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THE FUTURE OF THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE CAMEROONS UNDER  
UNITED KINGDOM ADMINISTRATION: REPORT OF THE UNITED  
NATIONS PLEBISCITE COMMISSIONER ON THE PLEBISCITE IN THE  
NORTHERN PART OF THE TERRITORY

Statement made by the United Nations Plebiscite Commissioner  
at the 987th meeting of the Fourth Committee

Note by the Secretariat: The following statement is circulated to  
members of the Fourth Committee in accordance with a decision taken  
by the Committee at its 987th meeting.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Just a few days ago, I had the privilege of submitting to the Trusteeship Council the first part of my report as Plebiscite Commissioner for the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration, dealing with the organization, conduct and results of the consultation held in the northern section of the Territory. I have now the honour, Mr. Chairman, to come before you and the distinguished members of the Fourth Committee, to say a few words at the outset of your deliberations on this item of your agenda. Allow me in the first place to say how much I value, and how grateful I am for, the opportunity that you have kindly given me to present the first part of my report. Having been elected by the General Assembly to exercise on its behalf the powers and functions of supervision in respect to the plebiscite, I feel it is my duty to come before you to submit my report.

Mr. Chairman, the United Nations as a whole, and this Committee in particular, are deeply aware of the momentous changes that are taking place in the African continent with the dynamic emergence of the African people towards

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self-government and independence. One of the significant features of this development is the fact that the international community, as represented by the United Nations and other international organizations, has been associated with this movement to a degree unknown before in the history of other areas of the world. The role of the international community has been, of course, limited, and the principal forces that are producing this change come from the peoples of Africa themselves. The action of the Administering Authorities, on the other hand, could not be overlooked in a fair appraisal of this development. But the fact remains that never before has there been a comparable participation of the community of nations in the emergence of such an important number of territories to the status of self-governing or independent nations, as well as in their political, economic and social development.

The question of the future of the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration forms part of the whole pattern of change taking place in Africa and, in fact, the need for an early consideration of the matter arose in no small part from the imminent attainment of independence by both of their much larger neighbours: on the one side by the Federation of Nigeria on 1 October 1960, and on the other by the Trust Territory of the Cameroons under French administration on 1 January 1960. This was rightly pointed out by the 1958 Visiting Mission in its report (document T/1426).

In my report, as well as in my introductory statement before the Trusteeship Council, the text of which is annexed to its report contained in document A/4313, I have already referred at some length to the general conditions prevailing in the northern part of the Trust Territory, an appreciation of which I considered to be essential for a better understanding of the factors involved in the plebiscite. In the interest of expediting the work of this Committee I do not, therefore, deem it necessary once again to repeat what has been said before. Suffice it to say at this point that the administration of the northern part of the Trust Territory as an integral part of the Northern Region of Nigeria, the Territory's poor communications, as well as other special features of the Territory and its peoples have a special significance in the over-all consideration of the plebiscite.

Despite the many adverse local factors, both physical and human, despite the novelty of an operation of this kind and the peoples' difficulty to grasp the wider implications of the alternatives placed before them, the surprisingly heavy interest shown by them in the plebiscite both before and on polling day once again demonstrates the wisdom of the framers of the United Nations Charter in assuring the peoples of the Trust Territories the right of expressing their wishes freely.

The results of the outcome of the plebiscite in the Northern Cameroons are by now well known to all members of this assembly. Of the 113,859 votes cast, 70,546 favoured the second alternative and 42,788 favoured the first alternative. Thus, approximately 80 per cent of the estimated number of potential voters and almost 88 per cent of the registered voters participated in the balloting. These figures compare very favourably with voting participation in most independent States and give in themselves an indication of the great interest shown by the population of the Northern Cameroons in the future of their territory.

Mr. Chairman: In discharging the responsibilities that the General Assembly entrusted to me and to the United Nations staff, we endeavoured to comply fully with the principles and provisions of the Charter and the wishes of the General Assembly. No effort was spared to supervise as adequately as possible the stages of the plebiscite that we were directed to oversee. The United Nations staff and myself travelled extensively throughout the Northern Cameroons, met with the people and their leaders, acted on all complaints that were brought to our notice and made representations to the Plebiscite Administrator whenever necessary. On the basis of this first-hand knowledge, I was able to state in the conclusions of my report that the plebiscite was organized and conducted by the Administering Authority with efficiency and impartiality, in accordance with the laws and regulations promulgated for the purpose, and that it was held in an atmosphere of freedom. Based on my personal observations and those of the United Nations staff and observers, I felt it my duty to state that one of the reasons, and I underline that it is one and not the only reason, why the people voted for the second alternative seemed to be their dissatisfaction with present arrangements concerning local government over which they exercise little, if any, control. There is a strong desire for a speedy introduction of reforms in the system of

local government which, as I had occasion to express to the Trusteeship Council, are long overdue. The people rightly want a greater democratization of the Native Authority, an effective participation in its councils by people who do not belong to the ruling tribes. There is also a growing demand for a more adequate development of the Northern Cameroons.

I also gained the impression that the people of the Territory do not wish to continue for any length of time under trusteeship, but in choosing the second alternative they registered their desire that the reforms should be introduced before trusteeship came to an end. In other words, they would like to manage effectively their own local affairs before deciding the broader issue of their ultimate future.

The people of the Territory, whether educated or not, know this to be one of their urgent needs and the Administering Authority, as well as the General Assembly, should not fail to take their wishes into consideration.

Mr. Chairman, I have not ventured to assume what all the motives of the voters may have been. This is obviously an impossible task. What may be in the peoples' minds will in all likelihood be shown only in the future and it would be most difficult to forecast the trends of public opinion in the Territory.

Mr. Chairman: In accordance with the provisions of Article 76(b) of the United Nations Charter, one of the basic objectives of the Trusteeship System is that of promoting the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the Trust Territories towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each Territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned. In keeping with these provisions of the Charter, the General Assembly decided by resolution 1350 (XIII), inter alia, that a plebiscite should be held in the northern part of the Cameroons administered by the United Kingdom, under the supervision of the United Nations. The results of the plebiscite, which are contained in my report now before you have amply justified, I believe, the wisdom of the decision taken by the General Assembly. Mr. Chairman: there is no substitute for a free consultation on the basis of secret ballot to ascertain the true wishes of the people. The plebiscite in the northern part of the Cameroons was the third

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popular consultation to be held in a Trust Territory under the supervision of the United Nations, and it is of special significance that it was the first time in the history of the Northern Cameroons that its people were given an opportunity to express their wishes either in an election or a plebiscite by means of the secret ballot.

The experience of these popular consultations held under the supervision of the United Nations has proven that the presence of our Organization increased the confidence of the people, contributed to the objectivity and impartiality with which these consultations were conducted by the respective Administering Authorities, and dispelled possible doubts on the part of the people concerning any form of interference in the exercise of their rights. Indeed, one may even venture to hope that in the not too distant future the system of international organization will be strengthened so as to permit popular consultations to be held under international supervision, not only in Trust Territories but also in other areas of the world, wherever the need arises.

In this way, Mr. Chairman, the free and effective exercise of the right to vote, one of the fundamental human rights, could be further promoted by the international community.

As a final remark and at the risk of being repetitious, let me say again that it was mainly due to the sense of responsibility and respect for law and order of the people of the Northern Cameroons that the plebiscite was successfully carried out. This, Mr. Chairman, is the most vivid and rewarding impression of my visit to the Northern Cameroons.

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