



General Assembly

Distr.: General
26 June 2023

Original: English

Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 6th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 13 June 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Rambally (Saint Lucia)

Contents

Question of Western Sahara (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent as soon as possible to the Chief of the Documents Management Section (dms@un.org).

Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org/>).

23-11354 (E)



Please recycle



The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

1. **The Chair** informed the Committee that the delegations of Burundi, Cabo Verde, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe had indicated their wish to participate in the work of the Committee as observers.

Question of Western Sahara (*continued*)
(A/AC.109/2023/17)

2. **Ms. Dhanutirto** (Indonesia) said that the Committee must strengthen its political will to achieve the decolonization of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. In so doing, it should take a case-by-case approach and make a careful, balanced and thorough assessment of each situation.

3. Her delegation continued to support the efforts undertaken under the auspices of the Secretary-General, and by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, to advance the political process and find a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable solution to the question of Western Sahara. It also supported the calls made in the resolutions of the Security Council for a realistic, practicable and enduring solution.

4. **Mr. Ugarelli** (Observer for Peru) said that, six decades after the question of Western Sahara had been added to the agenda of the Committee, there was no sign that the parties would show flexibility to find a mutually acceptable solution. The question must be addressed peacefully through diplomatic means with a view to finding a just and sustainable solution consistent with the resolutions of the United Nations, including those of the Security Council. A more thorough assessment should be made of the range of positions concerning the issue.

5. His delegation strongly supported the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to foster dialogue among the concerned parties and create the conditions for a genuine ceasefire. The resumed political process should be aimed at finding a just, viable, durable and mutually acceptable solution, beginning with the maintenance of the ceasefire agreed in 1991, and avoiding any action that could exacerbate tension. The parties should negotiate without preconditions and show political will, good faith and openness.

6. The international community should continue to support the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The current restrictions on the Mission's freedom of movement and on its supply chain hampered its operations east of the berm. His delegation supported the efforts of the United Nations to

strengthen the role of women in maintaining international peace and security. It was essential also to listen to the perspective of civil society organizations.

7. Alongside efforts to relaunch the political dialogue, funding should be secured for the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in providing humanitarian assistance to the refugee camps. Any interruption in those activities could result in serious food insecurity and malnutrition.

8. **Ms. Luna** (Observer for the Dominican Republic) said that the Moroccan autonomy initiative constituted a basis for a political process with the involvement of the United Nations. Her delegation appreciated the efforts made by the Secretary-General to foster dialogue with a view to finding a just and peaceful solution. It commended the work done by his Personal Envoy, including his visits to Rabat, the Tindouf camps, Algiers and Nouakchott in 2022 and the bilateral consultations held with the parties to the conflict in New York in March 2023. The international community should work together to find a peaceful, realistic, viable, lasting and mutually acceptable solution consistent with the rights and aspirations of the parties involved and with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

9. **Ms. Salman** (Observer for Bahrain) said that her delegation supported the efforts being made by the Kingdom of Morocco to achieve a political solution to the question of the Moroccan Sahara on the basis of the Moroccan autonomy initiative and the resolutions of the Security Council, in the context of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Morocco. Bahrain had affirmed its support for Morocco by opening a consulate in Laayoune, in the Moroccan Sahara, in December 2020.

10. **Ms. Ouattara Cisse** (Observer for Burkina Faso) said that her delegation supported the political process, under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General, to find a realistic, lasting political solution, based on compromise, to the regional dispute concerning Western Sahara, in accordance with the 17 Security Council resolutions adopted since 2007. It appreciated the progress made in the two round tables held in Geneva, on 5 and 6 December 2018 and on 21 and 22 March 2019 respectively, and welcomed the Personal Envoy's efforts to give impetus to the political progress, in particular through the informal bilateral consultations held with all the concerned parties in New York in March 2023. Her delegation supported the resumption of the round-table process with the same actors and in the same format.

11. Her delegation supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which constituted a realistic and reliable solution to the dispute and was consistent with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. It welcomed the opening of consulates in the region, something that would boost the region's prospects as a hub for development and stability in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and African regions. For its part, Burkina Faso had opened a consulate in Dakhla in October 2020. Resolving the longstanding dispute and strengthening cooperation among the States members of the Arab Maghreb Union would contribute to the stability and security of the region as a whole, and would help combat terrorism in the Sahel. Burkina Faso welcomed the development model launched by Morocco in 2015, which would have a lasting effect on the quality of life of the population of the Sahara. All parties, without exception, should comply with the ceasefire and cooperate with MINURSO.

12. **Mr. Diome** (Observer for Senegal) said that the good faith of the Government of Morocco had been evidenced by notable progress in human rights, democratic participation and economic development. Many States, including Senegal, therefore supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was in line with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. As was recognized in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the initiative included provisions to address the Tindouf refugee issue in accordance with international humanitarian law. In recognition of the actions taken by Morocco, Senegal had opened a consulate in Dakhla in April 2021.

13. A solution to the regional dispute would require a process under the exclusive auspices of the United Nations, based on the resolutions adopted by the Security Council since 2007. His delegation urged all the parties to build on the momentum of the two Geneva round tables, showing realism and a spirit of compromise. His delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's visit to the stakeholders in 2022 and the informal bilateral consultations held in New York in March 2023.

14. His delegation welcomed the participation of elected representatives of the Moroccan Sahara in the work of the Committee. In the interests of regional stability, it was essential to uphold the 1991 ceasefire. His delegation commended Morocco for doing so and for cooperating with MINURSO.

15. **Mr. Alamri** (Observer for Saudi Arabia) said that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supported efforts by the

Kingdom of Morocco to find a realistic political solution rooted in consensus, based on Security Council resolutions and under the auspices of the Secretary-General. Saudi Arabia continued to support the Moroccan autonomy initiative, in the context of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Morocco, as a solution consistent with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

16. His delegation appreciated the work of the Personal Envoy and hoped that consultations among concerned parties would continue. It commended Morocco for its endeavours to end the regional dispute and called on all concerned parties to show good judgment, realism and a spirit of compromise.

17. **Mr. Maniratanga** (Observer for Burundi) said that his delegation supported the efforts made by the Secretary-General and the activities of his Personal Envoy, including his visits to Tindouf, Nouakchott and Algiers in 2022 and the informal bilateral consultations held in New York in 2023 with Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and the Polisario. Enhanced cooperation among the member States of the Arab Maghreb Union would contribute to stability and security in the Sahel region.

18. His delegation strongly supported the political process being conducted under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions adopted since 2007. The continuation of the round-table process with the participation of the four main actors would result in a win-win solution to the dispute, which had exacerbated the plight of innocent civilians.

19. **Mr. Ndong Mba** (Observer for Equatorial Guinea) said that his delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's efforts to relaunch the political process under the auspices of the Secretary-General, including his visits to Rabat, the Tindouf camps, Algiers and Nouakchott in 2022 and the informal consultations with the concerned parties in New York in 2023, with a view to finding a realistic, practicable and lasting political solution based on compromise. His delegation hoped that the round-table process would resume with the same format and the same four participants, namely Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario.

20. Morocco had shown its commitment to finding a peaceful, negotiated political solution. It had taken tangible measures to improve socioeconomic development in the Western Sahara region through infrastructure projects, investment in key sectors and community development programmes. It had worked actively and constructively with the United Nations and

other international actors, including through informal conversations, and had proved open to innovative ideas. The opening of consulates of Arab, African, Asian and American States and regional organizations in Laayoune and Dakhla would make it possible to capitalize on the economic and social development opportunities offered by Morocco.

21. **Mr. Chanfi** (Observer for the Comoros) said that the principle of decolonization was intrinsically linked to that of territorial integrity. His delegation therefore supported the position of the Kingdom of Morocco with regard to the question of the Moroccan Sahara. Morocco had strong historic and cultural ties with the Moroccan Sahara; Sahrawi tribes had for centuries been integrated into Moroccan society, and those bonds bore witness to a deep, legitimate Moroccan presence in the region.

22. His delegation supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was a solid basis for negotiation, and commended the efforts made by the Personal Envoy, including his visits to the region in 2022 and the informal bilateral consultations held in New York in March 2023. Morocco had made important strides in such areas as socioeconomic development, infrastructure and health, which had markedly improved quality of life for the population in the region. A new local governance structure allowed them to participate in decision-making. Morocco had garnered international support for its credible and legitimate endeavours to find a lasting solution. In recognition of those efforts, the Comoros had opened a consulate in Laayoune in 2019.

23. His delegation was concerned at the suffering in the Tindouf camps and, in particular, the plight of women and children. Action should be taken to register the camp population in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the recommendations of UNHCR and the Security Council.

24. **Ms. Kambangoye Ankassa** (Observer for Gabon) said that her delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's visits to the region in 2022 and the informal bilateral consultations conducted in March 2023. It hoped that those encouraging developments would lead to the resumption of the round-table process, with the same four participants, namely Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario. It called on those participants to remain committed, in a spirit of compromise, with a view to finding a political solution to the regional dispute concerning the Moroccan Sahara.

25. Gabon supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which provided a credible basis for moving beyond the current deadlock towards an acceptable negotiated solution. The initiative now had the support of more than 100 States and of the Security Council.

26. Developments on the ground had been positive. Democratically elected representatives of the Moroccan Sahara took part in the regional seminars of the Committee. The new development model launched by Morocco in 2015 had led to a marked improvement in living standards in the region. In a sign of strengthened international cooperation, a growing number of countries, including her own, had opened consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla. The situation of human rights had also improved: the roles of the regional human rights committees in Laayoune and Dakhla, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), treaty bodies and special procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council had all been strengthened.

27. Morocco had fully respected the ceasefire, and the other parties should do the same. The condition of the population of the Tindouf camps remained a concern; people living there must have their fundamental rights respected.

28. **Mr. Akakpo** (Observer for Togo) said that his delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's efforts to relaunch the political process, particularly the bilateral consultations held with the concerned parties in New York in March 2023. All parties should remain committed with a view to finding a realistic, pragmatic political solution based on compromise. His delegation commended Morocco for respecting the ceasefire in the Moroccan Sahara and cooperating fully and continuously with MINURSO. It called on the other parties to follow suit.

29. His delegation welcomed the socioeconomic development brought about by the new development model, which had helped empower the population. It welcomed the opening of consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla, which would make it possible to capitalize on socioeconomic opportunities and promote the peaceful settlement of disputes.

30. **Ms. Mualubambo** (Observer for Angola) said that Western Sahara continued to be the last Non-Self-Governing Territory in Africa. Addressing that political challenge would require the urgent and unconditional implementation of all relevant resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the African Union, by holding a free and fair referendum in Western Sahara that would fulfil the aspirations of the Sahrawi people. A peaceful and lasting solution should be found in accordance with the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the resolutions of the United Nations.

31. It would be useful to strengthen cooperation between the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara and the African Union Special

Envoy on Western Sahara, Joaquim Chissano, with a view to finding a mutually acceptable and sustainable solution. For that purpose, they should interact with all stakeholders, including the Security Council, to realize the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination.

32. **Mr. Sané** (Observer for Guinea Bissau) said that the Government of Morocco had made commendable efforts to improve living standards for the population of the Moroccan Sahara and to find a lasting settlement to the regional dispute. All involved parties must continue to engage in political dialogue in a spirit of compromise, under the auspices of the United Nations and in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. His delegation called for the resumption of the Geneva round-table process, with the same format and the same participants, namely Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the Polisario. Accordingly, it welcomed the Personal Envoy's informal consultations with those participants in New York in March 2023.

33. The Moroccan autonomy initiative had been described as serious and credible by the Security Council, and had the support of more than 100 States. It provided a practicable and pragmatic basis for a mutually acceptable solution based on compromise. It had the potential to stabilize the region and improve the economic, social and cultural situation of its population. Morocco was to be commended for its contributions to infrastructure, education, health and human rights. Those developments had encouraged a growing number of States, including Guinea Bissau, to open consulates there.

34. **Ms. Kuzee** (Observer for Namibia) said that Namibia had been among the last countries in Africa to achieve independence; but that process would remain incomplete until Western Sahara had been decolonized. Her Government unequivocally and consistently supported the right of Western Sahara to self-determination in accordance with the Declaration on decolonization. Sustainable development could not be realized without recognizing the primacy of the Charter of the United Nations, in which the right to self-determination was enshrined. Her delegation remained deeply concerned at the lack of progress made towards that goal and, in particular, the stalling of the settlement plan for Western Sahara, which provided for a free and fair referendum. The United Nations had invested significant resources in MINURSO in an endeavour to hold that referendum. The Sahrawi people had thus been precluded from exercising their right to determine their political status and freely pursuing their economic, social, and cultural development. That situation was untenable.

35. Her delegation welcomed the visit to the region undertaken by the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye, on 29 and 30 July 2022, and commended the work of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General. It encouraged Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania to engage constructively with the mechanisms of the United Nations and the African Union. The Committee had a duty to ensure the implementation of all resolutions aimed at ending colonialism, occupation and oppression.

36. **Mr. Zoumanigui** (Observer for Guinea) said that his delegation looked forward to the resumption of the round-table process with the participation of Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and the Polisario. In order to make the process a success, the parties should show realism and a spirit of compromise. His delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's visits to the region in 2022 and the informal bilateral consultations held in New York in 2023 with Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario. It supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative as a compromise solution to the regional dispute that was consistent with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. Guinea had opened a consulate in Dakhla to strengthen its relations with Morocco, interact with the Guinean community of the region, participate in development activities and contribute to the peace process. His delegation welcomed the holding of democratic, transparent, free and credible general elections in Morocco, including the Moroccan Sahara. It commended Morocco for respecting the ceasefire and cooperating with MINURSO, and urged the other parties to follow suit.

37. In view of the worrying humanitarian situation in the Tindouf camps, it was essential to register and conduct a census of the population in accordance with international humanitarian law. His delegation continued to support any proposal aimed at creating a climate of peace and stability that would be beneficial to all the parties directly or indirectly involved in the search for a lasting solution to the regional conflict.

38. **Mr. Habashneh** (Observer for Jordan) said that the close ties between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Kingdom of Morocco had been reaffirmed in March 2021 with the opening of a Jordanian consulate in the Moroccan city of Laayoune. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was a realistic, logical and serious proposal that was consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and took into account the specificities of the region and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. His delegation commended the efforts of the Personal Envoy to relaunch the political

process under the auspices of the Secretary-General. Jordan remained committed to fostering all forms of cooperation with Morocco for the good of both countries and of the Arab world as a whole.

39. **Mr. Badubi** (Observer for Botswana) said that his delegation hoped that the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism would be marked by intensified collective efforts to accelerate the decolonization of the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories. For that purpose, the administering Powers should step up their commitment to promote the political, economic, social, cultural and educational advancement of the peoples of the Territories, thereby facilitating their eventual exercise of self-determination. Those administering Powers that had proved uncooperative should recommit to their obligations, which were underpinned by the Charter of the United Nations, the Declaration on decolonization and other relevant General Assembly resolutions.

40. In the case of Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa, obstructive and destabilizing actions had made a free and fair election elusive for more than 30 years, culminating in the collapse of the 1991 ceasefire in November 2020 and the subsequent escalation of military tensions. His delegation urged the parties to recommit to diplomacy and dialogue in order to achieve a just, peaceful and lasting solution. Any political process should be aimed at enabling the Sahrawi people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

41. While his delegation commended the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, it also underscored the primacy of the General Assembly with regard to matters of decolonization. It therefore encouraged the Committee to visit Western Sahara, something it had not done since 1975. Such a visit would enable the Committee to gather first-hand information, strengthen the General Assembly's oversight over matters of decolonization, and reduce the Assembly's excessive reliance on the Secretariat and the Security Council in relation to the question of Western Sahara.

42. **Mr. Alenezi** (Observer for Kuwait) said that his delegation supported the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy. The two previous round-table meetings had been marked by constructive engagement on the part of all four stakeholders in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions. His delegation hoped that the momentum they had generated could carry the process forward to a consensus political solution. It supported the calls in the relevant Security Council resolutions for a realistic, practicable solution based on compromise, and commended the Personal

Envoy's efforts to relaunch the process, particularly his visits to the region and his informal consultations with the stakeholders. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was the most constructive option available, and the unity and sovereignty of Morocco must be respected.

43. **Mr. Rios Sanchez** (Observer for Mexico) said that Mexico remained committed to achieving a just and lasting solution to the dispute over Western Sahara, in line with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Peace in the region depended on recognizing the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination, which was a peremptory norm of international law. Moreover, the voices of women and youth must figure prominently in any future dialogue between the parties. His delegation welcomed the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to build confidence and reach understandings to reduce the tension.

44. MINURSO had a vital role to play in ensuring stability and monitoring the ceasefire, in addition to its important demining work, which must continue unhindered. The human rights situation in the Territory should be monitored more closely so that all responsible could be held to account.

45. **Mr. Al-Maawda** (Observer for Qatar) said that Qatar supported the work of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to reach a lasting, consensus-based political solution in the context of a political process under the auspices of the United Nations, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and consistent with the sovereignty of Morocco. It believed that the Moroccan autonomy initiative should be the basis for any realistic solution, and commended Morocco for making a significant contribution to economic and social development in the Moroccan Sahara.

46. **Ms. Joyini** (Observer for South Africa) said that her country reaffirmed its support for the inalienable right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and independence in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and other relevant resolutions, the 1975 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the relevant decisions of the African Union. The Committee should act to protect the political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Sahrawi people, including their right to permanent sovereignty over their natural resources and regular reporting to relevant United Nations bodies on the situation in the Territory. Her delegation encouraged the Committee to visit the Territory and ascertain the situation on the ground, something that was long overdue.

47. Her delegation supported the Personal Envoy's endeavour to relaunch a political process bringing together both parties, namely the Kingdom of Morocco and Frente POLISARIO, to engage in direct talks and develop innovative solutions to the current impasse. Such solutions could include new confidence-building measures to bring the parties closer to direct negotiations. The international community should commit fully to the total elimination of colonialism in all its forms and manifestations, and should contribute more effectively to that goal. For its part, South Africa reaffirmed its solidarity with the Sahrawi people and all the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

48. **Ms. Fyneah** (Observer for Liberia) said that his delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's efforts to relaunch the political process, including his visits to Rabat and Algiers and the holding of informal consultations. The territorial integrity of all sovereign nations must be upheld at all times. It was therefore essential to comply with decision 693 (XXXI) of the African Union. The round-table process should resume without preconditions, in the same format and with the same four participants. Her delegation staunchly supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative as the most serious and credible compromise solution consistent with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The initiative had the support of more than 100 States. Her delegation encouraged all peace-loving nations to join the growing number of States that had established consulates in Dakhla and Laayoune.

49. Her delegation welcomed the election of Moroccan Saharan representatives in 2021 and their participation in Committee events and in the Geneva round-tables. It commended Morocco for the socioeconomic development of its southern provinces; its achievements in the area of human rights, particularly the work of the regional human rights committees; its cooperation with OHCHR; and its adherence to the ceasefire, which all parties should emulate.

50. The refugee population must urgently be registered in accordance with international law. Her delegation denounced the abuse of peaceful refugees by the Polisario, including the denial of humanitarian aid, which had been documented in several reports. It encouraged Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario to remain engaged in the political process with a view to finding a realistic, practicable and enduring solution based on compromise to the regional dispute over the Moroccan Sahara.

51. **Mr. Faati** (Observer for the Gambia) said that his delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's efforts to relaunch the political process under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General, including his visits to the region in 2022 and the informal consultations held in New York in March 2023 with Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and Polisario. His delegation encouraged all stakeholders to remain committed to the round-table process and pursue a regional, practicable and sustainable solution to the regional dispute, based on compromise. It welcomed the participation of the elected representatives of the Moroccan Sahara in the meetings of the Committee and in the two round tables held in Geneva.

52. The Gambia was strongly convinced of the sovereignty of Morocco over the Sahara region. It recognized the constructive and cooperative approach shown by Morocco and its commitment to dialogue and the United Nations-led process. All relevant stakeholders in the region should take a similarly constructive stance.

53. The Gambia strongly supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which would contribute to the security and stability of the region, enjoyed notable international support, took into consideration the local population's desire for self-determination, was consistent with international law, and was described in the relevant Security Council resolutions as serious and credible. It was encouraged by the work of the regional human rights committees and by the full cooperation of Morocco with OHCHR and special procedures mandate holders. It commended the investments made by Morocco in the Moroccan Sahara, which were boosting economic growth and improving living standards. The Gambia maintained consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla to deepen its engagement with the Sahara as a hub of development, and to promote peace, prosperity and stability for the region as a whole.

54. **Mr. Sepe** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that his delegation welcomed the Personal Envoy's visits and bilateral consultations aimed at relaunching the political process under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General. His delegation called for the round-table discussions to resume with the same format and the same participants, namely Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario, in a spirit of good faith and compromise.

55. His delegation appreciated the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was conducive to a compromise solution. In view of the international support which it had garnered, the initiative constituted a credible and serious solution to the regional dispute.

His delegation commended Morocco for fully respecting the ceasefire and called on the other parties to do the same. All parties should cooperate fully, genuinely and continuously with MINURSO to accelerate the political process and bring an end to the suffering of the civilian population.

56. The situation of the population of the Tindouf camps, particularly women and children, was particularly concerning. The population must be registered in accordance with international humanitarian law, the mandate of OHCHR, the recommendations of the Secretary-General and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

57. **Mr. Freire De Morais** (Observer for Cabo Verde) said that his delegation supported the ongoing negotiations under the auspices of the Secretary General, and welcomed the Personal Envoy's efforts to relaunch the political process. It commended the role of MINURSO and supported the renewal of its mandate.

58. Cabo Verde remained committed to the Charter of the United Nations, the Declaration on decolonization, and the provisions of its own Constitution regarding the right to self-determination. It therefore encouraged all parties to resume the round-table process and remain engaged with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution based on compromise. Only through negotiations would it be possible to reach a realistic solution that would create win-win opportunities for sustainable subregional and regional partnerships. Accordingly, his delegation welcomed the Moroccan autonomy initiative, as it did all other proposals to resolve the dispute. The initiative was the only basis for a just and lasting political settlement to the regional dispute, something that was vital for the stability and security of the Sahel region and for a peaceful, united and prosperous Africa.

59. **Mr. Youssef Aden Moussa** (Observer for Djibouti) said that his delegation supported a political process under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General to achieve a realistic, pragmatic and enduring political solution to the regional dispute concerning Western Sahara on the basis of compromise. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was in line with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and provided an excellent basis for negotiations. Morocco was to be commended for its progress in the area of human rights, its compliance with the ceasefire, and its cooperation with OHCHR, special procedures mandate holders and MINURSO.

60. **Mr. Majid Khamis Gharib Alnakhi Al Ali** (United Arab Emirates) said that his delegation supported the

measures taken by Morocco to defend its legitimate rights, including sovereignty over all the Moroccan Sahara. It supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which offered a serious and credible path to a solution that was in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, while also preserving the territorial integrity of Morocco. His delegation welcomed the two round-table sessions that had been held and urged continuation of the process begun in 2007 under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General. It welcomed the regional visits and bilateral consultations undertaken for that purpose by the Personal Envoy.

61. In recognition of the territorial integrity of Morocco, the United Arab Emirates had opened consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla. It welcomed the new development model launched in 2015, which had improved living standards in the Moroccan Sahara.

62. **Mr. Bendjama** (Observer for Algeria) said that the General Assembly had adopted numerous resolutions asserting the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and calling for a free and fair referendum in accordance with resolutions [1514 \(XV\)](#) and [1541 \(XV\)](#). Nevertheless, Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa, had been awaiting that outcome since 1963, and the yearning of its people for freedom had been held hostage. Many delegations had just taken the floor to support the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination. For its part, Algeria was staunchly committed to defending that right. Moreover, in its advisory opinion of 16 October 1975, the International Court of Justice had not found legal ties between Western Sahara and Morocco such as might affect the application of General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#). The Court had thus unequivocally recognized the inalienable right of the people of Western Sahara to exercise self-determination through the free and genuine expression of its will. That point had been acknowledged by his late Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco, who had stated in 1988 that he supported a just and definitive solution to the conflict in Western Sahara through a free and fair referendum on self-determination, duly conducted with complete transparency and without hindrance. The Security Council had then established MINURSO; but no progress had been made.

63. It would be useful for the Committee to visit Laayoune and Tindouf to assess the reality on the ground in the Territory. By virtue of its mandate, the Committee had a responsibility to make a decisive contribution to the decolonization of Western Sahara.

64. **Ms. Moloeli** (Observer for Lesotho) said that the commitments made under the settlement plan for Western Sahara had not been implemented. Disturbingly, there were still reports of Sahrawi people enduring callous treatment. Her delegation condemned all actions intended to obstruct the decolonization of Western Sahara and urged both parties to engage in talks genuinely aimed at achieving a long-lasting solution with promotion of human rights at its centre.

65. It was deplorable that the self-determination referendum had not yet been held in Western Sahara. The Committee should conduct a visiting mission to Western Sahara to gather first-hand information. The parties involved should refrain from any attempt to undermine what little progress had been achieved thus far. The fact that Western Sahara was a colony – the only one in Africa – contravened the principles of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

66. **Mr. Mawire** (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that the settlement plan for Western Sahara, which had been endorsed by the Security Council in 1991, had been deliberately frustrated and undermined by the occupying Power. Having itself experienced the trauma of colonialism and achieved independence through the assistance of the international community, the Zimbabwean people supported the legitimate struggle of the Sahrawi people. The Committee must uphold its long-standing and unequivocal position that Western Sahara was a Non-Self-Governing Territory whose people had an inalienable right to self-determination, which should be exercised through a referendum. The ceasefire and related agreements were virtually a dead letter, and military clashes continued to undermine the resumption of the peace process. His delegation nevertheless wished to acknowledge the hard work of the Personal Envoy under such difficult circumstances.

67. Direct dialogue should resume, without preconditions, between the Kingdom of Morocco and Frente POLISARIO. The Security Council should shoulder its responsibility to resolve the issue in accordance with its own resolutions, those of the General Assembly, and the pronouncements of the African Union. Until that happened, the decolonization of Africa would be incomplete.

68. **Mr. Hilale** (Observer for Morocco) said that the decolonization of the Saharan provinces of Morocco had been definitively and irreversibly concluded with their return to the homeland in 1975 under the Madrid Accord. The question of the Moroccan Sahara was now considered by the Security Council under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations as a regional dispute between Morocco and Algeria. It followed that only the

Security Council could make recommendations or propose a solution to the regional dispute. It did so every year in its resolutions on the topic, the most recent of which was resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#). In that resolution, the Security Council recognized four incontrovertible points. Firstly, the solution to the dispute must be realistic, practicable, enduring and based on compromise. The so-called settlement plan and referendum to which certain parties clung desperately had thus been definitively buried by the Security Council some two decades before. Secondly, the Moroccan autonomy initiative perfectly embodied such a solution, and preserved the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Morocco. Thirdly, the round tables, with the same format and with the same four participants, including Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, were the only forum in which the political process could be led to its conclusion. Fourthly, Algeria was a main party to the regional dispute. The Security Council had recognized that fact in successive resolutions by calling expressly on Algeria to take part in the round tables. Unfortunately, Algeria continued to reject the resolutions of the Security Council and refused to return to the round tables, thereby blocking the political process.

69. Morocco had placed the economic, social, political and cultural rights of the population of its Saharan provinces at the centre of its national development strategy. The latter had culminated in the launch, in 2015, of the new development model for the Saharan provinces, with a budget of more than \$8 billion for projects in the areas of urban planning, universities, hospitals, the judiciary, ports, airports, roads, agriculture and industry. Alongside the drive for socioeconomic development, the population was being empowered politically. Regular elections were held in a peaceful and calm environment. The most recent such elections, on 8 September 2021, had resulted in the democratic and transparent election of legitimate representatives of the region, two of whom had addressed the Committee at its fifth meeting (see [A/AC.109/2023/SR.5](#), paras. 5–8).

70. The “polisario” militias violated human rights on a daily basis in the Tindouf camps, with the full knowledge of the host country, Algeria. That separatist armed group enlisted children and subjected them to fanatical indoctrination worthy of Da’esh or Al-Qaida, something that constituted a war crime. The host country, Algeria, bore direct responsibility for all the human rights violations that took place on its territory. The situation had been denounced by United Nations human rights bodies, including the Human Rights Committee and the Working Group on Arbitrary

Detention. Humanitarian assistance had been systematically diverted with impunity since at least 2005, as had been confirmed in reports of UNHCR, WFP and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). In January 2023, WFP had published a report revealing the dysfunctional management of humanitarian aid in the Tindouf camps, including the appearance of WFP products in markets in neighbouring countries.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

71. **Mr. Bendjama** (Observer for Algeria) said that, with the adoption of the Madrid Accord in 1975, the territory and population of Western Sahara had been partitioned and shared between Morocco and Mauritania. Only following the withdrawal of Mauritania had Morocco occupied the southern part of Western Sahara, in a step that it now described as bringing to an end the colonization of the Territory. No economic development policy, however ambitious, could replace freedom. The Special Committee on decolonization must not become a committee on autonomy.

72. **Mr. Hilale** (Observer for Morocco) said that the right of reply was usually invoked to draw attention to facts, provide evidence or develop a political argument; but the statement just made by the representative of Algeria was meaningless. Its account of the events of 1975 was selective. It was in fact the late President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had suggested partitioning the Sahara: in 2002, he had suggested to the then Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, James Baker, that the Sahara should be divided between Morocco and the armed group created, armed and funded by Algeria. Morocco had rejected that proposal because it could not forfeit a part of its territory, whatever the cost.

73. The comments made by the representative of Algeria concerning the economic development of the Sahara conveyed a certain jealousy. Laayoune and Dakhla were more developed than some regions of Algeria. The population did not have to queue for food. It could move freely within Morocco and beyond; speak to the press, including the Algerian media, without hindrance; and participate in political life. In contrast, Algerian television channels and newspapers were being closed, dissidents jailed, and human rights associations and political parties dissolved. The representative of Algeria should be mindful that people in glass houses should not throw stones.

74. **Mr. Bendjama** (Observer for Algeria) said that his delegation would circulate to members of the Committee the text of the Madrid Accord, which had

provided for Western Sahara to be partitioned between Morocco and Mauritania.

75. If Western Sahara was such a paradise, it was unclear why its people were not allowed to exercise self-determination. If such a vote were held and the people opted for integration into Morocco, Algeria would have no objection. So long as they had not chosen their future and remained under foreign occupation, Algeria would continue to support their right to self-determination.

76. **Mr. Hilale** (Observer for Morocco) said that, when it came to self-determination, General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) was not the only point of reference. Other relevant texts included General Assembly resolutions 1541 (XV) and 2625 (XXV), in which no provision was made for the outcome desired by Algeria, namely a puppet state under its authority that would give it access to the Atlantic Ocean. If the principle of self-determination were applied as Algeria understood it, there would be some 600 countries in the world, and Algeria would be three countries. It was dangerous to claim self-determination for some and deny it to others.

77. His delegation had never claimed that the Sahara was a paradise. It was, however, a part of Morocco that enjoyed democracy and human rights. The representatives of the Moroccan Sahara who had addressed the Committee had been elected by their constituents. In contrast, Algeria funded, and brought before the Committee, representatives of a structure that had held no elections in 45 years, and had instead been appointed by the Algerian Government.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.