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V/LA COLLECTION

FOURTH COMMITTEE
13th meeting
held on
Thursday, 31 October 1985
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. CHAMORRO MORA (Nicaragua)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m

AGENDA ITEM 18: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (continued) (A/C.4/40/2, 3 and 4, and A/C.4/40/4/Add.1 and Add.3-7)

Hearing of petitioners

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Teehan (Guam Landowner's Association) took a place at the petitioners' table.
2. Mr. MARTCHENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) asked whether the people of Guam felt that there had been any improvement in their situation.
3. Mr. TEEHAN (Guam Landowner's Association) said that there had been some improvements in Guam, but that the benefits had accrued entirely to the transnational corporations rather than to the local people, who had been relegated to an inferior position in the country's economy.
4. Mr. LEVCHENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) requested clarification regarding population trends on Guam, since there had been conflicting information as to whether the local population was increasing or decreasing.
5. Mr. TEEHAN (Guam Landowner's Association) said that it had been stated in the Sub-Committee on Small Territories that the local population of Guam was increasing, but that could create the false impression that the population was in no danger of displacement. The fact was that the increase in the incoming population far exceeded the increase in the local population, with the result that the local population was coming to represent a smaller percentage of the total. Moreover, the United States Department of the Navy had said that it would have to increase its activities on Guam if it lost its bases in the Philippines. That would be the final blow to Guam's culture, because the military would have to import tens of thousands of alien workers in order to expand and maintain its military facilities.
6. Mr. Teehan withdrew.
7. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Alcalay (National Committee for Radiation Victims) took a place at the petitioners' table.
8. Mr. MARTCHENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) asked why the Administering Authority had not taken measures to protect the exposed Marshall Islanders during the second nuclear weapon test in 1954. How could one explain such criminal negligence?
9. Mr. ALCALAY (National Committee for Radiation Victims) said that the criminal negligence of the Administering Authority in allowing the islanders to get caught in radioactive fall-out was easily explained. Even United States documents showed

(Mr. Alcalay)

clearly that the purpose was human experimentation. That same purpose had motivated the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: there was now incontrovertible evidence to show that the Japanese had made peace overtures, offering the same terms as were finally accepted, several months before the first atomic bomb was dropped. The argument that the bombs had saved both American and Japanese lives was spurious, because the Japanese had already been brought to their knees through attrition. The only reason for dropping a plutonium bomb on Nagasaki after a uranium bomb had already been dropped on Hiroshima had been to experiment, and to intimidate the Soviet Union.

10. In 1946, the Administering Authority had evacuated the Marshall Islanders from the danger zone before testing its atomic weapons, but it had failed to do so in 1954 when it had tested a hydrogen bomb twelve hundred times more powerful. Subsequent evidence, based on studies of wind directions, showed that it had been known well in advance that the islanders would be exposed to fall-out and that a United States ship which was in the vicinity and could easily have evacuated them had instead been ordered out of the area. The explanation lay in the fact that the resulting medical findings provided the only knowledge available about the effects of radioactive fall-out on human beings. In other words, the islanders had been used deliberately as guinea pigs for medical studies of radioactive fall-out.

11. Mr. KOROLEV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) asked whether compensation was being sought from the Administering Authority for the three islands which had been wholly or partly destroyed as a result of United States nuclear testing, in addition to the compensation being sought for health damage and loss of territory, and, if so, how those claims were being treated in United States courts. He also wished to know what the implications of the Compact of Free Association were and whether the inhabitants were aware of them.

12. Mr. ALCALAY (National Committee for Radiation Victims) said that the inhabitants had indeed pressed for compensation for the three islands. High radiation levels persisted on the islands, despite extremely expensive clean-up efforts, and no one was willing to return to them. Only token payments had been made by way of compensation and for medical care. A medical monitoring programme had been started, but only to conduct scientific medical investigations for the Pentagon rather than to provide compassionate medical care for the people.

13. Five billion dollars in claims were pending in United States courts and the United States had used legal manoeuvres to block those suits because they were expensive and could constitute precedents for claims by other victims. Product liability suits had therefore been instituted against manufacturers, but now sub-contractors were also being given immunity by the United States Government, which wanted not only to keep the victims out of court and save money but also to avoid a discovery process which would give the radiation victims access to embarrassing information. The Compact of Free Association contained a clause which granted the Governments of the Marshall Islands and the United States immunity from legal action in return for a token payment to the Marshall Islands. By precluding further claims, it left future victims unprotected, in violation of the Trusteeship Agreement.

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14. Mrs. BERMUDEZ GARCIA (Cuba) asked whether, in the petitioner's view, the inhabitants' cultural identity had been affected during the period of trusteeship. She wished to know whether nuclear testing had had negative repercussions in general throughout the region and whether, in addition to sickness known to have been caused by nuclear testing, any other ailments affected large sectors of the indigenous population and, if so, what steps the Administering Authority had taken to deal with them.

15. Mr. ALCALAY (National Committee for Radiation Victims) said that many of the details given by the petitioners attested to the resilience of the indigenous inhabitants. However, the latter had largely been made second-class citizens in their own country. Many had been dispossessed of their land, surely a major factor in loss of cultural identity. The conditions of those living near the Kwajalein missile base were akin to apartheid. He reiterated his plea for a mission by the Special Committee of 24.

16. The Administering Authority was withholding information on health problems, including genetic defects and childbearing problems, which were continuing. He had learned at first hand of many chilling cases. Many types of cancer, including a rare one, pituitary cancer, were on the increase. Even the known facts did not reflect the true extent of the problem, since in many areas no autopsies were performed and cases went unreported.

17. The withheld information probably included details about genetic transformation and other radiation effects. In 1965, according to reports, some 50 per cent of the inhabitants of Rongelap had been affected by chromosome aberration, probably due to nuclear fall-out. Studies had shown that such fall-out could also affect natural immunity to disease, but the United States did not classify the resulting ailments as being due to radiation. In 1983, part of the region had suffered an outbreak of leprosy, a disease supposedly eradicated 30 years previously, which could have been prevented by spending a few million dollars on drugs. A cholera epidemic on Truk could likewise have been avoided by spending money on decent sanitation.

18. Mr. LEVCHENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked whether the petitioner could provide the Special Committee with details about the situation of people living on the other 11 islands or atolls he had mentioned, in addition to Bikini and Rongelap.

19. In general, since the relevant Secretariat documentation gave little detail, he wondered whether the petitioners on the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands could give some indication of how well aware the inhabitants were of the Administering Authority's obligations under the Trusteeship Agreement and Chapter XI of the Charter, bearing in mind also the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. For example, what public information facilities, including texts, films and recordings, were available and what had been done to make clear the true significance of the so-called Compact of Free Association for the Federated States of Micronesia? Could they also comment briefly on the way in which transnational corporations and other international financial interests were hampering Micronesia's development?

20. Mr. ALCALAY (National Committee for Radiation Victims) said that the lack of detail in United Nations documents stemmed from the United States policy of suppressing information. The United States representative had described the petitioners' statements as tendentious, but he had been unable to challenge the details provided.
21. The United States had acknowledged that 14 islands and atolls were affected by what it termed intermediate radiation, meaning levels between 50 and 100 rads - a significant amount, since a level of 450 rads was lethal, and the maximum permitted exposure level in the United States was 0.5 rad per annum. Studies had been carried out on only three of those islands and atolls, many of which were inhabited. Even the scientific research, described as medical care had been conducted only on Rongelap and Utirik, the remainder of the islands and atolls having been callously disregarded.
22. With reference to the many cases of thyroid disease, it should be noted that, according to the statistical incidence of thyroid tumours, only one random case ought to have been expected in the entire Territory of Micronesia. No information had been given with regard to Kwajalein and Ebeye: United States recalcitrance was matched only by that of France with regard to Polynesia. It was hoped that a team of scientists from the Federal Republic of Germany would be able to visit Rongelap to conduct studies which would be expanded into a medical programme.
23. Mr. DEYHIM (Islamic Republic of Iran) observed that, since the mid-1940s the Administering Authority had been using the Trust Territory as a test site for United States missiles fired from California and had also been stockpiling chemical weapons in the area. The international community was deeply concerned about the testing, stockpiling and deployment of such dangerous weapons.
24. He was aware that the indigenous inhabitants of the region had protested against and demanded an end to all weapon tests in their area. He wished to know more about those protests, whether the National Committee for Radiation Victims had studied the impact of the stockpiling and possible deployment and use of chemical weapons, and whether it had endeavoured to disseminate information on their impact.
25. Mr. ALCALAY (National Committee for Radiation Victims), after supplying details regarding the use of Kwajalein as a missile test site, said that over the years the people of the Marshall Islands had largely internalized their protest, an example of the cultural damage which he sensed was occurring there. He urged the Committee to send a delegation to the area in order to grasp fully the impact of 40 years of United States administration. The reports of the Trusteeship Council could never adequately reflect the true situation in the region.
26. The protests against the use of the islands for furthering the arms race had begun in 1969, when indigenous landowners had protested against the takeover of some of the islands by the United States Air Force. In 1979, Kwajalein Islanders had occupied the off-limits missile impact area. In 1982, in what was known as "Operation Homecoming", over 1,000 Kwajalein landowners had reoccupied some of the islands taken from them decades earlier.

(Mr. Alcalay)

27. The people of the Marshall Islands, recognizing that they were small and politically weak, did not know how to rid themselves of the United States military presence. At best, they felt that all they could do was extract fair compensation under a lease agreement with the United States for the presence of the military base. Under the compact of free association, they would not have sufficient authority once the United States terminated the trusteeship arrangement. The current presentation of their case in the Committee might prove to be the last forum for them in the international community. It was not too late for the United Nations to play a role in terminating the Trusteeship in a fair manner.

28. Elsewhere in Micronesia, the people of Palau, knowing all too well the history of the Marshall Islands and desiring to protect their health, had written into their constitution that they did not wish the islands to be turned into a nuclear storage facility, or a target in the event of a nuclear war. However, the United States was up to its old tricks and might ultimately get what it wanted from Palau.

29. While he had no information regarding the testing or deployment of chemical weapons in the area, Johnston Island had been a repository for chemical and nerve weapons for many decades and was about to become the site for the atmospheric burning of obsolete chemical and nerve weapons.

30. With regard to the question by the Soviet Representative concerning the people's familiarity with the work of the United Nations, on the whole, the people of the region knew very little about the Committee and the United Nations Charter. However, it was not too late for the United Nations to have an impact in the area. In May, during his visit to Rongelap, some of the indigenous inhabitants had expressed the view that, in 40 years, the United Nations had done very little for them.

31. Mr. Alcalay withdrew.

32. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Petersen, (Baruch College) took a place at the petitioner's table.

33. Mr. PETERSEN (Baruch College), replying to the question by the representative of the Soviet Union concerning the extent to which the people of Micronesia had been educated about the content of the compact of free association with the United States before the 1983 plebiscite, said that only the people of Pohnpei had studied the document thoroughly. They had concluded that they did not adequately understand the very complex and lengthy text, and had sought unsuccessfully to have the plebiscite postponed. They had, however, recognized that the compact would permit the United States to retain control over the region's internal affairs and had consequently voted strongly against it. The people of the other islands had endorsed the document. The mission sent by the Trusteeship Council to observe the plebiscite, when informed that the request of the people Pohnpei for a postponement had been denied, had told the leaders of Pohnpei that, despite the complexity of the text, the people must move ahead and participate in the plebiscite. The concerns of the people of Pohnpei had in fact been borne out by the amendments to the compact made by the United States Congress, and the other Micronesians undoubtedly now agreed that the text was unacceptable.

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(Mr. Petersen)

34. With regard to knowledge about the work of the United Nations in the region, on the basis of his own personal experience in Pohnpei he felt bound to say that, while the people there were aware of the existence of the United Nations and of the fact that a document existed which stated that the Administering Authority must put the best interests of the people first, they had little faith in the ability of the Trusteeship Council to enforce the United Nations Charter and the Trusteeship Agreement in the area. Despite the presence of visiting missions of the Council year after year, they had seen very little change in the manner in which the United States conducted itself vis-à-vis the Territory. The people recognized that their region constituted a strategic Trust Territory and that the United States, with its veto power in the Security Council, could do what it wished there.

35. In 1983, a member of the Pohnpei legislature had told him that the people felt that the Soviet Union, which had never been represented on Trusteeship Council missions, might pay more heed to their situation, and that they felt that the United Nations was not discharging its responsibilities towards the Territory.

36. The people were uninformed regarding the work of the Fourth Committee and the Special Committee. Perhaps those bodies would now abandon their support of the United States claim that they had no right to consider the Trust Territory and instead heed the desire of the people of Micronesia to become a truly sovereign nation.

37. Mr. Petersen withdrew.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.