



General Assembly

Distr.: General
15 February 2021

Original: English

Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Turks and Caicos Islands

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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Note: The information contained in the present working paper has been derived from public sources, including those of the territorial Government, and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the administering Power under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Information was transmitted by the administering Power on 9 December 2020. Further details are contained in previous working papers, available at www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



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The Territory at a glance

Territory: The Turks and Caicos Islands is a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Representative of administering Power: Governor Nigel Dakin (since July 2019)

Geography: The Territory, which comprises 40 islands and cays, lies 145 km north of Haiti and the Dominican Republic and 925 km south-east of Miami, United States of America. Six islands are permanently inhabited: Grand Turk, where the capital is located; Providenciales, the business and tourist centre with the great majority of the population; North Caicos; Middle Caicos; South Caicos; and Salt Cay.

Land area: 948.2 km²

Exclusive economic zone: 154,068 km²

Population: 44,542 (2020 estimate): approximately a quarter are citizens and three quarters are immigrants from the Bahamas, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Philippines and other countries

Life expectancy at birth: 79.8 years (men: 77.1 years; women: 82.7 years (2016 estimate))

Language: English

Capital: Cockburn Town

Head of territorial Government: Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson (since December 2016)

Main political parties: People's Democratic Movement; Progressive National Party

Elections: Most recent: 15 December 2016; next: 19 February 2021

Legislature: House of Assembly

Gross domestic product per capita: \$17,803 (real, 2019 estimate)

Economy: Tourism, financial services, construction

Unemployment rate: 7 per cent (2019 estimate)

Monetary unit: United States dollar

Brief history: The first inhabitants of the islands were the Arawak-speaking Taino people. In 1799, the islands were annexed by Great Britain as part of the Bahamas and subsequently Jamaica. They became a separate colony of the United Kingdom in 1962, when Jamaica achieved independence, but they maintained close constitutional ties with the Bahamas. After the Bahamas became independent, in 1973, a governor replaced the former administrator of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

I. Constitutional, legal and political issues

1. The Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution Order 2011, which entered into force as the Territory's fifth since 1962 on 15 October 2012, provides for a Governor as the head of the Government, a House of Assembly composed of elected and appointed members and the Attorney General, with a cabinet and ministers appointed from among those elected or appointed members. It added a variety of good governance initiatives and measures to ensure the sound management of public finances.

2. The 2011 Constitution also provides for the judiciary, the public service and a number of institutions protecting good governance, notably an integrity commission, a human rights commission, an auditor general and a director of public prosecution. Provisions are also made in relation to Crown land and public financial management. Under the Order, the British Crown reserves the power, with the advice and consent of the Privy Council of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to make laws for the peace, order and good governance of the Territory.

3. According to the administering Power, the Governor, appointed by the British Crown, is responsible for external affairs, defence, internal security, including the police force, the regulation of international financial services and some public service matters.

4. The legislature, the House of Assembly, comprises the Speaker, 15 elected members, 4 appointed members and the Attorney General. Ten members are elected to represent one electoral district each and the remaining five are elected by Territory-wide vote.

5. The law of the Territory consists mainly of locally enacted statutes, along with some laws enacted in the United Kingdom and applied to the Territory, and English common law. The court system includes magistrates' courts, the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal, with ultimate recourse to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. On the advice of a judicial service commission, the Governor appoints magistrates and the judges of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal.

6. According to the administering Power, the recent past has seen political turbulence in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The Territory operated on the basis of a ministerial system of government under the 2006 Constitution, negotiated between the elected territorial Government and the United Kingdom, until 14 August 2009, whereupon the United Kingdom brought into force legislation that, among other things, temporarily suspended parts of the Constitution, thereby removing the Government and the House of Assembly. The action had been motivated by mounting evidence of systemic corruption in the territorial Government and legislature and among public officers, which was uncovered by a commission of inquiry established in July 2008 (see also sect. IV.E below).

7. Between August 2009 and November 2012, the Governor, who had been given extended powers, worked under interim constitutional arrangements with an advisory council and a consultative forum. Each was constituted by islanders appointed by the Governor. The arrangement was referred to as the "interim Government", the "interim Administration" or "direct rule".

8. Coinciding with the 2009 suspension of parts of the 2006 Constitution, an economic downturn and austerity measures required to "balance the books" and to ensure that public services in the Territory could continue to function led to layoffs in the public sector. According to the administering Power, doing so generated a degree of resentment among some residents, who perceived the layoffs as being a direct result of intervention by the United Kingdom.

9. The interim Administration, which started in August 2009, came to an end on 9 November 2012, when elections were held. With an 84 per cent voter turnout, the Progressive National Party, which had been in office when the previous Government was removed in 2009, won eight seats, while the People's Democratic Movement won seven seats. The leader of the Progressive National Party, Rufus Ewing, was sworn in as Premier on 13 November 2012, returning elected government rule to the Territory.

10. In February 2013, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) noted with grave concern that, although the elections of November 2012 had led to the restoration of representative government in the Territory, the overall state of political affairs remained less than desirable and the restoration of true democracy was still a long way off. It dispatched a ministerial fact-finding mission to the Territory in June 2013. According to media reports, the mission's internal report contained a number of recommendations, including the holding of a referendum on the acceptance of British rule under the current Constitution. In March 2014, the Heads of Government of the Community received an update on the situation, undertaking to continue to monitor it and expressing their support for the full restoration of democracy in the Territory on terms driven by its people. Furthermore, they said that they continued to look forward to a response from the Government of the United Kingdom to the mission's report.

11. For its part, in September 2013, the House of Assembly established an eight-member constitutional review committee, comprising representatives of the territorial Government, the opposition and the public, which was mandated to review the 2011 Constitution, hold consultations with the public and make recommendations by 15 November 2014 to the House for constitutional changes to be debated and ratified for onward submission to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom.

12. In its report submitted to the Premier in November 2014, the constitutional review committee made a series of recommendations relating to most parts of the 2011 Constitution, which included the reinstatement of the automatic right to trial by jury enshrined in the 2006 Constitution, the inclusion of a requirement that the Premier be a Turks and Caicos Islander, the repeal of the provision disqualifying someone from running for Premier after serving two consecutive terms in that post and the removal of the reference to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer. With regard to a referendum on independence, the committee stated that it was a matter for the political hierarchy and not within its terms of reference.

13. The final report was debated and passed by the House of Assembly in January 2015, and the recommendations of the committee were forwarded to the Government of the United Kingdom for its consideration. According to the administering Power, after careful consideration, the Government of the United Kingdom did not accept those recommendations on the grounds that the current Constitution was key to ensuring that the Turks and Caicos Islands continued to meet internationally recognized standards of good governance, the rule of law and sound financial management. However, the post of Chief Financial Officer (see para. 12) was abolished in March 2017.

14. In the general election held on 15 December 2016, the People's Democratic Movement won 10 of the 15 elected seats in the House of Assembly, returning to the majority after a 13-year hiatus. Its leader, Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson, became the first female Premier of the Territory on 19 December 2016.

15. On 5 December 2018, the Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands participated in the oral evidence session of the inquiry entitled "The future of the UK overseas territories" conducted by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom Parliament, during which she recalled the suspension of the

Territory's Constitution. She also referred to the rising cost of the Special Investigation and Prosecution Team; the involvement of the territories in the selection of governors; the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act; and concerns about the post-"Brexit" loss of funding.

16. In a speech on the occasion of the swearing-in of the Governor in July 2019, the Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands stated that the present Constitution had not been crafted by the Territory and that it had been nothing short of an affront to the locally elected Government. She added that it was a document that left governance to personalities and that the Territory could not afford that uncertainty. She highlighted the ambition of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands to return to the 2006 Constitution, which, together with the current financial systems and oversight, presented a balance in the Territory's partnership with the United Kingdom, as it provided safeguards for the United Kingdom, while at the same time giving the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands their dignity.

17. In a public statement made in December 2019, the Premier announced that a report of the Constitutional Review Committee containing proposals for changes to the Constitution had been laid before the House of Assembly. She explained that, once the report had been debated in the House, it was her intention to submit the proposals to the Government of the United Kingdom. According to the administering Power, these proposals were shared with the United Kingdom in February 2020, and its Government responded in August 2020, seeking further clarification on some of the proposed changes.

18. On 9 January 2021, the Premier announced the date of the general elections, 19 February 2021.

II. Budget

19. According to the territorial Government, preliminary results show that during the financial year 2019/20, the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands enjoyed strong revenue performance. The total revenue of \$314.1 million exceeded the budget by \$7.9 million. An operating surplus of \$74.8 million was realized.

20. According to the administering Power, with respect to the 2020/21 budget, the approved revenue target was \$266.4 million. The initial outlook has been revised and the revenue target has been adjusted to \$173.9 million. The decline in revenue was caused by the ongoing global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has devastated the tourism sector. The recurrent expenditure target was approved at \$294.4 million; the capital expenditure target is \$35.6 million; and the non-recurrent expenditure target is \$6.9 million. As a result of the decline in government receipts, the recurrent expenditure target has been revised to \$266.4 million and the non-recurrent expenditure target to \$6.8 million. The capital expenditure target remains at \$35.6 million. An operating deficit of \$134.5 million is anticipated for the fiscal year. The deficit will be funded through cash reserves and loan financing.

21. The territorial Government levies no corporate or personal income tax, capital gains tax or inheritance tax. Foreign corporations pay licence fees to operate in the Territory.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

22. The main sectors of the economy are tourism and financial services. The Territory's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 in terms of current prices was estimated at \$1.2 billion, up from \$942.1 million in 2015. The official statistics indicate that the estimated real growth of the economy in 2019 was 5.3 per cent, following growth of 5.6 per cent in 2018. According to the administering Power, GDP is forecast to decline significantly in 2020 as a result of the global pandemic. This is expected to have a direct impact on the tourism sector, which has been the main driver of growth over the years. The tourism sector has rebounded from the impact of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria in 2017, and the territorial Government estimated that real GDP increased to approximately \$764.7 million in 2019, representing an increase of approximately 5.3 per cent when compared with approximately \$726.2 million in 2018.

23. According to the administering Power, while economic growth in the Turks and Caicos Islands has not been substantial over the past few years, it has been stable and positive, with the exception of the effects of the hurricanes in 2017 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, laying the foundation for improved performance in years to come. It is worth noting the vulnerability of the Turks and Caicos Islands to hurricanes during the period between June and November, since this can dampen economic activities as a result of damage to infrastructure, hotel closures, flight cancellations and other economic disturbances. The Turks and Caicos Islands recognizes the importance of practising fiscal prudence as an important aspect of its future growth and development prospects. Consequently, the Government seeks to ensure that its short-run macroeconomic management (three-year plans) and its medium-term development strategy intentionally complement its long-run development policy initiatives ("Vision 2040").

B. Tourism and construction

24. Despite the challenges faced as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, tourism continues to be the Territory's primary industry and accounted for approximately 39 per cent of the country's GDP in 2019. Tourism also contributes more than 25 per cent of the Government's annual recurring revenue. Both foreign investors and visitors, mainly from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, play significant roles. According to official statistics, cruise passengers accounted for 1,033,376 visitors in 2019, which represents more than two thirds of total visitors. The number of cruise passengers increased in 2019 by approximately 11,635 compared with 2018. The vast majority of stopover tourists continue to be accommodated at resorts on Providenciales. Preliminary data indicate that the contribution of the hotel and restaurant sector to GDP increased by 5.4 per cent in 2019, but it is expected to decline significantly in 2020, as the sector continues to feel the impact of the restrictive measures implemented across the world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

25. According to the administering Power, the abrupt halt to the tourism sector resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic will result in overall economic activity declining significantly in 2020. Given the complexity of tourism consumption, its economic impact will be felt widely in other production sectors. The combination of policies such as lockdowns, social distancing and quarantines has triggered a slowdown or even a complete stop in production and consumption activities for an uncertain period of time.

26. According to the administering Power, construction activity grew significantly in 2018 and is forecasted to grow further in 2020 and 2021 as a result of a significant uptick in government and private sector investments. Growth is also likely to be positive in future years.

C. Financial services

27. International financial services, including company registration, banking and insurance, are sources of external revenue for the Turks and Caicos Islands. According to the administering Power, a significant part of the Territory's financial services sector is the licensing of small captive reinsurance companies that operate primarily in the United States. The licensing, supervision and development of the international financial services sector are entrusted to the Turks and Caicos Islands Financial Services Commission, which also provides a centralized service for registering companies, partnerships, trademarks and patents in the Territory.

28. According to the administering Power, the territorial Government continued to seek treaty partners for tax information exchange agreements. The Territory signed the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information based on article 6 of the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, in Berlin on 29 October 2014. The Territory has also signed arrangements under the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act with the United Kingdom and the United States.

29. In April 2016, the Turks and Caicos Islands concluded a bilateral arrangement with the United Kingdom on the reciprocal exchange of beneficial ownership information. According to the administering Power, under the arrangement, which took effect on 1 February 2018, law enforcement authorities will have timely access to beneficial ownership information on corporate and legal entities incorporated in the respective jurisdictions.

30. In May 2018, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, pursuant to which the Secretary of State is required to provide all reasonable assistance to the Governments of overseas territories to enable each of those Governments to establish a publicly accessible register of the beneficial ownership of companies registered in its jurisdiction and to prepare, no later than 31 December 2020, a draft Order in Council requiring any overseas territory that has not introduced such a register to do so. That deadline has since been extended to 2023. The territorial Government made a statement on 11 October 2019 announcing that it would introduce such registers. On 15 July 2020, the Government of the United Kingdom welcomed the statements made by eight overseas territories, including the Turks and Caicos Islands, in which they committed themselves to greater transparency in financial services by announcing that they would establish publicly accessible registers of the beneficial ownership of companies.

D. Agriculture and fisheries

31. Agriculture and fisheries continue to account for less than 1 per cent of the Territory's GDP. Agricultural production is limited by the lack of fresh water and consists mainly of the growing of vegetables and citrus fruits on the Caicos Islands. According to the administering Power, there are no medium or large commercial producers of either crops or livestock. Fishing is the Territory's main primary sector industry.

E. Communications and utilities

32. The Territory's transport and communications facilities are of fairly good quality. The road network covers about 370 km, with 170 km of paved roads on Grand Turk, Providenciales and the Caicos Islands. Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria affected communications throughout the Territory. On islands outside Providenciales, communications are poor, owing to insufficient broadband capacity in the absence of optical fibre connectivity.

33. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the power system was severely damaged during the hurricanes, with up to 90 per cent of related infrastructure on islands such as Grand Turk affected. Although power generation was not affected, damage to 1,485 poles and 500 transformers caused nationwide outages that lasted for over six weeks. Reduced electricity supply affected health facilities, access to water, telecommunications services and recovery efforts. Electrical services throughout the islands have been fully restored, with significant improvements to the electrical grid.

34. The Territory has three international airports: the main one on Providenciales and smaller ones on Grand Turk and South Caicos. Flights are available to Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Canada, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, the United Kingdom and the United States (including Puerto Rico), although not all are direct.

35. The main commercial port of South Dock is situated on Providenciales. Grand Turk has a commercial port and a cruise ship terminal. North Caicos has a deep-water port.

36. Two telecommunications companies provide national and international telephone services in the Territory. There are three television stations in the Territory. The two main weekly newspapers also maintain websites.

37. According to the administering Power, electricity generation, transmission and distribution services in the Territory (save for two cays and one island) are provided by a vertically integrated monopoly provider. All but 0.5 per cent of electricity is produced from diesel-powered generators. Numerous studies have indicated that, owing to the excessive cost of electricity generation, renewable resources, including carbon-neutral sources such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves and geothermal heat, would not only be economically viable but also offer a less expensive alternative for private individuals. Regulatory reform to enable the uptake of sustainable energy is being undertaken as recommended in the Turks and Caicos Islands draft energy policy, and amendments to the Electricity Ordinance are under way to encourage the use of renewable sources of energy. A resilient national energy transition strategy is being developed, with emphasis on building resiliency, least-cost energy generation, reliability of supply and environmental sustainability. Legislation for integrated resource planning is also being undertaken to give necessary legislative support to the integrated resource planning process in order to ensure the consideration of all viable energy resources in the energy portfolio, as well as adherence to industry best standards and practices.

IV. Social conditions

A. General

38. According to the 2019 vital statistics report of the territorial Government, of the total estimated population of 44,542 in 2020, 22,745 (51 per cent) were men and 21,798 (49 per cent) were women. 76 per cent of the total population was 20 years of age and above. In 2012, nationals of Haiti were the largest group of foreigners, comprising 34.7 per cent of the population, followed by nationals of the Dominican Republic, at 4.9 per cent. According to a report issued by ECLAC in collaboration with the Statistics Department of the territorial Government, the Turks and Caicos Islands has one of the fastest growing populations in the Caribbean and could reach over 55,000 people by 2027. According to the report, citizens of the Turks and Caicos Islands, formerly called “belongers”, constitute a declining proportion of the population. Having represented 69 per cent of the total population in 1990, their numbers fell to 37 per cent in 2012 and, if current trends continue, they could represent less than a quarter of the population by 2027.

39. The Turks and Caicos Islands National Insurance Board, a statutory body of the territorial Government, is the sole provider of social insurance benefits to persons between 16 and 65 years of age who are gainfully employed within the Territory.

B. Labour and immigration

40. The public sector continues to be one of the Territory’s main employers. Other major employment sectors include tourism, construction and international financial and business services. According to the Trade and Labour Force Survey Report 2017 of the Turks and Caicos Islands, 25,418 persons were in the labour force, of whom 6 per cent were accounted as being unemployed.

41. According to the national skills audit for 2017, the hotel and service industry is the Territory’s largest employer. Turks and Caicos Islanders account for 76 per cent of persons employed in the financial service sector, the largest employer of Turks and Caicos Islanders by percentage in the Territory. The national skills audit also revealed that Turks and Caicos Islanders accounted for 9 per cent of upper-level management.

42. According to the administering Power, since 2012, the Territory has put in place a transparent and simplified system for obtaining British overseas territory citizenship. In 2015, the new Turks and Caicos Islander Status Ordinance was passed, which articulated the circumstances for acquiring Islander status by right or by grant, in keeping with the Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution Order 2011. According to the Ministry of Immigration, Citizenship, Labour and Employment Services of the territorial Government, Turks and Caicos Islander status is the highest immigration status accorded to persons who acquired the status or were bestowed the status upon application in accordance with the laws of the Turks and Caicos Islands. As such, only Turks and Caicos Islanders can do the following: vote in an election; apply and be considered for the acquisition of residential crown land; apply and be considered for a territorial government scholarship; and apply and be considered for a business licence to operate in the restricted business licence category. In addition, an immigration ordinance, passed by the House of Assembly in September 2015, contained provisions on asylum. In the view of the administering Power, this attests to the Territory’s commitment to its obligation under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951. A committee responsible for processing applications for Islander status came into effect on 1 January 2020 and was expected to begin reviewing applications from 2016 and 2017.

43. According to the administering Power, border security remains a major concern. The coastal radar station was upgraded. Diplomatic engagement with the countries of origin of illegal migrants is considered by the administering Power as a necessary initiative to mitigate illegal activities. The working relationships with the marine branch of the police and other response agencies has proved to be an important tool in the interception and screening of persons seeking to cross borders by sea. A national security strategy was launched in January 2020.

C. Education

44. Education in the Territory is free and compulsory for children from 4 to 16 years of age. There are 47 schools covering preschool to tertiary education. Of those, 10 primary schools and 4 secondary schools are run by the territorial Government. While there are more private schools than public schools, approximately 80 per cent of pupils are enrolled in public schools. There are also two schools for children with special needs. The adult literacy rate among Islanders is estimated at 98 per cent, while that of immigrants is much lower.

45. With regard to higher education, the Turks and Caicos Islands Community College, a community college with branches on Grand Turk and Providenciales, provides two-year and four-year courses of study.

46. Students from overseas territories benefit from the home student rate for tuition fees at British universities, provided that they have lived in a British overseas territory, the European Economic Area or Switzerland for the three years prior to the first academic year of their course of study. In addition, those students have access to funding provided by the European Union for higher or vocational education.

47. The Education Sector Plan 2018–2022 presents eight strategic imperatives and four cross-cutting issues for education in the Territory and identifies outcomes expected and the main strategies for achieving them.

D. Public health

48. According to the administering Power, medical facilities in the Turks and Caicos Islands have improved in recent years with the opening of new hospital facilities on Providenciales and Grand Turk. Serious cases are referred overseas, including regionally to the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic or Jamaica, and occasionally to the United States. If a service is not available regionally, serious cases are referred to facilities outside the Caribbean. Primary health-care facilities are operated by the Primary Health Care Department on all islands.

49. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the “Vision 2020” health sector plan includes a primary health-care renewal strategy aimed at reducing the use of expensive hospital services and improving access to primary care.

50. According to the administering Power, the Ministry of Health has embarked on the “Health in All Policies” initiative, in collaboration with PAHO, in order to sensitize ministers and heads of department from across government sectors to the importance of adopting a health-in-all-policies approach. Such an approach to health-related rights and obligations improves the accountability of policymakers at all levels. It includes an emphasis on the consequences of public policies on health systems, determinants of health and well-being. It also contributes to sustainable development. It is based on the recognition that the greatest health challenges, for example, non-communicable diseases, health inequities and inequalities, climate change and escalating health-care costs, are highly complex and often linked through

the social determinants of health. This framework provides the Turks and Caicos Islands with a practical means of enhancing a coherent approach, particularly at the national level. A draft strategic plan for implementing the initiative is in place.

51. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Turks and Caicos Islands closed its borders to all non-essential travel on 24 March 2020 and reopened its borders to regional and international travel on 22 July.

52. According to the administering Power, the territorial Government implemented a number of control measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included amendments to the Public and Environmental Health Ordinance and the issuance of the Turks and Caicos Islands Public and Environmental Health (Infectious and Notifiable Diseases) Notice 2020 and the Turks and Caicos Islands Public and Environmental Health (Control Measures) (COVID-19) Regulations 2020. The Ministry of Health developed and implemented a national COVID-19 emergency and response plan as part of its effort to manage and contain the spread of the virus. Persons desiring to travel into the territory must undergo pre-arrival polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing. Various COVID-19-related standard operating procedures, guidelines and protocols have been developed for the public and private sectors. The testing capacity and capability of the National Public Health Laboratory were significantly enhanced, with support from the United Kingdom. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the importance of the role of a public health laboratory in outbreak situations, where such facilities are integral to the rapid identification of disease agents so that the infected individuals may receive prompt treatment. Significant investment has also been made in increasing staffing across the health sector as well as increasing hospital capacity in anticipation of any potential surges in cases.

53. The Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands began vaccinating the local population against COVID-19 on 11 January 2021. The initial batch of 9,750 doses of the vaccines, enough to vaccinate 4,875 people (approximately 11 per cent of the population) arrived in the territory on 7 January 2021.

54. The Government of the United Kingdom has been supporting the overseas territories throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The support has included the funding and supply of testing kits, laboratory consumables, medical equipment and medical supplies and the provision of public health expertise. In addition, the Government of the United Kingdom has committed itself to supplying the overseas territories with a share of the COVID-19 vaccines that it procures. According to the administering Power, its support is in line with its enduring commitment to the peoples of its overseas territories.

E. Crime and public safety

55. According to the administering Power, the crime rate in the Turks and Caicos Islands remains low compared with other Caribbean nations. While most offences consist mainly of theft and burglary, there is also some violent crime, such as armed robbery and murder. Addressing the possession of illegal firearms remains a key priority target. In the three years from 2016 to 2019, crime declined by about 30 per cent. However, serious crime has remained at a constant level for the past five years, with gun-related murders almost doubling and reaching a record high in 2020. The police service has undergone extensive training in relation to child safeguarding, and a dedicated facility was opened on 10 December 2018. The centre is staffed by police, social workers and health service providers and uses the latest equipment available. According to PAHO, the Turks and Caicos Islands has enacted legislation that criminalizes human trafficking and mirrors the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and

Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The Domestic Violence Ordinance of 2014 provides greater protection for victims of domestic violence.

56. According to the administering Power, the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force collaborates with the private sector, has signed an official letter of agreement with the Miami Beach Police Department and works closely under Operation Bahamas and Turks and Caicos with the Royal Bahamas Police Force, as well as with the United States Coast Guard and Drug Enforcement Administration. All of those partners commit services and funding to jointly combat crime in the Turks and Caicos Islands, providing additional assets to those funded by the Government and the United Kingdom.

57. In 2020 and 2021, as part of the work led by the United Kingdom-funded office of the law enforcement adviser, specialist tactical, crime investigation and management officers have been deployed to provide support and capacity-building, and the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force recruited additional officers. A United Kingdom-funded justice adviser is expected to be deployed in 2021 to support the delivery of a justice strategy.

58. In 2020, HMS *Medway* and RFA *Argus* were stationed in the Caribbean as part of the North Atlantic patrol tasking of the Royal Navy, ensuring a year-round maritime presence of the United Kingdom to support the overseas territories to prepare for and respond to the threat of hurricanes and other disasters and to provide humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and crisis communications support in the region. The Government of the United Kingdom indicated its commitment to providing assistance to the overseas territories to deal with major storms and other disasters in the future.

59. According to the administering Power, a large criminal investigation by the Special Investigation and Prosecution Team, appointed during the interim Administration, has led to the prosecution of nine individuals from the former Government. The trial began in January 2016 and was expected to last between 12 and 18 months. However, owing to a number of delays, including those caused by changes of counsel and illness among the judiciary, Hurricanes Irma and Maria and COVID-19, the trial is still ongoing. The prosecution case closed on 20 September 2018. At the time of writing, the defence case for the trial was being presented.

60. The administering Power is establishing a contingent military force for the Territory, the Turks and Caicos Islands Regiment. As presently envisaged, the reserve force would be trained in basic engineering and communications skills to support the Territory's maritime units and be on standby in times of natural disasters. The permanent staff are undergoing training at Sandhurst Military Academy, and the first wave graduated in November 2020. The Regiment is expected to be stood up in 2021.

F. Human rights

61. In addition to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, major international human rights instruments have been extended to the Turks and Caicos Islands. The right of individual petition to the European Court of Human Rights has also been extended to the Territory.

62. To strengthen the human rights framework in the Territory, the 2011 Constitution included a preamble in which the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands affirmed their intention to commit to the democratic values of a just and humane society, pursuing dignity, prosperity, equality, love, justice, peace and freedom for all.

In addition, according to the administering Power, the section therein covering fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual provided a more comprehensive and inclusive legal framework that was more aligned to the protections guaranteed by the Convention than that of the previous 2006 Constitution, as evidenced, for example, by the addition of sexual orientation as a protected right.

63. The Human Rights Commission was established in 2008 as one of the institutions tasked with the protection of good governance under the framework primarily set out in the 2011 Constitution. Its primary responsibility is to promote understanding and the observance of human rights. Its operation and functions are governed by subordinate legislation under the revised Turks and Caicos Islands Human Rights Commission Ordinance of 2018.

64. The Equalities Ordinance 2012 offers protection from discrimination additional to that contained in the 2011 Constitution, identifying the protected characteristics of age, disability, marriage, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

V. Environment

65. The Territory's Department of Environment and Coastal Resources is responsible for the conservation, protection and management of the Territory's natural resources, including wetlands, which cover nearly half of the surface of the islands. Most of the Territory's tourism-based economy hinges on maintaining a natural environment of high quality. While Providenciales and, to a lesser extent, Grand Turk are undergoing rapid development, many of the other islands, such as North Caicos, Middle Caicos and South Caicos, are experiencing less development. East Caicos remains largely untouched and ecologically intact.

66. The Department continues to require an environmental impact assessment to be conducted for all development projects to ensure that such development will not cause undue damage to the environment, and that the best options are taken into account and/or that inevitable impacts are mitigated. According to the administering Power, careful attention is given to the delicate balance between development and environmental preservation.

67. The Territory continues to regularly participate in regional meetings sponsored by the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, at which planning for sustainable fisheries and disaster risk management are discussed along with climate change issues. The administering Power also continues to provide funds for projects focused on environmental sustainability.

68. The Territory has begun work on several important pieces of environment legislation, especially around species management, with regard to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and biosecurity, with the administering Power providing drafting support in many areas. In addition to the United Kingdom-funded conservation work to protect indigenous species, the Territory is conducting trials on tackling coral tissue disease, which threatens its reefs and the tourism and fishing industries.

VI. Relations with international organizations and partners

69. The Turks and Caicos Islands is an associate member of ECLAC, including the Commission's Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee.

70. The Territory is an associate member of CARICOM. It is also a member of the Caribbean Development Bank, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. In addition, it is a member of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism and an associate member of the Association of Caribbean States.

VII. Future status of the Territory

A. Position of the territorial Government

71. Information on constitutional, legal and political developments is contained in section I above.

B. Position of the administering Power

72. According to the administering Power, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the eighth meeting of the United Kingdom-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council was held virtually from 23 to 26 November 2020, when the administering Power hosted the representatives of the Governments of its overseas territories. With the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in attendance, the participants held wide-ranging discussions on such topics as economic issues, COVID-19 response and recovery, the protection of vulnerable groups and environmental matters. According to the administering Power, the statement made by the Prince of Wales at the meeting, ahead of discussions on the environment and the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be hosted in 2021 by the United Kingdom, showed the importance placed by the United Kingdom on its relationship with the overseas territories and its recognition of their significant contribution to its biodiversity.

73. In the communiqué adopted at the eighth meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council, the Government of the United Kingdom and the leaders of the overseas territories indicated that the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, applied to the peoples of the overseas territories. They reaffirmed the importance of promoting the right of those peoples to self-determination, a collective responsibility of all parts of the Government of the United Kingdom.

74. The Government of the United Kingdom and the leaders of the overseas territories committed themselves to exploring ways in which the overseas territories could maintain international support in countering hostile sovereignty claims. It was also stated that for those Territories with permanent populations that wished so, the United Kingdom would continue to support their requests for removal of the Territory from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

75. At the 3rd meeting of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), on 15 October 2020, during the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, the representative of the United Kingdom stated that the relationship of his Government with its overseas territories was a modern one based on partnership, shared values and the right of the people of each Territory to choose to remain British.

76. He stated that his Government's responsibility was to ensure the security and good governance of the territories and their peoples and that territorial Governments were expected to meet the same high standards as the Government of the United Kingdom in maintaining the rule of law, respect for human rights and integrity in

public life, delivering efficient public services and building strong and successful communities. He explained that his Government was committed to involving all overseas territories in the negotiations on its future relationship with the European Union, in order to ensure that their priorities were taken into account at every stage of the process.

77. He added that, while the United Kingdom would carry out all the responsibilities of the sovereign Power, the Governments of the United Kingdom and its overseas territories were in agreement that the overseas territories were internally self-governing, subject only to the United Kingdom retaining powers to enable it to carry out its obligations under international law. He also added that the Joint Ministerial Council met annually to monitor and drive forward the collective priorities.

VIII. Action taken by the General Assembly

78. On 10 December 2020, the General Assembly adopted resolution [75/119](#) without a vote, on the basis of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples for 2020 ([A/75/23](#)) and the subsequent recommendation by the Fourth Committee. In that resolution, the Assembly:

(a) Reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands to self-determination, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and with General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#), containing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;

(b) Also reaffirmed that, in the process of decolonization of the Turks and Caicos Islands, there was no alternative to the principle of self-determination, which was also a fundamental human right, as recognized under the relevant human rights conventions;

(c) Further reaffirmed that it was ultimately for the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands to determine freely their future political status in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter, the Declaration and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and in that connection called upon the administering Power, in cooperation with the territorial Government and appropriate bodies of the United Nations system, to develop political education programmes for the Territory in order to foster an awareness among the people of their right to self-determination in conformity with the legitimate political status options, based on the principles clearly defined in Assembly resolution [1541 \(XV\)](#) and other relevant resolutions and decisions;

(d) Took note of the positions and repeated calls of the Caribbean Community and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in support of a democratically elected territorial Government and of the full restoration of democracy in the Territory as decided by its people;

(e) Noted the continuing debate on constitutional reform within the Territory, and stressed the importance of participation by all groups and interested parties in the consultation process;

(f) Stressed the importance of having in place in the Territory a constitution that reflected the aspirations and wishes of its people, based on the mechanisms for popular consultation;

(g) Requested the administering Power to assist the Territory by facilitating its work concerning public educational outreach efforts, consistent with Article 73 *b*

of the Charter, and in that regard called upon the relevant United Nations organizations to provide assistance to the Territory, if requested;

(h) Welcomed the active participation of the Territory in the work of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean;

(i) Stressed that the Territory should continue to participate in the activities of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, including regional seminars, in order to provide the Committee with up-to-date information regarding the decolonization process;

(j) Welcomed the continuing efforts made by the territorial Government addressing the need for attention to be paid to the enhancement of socioeconomic development across the Territory;

(k) Stressed the importance of the Special Committee being apprised of the views and wishes of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands and enhancing its understanding of their conditions, including the nature and scope of the existing political and constitutional arrangements between the Turks and Caicos Islands and the administering Power;

(l) Called upon the administering Power to participate in and cooperate fully with the work of the Special Committee in order to implement the provisions of Article 73 *e* of the Charter and the Declaration and in order to advise the Committee on the implementation of the provisions under Article 73 *b* of the Charter on efforts to promote self-government in the Turks and Caicos Islands, and encouraged the administering Power to facilitate visiting and special missions to the Territory;

(m) Reaffirmed the responsibility of the administering Power under the Charter to promote the economic and social development and to preserve the cultural identity of the Territory, and requested the administering Power to take steps to enlist and make effective use of all possible assistance, on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis, in the strengthening of the economy of the Territory;

(n) Took into account the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals, stressed the importance of fostering the economic and social sustainable development of the Territory by promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion and promoting the integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supported, *inter alia*, economic, social and human development, while facilitating ecosystem conservation, regeneration, restoration and resilience in the face of new and emerging challenges, and strongly urged the administering Power to refrain from undertaking any kind of illicit, harmful and unproductive activities, including the use of the Territory as an international financial centre, that were not aligned with the interest of the people of the Territory;

(o) Requested the Territory and the administering Power to take all measures necessary to protect and conserve the environment of the Territory against any degradation, and once again requested the specialized agencies concerned to monitor environmental conditions in the Territory and to provide assistance to the Territory, consistent with their prevailing rules of procedure;

(p) Reiterated its call upon the administering Power, the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system and regional organizations to provide all the assistance necessary to the Territory, support the recovery and rebuilding efforts and enhance capabilities for emergency preparedness and risk

reduction, in particular in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria that impacted the Territory in 2017;

(q) Requested the Special Committee to continue to examine the question of the Turks and Caicos Islands and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session and on the implementation of the resolution.

