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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 THIRTY-EIGHTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Thursday, 20 April 1967, at 3.40 p.m.

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(continued)

PRESENT:

<u>Chairman:</u>	Miss SINEGIORGIS	Ethiopia
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mr. JCUEJATI	Syria
<u>Members:</u>	Mr. CAWEN	Finland
	Mr. DIAKITE	Mali
	Mr. USTINOV	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
	Mr. FCUM	United Republic of Tanzania
	Mr. PEJIC	Yugoslavia
<u>Also present:</u>	Mr. SHAW	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.374 and Corr.1 and 2) (continued)

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

Mr. DIAKITE (Mali) noted that, in his initial statement at the 35th meeting, the United Kingdom representative had said that, in Mauritius, constitutional discussions between the United Kingdom and the representatives of the various political parties had already set the stage for independence - thus implying that there was no need for the Sub-Committee to consider whether General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) was being implemented. That was an oversimplification of the situation. Indeed, if one examined the political and economic situation in Mauritius, as in the other two Territories under discussion, one found that resolution 1514 (XV) was not being implemented and that basic United Nations principles were being disregarded. According to those principles, peoples had a right to self-determination and independence, decisions on constitutional changes must be left in the hands of the peoples themselves, territorial integrity must be respected and - a principle which was vital to genuine independence - the right of peoples to sovereignty over their natural resources must be guaranteed. All those principles were being flouted. In addition, military bases were being established in the Territories, despite the General Assembly decision that the establishment of such bases in colonial territories was incompatible with the United Nations Charter and resolution 1514 (XV).

The United Kingdom representative had gone on to say that, at the end of the Constitutional Conference held in 1965, the Secretary of State for the Colonies had announced that Mauritius would achieve independence if a resolution asking for it was passed by a simple majority of the Legislative Assembly resulting from a new general election. He found that condition surprising. He would have thought that a constitutional conference would represent the last step before independence; the requirement for new elections constituted a barrier in the path to independence. It was hard for him to conceive of a people deciding against independence, but apparently the United Kingdom hoped to ensure that the complexion of the new Assembly was favourable to it.

(Mr. Diakite, Mali)

With regard to the arrangements for the elections he noted that, according to paragraph 18 of the Secretariat working paper (A/AC.109/L.374) the total electorate was about 340,000, or 48 per cent of the population. Since the rate of population growth was high and the population was predominantly young, the minimum voting age of twenty-one had the effect of excluding a large part of the population, and giving the electorate an unrepresentative character. That illustrated the danger of allowing the United Kingdom to organize the elections to a body which was to vote on the question of independence.

Paragraph 16 of the Secretariat paper revealed that a number of seats were to be filled by the "best losers" in the elections. He found such an arrangement extraordinary, since it meant seating people who had been rejected by the electorate and thus reversing the democratic decision of the people.

It was clear from the Secretariat paper that there had been no economic progress in any of the Territories and that no attempt was being made to alter the structure of the economy in order to ensure economic progress in the future. Mauritius depended essentially on the production of sugar and coffee. In view of the world market situation with regard to coffee, with severe fluctuations in prices and low price-levels, coffee-producing countries were trying hard to redirect their production. It was clear that coffee provided no basis for economic development, and the situation was similar with regard to sugar. As far as employment was concerned, economic growth was not keeping pace with the rapid rise in population and chronic unemployment and under-employment resulted. No real solution to that problem was yet in sight.

Miss SINEGIORGIS (Ethiopia) said that very little had been accomplished towards implementing the provisions of relevant General Assembly resolutions in Mauritius, Seychelles and St. Helena. The Special Committee and the General Assembly had repeatedly reaffirmed the right of the people of those Territories to freedom and independence and had invited the administering Power to take effective measures to implement General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). Yet the Sub-Committee was obliged to take up the question once again. In September 1966, the United Kingdom delegation had informed the Sub-Committee that registration for the purpose of the new elections had been due to begin on 1 September 1966 but,

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(Miss Sinegiorgis, Ethiopia)

because of Ramadan, the elections could not be held before February 1967; it had added that Mauritius could thus achieve independence during the summer of 1967 (A/AC.109/SC.2/SR.29, p. 8).

At the 35th meeting, however, in reply to a question from the representative of Syria, the United Kingdom representative had said that independence would probably be obtained in 1968. For certain reasons, the elections due to be held in February 1967 had been postponed. She regretted to have to say that her delegation was not satisfied with the reasons given for the delay. The Ethiopian delegation urged the United Kingdom Government to hold the promised elections at an early date. The people of Mauritius had expressed their wish for independence in 1965 at the London Constitutional Conference, but they were still waiting for the day of independence to arrive. Her delegation appealed to the administering Power to implement fully the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

With regard to Seychelles and St. Helena, developments were still very slow; hardly any progress had been made in either the political, economic or social situation. As could be seen from Sir Colville Deverell's report, the situation in Seychelles remained serious. Sir Colville had expressed the opinion that, in view of the political inexperience of the people, constitutional evolution should proceed "with reasonable deliberation", and had complained that the preoccupation of the political parties with the question of the ultimate status of Seychelles was distracting attention from the more immediate matter of the next steps along the path of constitutional evolution. Whatever Sir Colville's views on the people's preoccupation with the question of the Territory's ultimate status might be, her conclusion was that the people of Seychelles were anxiously awaiting full independence. She would therefore like to see the administering Power comply with the people's wishes on the basis of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and other relevant resolutions.

As to economic conditions, Seychelles had been unable to balance its budget without external aid since 1958, unemployment was increasing, the rate of population growth was rising and agricultural production remained static. That was a sad situation in a country soon to become independent, and her delegation urged the United Kingdom Government to take immediate steps to help Seychelles cope with its economic and social problems.

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(Miss Sinegiorgis, Ethiopia)

She had also noted that very little progress had been made in St. Helena in the economic, social and political fields. Her delegation appealed to the administering Power to implement resolution 1514 (XV) and other relevant General Assembly resolutions in respect of St. Helena. Most particularly, as far as all three Territories were concerned, it recommended that the administering Power should do its utmost to solve the educational, social and economic problems with which they were faced.

Mr. JOUEJATI (Syria), referring to the answers given to his questions by the representative of the United Kingdom at the Sub-Committee's 37th meeting, thought he was justified in asking what was the potential economic wealth of the Territories and to what extent that potential had been realized for the benefit of the population. There were indications that Mauritius had considerable potential in hydroelectric power, yet, according to the representative of the administering Power, there were only eight hydroelectric stations now in operation and a ninth under construction. He would be interested to know what the production was in kilowatts, to what use it was put and whether it was helping to raise the economic standard of the population.

The representative of the administrative Power had indicated that unemployment was decreasing, but he wondered why there was any unemployment at all in a place which was apparently so rich in natural resources and when a relatively extensive economic development project might absorb all available manpower, and even require more. The United Kingdom had both the capital and technical knowledge for such a project.

The representative of the United Kingdom had dwelt on the benign nature of the strategic installations on the islands, claiming that they were only refuelling stations. He wondered whether they had been constructed on Mauritian land with the express free consent of the people. If not, were they not impeding self-determination and independence?

He welcomed the assurance given that there was no discrimination in the sugar or other industries, but asked what were the salary scales for Europeans and indigenous employees and whether the latter had access to managerial positions.

(Mr. Jouejati, Syria)

He urged the administering Power to give replies that provided a comprehensive picture of the islands under its administration, and not merely partial answers. What was important was that the people should freely exercise their right to self-determination, that there should be social, economic and political progress and that the sovereignty of the people and the territorial integrity of their land should be respected. The Sub-Committee should not base its conclusions on the opinion of the administering Power as to what was reasonable.

Mr. SHAW (United Kingdom), replying to the comments made by the representative of Mali concerning the delay in granting independence to Mauritius following the 1965 Constitutional Conference and the requirement that a new Legislature should approve a request for independence, referred him to the report of that Conference, which had made it very clear that there had by no means been agreement as to whether the issue of independence had been fully considered at previous general elections and that it had been decided by the parties represented at the Conference that steps should be taken to review the electoral arrangements before new elections were held. Two points of view had been expressed: one had been that there was no need to consult the people regarding the future status of Mauritius since their desire for independence had been demonstrated by their support in three general elections for the parties favouring independence, but that it would be appropriate to hold general elections before independence so that the newly elected Government could lead the country into independence; the opposing argument advanced had been that the question of independence had not been a prominent issue in previous general elections and it was therefore doubtful whether the voters really desired it.

Those had been the views not of the United Kingdom Government, but of the parties represented at the Conference. Agreement had therefore been reached on the procedure he had described and, if a majority of the newly elected Legislature so decided, independence could be granted within a period of six months. The reasons why the approval of a majority in the Legislature was required were perfectly clear to anyone familiar with democratic procedures. As he had made clear in earlier statements, the delay in holding general elections had been caused by the process of reviewing the electoral system and the initiative now lay with the Government of Mauritius. In December 1966, the United Kingdom Secretary



(Mr. Shaw, United Kingdom)

of State for the Colonies, after discussions with the Prime Minister of Mauritius, had expressed the hope that the latter would share his wish for early elections and the Prime Minister of Mauritius had confirmed that he wished elections to be held in 1967. The United Kingdom could do no more; the initiative for holding elections lay with the Mauritians themselves.

On the question of the voting age, which had also been raised by the representative of Mali, the franchise arrangements had been reviewed at the 1965 Constitutional Conference and the leaders of the parties represented had agreed to leave it unchanged. It had therefore been the decision of the Mauritian representatives themselves. There was, moreover, nothing unusual in a minimum voting age of twenty-one; that was the case in many countries.

With reference to the salary scale in the sugar industry, he assured the representative of Syria that no sections of the population of Mauritius could be regarded as indigenous in the sense valid in other parts of the world. No distinction was made in the sugar industry between the Europeans and other sections of the population.

He repeated that no refuelling facilities had so far been constructed in the British Indian Ocean Territory and no decision had yet been taken to do so.

Mr. DIAKITE (Mali) said that he had been surprised by the United Kingdom representative's answer to his question concerning the delay in granting independence. In paragraph 20 of document A/AC.109/L.374 it was stated that neither the United Kingdom Government nor the Government of Mauritius could avoid the subsequent delays. Internal political difficulties alone could not be the cause for the delay; one cause appeared to be the requirement that a newly elected Legislature should first approve a resolution asking for independence. He believed that after the 1965 Constitutional Conference the path to independence had been wide open. There was some doubt in his mind as to the United Kingdom's willingness to move towards the emancipation of the Territory.

On the question of the minimum voting age, it should be recognized that the population of Mauritius was a somewhat special case because of the age pyramid and the rapid growth of population. To give the franchise only to those over the age of twenty-one would favour the population of mixed and French descent who mainly supported the Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate (PMSD), which was in favour



(Mr. Diakite, Mali)

of preserving the links with the administering Power. That indicated what the outcome of the proposed popular consultation would probably be. In many countries the minimum voting age was eighteen. If that were adopted in Mauritius, 75 per cent of the population, instead of 48 per cent, would be entitled to vote and the majority would then consist of young people who did not belong to the land-owning class. The situation presented complex problems which should be studied carefully since the future of a nation was at stake.

He was deeply concerned over the strict dependence of Mauritius on coffee and sugar. A country which was about to become independent should not depend on those two products alone. Mauritius, for instance, was entirely dependent on Madagascar for rice. If something could be done to make the Territory less dependent on the fluctuating prices for coffee and sugar, the United Kingdom should inform the Sub-Committee. It should also diversify agricultural production so that the Territory, which had a rich soil, could satisfy more of its own needs.

Mr. SHAW (United Kingdom) said that the requirement that a request for independence should first be approved by a majority of the newly elected Legislature of Mauritius was no more than a guarantee of the democratic expression of the wishes of the people. It was true that the FMSD did not support full independence, but he pointed out that that party represented not only those of European or mixed descent but also many of African descent who were resident in the Territory. It was hoped, however, that the new electoral arrangements would cut across such communal or racial considerations.

In his statement at the Sub-Committee's 37th meeting, he had mentioned the various efforts being made to promote new industry and diversify the economy of Mauritius. Both the United Kingdom Government and the Government of Mauritius fully realized the need for diversification.

Mr. USTINOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) agreed with the representative of Mali that the administering Power should give some thought to lowering the minimum voting age, especially since the population of Mauritius did not have a long life-expectancy. The explanation given by the United Kingdom representative was not convincing. What was good for other countries was not necessarily good for Mauritius. Some countries recognized that people already had

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(Mr. Ustinov, USSR)

opinions by the age of eighteen and were in a position to decide how to vote.

He had been glad to hear from the representative of the administering Power that there were at present no plans to establish military bases in the Territories, especially in the new colony. That would have been satisfactory if there had not been reports to the contrary. There was considerable concern in Africa and Asia on that point and there had even been discussion in the United Kingdom Parliament. He understood that the United Kingdom representative in New Delhi had been handed a statement pointing out that military preparations in the Indian Ocean were contrary to the spirit of the United Nations Charter, and the spokesman for the Indian Government, to whose statement the Yugoslav representative had referred at the Sub-Committee's 36th meeting, was very well informed about the discussions in the Special Committee, and in the United Nations in general, and he was reported to have expressed the hope that the United Kingdom Government would take those discussions into account and would give up any plans to establish military bases in the Territories. He still did not consider the United Kingdom statement definitive; but if it was, he welcomed it.

Mr. SHAW (United Kingdom) pointed out that it was the elected representatives of the people of Mauritius themselves who had decided to retain a minimum voting age of twenty-one. What was more important was that in Mauritius the voters had a free choice between various political parties and a free choice of candidates.

He had noted the USSR representative's comments concerning India's views. No doubt when the question was discussed at a later stage by the plenary Special Committee the Indian representative would make clear his Government's position on the matter.

Mr. POLYAKOV (Secretary of the Committee), replying to a request for clarification by the Tunisian representative (A/AC.109/SC.2/SR.37), pointed out that there was no contradiction between paragraphs 14 and 22 of document A/AC.109/L.374. As stated in paragraph 22, three parties had protested against the Banwell Commission's proposals for electoral arrangements following the issuance of the report, but, as stated in paragraph 14, the report had been accepted after certain amendments to the recommendations had been made following the visit of Mr. John Stonehouse to Mauritius to settle the dispute.

(Mr. Polyakov, Secretary  
of the Committee)

As to the figures concerning the export of sugar, he understood that sugar was generally harvested during the second half of the year and it was therefore natural that it should mainly be exported during that period. There was, therefore no contradiction between paragraphs 31 and 33 of document A/AC.109/L.374.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the representative of the United Kingdom for his helpful participation in the Sub-Committee's discussions.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.