



# General Assembly

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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 Friday, 21 February 2020, 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 2020 session of the Committee. When he had addressed the Committee in 2019, he had spoken about his deep connection with the issue of decolonization, which was one of the defining mandates of the United Nations. The Carnation Revolution of April 1974 that had brought democracy to his own country, Portugal, had been possible thanks to the liberation movements in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, and there had always been a strong link between the Portuguese democrats and the liberation movements of the former colonies as a result. He wished to stress his personal and sincere commitment to the Committee's work, which he continued to follow closely.

2. The celebration in October 2020 of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations was an opportunity to reflect on the Organization's achievements. Decolonization was one of the most significant chapters in its history and he commended the Committee on the key role it had played. Of the 72 Territories placed on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1946, only 17 remained. The United Nations should be proud of that achievement.

3. Nevertheless, the peoples in those 17 Territories were still waiting for the promise of self-government to be fulfilled, as set forth in Chapter XI of the Charter of the United Nations, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and other relevant United Nations resolutions. The year 2020 also marked the end of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, a milestone that presented another important opportunity to take stock of the progress made.

4. Given that the most recent Non-Self-Governing Territory to conclude its decolonization process had been Timor-Leste in 2002, it was reasonable to ask whether an impasse had been reached. However, that was not the case; the decolonization agenda was moving ahead, albeit at a slow pace. In 2020, New Caledonia would hold a second referendum on independence, following its first referendum in 2018. The Committee continued to nurture and build new relationships with Territories and administering Powers. The 2019 regional seminar had been attended by an unprecedented number of participants from Territories, administering Powers, Committee members and other stakeholders. In December 2019, a Committee delegation had visited Montserrat to gather first-hand information on the political and socioeconomic situation in the Territory.

5. The decolonization process must be guided by the aspirations and needs of the communities living in the Territories. Their concerns were varied, and it was a collective responsibility to amplify their voices. Many of them faced very real and pressing challenges, as the vast majority of the Territories were small islands on the front lines of climate change. Many had faced devastating natural disasters, while others were struggling to build sustainable and self-sufficient economies. The Committee must continue to serve as a forum for meaningful dialogue between Territories and administering Powers so that the peoples of the Territories could make informed decisions about their future.

6. He would remain alongside the Committee as it made another push to eradicate colonialism once and for all. The United Nations owed it to the peoples living in the Territories to complete that historic task. He encouraged the Committee to be innovative and resolute in its work and wished it every success for the 2020 session. For its part, the Secretariat would make every effort to support the Committee in fulfilling one of the Organization's essential missions.

### **Election of the Chair**

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

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

9. **The Chair** said that the delegations of Algeria, Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the Gambia, Morocco, Namibia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Uruguay and Zimbabwe had indicated their wish to participate in the work of the Committee as observers.

10. The decolonization agenda was indeed not at an impasse; rather, it was moving forward, and it was the Committee's mission and responsibility to achieve meaningful progress as efficiently as possible and in collaboration with all involved. She counted on the Committee's active support to further the decolonization agenda on the basis of the four principles of her chairmanship, namely, commitment to mandate, collaboration, pragmatism and agility. In 2020, the United Nations would celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary and the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism would draw to a close. By strengthening dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders, in particular between the Non-Self-Governing Territories and the administering Powers, and by continuing to devise creative and practical proposals, the Committee could achieve concrete outcomes.

11. The Committee had before it the important task of continuing to seek suitable means for the effective and complete implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and all relevant General Assembly resolutions, on a case-by-case basis. However, the pace of progress must be increased.

12. The Committee had modified its working methods in order to hear from the Territories before discussing and adopting its resolutions, thus ensuring that their views would be taken into account. The 2019 Caribbean regional seminar held in Grenada had been attended by an unprecedented number of Committee members and by representative of Territories that had not engaged with the Committee for a number of years. Such momentum must be maintained. In the last year of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, New Caledonia would hold its second referendum on self-determination in accordance with the Nouméa Accord. The General Assembly had noted with gratitude the cooperation of France regarding the work of the Committee in relation to New Caledonia, the positive progress made since 2014 on the electoral process for the referendum and the importance of and need for clarity through an educational campaign concerning the potential referendum outcomes. The Committee would continue to support the ongoing process of decolonization in New Caledonia as its people prepared to exercise their right to self-determination for the second time.

13. The visiting mission to Montserrat from 17 to 20 December 2019 had been a significant accomplishment for the Committee. Its objective had been to gather first-hand information on the situation in Montserrat, focusing on its political, economic, social and environmental development and challenges to sustainable development, particularly the impacts of the volcanic eruptions since 1995. In view of the liquidity crisis facing the United Nations in late 2019, the Bureau had sought creative solutions to ensure that the mission could go ahead as planned. In the end, it had been conducted thanks to a combination of regular budget and extrabudgetary resources and self-funding arrangements. The mission had held 19 meetings in Montserrat and two meetings in Antigua and Barbuda, and had sought to meet with as many relevant stakeholders as possible. At all meetings, the mission had reiterated its impartiality and objectivity under the Charter of the United Nations and the mandate entrusted to the Committee. She wished to thank the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for its cooperation in facilitating the mission,

and the people and Government of Montserrat, the Governor and all interlocutors for their cooperation, support and hospitality. She also wished to thank the Government of Antigua and Barbuda for its assistance.

14. Throughout the Committee's history, visiting missions had proven to be a vital tool that enabled the Committee to ascertain the situation in the Territories and the wishes and aspirations of their peoples. The Committee should continue to make every effort to dispatch visiting missions to the Territories on a case-by-case basis and to maximize their utility and value as a means of advancing the decolonization process and bringing the number of Non-Self-Governing Territories down to zero. She was confident that the Committee's collective efforts would bring renewed impetus to the decolonization process.

#### **Adoption of the agenda**

15. *The agenda was adopted.*

#### **Election of other officers of the Committee**

16. *At the invitation of the Chair, Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba), Mr. Djani (Indonesia) and Mr. Kabba (Sierra Leone) were elected Vice-Chairs, and Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur, by acclamation.*

#### **Organization of work (A/AC.109/2020/L.1 and A/AC.109/2020/L.2)**

17. **The Chair** drew attention to a note by the Secretary-General (A/AC.109/2020/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.109/2020/L.2) containing suggestions concerning the Committee's organization of work, programme of work and timetable.

18. The tentative programme of work had been adjusted to reflect the concerns of the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Unlike in previous years, the Committee would discuss the agenda items before it considered the related draft resolutions, in order to be able to take into account the information provided by participants. The Bureau fully supported that approach and recommended it for approval by the Committee.

19. She took it that the Committee wished to approve the tentative programme of work and timetable contained in A/AC.109/2020/L.2, with the understanding that they might be subsequently revised if required.

20. *It was so decided.*

21. **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.

22. *It was so decided.*

#### **Organization of the 2020 Pacific regional seminar** (A/AC.109/2020/19)

23. **The Chair** invited the Committee to consider preparations for the 2020 Pacific regional seminar, starting with the dates and venue.

24. She said that the Government of Indonesia had expressed interest in hosting the seminar and communications had been circulated to all Committee members to that end. Bureau members had unanimously expressed their firm support for that offer and had recommended that the Committee accept it. She took it that the Committee wished to accept the offer to hold the seminar in Indonesia in 2020.

25. *It was so decided.*

26. **The Chair** thanked the Government of Indonesia, on behalf of the Committee, for offering to host the regional seminar. She said Indonesia had already hosted the regional seminar, in 2008, which demonstrated the importance that it attached to the work of the Committee. The Bureau had first considered its usual practice of holding the regional seminar around the third week of May, thus coinciding with the annual Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories that started on 25 May. However, as Ramadan would also be observed that week, the Bureau recommended that the Committee consider holding the seminar from 2 to 7 May 2020, as proposed by the host country. She took it that the Committee wished to hold the regional seminar on the proposed dates.

27. *It was so decided.*

#### *Guidelines, rules of procedure, theme and agenda of the seminar*

28. **The Chair** drew attention to the guidelines, rules of procedure, proposed theme and provisional agenda for the seminar, as contained in document A/AC.109/2020/19. Apart from the new theme and agenda, the text was essentially the same as in previous

years. The working languages would be English, French and Spanish, since she intended to preside over deliberations in English. She took it that the Committee wished to approve the guidelines, rules of procedure, theme and agenda of the seminar.

29. *It was so decided.*

#### *Composition of the official delegation*

30. **The Chair** recalled that the Committee's official delegation to the seminar would comprise the Chair, her adviser, members of the Bureau and the representatives of the four regional groups in the Committee, for a total of 10 Committee members. The four regional groups were the Group of African States, the Group of Asia-Pacific States, the Group of Eastern European States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. The nomination of the regional Group representatives would be coordinated by the Bureau members from the respective Groups. The United Nations would bear the travel costs and daily subsistence allowances of the delegation.

#### *Extension of invitations to experts and organizations*

31. **The Chair** said that the Committee would be meeting in the coming days to discuss preparations for the seminar, including the Committee's practice of extending seminar invitations to selected experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations. She took it that the Committee wished to authorize the Chair and the Bureau to finalize the list of experts and organizations invited to the seminar.

32. *It was so decided.*

33. **The Chair** recalled that, in accordance with rule 6 of the rules of procedure for the seminar, participation would be restricted to the persons to whom formal invitations had been addressed, or to their proven representatives if any of those persons were unable to attend.

#### *Extension of invitations to representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories*

34. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with the established practice of the Committee, invitations to the seminar would be extended to all elected and appointed officials of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The United Nations would bear the travel costs of the officials of all Non-Self-Governing Territories. Invitations would also be extended to the administering Powers and other Member States, specialized agencies within the United Nations system and some regional organizations.

However, their travel and accommodation costs would not be borne by the United Nations.

35. *It was so decided.*

36. **The Chair** said that the Committee's budget had been gradually reduced over several bienniums, and the allocations had been further reduced by the General Assembly for 2020. The liquidity crisis and the reduced resources had hindered the Committee's 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. Members of the Committee could contribute to the efficient implementation of its mandates by providing information in a timely manner.

37. 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. Timely communication of participants' information to the Secretariat was therefore vital.

38. The Committee would meet again on 13 March 2020 to plan and organize the seminar. The meeting would be announced in the Journal.

39. *It was so decided.*

#### **Other matters**

40. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that his delegation recognized the commitment of the Bureau to the eradication of colonialization, which he hoped would happen within the lifetimes of those present. The Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism was drawing to a close, and efforts must be intensified in 2020 to fulfil the mandate conferred upon the Committee by the General Assembly.

41. **Mr. Koba** (Indonesia) said that, as the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism came to an end, the Committee must continue to focus on the decolonization of the 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories on the basis of a careful, balanced and thorough assessment of their particular situations. There was no one-size-fits-all solution and the decolonization process must be advanced on a case-by-case basis. The Committee must continue to engage with the administering Powers and other stakeholders, which would strengthen communication and was a more constructive approach that had resulted in the visiting mission to Montserrat. Indonesia encouraged all parties to make use of relevant United Nations forums and

bilateral mechanisms to find common ground. His delegation would continue to work with others and contribute to fulfilling the Committee's mandate. In that regard, Indonesia looked forward to welcoming Committee members to the Pacific regional seminar in May 2020.

42. **Mr. León González** (Cuba) said that the Committee's work was very important for the United Nations. The Committee had achieved a great deal, but much remained to be done. The remaining Territories under the purview of the Committee must continue to be addressed in accordance with the relevant resolutions. Cuba was firmly committed to the Committee's work.

43. **Mr. Tejan** (Sierra Leone) said that his delegation wished to assure the Bureau of its unwavering commitment to the Committee's mandate and to all future activities, including attendance at the Pacific regional seminar.

44. **Mr. Reyes Hernández** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the presence of the Secretary-General at the opening meeting attested to the importance of the Committee and its mandate. The Committee could count on the support of his delegation in carrying out its programme of work.

45. The date 14 December 2020 would mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. While great strides had been made since then, a number of Non-Self-Governing Territories remained on the list, and Puerto Rico was still under the Committee's purview. More could be achieved by listening to the peoples in a colonial situation and strengthening dialogue and cooperation with the administering Powers to facilitate the decolonization process. He reaffirmed his delegation's willingness to work with the other delegations and within the United Nations framework to advance the urgent and unfinished matter of decolonization.

46. **Mr. Motufaga** (Fiji) speaking also on behalf of Papua New Guinea, welcomed two representatives from the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste and a representative of the secretariat of the Melanesian Spearhead Group to the meeting, and said that their presence attested to the continuing importance accorded to the Committee's work.

47. Enhanced leadership was needed in the quest for a durable and lasting solution acceptable to all parties in the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories in the final year of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. The Bureau continued to be

composed of members who were broadly representative of the United Nations geographical regions.

48. The important matters on the programme of work for 2020 would require concerted cooperation, and there was an urgent need to improve constructive engagement with the administering Powers and the Territories on a case-by-case basis. Fiji and Papua New Guinea looked forward to working towards a successful outcome at the Pacific regional seminar.

49. The year 2020 would be another referendum year for New Caledonia, following the first successful referendum in 2018, which had been a high point in the Committee's leadership and in the ongoing constructive and cooperative efforts of the people and Government of New Caledonia and the administering Power, France, under the Nouméa Accord. The self-determination of New Caledonia was unfinished business on the United Nations decolonization agenda and remained a priority for the Melanesian Spearhead Group. The Group looked forward to supporting the upcoming referendum, including with respect to the remaining concerns regarding the electoral list for the referendum. It would continue to engage constructively and in a spirit of peaceful dialogue with all stakeholders to further advance the Territory's self-determination. He reaffirmed a wholehearted resolve to work in partnership with the other Committee members and relevant stakeholders.

50. **Mr. Bahr Aluloom** (Iraq) said that the Secretary-General had expressed the aspirations of the 17 remaining Territories to live in dignity and freedom. The 2020 session coincided with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations and the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#). His delegation hoped that the session would contribute to the successful implementation of the Committee's mandate.

51. **Mr. Alexsaev** (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation had been instrumental in the creation of the Committee and it was a pleasure to see it at work. His delegation would spare no effort to ensure that all the Committee's tasks were completed.

*The meeting rose at 11 a.m.*