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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

Summary record of the 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 21 February 2019, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chair: Mr. Guterres (Secretary-General of the United Nations)

Chair: Ms. McGuire (Grenada)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Opening of the session by the Secretary-General

1. **The Temporary Chair** said that it was an honour to open the 2019 session of the Committee as the decolonization agenda was close to his heart. Born in Portugal during the Salazar dictatorship, a dictatorship that had oppressed the Portuguese people as well as those of the former Portuguese colonies, he would never forget that the Carnation Revolution of 1974 that had deposed the dictator and brought democracy to his country had only been possible thanks to the liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. Those movements had convinced the Portuguese military that the wars it was waging against them were senseless and must be stopped. His vivid recollection of the Salazar regime's negative references to the Committee in its propaganda made the experience of presiding over the Committee, albeit briefly, that much more poignant.

2. Decolonization had helped to transform the United Nations membership, propelling the Organization's growth from 51 original Member States to 193 at present. Decolonization was one of the most significant chapters of the Organization's history, one that continued to be written, as 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories remained. Each of those Territories deserved attention as it waited to attain self-government, in accordance with Chapter XI of the Charter of the United Nations.

3. There had been notable movement on the question of New Caledonia in recent months. In a referendum held in November 2018, New Caledonians had expressed their will on the future and on the status of the Territory, taking an important step forward in the decolonization process. The cooperation of France, the administering Power, throughout the referendum process, in accordance with the 1998 Nouméa Accord, had been commendable. For its part, the Committee had assisted New Caledonia in the period leading up to the referendum, dispatching two visiting missions to the Territory.

4. To achieve decolonization, the voices of the peoples of the Territories must be heard, and the cooperation of all concerned, including the administering Powers, was likewise vital. It was also paramount that the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories understood the options regarding their political status and right to choose their future freely.

5. He commended the Committee's tireless efforts to uphold its mandate, support the peoples of the Territories in achieving self-government and maintain

dialogue and productive cooperation with the administering Powers and all concerned. Together, the international community should uphold the collective duty to enable the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to bring their decolonization process to a successful and freely chosen conclusion. For its part, the Secretariat would make every effort to support the important work of the Committee, which had accompanied many Territories in their journey since the 1960s.

Election of the Chair

6. *Ms. McGuire (Grenada) was elected Chair by acclamation.*

7. *Ms. McGuire (Grenada) took the Chair.*

8. **The Chair** said that the delegations of Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Guyana, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Namibia, South Africa, Spain and Uruguay had indicated their wish to participate in the work of the Committee as observers.

9. The Committee continued to discharge the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, as well as other relevant resolutions. In fulfilment of that mandate, it was essential to continue to strengthen dialogue with the administering Powers, the Non-Self-Governing Territories and all relevant stakeholders. Productive cooperation was all the more vital, with the end of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism less than two years away. In closing, she encouraged all members to participate actively in the work of the Committee.

Adoption of the agenda

10. *The agenda was adopted.*

Election of other officers of the Committee

11. *Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba), Mr. Djani (Indonesia) and Mr. Kai-Kai (Sierra Leone) were elected Vice-Chairs, and Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur, by acclamation.*

Organization of work (A/AC.109/2019/L.1 and A/AC.109/2019/L.2)

12. **The Chair** drew attention to a note by the Secretary-General (A/AC.109/2019/L.1) indicating the resolutions and decisions relevant to the work of the Committee for the current year. The Committee also had before it a note by the Chair (A/AC.109/2019/L.2)

containing suggestions concerning the Committee's organization of work, programme of work and timetable. Since the issuance of [A/AC.109/2019/L.2](#), the Bureau had considered a request that the two meetings on the question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) should be held on Thursday 25 June 2019. She took it that the Committee wished to approve the tentative programme of work and timetable contained in [A/AC.109/2019/L.2](#) as orally revised, with the understanding that they might be subsequently revised if required.

13. *It was so decided.*

14. **The Chair** suggested that, in accordance with the practice of the General Assembly, the Committee should agree to continue the practice whereby its meetings could be declared open without the presence of the quorum required under rules 67 and 108 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. That would enable the Committee to avoid late starts and proceed expeditiously with its work, thereby making optimal use of available resources. However, in accordance with rule 108, the presence of a majority of the members would be required for any decision to be taken.

15. *It was so decided.*

Organization of the 2019 Caribbean regional seminar

16. **The Chair** said that the Committee had yet to find a host for the 2019 Caribbean regional seminar from among its members from the Caribbean region, which was making it difficult to organize the event in a timely manner. The Committee's budget had been gradually reduced over several bienniums, which had hindered its capacity to fully and effectively carry out its two important annual mandates, namely dispatching visiting missions to the Non-Self-Governing Territories and organizing its regional seminars. The Committee would have to adjust its way of operating, particularly its travel plans. In the meantime, members of the Committee could contribute to the efficient implementation of its mandates by providing information in a timely manner.

17. The advent of the new centralized administrative system, Umoja, meant that official travel requests now took longer to process and must therefore be initiated much further in advance in order to avoid exorbitant costs resulting from last-minute bookings. The Committee must find a host for the seminar as quickly as possible. She therefore suggested that Committee members from the Caribbean region that were interested in hosting the seminar should notify her by 8 March 2019; if no offers were received from Caribbean members by that date, other Committee members could

volunteer to host the seminar. Once a host had been determined, the Committee would meet again, in late March, in order to plan and organize the seminar. That meeting would be announced in the Journal.

18. *It was so decided.*

19. **Mr. Webson** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the previous Bureau had met with representatives of the United Kingdom and raised the possibility of hosting the regional seminar in one of that country's Caribbean Territories. The current Chair and Bureau might wish to pursue that proposal, in consultation with the United Kingdom.

20. **The Chair** said that the Bureau would discuss that proposal.

Other matters

21. **Mr. Webson** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that he had had the privilege to lead the Committee at an exciting and challenging time. The Committee must act to effect a change in the status quo before the Third Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism drew to a close. As the Committee's progress towards helping the Non-Self-Governing Territories to decolonize would be the ultimate measure of its success, a re-evaluation of its approach might be in order.

22. During his tenure, the Bureau had held fruitful consultations with the representatives of three administering Powers and two stakeholders, addressing topics ranging from measures adopted to improve core public services, governance and environmental management practices in Tokelau to the impact of Brexit on Territories governed by the United Kingdom. At its meeting with representatives of France, the Bureau had expressed its gratitude to that administering Power for the arrangements made to accommodate the visiting mission to New Caledonia, and the question of French Polynesia, another item on the Committee's agenda, had also been discussed. Moving forward, he hoped that the administering Powers would engage proactively with the Bureau and participate in the Committee's proceedings.

23. He thanked the Government and people of Grenada for hosting the 2017 Caribbean regional seminar. In addition to holding the seminar, the Committee had worked with the Fourth Committee to present several resolutions to the General Assembly, thereby meeting its objectives for the year.

24. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Committee's contribution to upholding the right of self-determination had benefited dozens of peoples languishing under colonial rule, enabling many

Non-Self-Governing Territories to become independent nations and, subsequently, States Members of the United Nations. The crucial difference between the Organization and its predecessor, the League of Nations – and what had ultimately caused the League to fail – was that the United Nations had rejected war and colonialism, while the League had legitimized both. Indeed, the provision in the Covenant of the League for the mandate system had effectively acknowledged the right of colonial powers to govern colonized peoples.

25. The fact that most of the 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories were governed by three of the permanent members of the Security Council made it that much more difficult for the Committee to fulfil its mandate – and all the more incumbent on those major Powers, together with the Committee, to put a definitive end to colonialism.

26. **Mr. Djani** (Indonesia) said that, as the end of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism approached, the Committee should continue to focus its efforts on the decolonization process for the 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. It was encouraging that the Committee continued to hold informal consultations and engage with the administering Powers and other stakeholders. The successful referendum held in New Caledonia in 2018 was an important milestone and attested to the value of cooperation between the Committee, the administering Power and the people of the Territory. Indonesia stood ready to support and participate in the New Caledonian process, on the basis of the Nouméa Accord.

27. The Committee should continue to analyse thoroughly the situation in each Non-Self-Governing Territory in order to decide on the best way to proceed, since there was no one-size-fits-all solution. Furthermore, it should continue to involve the administering Powers in those efforts, as strengthened communication with them would make its work more constructive. Continuous, genuine dialogue between the administering Powers, the Non-Self-Governing Territories and other concerned parties was necessary for the Committee to complete its work. The parties should make use of all United Nations forums and bilateral measures to find common ground and move forward.

28. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba) said that, fifty years on, the decolonization process had yet to conclude, with peoples who continued to languish under colonial rule looking to the United Nations with hope. The Committee must not leave those peoples behind. For its part, Cuba would continue working with the

Committee to ensure that the peoples of all 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, as well as Puerto Rico, could exercise their right to self-determination.

29. **Mr. Sheriff** (Sierra Leone) said that his delegation, along with its fellow Bureau members, would work tirelessly to uphold the Committee's mandate.

30. **Mr. Rai** (Papua New Guinea), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, namely, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and his own country, said that the urgent need to improve constructive engagement with the administering Powers and the Non-Self-Governing Territories on a case-by-case basis constituted a priority for the Group.

31. The Group reaffirmed its pledge to lead and support the Committee's efforts on the question of New Caledonia and stood ready to engage in peaceful dialogue with all stakeholders in support of the Territory's self-determination. The Committee, the people and Government of New Caledonia and the administering Power, France, had done excellent work to conduct the successful referendum on self-determination in November 2018. As that Territory's decolonization process remained unfinished, the Group looked forward to the next stages of that process, including the preparations to hold provincial elections in May 2019. Lastly, ahead of the forthcoming Caribbean regional seminar, the Committee might consider reviewing the outcome of the recent referendum and drawing lessons from the process that would enable the Committee to better fulfil its mandate.

32. **Mr. Bahr Aluloom** (Iraq), reiterating his Government's attachment to the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, said that Iraq would continue to support the Committee's work.

33. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that the Committee could count on the unwavering support of Nicaragua for its work.

34. **Mr. Aleksaev** (Russian Federation) said that the Committee's unity must be reinforced continually, as it was consensus that made its decisions authoritative and that would ensure the sustainability of the decolonization process. In preparation for the next regional seminar, it was imperative for the organizers and the authorities of the territories in which the seminar would be held to ensure that all participants were granted the necessary visas, given that the Committee handled some of its most important business at those events.

35. **Ms. Joseph** (Saint Lucia) said that her country and many other small island Member States, some of them Committee members, had attained full self-government largely as a result of the very decolonization process guided by the Committee. While entire generations had been born into independence in the region, the complete decolonization of island Territories – most numerous on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories – had yet to be achieved. Saint Lucia stood ready to work with other Committee members to expedite the exercise of the right of self-determination and bring about genuine decolonization and political equality. To that end, the Committee must proceed urgently to implement the tangible decolonization measures mandated by the General Assembly, in particular, the case-by-case work programmes, which representatives of several small island Territories had entreated the Committee to implement, to no avail. The in-depth analysis yielded by such work programmes would be vital in helping Member States grasp the increasingly complex dynamics of contemporary colonialism, lest the Committee be reduced to relying on competing opinions in lieu of actual facts.

36. **Mr. Mantilo** (Timor-Leste) said that the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism was due to end in 2020, but little progress had been made with regard to the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing-Territories. The failure of some of the listed peoples and Territories to engage with the Committee was equally troubling. The Committee should draw up a calendar for visiting missions to the Non-Self-Governing Territories on a case-by-case basis, as previously proposed by his delegation. Visiting missions enhanced the capacity of the United Nations to assist the peoples under colonialism by providing an effective means of assessing the situations in those Territories as well as ascertaining their aspirations for their future status.

37. The issue in Western Sahara was one of decolonization, and his delegation reiterated its strong support for that Territory's right to self-determination and congratulated all participants in the round-table discussions that had taken place in Geneva in December 2018. He hoped that the round of discussions slated for March 2019 would yield substantial results. Lastly, he commended the people of New Caledonia on the November 2018 referendum, which marked the beginning of the process that would enable them to exercise their right to self-determination.

38. **Mr. Naouali** (Tunisia) said that cooperation and dialogue were all the more crucial to upholding the Committee's mandate as the end of the Third Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism drew near. In that spirit,

his delegation would continue to engage constructively with the Committee.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.