commission to make recommendations on the electoral system.

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(Mr. Taitelbaum)

Mali believed that the constitution of a country and all related questions were essentially matters for that country's people to decide. The administering Power had no right to make self-government and independence for the Territory conditional on full agreement among the political parties concerning a constitution which did not meet the legitimate aspirations of the indigenous inhabitants. In his view, the setting up of the Banwell Commission was simply a manoeuvre designed to perpetuate the United Kingdom presence in the Territory simply in order the better to exploit its wealth and its people; for while the attention of the Mauritians was centred on constitutional problems, the British companies were continuing to pillage the country, whose economy was in a catastrophic condition. Mauritius could not be considered in isolation in that connexion; attention must also be given to conditions in Seychelles and St. Helena, whose climate, owing to their geographical position, was ideal for diversified cultivation. Yet sugar plantations covered a total of 215,800 acres and tea plantations 6,600 acres, leaving only 17,600 acres for other food crops, and the Mauritians, and for that matter the inhabitants of Seychelles and St. Helena also, were forced to import foodstuffs from the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Thus, the decline of the Mauritian economy noted in the working paper was not surprising. In the fourth quarter of 1965, the public debt had amounted to 264 million rupees, or 18 million more than in the corresponding quarter of 1964. That loss to the Territories swelled the excessive profits of the British companies, and that was why the administering Power was refusing to allow self-government and independence for the Territories. Sugar exports had fallen from 334.2 million rupees in 1964 to 289.7 million in 1965, while the profits of the British companies were on the increase. Meanwhile there was heavy unemployment in the island and the Government was advising the indigenous inhabitants to go abroad to work, so that it could make greater military use of the island. He remembered the statement made by the petitioner concerning the intention of the United Kingdom and the United States to turn the island into a military base for aggression. It was interesting to recall the United Kingdom Prime Minister's recent statement that any Power called upon to participate in United Nations peace-keeping operations would have to be on

(Mr. Brown, U.K.)

the spot or in a position to go there, and that the United Kingdom could not ignore the fact that its partners wanted it to be able to exert enough influence in Asia and Africa to neutralize existing or potential centres of infection. According to the Prime Minister's own words, the United Kingdom Government had sought to abandon the system of large military bases in populated areas and to establish itself in areas which were virtually devoid of indigenous inhabitants and from which its forces would be able to move to the theatre of operations rapidly and at minimum expense. That statement, especially if it was recalled what had happened in Ascension Island two years previously needed no comment.

Mali was opposed to military bases which were meant for aggression and which prevented the peace-loving peoples of the Territories, notably Mauritius, Seychelles and St. Helena, from enjoying their right to self-determination and independence. Consequently, his delegation again appealed to the administering Power to fulfil its obligations by enabling the indigenous people to attain independence, in accordance with their freely expressed desire, in the best conditions. The constitutional problem should not prevent the granting of self-government in the near future, since the Territory must attain independence as soon as possible. The establishment of the military base in the area was an unlawful act. The United Kingdom should dismantle the base and replace it with hospitals and schools, which the people certainly needed much more.

Mr. BROWN (United Kingdom) said he assumed that the statement made by the Soviet Union representative at the 28th meeting on 12 August, as it appeared in the provisional summary record, would be extensively rewritten. The new arrangements for the administration of certain small islands represented an administrative readjustment freely worked out with the Governments and elected representatives of the Territories concerned. No decisions had yet been reached by either the United Kingdom Government or the United States Government on the construction of any facilities anywhere in the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Since the representative of the Soviet Union had suggested that the Sub-Committee should recommend the Special Committee to take steps to ensure that all land was restored to the indigenous inhabitants of those Territories and that the rights of those inhabitants to dispose of the natural resources of the islands were preserved, he recalled that the United Kingdom delegation had already pointed

(Mr. Brown, United Kingdom)

out that the first human inhabitants of Mauritius and the Seychelles had come from France and those of St. Helena from the United Kingdom. He wondered whether the indigenous inhabitants to whom the representative of the Soviet Union was referring were the dodos and tortoises - the sole occupants of the islands before the Europeans had arrived.

At the twentieth session of the General Assembly, the Fourth Committee had discussed the question of Mauritius. The Electoral Commission, established in December 1965, under the chairmanship of Sir Harold Banwell, had recommended in February 1966 that there should be twenty three-member constituencies for Mauritius and one two-member constituency for Rodriguez, giving a total of sixty-two seats to be filled by direct suffrage. Five additional "corrective" seats would be filled, to be allocated, one at a time, to the party which had the highest average number of votes per seat won; a "good loser" candidate of that party, belonging to the community least well represented, would then be declared elected. These "corrective" seats, however, would be awarded only to parties which had secured 10 per cent of the total poll and had won at least one constituency seat. Also, under a "variable corrective", any party with 25 per cent of the votes should have its seats increased up to 25 per cent if necessary by the appointment to the Legislature of the requisite number of "good losers." The United Kingdom Government had accepted the Banwell Commission's recommendations in full, but the three parties forming the Coalition Government had protested. Only the leader of the Opposition Party, the Parti Mauricien Social Democrate, had welcomed the report. Most of the opposition had been directed towards the "correctives", i.e., the measures designed to provide assurances to minorities on the island that they would be adequately represented in Parliament and therefore that the main clauses of the Constitution should not be amended without their agreement.

In the course of a visit to Mauritius by a British Minister full agreement among all political parties had been reached on a system of seventy seats, in twenty three-member constituencies; sixty members would be elected by block voting (each voter being obliged to cast his full three votes). Two members would be elected for Rodrigues by block voting. In addition, there would be eight "best loser" seats. The first four such seats would be reserved, irrespective of party, for communities under-represented in the Legislative Assembly after the constituency elections. The remaining four "best loser" seats would be allocated on the basis

(Mr. Brown, United Kingdom)

of party, without any qualifying requirement for a minimum number of seats or votes. That system would guarantee the fair distribution of seats among the various communities on the one hand, and the different parties on the other. Registration was due to begin on 5 September, but because of Ramadan the elections could not be held before February 1967. If a majority of the new legislature favoured independence, Mauritius would therefore be able to achieve independence after six months of internal self-government, i.e., during the summer of 1967.

Pursuant to the Banwell Commission's recommendations, a team of observers from Commonwealth countries had been established under the chairmanship of Sir Colin McGregor, formerly Chief Justice of Jamaica. Some of them would be present in Mauritius from the outset of the registration of electors.

The establishment of the Banwell Commission had not been in any sense a delaying manoeuvre, as the representative of Mali had implied, because agreement had finally been reached and independence was conditional upon the outcome of the elections. That had been the most appropriate procedure, because of the divisions of opinion concerning the ultimate status of the Territory. The United Kingdom Government continued to regard independence as the right solution and would take all possible steps to ensure that Mauritius became independent as soon as possible.

He pointed out in connexion with the paragraphs of document A/AC.109/L.279/Add1 which referred to economic conditions in Mauritius, that 1963 had been in some respects an exceptional year with a record production of sugar and very high exports because of the international sugar shortage during that year. In fact, the receipts from sugar exports in 1964, although lower than those in 1963, had still been well above those in 1961 and 1962. Again, sugar production in 1965 had shown an increase compared with 1964. The Mauritius and United Kingdom Governments had taken measures to maintain the pace of economic development in Mauritius. In addition to receiving grant funds, (US\$6.7 million allocated for development for 1965/68 and nearly \$13 million in further grants and loans for cyclone reconstruction) it should be remembered that Mauritius enjoyed an outlet at guaranteed preferential prices under the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement; (currently more than £47 a ton compared with the world price of about \$17); the preferential price applied to an estimated 75 per cent of Mauritius sugar exports.

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(Mr. Brown, United Kingdom)

With regard to the Seychelles, he drew attention to the main developments since July 1964 and in particular to the exchange of dispatches between the Colonial Secretary and the Governor, a useful summary of which was to be found in document A/AC.109/L.279 (para. 75). The Legislative Council had asked the United Kingdom Government for a response to its proposal that the territory should remain British or be integrated with Britain. The Colonial Secretary had replied acknowledging the Council's desire for no change in the present relationship and suggesting that the territory should now drop the minor qualifications for voting and move to universal suffrage. He also suggested apportioning departmental responsibilities to non-official members of the Executive Council and the appointment of a Constitutional Commissioner who would visit the Seychelles and consult all shades of opinion, including parties and individuals, before reporting on the future constitutional evolution of the territory. The Commissioner had accordingly been appointed and had visited the Seychelles and submitted his report, which was under consideration. A strike had taken place in the Seychelles, but the strikers had returned to work, having accepted an interim-wage award equivalent to an 11.1 per cent increase. His delegation thought that that information should answer the Syrian representative's questions concerning low wages in the Seychelles. The strike which had taken place in June had ended with a return to work when the unions accepted an interim wage increase of 11.1 per cent. The Seychelles were receiving under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts increased assistance in grants, part of which had been allocated towards development schemes (\$3.36 million for 1966/68) and the remainder towards the Seychelles budget.

There had been a number of major economic and social developments in St. Helena since 1964, which were briefly described in document A/AC.109/L.279/Add.1. Government labourers had received a pay increase of 90 per cent with effect from July 1965. That had caused the collapse of the flax industry but had not caused unemployment, owing to the other employment opportunities available.

The Governor of St. Helena had transmitted to the Colonial Secretary a dispatch in which he had referred to consultations which had taken place with a representative cross-section of the community in regard to possible further constitutional advance. The Advisory Council had adopted a resolution welcoming the proposed revisions of the Constitution and asking the United Kingdom Government for approval. Under the proposals, which had been almost unanimously agreed among the inhabitants of the territory, the Advisory Council would be replaced by a

(Mr. Brown, United Kingdom)

Legislative Council which would include four additional elected members, bringing the total number of these to twelve. The Council would also have six nominated non-officials and two nominated officials. The Council would enact legislation, the Governor possessing certain reserve powers for use in exceptional circumstances. He would appoint committees of the Council and, as appropriate, delegate powers and departmental responsibilities to them. Those committees would include special experts as necessary and a majority of members drawn from the Legislative Council. The Executive Council would consist of two officials and the chairmen of the Legislative Council committees. The public service would remain the responsibility of the Governor. The Governor had expressed his belief that those changes would enable the people of the Territory to take a much more effective and responsible part in the regulation of their own affairs.

The Territory already had universal adult suffrage and elections had been held in 1963. Significant and progressive developments had thus taken place in the political and constitutional evolution of the three groups of islands, in each case with the full participation and in consultation with the peoples of the Territories themselves and their democratically elected representatives.

Mr. SHAKHOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the United Kingdom representative's statement was intended only to confuse and to keep the United Kingdom Government from having to say what it intended to do to carry out the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Committee of Twenty-Four. The United Kingdom representative had spoken at length about the constitutional changes, the establishment of an electoral system and appropriate legislation, as though such matters were central to United Kingdom policy. The USSR delegation wished to state categorically that the changes in the Constitution were a matter for the people alone to decide and to ask the United Kingdom to cease manoeuvring to prolong colonial domination and to remove all obstacles to its termination, for it was time to grant the peoples the independence to which they were undeniably entitled.

The United Kingdom representative had tried to refute the USSR delegation's remarks by saying that no agreement had been signed between the United Kingdom and the United States regarding the financing of the base in the Chagos Archipelago, but he had been careful to say nothing about the fact that work had already started on the base. The USSR delegation had not invented those facts; the information...

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(Mr. Shakhov. USSR)

mentioned in the Committee and the Sub-Committee had been published in the United Kingdom and United States Press and could easily be checked. Indeed, the Press had revealed that the United States was bringing pressure to bear on their partners to remain east of Suez and carry out their obligations there. Those "obligations" were to police that part of the world. There had been reports in the United States and the United Kingdom Press that talks had taken place between the United States and the United Kingdom and an agreement had been signed giving responsibility for most of the bases east of Suez to the United States, which undertook to pay for the installation of the base in the Chagos Archipelago. It was difficult to see why the Press of the two great Western Powers should publish the information if no such agreement had been signed. If the United Kingdom persisted in its denials, it would be easy to demonstrate the truth by sending a mission of inquiry to the spot, as the Syrian representative had proposed; but the USSR delegation feared that the news was well-founded and that all the information about the base was correct.

As to the original inhabitants of Mauritius, the turtles and the dodos, the United Kingdom had not told USSR representatives anything they had not known and they had replied to its comments. As the United Kingdom delegation had brought up the subject of ornithology, however, he would remind it that other birds than dodos, birds with a larger wing-span, now swept over the Non-Self-Governing Territories, and were used by the colonialists to terrorize the subject peoples. There had been talk quite recently about those that had flown over Ascension Island. The United Kingdom representative had apparently been instructed to repeat the specious arguments that had been advanced the previous year, but there was certainly much more to be said about those modern birds, a species which was neither extinct nor becoming extinct; the 1965 and 1966 summary records were very instructive on the subject.

Mr. THIAM (Mali) said that although the electoral system described by the United Kingdom representative, which the administering Power wished to introduce into Mauritius was very complex - he himself had difficulty in understanding it properly - he welcomed the fact that the report of the Banwell Commission had been approved by all the political parties and that the elections would enable the Territory to attain independence beginning in the summer of 1967.

The CHAIRMAN said he could not agree with the United Kingdom representative's strictures on the working paper on Mauritius, Seychelles and St. Helena (A/AC.109/L.279) prepared by the Secretariat. The Sub-Committee appreciated the high quality of the work done by the Secretariat, whose difficulties were due to the fact that the administering Power did not supply the required information. The Secretariat would be ready to correct any inadequacies in document A/AC.109/L.279 if the United Kingdom would provide the necessary data.

As to the installation of military bases in the Seychelles, to which the speakers attached so much importance, he recalled that the question had been considered by the Organization of African Unity, by the Conference of Non-Aligned States and also by the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly. The African countries, in particular, were absolutely opposed to the installation of military bases in that part of the Indian Ocean, particularly as they themselves had undertaken not to acquire nuclear weapons. The United States and the United Kingdom, the two Powers which were reported to be installing bases in the Seychelles, should give an assurance that they abandoned the idea, and they should do so before the Fourth Committee met, so that the matter would be less disquieting by the time it was discussed by that Committee.

The administering Power seemed to have made a great effort to see that the minorities were represented in the Mauritius Legislative Assembly; but would it not be better if the United Kingdom left the initiative of constitutional changes to the people, instead of always putting forward its own suggestions, which gave the impression that the constitutional development of the Territories which the Committee was not considering was dictated to them?

Mr. JOUEJATI (Syria) agreed with the representatives of the USSR and Mali that the fundamental question was how the United Kingdom intended to apply General Assembly resolution 2069 (XX).

The possibility of the United Kingdom and the United States installing military bases caused concern in Africa and the Middle East, particularly as bases of that kind had recently been the starting point for acts of aggression that had been condemned by the United Nations. The representative of the administering Power had stated that there was no agreement between the two countries at present, but negotiations were apparently under way; he would like to know whether the indigenous population was represented in the negotiations, and if so, by whom.

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Constitutional development must be freely decided on by the inhabitants. The representative of the administering Power had said that when representatives had been elected by the electoral system it had proposed, they would decide the question of independence. He would like to know when the Legislative Assembly which was to be elected would meet and take such a decision. He also wondered how the problem of the different ethnic groups was to be overcome by the proposed electoral system.

As he had pointed out earlier, Mauritius was subject to economic difficulties because of its bad climate; and the local housing was not sufficient protection from the elements.

Mr. SAHLI (Tunisia) wondered what might be the advantages of such a complicated, not to say peculiar, electoral system as the one proposed for Mauritius and described by the United Kingdom representative. Would national unity really be possible under such a system? Would not elections on the basis of universal suffrage be preferable?

Mr. BROWN (United Kingdom), replying to the Chairman, said that he had not intended to criticize Working Paper A/AC.109/L.279, but to give the right perspective on some of the facts cited in it by explaining that 1963 had been an exceptional year for agriculture in Mauritius, and that if the figures for production had been lower in succeeding years, that did not mean that the Territory was in economic difficulties.

The proposed electoral system for Mauritius was not so complicated as some members of the Sub-Committee thought. Of the seventy seats provided for, sixty-two were to be filled by normal universal suffrage; only the remaining eight were "best loser" seats and were intended to ensure that the minority groups would be represented in the Legislative Assembly. As everyone knew, the system, proposed by the Banwell Commission, had been accepted by all the political parties of the island, after two unsuccessful experiments and after action by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Replying to the Syrian representative's question, he said that he had already stated in his report that the Legislative Assembly would meet immediately after the elections, or about February 1967; Mauritius would then be able to ask for independence if it so wished.

Mr. JOUEJATI (Syria) asked whether the eight "best loser" seats would be filled by representatives of the island's Chinese and Muslim population.

Mr. BROWN (United Kingdom) replied that it had been decided not to set aside special seats for particular minorities or communities, but that the new electoral system had been framed so as to ensure their fair representation. The new system was less complicated than might appear and above all it commanded general agreement among all the Mauritius political parties.

#### ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN asked the Secretariat to draft the reports on the work already done by the Sub-Committee during the coming week. He trusted that the members of the Sub-Committee would review the reports quickly, so that they could be adopted before the end of the week.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.