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**FIRST COMMITTEE, 1115th  
MEETING**

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at 10.30 a.m.

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Chairman: Sir Claude COREA (Ceylon).

**AGENDA ITEM 79**

**The problem of Mauritania (A/4445 and Add.1) (continued)**

**GENERAL DEBATE (continued)**

1. Mr. OWONO (Cameroun) said that so far nothing had been said on the substance of the question which in his delegation's view justified its inclusion in the agenda. His delegation's approach to all matters examined at the United Nations was governed by the facts in each case. In the problem of Mauritania, the only real fact was that that country would attain independence on 28 November 1960. Prior to the debate, his delegation had repeatedly asked for further information on the facts adduced by the complaining party; it felt, to put it bluntly, that the main issue was whether the Moroccan delegation believed the United Nations would be able to find a solution to the question which would be in keeping with its Government's position. His delegation was far from satisfied that that was the case, since no practical solution had been proposed which was consistent with the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

2. The arguments put forward by the representatives directly concerned had to be considered solely in the light of the rights and duties of the United Nations, and his delegation's impression was that a clear case had not yet been made to support the view that Mauritania was Moroccan. Some had asserted that Morocco had rights over the territory because it had exercised effective political, religious and social control there prior to the French occupation. At the 1111th meeting the representative of Saudi Arabia, in attempting to prove that Mauritania had never had a separate existence as a State, had claimed that the territory had never existed as a geographical or political entity because it had always been part of Morocco, the word Mauritania having been used by the Romans to designate not only Morocco but the neighbouring regions. The Camerounian delegation considered that that point had not been proved, and that accordingly the United Nations should immediately declare the question outside its competence both juridically and constitutionally. If, as was contended, not only Morocco but also Algeria and Tunisia had been part of the Roman Mauritania, then the Committee might

well be asked at the next session to decide whether Algeria and Tunisia should be annexed to Morocco.

3. The United Nations had only two possible courses of action: to declare the question outside its competence or to oppose Mauritania's attainment of independence, an event only four days distant. The Committee could surely not countenance such a denial of the principles of the United Nations Charter. On 28 November his country would formally recognize the independence and sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, for it saw no reason for postponing that step. Mauritania would be achieving its independence in the same circumstances as all the Member States which had joined the United Nations in 1960, and the event would be a new occasion of rejoicing for Africans and for the free peoples of the world.

4. The relations between Mauritania and Morocco after 28 November would be solely a matter for those two States. It was his delegation's firm belief, however, that the great groupings of States which Africa was seeking to form must be founded on mutual consent, not on annexation. Unfortunately, the Moroccan representative's statement at the 1109th meeting that his country would not recognize any action taken by France in the name of the Mauritanian people did not hold out much hope that that principle would be respected.

5. His delegation had tried to understand the Moroccan position and would be glad to contribute to unity between Morocco and its neighbours; but it could not lend its support to annexation or integration. He wondered whether the implication of the Moroccan statement he had just cited was that the independence of Mauritania would be among the measures taken by the French Government which the Moroccan Government would not recognize. If so, his delegation would feel entitled to question the position of certain countries with regard to the struggle of the Africans to rid themselves of foreign occupation and to achieve the final goal of independence.

6. Mr. LIU (China) said that in a few days a new nation would formally come into being—an event which not only testified to the achievements of the African peoples but also constituted the fulfilment of the ideals and principles of the United Nations Charter.

7. It was being asserted, however, that the new State, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, should be considered a part of Morocco. He did not intend to examine the historical factors involved; such factors were often cited as the basis of claims and counter-claims, but so far as the United Nations was concerned the paramount principle to be followed was the principle of self-determination. It was in accordance with that principle that the Chinese delegation had consistently supported the national independence movements in Asia and Africa.

8. It was commonly acknowledged that the emergence of the African States was an event of the greatest significance. Many of the African States admitted to the United Nations during the present session had been members of the French Community, from which Mauritania would soon emerge as a fully sovereign nation. They had achieved their nationhood by a peaceful process which was in striking contrast with the chaos and violence obtaining in many parts of the world. They had demonstrated their capacity to exercise their rights and duties as sovereign nations, and their views on the question of Mauritania must command attention.

9. He submitted that to attempt to place obstacles in the way of the Mauritanian people in the final stage of their road to independence was to question the status of the other African States which had achieved independence by the same process and to contradict the principles of the Charter, under which the expressed wishes of the people were paramount. His delegation therefore considered that the United Nations had no authority to intervene at the present stage, just as it would have no authority to intervene if, after having achieved independence, the people of Mauritania should wish to be united with any of the neighbouring States. What the United Nations could and should do was to help the new African States to maintain their political stability, and to promote their economic development, so that the peoples of the great African continent might march forward together in peace and security and by their united efforts contribute their full share to the consolidation of a free world.

10. Mr. WIRJOPRANOTO (Indonesia) observed that the problem of Mauritania, which was in fact the problem of the partition of Morocco, directly involved a Member State with which Indonesia had the closest and warmest relations. His delegation had therefore listened with great care and interest to the arguments advanced by Morocco on the one side and by France on the other.

11. The problem of Mauritania was a typical colonial problem, springing from the well-known policy of "divide and rule". References had been made to racial and geographical differences between Morocco and Mauritania. That argument, carried to its logical conclusion, would mean the fragmentation of practically every sovereign nation in the world. The existence of Machiavellian designs for annexation had also been alleged. That was an old charge, which had been levelled against Indonesia and other newly re-born nations. It was curious that it should be the colonial Powers which imputed such intentions to peoples which had only recently emerged as new States.

12. Putting aside all specious arguments, there was one aspect of the problem which his delegation regarded as pertinent and significant. That was the question of the manner in which the people of Mauritania wished to enjoy their freedom. They must decide their own future, and that must necessarily involve more than a decision for independence.

13. As the representative of Morocco and other members of the Committee had pointed out, Mauritania had for centuries been an integral part of Morocco. That was not even seriously disputed; up to the time of the protectorate Morocco and Mauritania

had been recognized as parts of one country under one sovereignty. France, as the colonial Power, had dismembered the unified State of Morocco. It had done so without the consent of the people of Morocco, including the Mauritians. That dismemberment, however, had been of very short duration, lasting less than the life of one generation. Today France was seeking to preserve the advantages it had gained from the protectorate and was trying by underhand means to confer legality upon an illegal act and to thwart the freely-expressed will of the Mauritanian people. The question naturally arose why, if France was acting in good faith, it had placed every conceivable obstacle in the way of Mauritania's reintegration into the Moroccan community and why, instead of imprisoning and hounding into exile the outspoken leaders of Mauritania, it did not take cognizance of the desire for reintegration and give the Mauritians an opportunity freely to express themselves on the matter. Animated by self-interest and by narrow economic and strategic considerations, France was hurrying the Islamic Republic of Mauritania to independent nationhood while for more than six years it had denied independence to Algeria. It had rushed through a loan from the International Bank which tied Mauritania hand and foot to the powerful French-controlled Société des mines de fer de Mauritanie. That was an example of a great Power exploiting the economic resources of another people.

14. The representative of France, in his statement at the 1109th meeting, while acknowledging that many national leaders of Mauritania had had to flee to the north of their country, had dismissed them contemptuously as "a handful of Mauritians who had taken refuge in Morocco". It must be assumed that those leaders had had to seek refuge from the French authorities, who were still in control in Mauritania. Such expressions of contempt were characteristic of the colonialist Powers.

15. The problem of Mauritania was too urgent for mere words; the United Nations must act to carry out its responsibilities. The situation threatened the peace and security not only of Morocco but of the whole of Africa and must not continue to fester unheeded. The United Nations must adopt constructive recommendations for a peaceful settlement of the dispute. It should recognize the obligation of the French Government to examine the unsettled frontiers question with the Government of Morocco in accordance with their agreement to establish a mixed commission for the purpose. Moreover, the United Nations should declare that the people of Mauritania should be given an opportunity freely to express their willingness to be reintegrated into the Moroccan community. That declaration should be made before 28 November 1960, the date of the "fait accompli" of Mauritanian independence. In the course of a recent visit to Morocco, President Sukarno of Indonesia had joined with the King of Morocco in proclaiming support for the Mauritians in their struggle for liberation and their willingness, freely expressed, to be reintegrated into the Moroccan community. The Indonesian Government stood by that proclamation, and appealed to all Member States to support such a free expression of will for the peaceful solution of the problem.

16. The problem of Mauritania was similar to another colonial problem which had been dealt with

by the First Committee at previous sessions. He referred to the question of West Irian. The similarity resided in the fact that both questions had arisen because of the manoeuvres of the colonial Powers to maintain their policy of domination by dismemberment and by destroying national unity. There was, however, an essential difference between the two problems; West Irian had been unilaterally torn from the rest of Indonesia only after that country's proclamation of independence and after all its people, including the West Irians, had exercised the right of self-determination. That was not so in the case of Mauritania, which had been amputated from Morocco before the proclamation of Moroccan independence. Since then, the Mauritania had not been able freely to express their willingness to be reintegrated in the Moroccan community. Consequently there should be no confusion with regard to Indonesia's reasons for supporting the Mauritanian people's willingness, freely expressed, to be reunited with Morocco.

17. The tragedy of colonialism was that it created divisions and conflicts between brothers. The United Nations could not tolerate such a perpetual source of trouble and despair, and must adopt appropriate measures to end colonialism and its destructive and inhuman machinations.

18. Mr. SCHURMANN (Netherlands) said that while he would not reply in detail to the representative of Indonesia, he would comment on one statement he had made—that West Irian had been unilaterally torn from the rest of Indonesia only after that country's proclamation of independence and after all its people, including the West Irians, had exercised the right of self-determination. The Indonesian representative was well aware that when sovereignty over Indonesia had been ceded by the Netherlands to Indonesia, an agreement had been entered into providing that Netherlands New Guinea should remain under Dutch sovereignty and that the Netherlands and Indonesia should try to negotiate a settlement with regard to its future. The Netherlands Government had negotiated for several years with Indonesia, but had been unable to reach agreement because Indonesia had insisted that Netherlands New Guinea should be handed over to Indonesia without a previous consultation of its population. The Netherlands maintained that it was for the population of Netherlands New Guinea itself to decide whether it wished to be annexed to Indonesia. If it decided that it did wish to be so annexed, the Netherlands Government would have no objection whatsoever.

19. Mr. WIRJOPRANOTO (Indonesia) said that he would not pursue the question, for fear of being ruled out of order. He would merely say that the dispute about West Irian was still on the agenda and that the representatives of Indonesia and the Netherlands would shortly have the opportunity of discussing it.

20. Mr. BAGATSING (Philippines) said that he wished first of all to make it clear that his country, like many others represented in the Committee, had no private interests at stake in the question of Mauritania. His delegation would have preferred the dispute to have been settled through negotiations between the parties concerned, thus sparing delegations the painful necessity of taking a stand on the problem; the question was all the more difficult for the Philippine delegation on account of his country's deep feelings

of friendship towards Morocco, whose Government had moved the inclusion of the item in the agenda.

21. The question involved the right of peoples to self-determination. The Philippines had fought to win that right for itself, and had struggled at San Francisco for its incorporation in the United Nations Charter. However, the application of that universally accepted principle to Mauritania raised difficulties. On the basis both of the principle of self-determination and of historical and other factors, one party to the dispute maintained that the independence of Mauritania was the only logical solution, while the other asserted that the just and logical solution was union with Morocco. To add to the difficulties, Mauritania was to accede to independence in four days' time. The question was now whether the United Nations should request the French Government to defer the recognition of independence.

22. On the face of it, it seemed paradoxical that during the present year of African independence, the United Nations should be asked to defer the independence of an African territory. Morocco had insisted that historical, geographical and cultural ties dictated the incorporation of Mauritania into the Kingdom of Morocco. The French delegation had stated that Mauritania's accession to independence was in accordance with the wishes of the people, freely expressed in referenda and elections; but the Moroccan delegation had cast doubt on the validity of the latter. Without questioning the Moroccan arguments, the Philippine delegation felt that it would be neither practicable nor politic for the General Assembly to seek to delay Mauritanian independence, even if it had the authority to do so—which was doubtful. He wished to ask Morocco whether it would not be preferable to allow an independent Mauritania to discuss the question of unification with the Moroccan Government.

23. It was certainly true, as the Moroccan delegation had argued, that the tendency towards the unification of territories which had been arbitrarily divided by the accidents of colonial rule was salutary not only because it united related populations, but also because it created more viable national economies. That process had already led to the incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia, and only recently to the union of British Somaliland with the Republic of Somalia. But such unions must be the result of free decisions by the African peoples themselves.

24. The Moroccan delegation had also been right to point out that economic imperialism could nullify the theoretical independence of an economically underdeveloped country. The Philippine delegation, however, was confident that the Mauritanian people, with the assistance both of the United Nations and of its sister States in Africa, including Morocco itself, would be able to overcome that inevitable hazard.

25. Mr. RIFA'I (Jordan), exercising his right of reply, said that at the 1114th meeting the representative of Upper Volta, during his statement defending the partition of Morocco and the creation on its soil of a new State, had touched on the Israel problem, which was one of special concern to Moslem peoples. Jordan had close ties with the African peoples, and considered that solidarity between African and Asian nations was of the utmost importance; imperialism and Zionism were endeavouring for their own ends to

weaken that solidarity. His delegation hoped that the representative of Upper Volta would be more cautious in future when probing into a grave international problem.

26. Mr. ROSSIDES (Cyprus) said that the arguments which had been adduced to prove or disprove former Moroccan sovereignty over the territory known as Mauritania had no great bearing on the issue. No right derived from a sovereignty imposed against the will of a people by a dominant nation; indeed, justice demanded its termination. Where the question was one of national and not imposed sovereignty, however, other considerations must prevail. What was therefore important was to determine what was the ethnic character and national consciousness of the people concerned, as well as what were its actual wishes.

27. It was well known that ethnically the people of Morocco were a combination of Berbers and Arabs, a combination to which in the past the name of "Moors" had been given; and the vast majority of the people of Mauritania were of the same stock. The people of both territories shared the same religion, language and customs, and had been so closely linked in the past that the Sultans of Morocco had sometimes been Mauritians. The two areas had been artificially separated by France. Now that the former circumstances had been brought to an end by the granting of independence, however, reunification could and should be considered. The United Nations, while it must uphold the right of self-determination, must not encourage the fragmentation of nations. Unification was the road towards greater unity among nations and the consolidation of the world community. The Cypriot delegation had already, in the Assembly's general debate (906th plenary meeting), welcomed the emergence of what was called the "African personality", it would therefore warmly welcome a sincere effort by both parties to reach an understanding on the issue.

28. It was important to determine whether the people of Mauritania wished to be incorporated into the State of Morocco or would prefer separate independence. It had been said that the people had already opted for independence; but in the referendum the choice put before them had been the retention of the status quo and a form of independence; the alternative of joining Morocco had not been put to them.

29. In the opinion of the Cypriot delegation, the question should be settled through negotiations between the parties with a view to reaching an agreement in keeping with the principles of justice and the wishes of the Mauritanian people.

30. Mr. SULAIMAN (Iraq) said that his country was second to none in supporting the cause of national independence and liberation from colonial rule; the record of Iraq in the United Nations made that clear. But for a people which had been torn away from its national state, liberation could be achieved either by separate independence or by rejoining that part of its country which had already gained its sovereignty. The

representative of France had alleged that Morocco was seeking to annex a young African State in defiance of the expressed will of its people, and had spoken as if France was fighting for the national liberation movement. The case was not as simple as that.

31. Although the French representative had asserted, at the 1109th meeting, that France was not defending any private or selfish interest in Mauritania, it was well known that that territory, which had a population of less than a million, was rich in mineral resources; the iron ore of Fort Gouraud, estimated at 144 million tons, and the copper of Akjoujt, estimated at 23 million tons, were exploited by the Société des mines de fer de Mauritanie and the Société des mines de cuivre de Mauritanie respectively, and were major interests of French capital. The fishing industry and the transport system were controlled by monopolies in the hands of two French citizens who also held responsible posts in the new administration. French political influence was clearly reflected in the Constitution, foreign policy, defence, financial policy and education having been left within the competence of the French Community. Moreover, France was planning to establish a military base at Port-Etienne and to use the region for nuclear tests and rocket-launching pads.

32. The Iraqi delegation believed that the people of Mauritania would best be able to exercise their independence in unity with their Moslem compatriots. Its reasons were, firstly, that they would be in a stronger position to exercise their rights as a free people within a wider national unity. Secondly, the dismemberment of the country had been an act imposed by force in the early twentieth century, when Mauritania was made a colony of France. Thirdly, that action had been incompatible with the pledge given by France, in signing the General Act of the International Conference of Algieras in 1906, to respect the integrity of Morocco. Fourthly, when Morocco had become independent in 1956, it had been agreed that Morocco should regain sovereignty over all its territories; but a frontier commission set up to delimit those territories had been unable to meet because of the position taken up by France. Fifthly, the question was one of restoring national unity to a people, not of allowing a country to annex a foreign territory. The ethnic, linguistic, spiritual and historical ties binding the peoples could not be disregarded; it was that unity of sentiment which was the foundation of the modern national State. Sixthly, lands which had been partitioned as a result of colonialism, or in which, as in the Congo, attempts had been made to divide the country on the eve of its independence, were a grave threat to international peace and order.

23. For those reasons, the Iraqi delegation believed that the question of the future of Mauritania should be considered in the light of the real interest of the people in the attainment of national independence in unity and integrity.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.