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Summary record of the 6th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 11 October 2019, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Ahidjo (Vice-Chair) (Cameroon)
later: Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Chair)..... (Iraq)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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In the absence of Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq), Mr. Ahidjo (Cameroon), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 59: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (continued)

Hearing of petitioners (continued)

1. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with the Committee's usual practice, petitioners would be invited to take a place at the petitioners' table, and all would withdraw after making their statements.

Question of Western Sahara (continued) (A/C.4/74/6)

2. **Mr. Sghayer** (Sahraoui Political Asylum) said that, as a citizen of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, he could attest to the tribulations endured by the Sahrawi people, whose situation was the last decolonization question in Africa. By placing Western Sahara – which had been known as Spanish Sahara at the time – on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1963, the United Nations had recognized the Sahrawi people as a colonized people whose inalienable right it was to exercise self-determination. The General Assembly had continued to uphold that right in successive resolutions on the question of Western Sahara. As the occupying Power, Morocco had violated those resolutions and the ceasefire agreement with its repeated provocations. In addition, the illegal border crossing Morocco had opened, one not provided for in the ceasefire agreement, was being used to smuggle Sahrawi natural wealth and Moroccan drugs.

3. The Moroccan occupier's machinery of repression employed internationally prohibited methods to break up peaceful Sahrawi demonstrations, resorting to systematic torture, arbitrary arrests and even killings in cold blood. Moreover, Sahrawi youth were secretly exiled to silence their clamour for freedom and independence.

4. Fish stocks, phosphate, gold and other minerals continued to be depleted without benefiting the Sahrawi population. The international community and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) had greeted those developments with silence, exacerbating his people's suffering. While Sahrawis, weary of waiting, continued to call for peace and abide by international norms and United Nations resolutions, the Moroccan occupier persisted in stalling, flouting resolutions and agreements, as its international allies colluded to prolong the conflict. While his people

had no predilection for war or instability, having tasted the bitterness of conflict and dispersal first-hand, it could not rule out a return to armed conflict, prompted by its conviction that the Sahrawi quest for self-determination was a just cause.

5. **Mr. Greimich**, speaking in his personal capacity as a Sahrawi, said that the systematic plunder of the natural resources of Western Sahara by Morocco was preventing his people from reaping the benefits of the Territory's wealth. Morocco received over \$2.2 billion annually in profit from exports of non-renewable minerals extracted from Western Sahara, in addition to the profits reaped from the direct sale of fish stocks and from agreements allowing other parties, such as the European Union, to fish in the waters surrounding the Territory.

6. The product of agricultural activity conducted by Morocco on Western Saharan soil was exported to European markets. Renewable energy plants in the Territory, which belonged to a company owned by the King of Morocco and other foreign companies, also yielded considerable benefits for the occupying Power. By 2020, all renewable energy sold by Morocco would be generated in occupied Western Sahara, despite the fact that the Territory rightfully belonged to the Sahrawi people.

7. His people had never consented to those projects, nor to the dozens of trade agreements concluded by Morocco with its counterparts governing operations on Sahrawi soil, despite the fact that no State, not even those sympathetic to Moroccan policy, had recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the Territory. In addition, a legal precedent had been established by the 2016 decision of the European Court of Justice, which had found that it was illegal for Western Sahara and the surrounding waters to be included in any trade agreements concluded by Morocco with a third party, as well as the 2018 ruling of the High Court of South Africa, which had found that the cargo of phosphate smuggled from Western Sahara by the Moroccan Government must be detained.

8. The massive gain from the Territory's natural resources was not being invested in the development or socioeconomic well-being of the Sahrawi people. Instead, Morocco used that revenue to fund military expansion throughout Western Sahara, repress the population's peaceful demands, promote Moroccan settlement in the Territory to alter its demographic composition, thereby marginalizing Sahrawis, and advance its cause by mounting pressure campaigns in global centres of influence.

9. **Ms. Krüger** (Instituto Personna – Human Rights Brazil) said that the natural riches of Western Sahara and its geographical location were the true driving factors behind the actions of the Polisario and the countries and organizations that supported the so-called independence of the Sahrawi people. The majority of inhabitants in the refugee camps lived without running water and depended almost exclusively on international aid to survive. That aid had decreased over the years, mostly due to its diversion by the Polisario. The current situation clearly demonstrated an inability to create a state of law that granted refugees a minimum level of well-being and security.

10. The absence of the rule of law or of a democratic organization led by representatives of the population meant that the Territory was living under a totalitarian dictatorship. The Polisario was not concerned with Sahrawi culture or law. Instead, it was allied with terrorist groups that received weapons, munition, drugs and guerrilla training and employed tactics of torture to achieve their objectives. All manner of human rights violations took place in Tindouf, including torture, sexual exploitation and restrictions on movement. Several opponents of the dictatorial regime had suffered barbaric deaths. Indoctrination in schools and the propagation of false information were also taking place. Furthermore, the Polisario deliberately provoked armed conflict in order to use the reactions of defence by the Moroccan Government to victimize itself.

11. The rejection of the proposal by the Moroccan Government was proof that the Polisario actions were not taken in the interests of the people, but rather for the Territory and its natural riches. Sahrawis had been manipulated through selective information and had received minimal benefits. The current state of affairs could only lead to the destabilization of the Maghreb and the establishment of a nucleus of terrorism in close proximity to Europe. The conflict had more than just regional implications; rather, it posed a threat to global peace.

12. **Ms. Perino**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that for almost half a century, the Sahrawi people had endured illegal occupation, fleeing to the desert to escape violence perpetrated by Morocco. In particular, children were suffering from the deprivation in the refugee camps in Algeria. There was a lack of nourishment for their developing minds and bodies and often there was no medication to treat sickness resulting from water contamination. Their journey to school was long and exhausting and they relied completely on humanitarian aid for their school materials. She asked what future awaited the children, who would have no opportunity to access higher education, had limited

health resources and suffered from the effects of poor nutrition and improper infrastructure. Most significant was the denial of their human right to identify and be recognized as Sahrawi. Despite such great instability, she hoped that the Sahrawi people would have the opportunity to live in their free land within her lifetime.

13. **Ms. Molo Alvarado** (Afropanameña Soy) said that women, children and older persons were suffering significant deprivation in the Tindouf camps, where they had been kept for over three decades by the uncontrolled militias of the Polisario. Among the critical problems they faced, two thirds of women had anaemia and one third of children suffered from chronic malnutrition, as attested by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme.

14. The inability of the Polisario to ensure a minimum level of well-being and security in the lives of refugees was demonstrated by the movements of young people, many of whom were seeking work in other towns or emigrating. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees obliged host countries to fulfil commitments in relation to the economic and social rights of individuals, relating to their professional and domestic situations and to ensuring that they had a residency card. Algeria had been denounced by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for delegating the management of the camps to the Polisario, in stark contradiction to the principles of international law. Deplorable practices occurred in the Tindouf camps, including the systematic abuse of women at the hands of the Polisario, the kidnapping of children and the diversion of humanitarian aid.

15. The adoption of the Moroccan autonomy initiative would offer an opportunity for peace, constituting a definitive decision to end the conflict and liberate the thousands of individuals who were still being held in the camps. It was time for the Committee, countries and organizations to act with conviction, notably by demilitarizing the camps, which endangered peace and threatened stability in the region, encouraged illegal immigration, increased the threat of terrorism and risked leading to even greater conflict.

16. **Mr. Ahl El Mekki** (Chamber of Representatives) said that the Saharan question required a realistic solution. There was no resolution possible with the Polisario, which had rejected every solution proposed since the 1991 ceasefire at the behest of entities pulling the strings in the manufactured conflict, obstinately insisting on holding a referendum according to its whims. The failure of over a decade of efforts by United Nations mechanisms and experts to lay down the

necessary groundwork to organize a referendum made it impossible to do so. After examining the Saharan question for 44 years, the consensus among the major decision-makers was that a solution must be practicable, realistic and based on compromise.

17. The Security Council had definitively abandoned the referendum option in 2004, emphasizing in subsequent resolutions the need to achieve a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, based on compromise. In a region convulsed by security crises, the Moroccan autonomy initiative provided a path to sustainable peace while meeting the aspirations of the inhabitants of the region and ending the suffering of the Tindouf camp population. The Moroccan effort had been hailed by various Governments as a serious and credible step towards a settlement; that commendation was rooted in the widely-held conviction that it was impossible for the Sahara to be independent from Morocco.

18. The good will demonstrated by Morocco had been met with the rejectionist intransigence of the separatist front and its leaders. As a democratically elected representative of the Saharan population, he was duty-bound to relay to the world that Saharans would not allow the generals in charge of the Polisario, who had lost their legitimacy as leaders, to govern them and threaten their future and that of future generations of Saharans. He supported the aim of the Moroccan autonomy initiative, namely, to reach a solution acceptable to all that would allow his brethren in the Tindouf camps to return to their country in a dignified manner.

19. **Ms. Zanoguera** (University of Toledo) said that unless all citizens of the world were free, none could be secure in their freedom. Colonialism was a system in which the subjugation and exploitation of a group of people was justified on the basis that natives were lesser humans than those who invaded their lands. The effects of appropriated land and denied freedom were atrocious, constituting an attack on humanity, and ran counter to General Assembly resolution 2621 (XXV).

20. The international community, through its inability to act in accordance with justice and law, remained an accomplice to one of the darkest chapters in the history of Africa, in which Sahrawis were regarded as less than human by Morocco. She asked how many more years it would be necessary to attend the General Assembly to convince all present that Sahrawis deserved human rights. In order for justice to prevail in Western Sahara, the United Nations must exert its power over all those who denied Sahrawis the right to self-determination.

21. The Spanish Government had not been held accountable for its betrayal of the Sahrawi people when it signed the Madrid Agreement. Meanwhile, the Spanish population had continued to work towards helping Sahrawis and to show support for their sovereignty. As the current administering Power of Western Sahara, Spain must lead efforts towards a democratic referendum.

22. **Ms. Daoudi** (Sahara Media Center) said that, in the Sahara, leadership roles were increasingly being given to women for their emancipation and to drive social inclusion. Such an environment gave Sahrawi women preponderant roles in the public sphere. However, the reality was very different in the Tindouf camps, where women were subjected to all kinds of ill-treatment, including deprivation of the right to freedom of movement, rape by Polisario leaders and despicable forms of torture. While the Polisario spared no effort in suppressing dissenting voices and oppressing women in the Tindouf camps, Sahrawi women leaders were joining all initiatives aimed at creating a prosperous environment for the local population in south Morocco.

23. **Mr. Fall** (Protecting Sahrawi National Resources) said that he did not understand the international community's double standard on the question of Western Sahara, whose occupation by Morocco was condoned by influential States, such as France, that otherwise respected the right of self-determination. The Sahrawi people demanded that that right, a principle central to international law, be upheld. Morocco had exploited the historic allegiance of Sahrawi tribes to the Moroccan king to occupy the territory, a practice adopted only by terrorist organizations.

24. The Territory's rentier economy was controlled entirely by Morocco, ensuring that the Sahrawi people did not reap its benefits. For Morocco, Sahrawi economic emancipation would lead to political liberation. The main beneficiaries of Moroccan economic activity in the Territory were the persons supporting the Moroccan occupation and Moroccan military and political figures living as settlers in the Territory.

25. According to estimates accepted by Sahrawi organizations, Sahrawis received a minimal percentage of the spoils of Moroccan economic activity across various sectors in Western Sahara, which, in certain cases, yielded the bulk of overall national output, as in the fishing sector. Furthermore, Moroccan projects in Western Sahara were short-sighted and not viable on the ground.

26. The Moroccan occupation systematically opposed all Sahrawi entities engaging in intellectual and

economic production, with several Sahrawi-owned businesses being shut down in Laayoune and other cities. Thousands of Sahrawis had taken to the streets to protest the economic situation imposed on their people, and dozens had been detained and imprisoned. In sum, Morocco should be recognized for what it was, namely, a totalitarian monarchy. As a third-world country occupying another country, Morocco had nothing to offer Western Sahara apart from the intent to undermine its independence and sovereignty.

27. **Ms. Girouard** (RunningHome) said that there was a direct link between climate change and the occupation of Western Sahara. For the past 43 years, Morocco had been illegally occupying Western Sahara and exploiting its natural resources, while the international community had remained silent, largely due to strategic partnerships between Morocco and international corporations.

28. According to Greenpeace, overfishing was one of the biggest threats to oceans. While the European Court of Justice had ruled that the European Union could no longer fish in Western Saharan waters, other foreign fleets were still fishing there. Climate change disproportionately affected vulnerable communities, especially those of displaced and indigenous peoples around the world. Sahrawis in refugee camps were frequently affected by flooding and rising temperatures.

29. Although the United Nations had ranked Morocco as the second-highest country for combating climate change the previous year, the renewable energies in which that country had made significant investments were being used to power phosphate mines in the occupied Territory. Hence, Morocco was legitimizing its crimes to the international community. The formula of growth and profit was causing global warming and costing the lives of current and future generations. A shift was needed from a system that exploited land, depleted resources and suppressed communities, only to bring economic power to wealthier countries. It was crucial to support the right of the Sahrawis to self-determination, freedom and justice, as well as to advance the agenda for a referendum.

30. **Mr. Dahi** (Laâyoune) said that, for years, Polisario militias and the intelligence services of the host country of the Tindouf camps had governed as they had seen fit, without oversight. They kidnapped, arrested, imprisoned, tortured and even killed those who dared to criticize them or demand the most basic rights, and they kept the gates of the camp, in effect a large prison, closed even to human-rights and humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations itself.

31. For over 40 years, there had been no possibility of alerting the international public to what transpired

inside the camps. With the spread of social media, the voices of the victims had begun to emerge and the public was discovering the heinous nature of what took place in those camps, the only refugee camps in the world whose inhabitants did not hold refugee cards and were not allowed to leave the premises. Owing to the host country's refusal to grant specialized international agencies access to the camps to conduct a census of and interview the camp population, no one knew how many people lived in the camps or what their nationalities were.

32. Emboldened by the solidarity shown to the detained around the world, the inhabitants of the Tindouf camps had participated in dozens of marches and protests over the previous year, some to demand justice for murdered or disappeared relatives and others to draw attention to the tragic situation in the camps. Each party with a hand in the crimes being perpetrated inside the camps must shoulder its responsibility for said crimes.

33. **Mr. Ayach** (Foum El Oued commune) said that, for years, he and others had been drawing the General Assembly's attention to the crimes committed by the Polisario militias against the innocent inhabitants of the Tindouf camps. The suffering of his brethren would not end until they were allowed to return to the Kingdom of Morocco, their homeland, to share in the development that the people of the Sahara had helped to foster, along with the central authorities and officials elected by the population in free and fair elections monitored by international observers.

34. There was a pressing need to intervene to protect the most vulnerable, namely, women, children and victims of racial discrimination, as slavery, sanctioned by official Polisario decree, was rife in the camps. It was no secret that, in one of the camps, sons inherited their fathers' slaves as they would other possessions. Moreover, young women were being raped, detained, prevented from traveling and forced to marry men old enough to be their fathers. The leader of the Polisario militias himself, Brahim Ghali, was wanted by the Spanish authorities and accused of rape and genocide. His followers had come to regard such grisly deeds, perpetrated by the person in charge of the camp, as ordinary conduct, as evidenced by their own acts of kidnapping, torture, rape, arbitrary detention and murder.

35. **Mr. Crespo Aguilar** (Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de Castilla La Mancha para el Sáhara Occidental) said that, in Western Sahara, he had seen countries and businesses enriching themselves in the land where Sahrawis were the legitimate people

suffering injustice. While the right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara was recognized in United Nations resolutions, in reality, the Territory was largely occupied by Morocco, which had no legal sovereignty and acted as a de facto occupying Power, repressing the aboriginal inhabitants and profiting from the exploitation of their natural wealth.

36. Even though Moroccan actions in Western Sahara had been condemned by the Court of Justice of the European Union, that country continued to plunder the resources of the Sahrawi people by depleting fish stocks and extracting phosphates. According to international humanitarian law and laws relating to occupation, occupying Powers did not have the right to benefit from the resources found in occupied lands. Moreover, looting in the occupied territories of Western Sahara could be considered a war crime.

37. In the camps, the Sahrawi refugees were separated from the riches of their land and deprived of the benefits they produced. The role of States and of the United Nations was crucial in ending violations of the political, economic and cultural rights of the Sahrawi people. In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they must be protected by the rule of law, in order to avoid recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression.

38. **Ms. Baez**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that, for the sake of regional stability and development, as well as the security and interests of the larger international community, Western Sahara could no longer be a forgotten conflict that was considered peripheral to world affairs. Western Sahara had endured a seemingly interminable struggle to achieve sovereignty, from its colonization by Spain in 1884 to the ongoing United Nations meetings to discuss the issues of the Moroccan occupation. The independence of Western Sahara was widely recognized and legitimate throughout most of Africa. If Morocco was trying to build infrastructure and improve the economy of Western Sahara in good faith, it would work with the people, meanwhile abiding by the standards and policies of its own Government.

39. **Mr. Gain** (National School of Trade and Management, Morocco) said that the Polisario was a proxy entity that served the geopolitical agendas of certain countries in the region. It had perpetrated gross human rights violations against the inhabitants of the Tindouf camps as well as Mauritanian and European nationals, torturing Sahrawi activists, forcing children to join its armed groups and raping women. Members of the Polisario armed militias had also joined terrorist groups in the Sahel and Sahara.

40. Many voices from the international sphere had confirmed that the Polisario had no legitimacy to represent Sahrawis. There had been condemnation and criticism by the European Anti-Fraud Office, European Court of Justice, Human Rights Watch, France libertés: Fondation Danielle Mitterrand and the United Nations Human Rights Committee of the practices, conditions and treatment in the camps at the hands of the Polisario. The atrocities reported included systematic torture, slavery, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances. Members of the Polisario must be held accountable for such actions.

41. **Mr. El Baihi** (Ligue Sahara pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme) said that, since establishing the Tindouf camps, the Polisario had taken hundreds of Sahrawi children from their families and instilled in their hearts hatred for an enemy it had fabricated. At the age of four, he and other innocent children had been sent to a South American country to live for over a decade. Subjected to indoctrination and forced to do hard labour, they had received military training and had alien cultural values instilled in them. Upon returning to the Tindouf camps in the hope of being compensated for their imposed exile, they found in place the same leadership that had exiled them, killing, imprisoning and torturing the innocent camp population.

42. He had fled that grim reality to the motherland of Morocco, where he had discovered Sahrawis living in a just society, able to travel without requesting permission and contributing their labour to the benefit of their own land. Local councils were elected by the populace every five years to govern and protect their interests.

43. Having learned the truth about the Polisario organization from the inside, he could attest that it had lost any legitimacy it had once had and that it had perpetrated crimes for which it must be held accountable. Anyone who supported the Polisario provided cover for its violations against his people in the Tindouf camps. The suffering youth of the Tindouf camps were in dire need of the Committee's urgent intervention to alleviate their plight. He also called upon Algeria to shoulder its full historic and moral responsibility for the flagrant human-rights violations being perpetrated on its soil.

44. **Mr. Bascones Aoiz** (Asociación Catalana de Amigos del Pueblo Saharaui) said that the Sahrawi people, represented by the Frente POLISARIO, had the right to self-determination. The question of Western Sahara did not involve the territorial integrity of other countries, in contrast to other cases such as that of Gibraltar, which affected the territorial integrity of Spain.

45. He urged the Committee to ensure that the mandate of MINURSO was implemented. The referendum on self-determination, which was the sole purpose of that Mission, should lead to the establishment of a State for the Sahrawi people, with the support of Spain. As long as the objective of MINURSO remained unfulfilled, that Mission should actively defend human rights and condemn all the practices of abuse perpetrated by Morocco in the territories it occupied illegally in Western Sahara, while working to preserve the natural and economic resources of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

46. **Mr. Hormat Allah** (Agence Développement Social de Dakhla) said that, under a new development model for the country's southern provinces, Morocco had invested \$7.7 billion to enhance access to social, economic and cultural rights and promote local initiatives aimed at overcoming the effects of climate change. The model was part of a regionalization plan which involved a new compact between the State and its southern regions that prioritized the well-being of the local Sahrawi population. Elected councils in the Saharan provinces and State institutions were working to instil democratic values in the region by consulting with local actors to ensure that regional plans and policies were in line with the expectations of the local population.

47. European Union officials had visited the Saharan provinces and witnessed the undeniable efforts to promote socioeconomic development for Sahrawis, and renewed agreements between the European Union and Morocco were evidence of the international recognition of the legitimate rights of the population to development. Moreover, the European Court of Justice had pronounced that the Polisario had no standing to represent Sahrawis. Such facts were not mentioned in Polisario propaganda statements made with the aim of deceiving the international community.

48. More than 67,000 foreigners had visited Moroccan Sahara in 2019, which showed that Morocco did not restrict access to the Sahara. While Sahrawis were working towards development, certain parties were committed to hiding the dishonest, immoral and illegal actions of the Polisario. Meanwhile, Moroccan State institutions had demonstrated commitment to proceeding with the development model for the region, ensuring the rule of law and introducing policies to the local community that satisfied their needs and aspirations.

49. **Mr. Braih** (Association pour le Développement Social et Humain) said that his brother, former Polisario official Khalil Ahmad Braih, had been kidnapped 10

years earlier on the soil of that organization's host country. Transferred to the Tindouf camps in 1977, his brother had served in various sensitive roles as a moderate official in the so-called Polisario until his kidnapping. He had been privy to dangerous confidential information implicating the Polisario leadership and numerous host country officials in war crimes perpetrated in the camps, including the disappearance of 160 people in unclear circumstances, during the tenure of Brahim Ghali at the helm of the organization's military and repressive apparatus.

50. As his brother had been preparing to give a series of lectures on human rights at a university in the host country, with the intention of publicly implicating the officials responsible for those crimes, the intelligence services of that country and the Polisario leadership had laid a trap for him and taken him to an undisclosed location.

51. Polisario leader Brahim Ghali had been forced to receive a commission dispatched by an organization established to seek justice for his brother, demanding information on his disappearance. However, not only had Ghali gone on to renege on his pledge, claiming that he had received orders to avoid delving into the case, but he had threatened Khalil Ahmad's relatives and characterized them as traitors for seeking information about his fate.

52. He and his family wished only to learn the fate of their relative so as to mourn him properly if he was indeed deceased, and to ensure that, if alive, he would be tried or released. They clung to the hope that the General Assembly would take on his brother's case and exert the pressure necessary to secure his release.

53. **Ms. Bahiya** (Dakhla Oued Eddahab Regional Council) said that, as a Moroccan Saharan citizen and member of a delegation of elected officials that had participated in the proceedings of the Special Committee on decolonization, she came before the Committee to champion the causes and interests of the population of Dakhla Oued Eddahab. Her legitimacy stemmed from her victory in an electoral process that observers had recognized as fair and democratic. As on previous occasions, the Saharan regions had had the highest voter turnout rates nationwide, with 80 per cent of registered voters participating. Saharan citizens had freely chosen their representatives from a pool of hundreds of candidates from different political backgrounds. Meanwhile, the stooges in the service of a foreign agenda who had ruled the Tindouf refugee camps with an iron fist for 45 years falsely claimed to represent Sahrawis but had not had the courage to organize a single election in all that time. Some of their

number were wanted by the Spanish authorities for rape and genocide.

54. In stark contrast, the inhabitants of Moroccan Sahara participated in all areas of life and upheld their duty to handle the affairs and advance the development of their region, exercising their civil, political, economic and cultural rights in total freedom. Elected officials were bound to keep their campaign promises to citizens if they wished to be re-elected at subsequent elections.

55. As an elected official, she took great pride in her constituency's direct participation in running local affairs, including helping to implement one of the largest development programmes conceived for the Sahara region. The stellar results achieved on the ground, recognized by the Secretary-General in several reports, served as an incentive to redouble efforts to serve the electorate and continue to develop the locality, which was already ranked third in the nation in terms of income per capita, after Laayoune and Casablanca. Projects were carried out with the plight of her brethren in the Tindouf camps very much in mind, as reports of the oppressive conditions and material hardship of the camps reached her community on a daily basis.

56. **Mr. Abba** (Conseil Regional de Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra) said that the progress made in the Sahara region was part of the development plan for the southern provinces launched by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, which emphasized the participation of local populations in addressing issues relating to the right to prosperity and social development. The new development model was centred around four pillars, which focused on growth and regional competitiveness, inclusive human development, sustainable territorial development and culture as a lever for development.

57. The realization of economic and social progress and regionalization in the Sahara region was sustainable, beneficial to the local population and favoured the success of the Moroccan autonomy initiative. Such projects also aimed to prepare for the return of Sahrawis to the motherland to enjoy a decent life of democracy and prosperity. The Moroccan autonomy initiative would allow Sahrawis to continue to run local and political affairs and to actively contribute to the ongoing social empowerment and economic development in the region.

58. **Mr. El Ouali** (Association 9 Mars) said that the oppression of human rights defenders was a long-standing practice in the Tindouf camps. The Polisario had perpetrated a pattern of arbitrary detentions of those who exposed its human rights violations and opposed its approach to the Sahara conflict. In June 2019, over three days, three prominent Sahrawi activists had been

kidnapped by members of the Polisario for speaking out about the grave human rights violations in the Tindouf camps. Their detentions undermined the discourse of all those who spoke in the Committee in support of that non-State entity. The mission of such persons was to defend the oppressed, not the oppressor; by supporting the Polisario they were impeding access to justice and obstructing the rule of law. The international community should work to bring justice to the families in the Tindouf camps, help save the lives of the three human rights defenders in the illegal detention centres and hold to account those who were violating human rights with impunity.

59. **Mr. Baqai**, speaking in his personal capacity as a citizen of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, said that he had returned to request that the United Nations deliver on its promise regarding the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara. Nothing had changed over the previous year, and the Territory's natural resources continued to be exploited by Morocco and transnational companies. Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations clearly stated that the benefit of the people of Non-Self-Governing Territories must be considered when making economic investments in those regions. Frente POLISARIO, the recognized political representative of the people of Western Sahara, had not been consulted on the trade deals made by Morocco with foreign investors. Moreover, the long-term sustainability of phosphate mining and fishing gave cause for concern, with fish stocks nearing depletion.

60. The unsustainable fishing practices robbed future generations of Sahrawis of a valuable economic resource. He therefore urged the Chair and all Committee members to work to ensure that the Sahrawi people's right to a free and impartial referendum was upheld. In closing, he asked all present to observe a minute of silence to reflect on the lack of progress made on the issue and to ponder the plight of Sahrawis living in refugee camps.

61. **Mr. Björnsson**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that Morocco fully complied with international law in its policies aimed at leveraging the natural resources of the Sahara to promote socioeconomic development in the region. The fishing and phosphates industries were an important economic sector that created jobs and improved the quality of life of the local population. Natural resources were central to the new model for the development of the southern provinces. They were extracted with the consent of the local populations, which were represented by democratically elected councils. Through consultations with local and regional government officials, the European Commission had verified on the ground that the populations of the Sahara

fully consented to and directly benefited from the exploitation of natural resources in their region. On the basis of those facts, the European Union-Morocco agricultural agreement and the European Union-Morocco fisheries agreement had been adopted.

62. Moroccan efforts to extract natural resources had enabled the local populations to fully exercise their right to development through the full enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights. The standard of living in the Sahara had been raised above that of the rest of Morocco. False claims on the lawfulness of natural resource exploitation by Morocco constituted pernicious attacks on the rights and livelihoods of the populations of the Sahara. The right to development was inalienable; Morocco had created conditions that ensured the population of the Sahara could access that right.

63. **Mr. Yara** (Laayoune Tech) said that every year he spoke on behalf of the Sahrawi people, but since the Committee's previous session, no progress had been made. He challenged the opposing parties to produce any solid evidence to show the involvement of Sahrawis in drug trafficking, rape, terrorism, or any other activities they were alleged to have engaged in. Morocco's investment in natural resources that it had stolen from the Sahrawis was proof of its occupation of the Territory. One of the main reasons behind its occupation was to use Western Sahara as a gateway for drug trafficking to Europe and Africa. Additionally, many of the terrorist acts that had occurred in the past year had involved Moroccans. He asked why, if Morocco were truly a safe haven, did it prevent the participation of Human Rights Watch in MINURSO. It was time for a resolution to be reached on the question of Western Sahara, under the auspices of the United Nations.

Agenda item 55: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations (continued) (A/74/23 (chaps. V and XIII) and A/74/63)

Agenda item 56: Economic and other activities which affect the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories (continued) (A/74/23 (chaps. VI and XIII))

Agenda item 57: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations (continued) (A/74/23 (chaps. VII and XIII) and A/74/80)

Agenda item 58: Offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories (continued) (A/74/65 and A/74/65/Add.1)

Agenda item 59: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (continued) (A/74/23 (chaps. VIII, IX, X, XI, XII and XIII), A/74/80 and A/74/341)

64. **Mr. Al-Maawda** (Qatar) said that colonialism and foreign occupation constituted violations of human rights, imperilled peace, human rights and democracy and must therefore be opposed and the right to self-determination championed. Qatar encouraged the just settlement of territorial disputes in accordance with international law, considering each situation on a case-by-case basis.

65. Qatar firmly supported the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to live in an independent State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with all international instruments on decolonization. It also called for an end to the occupation of Palestinian and other Arab lands.

66. On the question of Moroccan Sahara, he emphasized the importance of dialogue and negotiation in achieving a lasting solution. Qatar supported all efforts to reach a political settlement under the auspices of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and in a manner that preserved the sovereignty of the Moroccan State. In that connection, Qatar reiterated the position expressed at the 2016 summit between Morocco and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in support of the autonomy initiative proposed by Morocco as a basis for settling the dispute. The General Assembly should support all efforts to complete the political process and achieve a consensus-based solution, which would foster cooperation among States in the region and promote regional security and stability.

67. *Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) took the Chair.*

68. **Ms. Lodhi** (Pakistan) said that the Charter of the United Nations was not only an instrument of security to guard against the horrors of war, it also embodied hope for the millions of people who were still struggling against the yoke of colonialism. As the third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism came to a close, the persistence of foreign occupation was a travesty of the universal principle of political and economic freedom of all peoples. Decolonization and

the right to self-determination could not be limited to Non-Self-Governing Territories alone. Their application was universal, and their denial bred discontent, ignited conflicts and threatened peace and security, as witnessed and experienced by South Asia and the Middle East for decades.

69. The decolonization agenda would remain incomplete without the just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Rather than ensuring that the people of the disputed territory exercised the right to self-determination, India had been subjecting them to brutal and systemic oppression for decades. Worse still, India had illegally annexed the occupied territory, turning it into a prison into which thousands of additional troops had been moved, in an area that was already recognized as the most militarized zone in the world. Such action was in flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions and had resulted in a humanitarian crisis. There were scores of chilling reports of widespread torture, arbitrary arrests, abduction of young children, food shortages and a lack of medical attention in hospitals resulting in fatalities, including of children.

70. It was time for the Security Council to deliver on its commitments to the Kashmiri people. Unilateral actions in gross violation of Security Council resolutions and of international law threatened the very foundations of the rules-based international order, while also eroding the credibility and legitimacy of the United Nations itself. Pakistan would continue to be the voice of the Kashmiri people in all international forums until justice was done and they could exercise their right to self-determination.

71. **Ms. Badjie** (Gambia) said that her delegation welcomed efforts to strengthen dialogue between the stakeholders involved in the question of the Sahara through the holding of two round tables. A third round table would offer another opportunity to discuss a sustainable political solution, with a view to resolving the regional dispute, based on a spirit of realism and compromise.

72. Morocco had taken constructive steps to ensure that the political process to resolve the regional dispute over Moroccan Sahara proceeded through positive and cooperative political dialogue. All other stakeholders, particularly neighbouring countries, must demonstrate similar efforts to propel the process towards the ultimate goal of a definitive, sustainable solution. Furthermore, the Gambia supported the ongoing political process held under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General, with a view to finding a realistic, practicable and enduring political solution in accordance with Security Council resolution [2414 \(2018\)](#).

73. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was the viable solution to the question of the Sahara as it took into consideration the desire of the local population for self-determination, and thus offered a realistic compromise that could contribute to the stability and security of the Sahel region, while conforming to the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The human rights achievements of Moroccan regional commissions, notably the new development initiative for the region, were also encouraging and would undoubtedly lead to economic growth and improved living standards in the region.

74. **Mr. Gertze** (Namibia) said that, as a country that had previously been colonized, Namibia held international law in relation to human rights and dignity in high esteem. The continued denial of the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara was deeply concerning and constituted a challenge to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as to the credibility of the General Assembly. Member States, particularly those involved in the negotiation process, must seek an end to the impasse and work together in good faith for the immediate and unconditional implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan.

75. It was concerning that a referendum on self-determination had not yet been held and that Security Council resolution [658 \(1990\)](#) had not yet been implemented. The occupation of Western Sahara was an outstanding case of colonialism that must be resolved as a matter of urgency. In accordance with the principles of the third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the administering Powers should cooperate with the Committee on fully implementing the Declaration on decolonization. The United Nations should collectively support the will of the people of Western Sahara, ensuring their liberation and removal from the refugee camps.

76. Namibia applauded the efforts of the Secretary-General's former Personal Envoy and encouraged the appointment of a successor as soon as possible. It was also hoped that, with the determination of the mandate of MINURSO, a clear path towards self-determination and peace would be charted by the Security Council, in the interest of the Sahrawi people. Namibia sympathized with all those who were denied their right to self-determination. Moreover, it was thanks to the Committee that today, the people of Namibia could enjoy the freedom of self-governance, peace, prosperity and socioeconomic development.

77. **Mr. Skoknic Tapia** (Chile) said that his delegation valued the efforts of the international community to advance the decolonization agenda in accordance with international law and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). He reaffirmed his Government's support for the legitimate rights of Argentina over the Malvinas Islands and welcomed the progress made in bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and Argentina in recent years, as reflected by the introduction of new flights to the Malvinas Islands and the reciprocal visits by high national authorities. Chile remained committed to working with the Committee.

78. **Mr. Sahraei** (Iran) said that the issue of decolonization should remain a priority of the United Nations; the work of the Special Committee was highly important in that regard. However, despite all efforts made to enable the populations of Non-Self-Governing Territories to exercise the right to self-determination, those peoples were continuing to suffer from the scourge of colonialism.

79. The United Nations should take effective measures to speed up the decolonization process. The administering Powers were obliged to protect the human and natural resources of the Non-Self-Governing Territories against abuse and to avoid any activities that might adversely affect the environment and the health and economic development of the peoples of the Territories. The military activities of administering Powers in certain Territories were a source of particular concern.

80. Visiting missions by the Special Committee to the Non-Self-Governing Territories could enhance the capacity of the United Nations to assist the peoples under colonialism to achieve the objectives set forth in the Declaration on decolonization. The administering Powers should therefore cooperate with the Special Committee by facilitating visiting missions in the Territories under their administration. In addition, they should ensure the timely submission of information about the political, economic, social and educational advancements of the Territories under their administration, in accordance with Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations.

81. Lastly, he rejected the terminology used by certain delegations to refer to the Persian Gulf. The term "Persian Gulf" was the time-honoured name for that body of water and it enjoyed international recognition, including from the United Nations.

82. **Ms. Uaiene** (Mozambique) said that, against the backdrop of global initiatives to promote peace, stability and cooperation and enhance human well-being, the principles of self-determination and independence,

principles central to those efforts, should be approached in a dynamic manner. The right to economic and social progress for peoples struggling to achieve independence and sovereignty was enshrined in the Constitution of Mozambique.

83. She reiterated her Government's long-standing support for United Nations and African Union efforts to facilitate the exercise of self-determination by the people of Western Sahara. It was regrettable that that right had yet to be upheld, three decades after the establishment of MINURSO. The role of the Organization was central to reaching a just, peaceful and mutually acceptable solution that fulfilled the aspirations of the Territory's people. Following the meetings between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO facilitated by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General in 2018 and 2019, Mozambique called upon the United Nations to take tangible action to that end, including by extending the mandate of MINURSO and monitoring the human-rights situation in the Territory. The unconditional implementation of all international resolutions and decisions on Western Sahara provided the only guarantee of reaching a positive, permanent settlement.

84. The continuous expansion of Israeli settlements had led to an alarming increase in displaced persons and refugees in Palestine, hindering attempts to bring peace and stability to the region. Mozambique deplored the stagnation in negotiations to reach a peace agreement that might yield a sustainable, lasting and just political solution to the question of Palestine, based on the two-State solution. Her Government continued to support United Nations and other initiatives to that end and appealed to all parties to the conflict to show good will and implement constructive United Nations recommendations, with a view to ending the protracted conflict.

85. **Mr. Nguyen Nam Duong** (Viet Nam) said that nearly six decades after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories remained, with the inhabitants of those Territories unable to enjoy their rights. International peace and stability could be fully achieved only once people were able to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Decolonization, a fundamental goal of the United Nations, was also a prerequisite to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in terms of the promotion of human rights and the pursuit of socioeconomic advancement.

86. Having itself undergone prolonged struggles in its quest for national self-determination and independence,

Viet Nam strongly advocated the complete eradication of colonialism as promoted by United Nations institutions and agencies in the spirit of the Declaration on decolonization and the resolution on the third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

87. Further effective measures and actions were necessary to remove the obstacles to the full realization of the right of colonial peoples to self-determination. The administering Powers should cooperate fully with the Special Committee to ensure that their activities did not negatively affect the legitimate interests of the peoples in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, but rather would promote their socioeconomic development, protecting their environment and assisting them in exercising their rights to self-determination, in line with the Charter and the relevant resolutions. Viet Nam reaffirmed its commitment to join other Member States in working with the Committee towards a successful outcome, to advance their shared goal of decolonization and self-determination.

88. **Mr. Barro** (Senegal) said that his delegation supported the process, conducted under the exclusive auspices of the Secretary-General, aimed at achieving a realistic, practicable and enduring political solution to the question of Moroccan Sahara based on compromise. In that regard, it was encouraged by the two round tables held in 2018 and 2019, which had brought together Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Mauritania and Algeria, and urged all parties to continue to participate in the talks.

89. The Moroccan autonomy initiative embodied the constructive approach of Morocco to establishing a modern democratic society based on the rule of law, individual and collective freedoms and socioeconomic development, all the while respecting the Kingdom's sovereignty. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the implementation of the new development model launched by the Government of Morocco to foster regional development.

90. Resolution of that dispute would help to reinvigorate regional cooperation, promote development and overcome serious regional and global challenges. In particular, tackling terrorism and other cross-border issues stemming from the vastness of the Sahara desert would require a pragmatic approach based on Sahelo-Saharan partnership. Senegal therefore renewed its call for the dispute and the situation of the refugees in the Tindouf camps to be resolved once and for all.

91. **Mr. Shaddad** (Jordan) said that it was incumbent upon the international community to achieve progress towards decolonization, which remained a priority. To

that end, constructive dialogue among all stakeholders would be necessary to find realistic, sustainable solutions to all disputes, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations.

92. The refusal to allow the Palestinian people to exercise the right of self-determination and establish an independent, sovereign State of Palestine was the source of the Palestinian-Israeli crisis racking the Middle East. The region would not know peace and stability until that crisis was resolved through a two-State solution in line with international law and United Nations resolutions, leading to the establishment of an independent, viable, sovereign State of Palestine within 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

93. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan welcomed the constructive engagement of the fraternal Kingdom of Morocco, its historic ally, which had proposed the Moroccan autonomy initiative in its effort to reach a definitive political solution to the question of Moroccan Sahara, based on compromise. His Government endorsed the initiative as a serious, credible mechanism that took into account regional specificities and Moroccan sovereignty and territorial integrity. The measures taken by Morocco to improve the living standards of the Saharan population and enable it to benefit from the region's resources were equally commendable. Lastly, Jordan welcomed the contribution of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to achieving progress in the political process, including the round tables held in 2018 and 2019, in which all stakeholders had participated constructively.

94. **Mr. Sadnovic** (Indonesia) said that the 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories were a reminder that the Committee's work on decolonization required its utmost focus to ensure that the aims of the third International Decade on the Eradication of Colonialism were fulfilled. The effort would require intensive collaboration between the administering Powers and the Territories, along with continued international support.

95. The Special Committee on decolonization and the Decolonization Unit of the Department of Political Affairs were doing valuable work. The Special Committee had convened annual regional seminars and made progress in engaging constructively with the administering Powers at its substantive session in June.

96. The United Nations, in working with the administering Powers and the Territories to achieve decolonization on a case-by-case basis, was guided by the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant General Assembly resolutions. In the process, it was

essential to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of independent States and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. All involved in decolonization should continue engaging with the United Nations or should work within the framework of bilateral relations with a view to reaching mutually acceptable solutions. In that regard, his delegation expressed appreciation for the continued engagement of the relevant United Nations agencies and regional commissions and for their provision of technical assistance to the populations of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Such collaborative efforts would bring meaningful change to the lives of the dependent peoples.

97. **Ms. Ma Yuanchun** (China) said that helping colonized peoples exercise their right to self-determination and attain independence was in line with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. Over the preceding 70 years, countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America had struggled relentlessly to shake off the yoke of Western colonialism and aggression. The adoption of the Declaration on decolonization and the establishment of the Special Committee on decolonization had advanced the decolonization process. Nevertheless, 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories remained, home to two million people.

98. Complicated disputes, remnants of the colonial past, hampered development and undermined the exercise of legitimate rights. Her delegation urged all administering Powers to take effective measures to promote the social, economic, cultural and educational development of the Territories and protect their natural resources and environment. In addition, militarization should be halted, and investigations should be conducted, and compensation paid, in all Territories that had suffered as a result of nuclear tests.

99. China supported the sovereign claim of Argentina to the Malvinas Islands. Meanwhile, the parties concerned should act in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions, engage peacefully in dialogue and negotiations and try to find political solutions that would be acceptable to all.

100. As the third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism drew to a close, China would continue to participate actively in the work of the Fourth Committee and the Special Committee. It stood ready to work closely with the other Member States to promote positive results during the Decade in order to fully realize the historic mission of decolonization.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

101. **Ms. Viney** (United Kingdom), replying to the statement made by the representative of Chile, said that while her delegation welcomed the points that representative had made about improvements in the bilateral relations between Argentina and the United Kingdom, it must reiterate its position on sovereignty. The United Kingdom had no doubt about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas of both Territories. Nor did it doubt the right of Falkland Islanders to self-determination, as that principle was enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in article 1 of the two international covenants on human rights, by virtue of which they freely determined their political status and freely pursued their economic, social and cultural development. No dialogue on sovereignty could be conducted unless agreed upon by the Falkland Islanders.

102. Her Government's relationship with the Falkland Islands, as with all of its overseas territories, was a modern one based on partnership, shared values and the right of the people of each Territory to determine their own future.

103. **Mr. Mazzeo** (Argentina), replying to the representative of the United Kingdom and reiterating the statements delivered by the Argentine President to the General Assembly and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship to the Special Committee in 2019, said that his Government reaffirmed that the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas were an integral part of Argentine national territory and that, having been illegally occupied by the United Kingdom, they were the subject of a sovereignty dispute between the two parties, which was recognized by various international organizations.

104. That illegal occupation had led the General Assembly to adopt 10 resolutions on the issue, all of which recognized the existence of the sovereignty dispute over the Malvinas Islands and called upon the two Governments to resume negotiations with a view to finding a peaceful and lasting solution to the dispute as soon as possible. For its part, the Special Committee had repeatedly adopted resolutions in the same vein, most recently in June 2019, and the General Assembly of the Organization of American States had adopted a new statement on the issue in similar terms that same month.

105. The principle of self-determination, which the United Kingdom used as the basis for its refusal to resume negotiations on sovereignty, was inapplicable to

the dispute in question, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly and Special Committee resolutions.

106. The interests and way of life of the inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands were adequately addressed by the relevant General Assembly resolutions and by the Constitution of Argentina. Argentina reaffirmed its legitimate sovereignty rights over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas, which were an integral part of its national territory.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.