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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 6th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 6 October 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Vice-Chair) (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)
later: Ms. Joyini (South Africa)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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In the absence of Ms. Joyini (South Africa), Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Agenda item 54: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations (continued) (A/78/23 and A/78/63)

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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.4/78/6)

2. **Ms. Zrug** (Saharawi Association against Impunity in the Tindouf Camps) said that she had been born and raised in the Tindouf camps. Before her birth, the leaders of the Polisario had abducted her father and tortured him to death. His body had never been found. Polisario officials continued to carry out sadistic acts with the connivance of the host country. The latter issued them with passports under false identities, to prevent them from being arrested abroad.

3. After leaving the camps, she had founded an organization which had been able to identify 134 Sahrawis who had been taken to Polisario prisons and whose fate remained unknown. It was campaigning for those individuals or their remains to be released, and for those responsible to be prosecuted. However, in a flagrant violation of international law, the host country prevented the inhabitants of the camp from accessing its judicial system. The camps were thus an extrajudicial

zone in which the Polisario militias could commit systematic abuses with impunity. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had thus far declined to take action. Many petitioners had taken the floor to express solidarity with the Sahrawi people; their solidarity should extend to the victims of the Polisario in the camps.

4. **Mr. El Ahmadi** (University hospital medical professional) said that the allegations made by certain petitioners concerning the state of education in the Moroccan Sahara were false. He had attended a public school in the Moroccan Sahara and gone on to study medicine and have a distinguished career. In his own region of Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra, where education was compulsory, as it was in the rest of Morocco, there were 155 schools, including 15 top-ranking high schools, which provided an education to 98,000 pupils. In terms of higher education, there was a medical school, an engineering school, a teacher training college, various trade schools and a school offering preparatory classes for admission to the elite institutions. Thanks to the education they had received in the Moroccan Saharan, many Saharans had been accepted to prestigious educational establishments in the rest of Morocco and abroad, returning after their studies to take up important jobs, such as heading the decentralized ministries in the southern provinces. Rather than making ridiculous allegations, petitioners should be calling upon the Polisario to stop enlisting Saharan children in their armed militias and inciting them to hatred and violence, and to put an end to the enslavement of children. Children belonged in schools, not barracks.

5. **Mr. Mohamed**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that he had been born in the Tindouf camps and belonged to the Sahrawi people, which was fighting for freedom and independence. The Moroccan occupation forces were keeping Sahrawis in the occupied part of Western Sahara in a state of enforced poverty, something that amounted to a crime against humanity. Families there often subsisted on only 200 euros a month, and they could be deprived of their income if they called for decolonization. A United Nations mechanism was needed to protect the human rights and resources of the Sahrawi people. A referendum must be held in order for the Sahrawi people to exercise self-determination. The Sahrawi people had been accused of terrorism; but the real criminal was the Moroccan people, which had killed or displaced an entire people. He was grateful to the Government and people of Algeria for standing by the Sahrawi people.

6. **Ms. Hmyene** (Association pour la liberté des femmes séquestrées dans les camps de Tindouf) said that

the “Polisario”, abetted by the host country, Algeria, was subjecting women and children in the Tindouf camps to physical and psychological violence, including rape, enforced childbirth and enslavement. The leader of the “Polisario”, Brahim Ghali, had a long history of crimes including sexual violence and rapes. The group’s victims included Maloma Morales, Darya Embarek Salma and Nadjiba Mohamed Kacem. Boys and girls were forcibly conscripted and given military training by the “Polisario” movement, under Algerian oversight, a practice that flagrantly violated international human rights law and caused significant physical damage and trauma. Instead of being given an education, they were being taught to hate and to wage war. Those facts had been confirmed by defectors from the “Polisario”.

7. **Mr. El Baihi** (La Ligue du Sahara pour la démocratie et les droits de l’homme) said that, as a former Polisario official, he had overseen the distribution of humanitarian aid in the Tindouf camps. Such aid was being embezzled by Polisario leaders and certain host country officials, who refused to allow a census of the camps’ inhabitants in order to claim resources far in excess of actual needs. As a result, those individuals had become a mafia that traded on the tragic situation of the population. The Polisario silenced anyone who spoke out about the situation. They had recently abducted and tortured the Polisario member Mohammed Ould Souid, who had intercepted a truck containing stolen aid bound for the Sahel. They had also abducted and tortured 14 women who had held a peaceful demonstration calling for his release.

8. The embezzlement of aid showed that the Polisario leadership and the host country had nothing but contempt for donors, and that they were prepared to lie to the international community in order to perpetuate the myth of a people that existed only in their own imagination, and thus pull off the greatest heist in recent history. Algeria bore sole responsibility for the human rights violations that took place on its territory.

9. **Mr. Bendriss** (Association de soutien à l’initiative marocaine d’autonomie) said that in the 16 years since the Moroccan autonomy initiative had been put forward, an ever-growing number of Member States had endorsed the initiative as the only serious, realistic and credible means of resolving the fabricated regional dispute over the Moroccan Sahara. Throughout those 16 years, Algeria and its proxy, the Polisario, had deprived the population of the Moroccan Sahara of the chance to live a peaceful and dignified life. The initiative was part of the process of building a modern Moroccan society based on the rule of law, individual and collective freedom, and economic and social development. Under the initiative, the population of the Moroccan Sahara

would be able to manage their own affairs democratically through legislative, executive and judicial bodies, develop their region, and participate actively and without discrimination in the economic, social and cultural life of Morocco. The initiative would put an end to the regional dispute and allow those sequestered in the Tindouf camps to return to their homeland, Morocco.

10. **Ms. Essalek** (Observatoire du sud pour le développement territorial) said that, as a woman from the Moroccan Sahara, she could testify that empowering women was a priority area of public policy in the southern provinces of Morocco. Women were well-represented at all levels and played active roles in such areas as culture, the environment, education, health, construction, science and academia. In all those roles, they were able to contribute their expertise and to shape the broader strategic vision. The empowerment of women in the region was part of a national endeavour to promote gender equality as the basis for a modern, democratic society. Women played a pivotal role in regional and national human rights bodies and in comprehensive efforts to develop the Moroccan Sahara.

11. **Mr. Mohamed** (Civil society activist) said that defenceless civilians in the Tindouf camps were subjected to detention, enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killings, enslavement and child recruitment, all of which flagrantly violated the Geneva Conventions and the obligations of the host country under international law. The human rights situation in the camps had deteriorated alarmingly. Polisario leaders had formed armed groups to carry out reprisals against Saharans who dared to call into question their corruption, authoritarianism and embezzlement of humanitarian aid. The host country had done nothing to protect Saharans under its jurisdiction, particularly bloggers, social media users and relatives of detainees held in secret prisons. Polisario leaders who had no connection to the territory of the Sahara were conducting a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Sawa'id tribe, some of whose youth had intercepted a truck transporting misappropriated fuel. The Committee must prevail on the host country to uphold the rights of Saharans on its territory and put a stop to the lawlessness and impunity in the camps.

12. **Mr. Gain** (African Institute for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation) said that he was part of a generation of young Sahrawis born after 1975 in the southern provinces who considered Morocco to be their homeland and who were committed to exercising their inalienable right to the democratic management of local affairs. Members of his generation, who included parliamentarians, businesspeople, engineers and

academics, were eager to create a promising socioeconomic atmosphere and serve the population of the Moroccan Sahara. While his generation had been raised to believe in openness, tolerance, respect for diversity and freedom of expression, Sahrawis in the Tindouf camps had been brought up with an ideology of violence and hatred. The Polisario, with its narrative of victimhood, was responsible for perpetuating that environment. His generation would continue their struggle to liberate their brothers and sisters from the shackles of the host country, which bore responsibility for the genesis and continuation of the conflict. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was the only solution to the conflict and would ensure the dignified return and reintegration of those kept in the Tindouf camps against their will.

13. **Mr. Yahya** (Hispania Aprican) said that, as a Sahrawi and an advocate of the inalienable right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination, he was committed to championing their right to determine their own destiny and hold a referendum. Although the Moroccan autonomy initiative had been presented as a compromise solution, it did not offer genuine freedom for the Sahrawi people, as true freedom was anchored in self-determination, which was the bedrock of every individual right. The Government of Morocco had attempted to promote the initiative through lobbying, the illicit exploration of the resources of Western Sahara, and by striking deals with Member States in exchange for recognition of its illegitimate claim over Western Sahara. The establishment of sham embassies and consulates in occupied territory made a mockery of international law. He urged all representatives to visit the region to witness first-hand the situation, including the suppression of freedom of speech, both in Western Sahara and in Morocco. The development of Western Saharan cities was funded through the illegal exploitation of the resources of Western Sahara, and Moroccans were being encouraged to migrate illegally to occupied territory.

14. **Ms. Perino**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that the Sahrawi people felt frustrated, betrayed and abandoned by the international community. They wondered why the situation in Western Sahara did not receive the same attention as other conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine. While conditions in the refugee camps had always been harsh, the situation had recently worsened owing to the decision to reduce monthly food distribution, which had led to increased food insecurity. Conditions were no better in the occupied part of Western Sahara, where Sahrawis endured constant surveillance and faced harassment and detention for campaigning for their independence. The inability of the

United Nations to resolve the matter through peaceful and diplomatic means had resulted in a war that had claimed many innocent lives. The Sahrawi people had the right to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development. No deal between nations could decide their fate. International courts, including the International Court of Justice, had ruled the Moroccan annexation illegal.

15. **Mr. El Ouali**, speaking in his personal capacity as a senior Sahrawi education official, said that although petitioners from around the world had addressed the Committee, no Sahrawis living in the Tindouf camps had been able to do so, for the simple reason that they were sequestered in the camps by the armed militia of the Polisario and the army of the host country. The Committee had heard only from former residents of the camps. Some were survivors of Polisario prisons, who had recounted the atrocities they had suffered. Others, however, were relatives of Polisario leaders who, by misappropriating humanitarian aid, had been able to send their children to study abroad, spread false claims and prepare to succeed them. The insolence displayed by those representing the Polisario, including insulting petitioners who did not share their opinions, was the result of indoctrination and the systematic repression of divergent opinions. The same ideals were inculcated in the Polisario leadership during their annual retreats, which were held under the supervision of the Algerian intelligence services and attended by some of the petitioners who had addressed the Committee.

16. **Mr. Assor**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that since the decolonization of the Moroccan Sahara in 1975, the top priority for Morocco had been to ensure dignified living conditions for the population and to promote the economic and social integration of the southern provinces. A colossal amount had been invested to ensure the convergence of the southern provinces with the rest of Morocco. The result had been strong economic growth, improved living conditions, reduced poverty and social inequality, progress in human development and greater enjoyment of basic rights and freedoms. The Moroccan Sahara was increasingly open to the world, with daily visits by international civil society organizations, national and foreign parliamentarians, diplomats, special procedure mandate holders of the Human Rights Council, and members of the media.

17. **Mr. Sarufa** (Papua New Guinea), speaking on behalf of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, said that the Group recognized the work of the Fourth Committee and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and

Peoples, which was critical to the decolonization agenda. On the question of New Caledonia, the Group congratulated Mr. Roch Wamytan on his re-election as President of the Congress of New Caledonia and Mr. Robert Xowie, who was the first representative of a New Caledonian pro-independence party to be elected to the Senate of the administering Power. In July 2023, during a visit to the Territory, the President of the administering Power had expressed a possible way forward for New Caledonia. However, following the third referendum on self-determination, whose outcome remained a point of contention, there was still a substantial gulf between the views of the stakeholders in New Caledonia.

18. The United Nations must continue to closely monitor the situation in New Caledonia, while ensuring that it remained on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Constructive and peaceful cooperation was necessary between the people of the Territory, the administering Power and the United Nations, with a view to finding an amicable and lasting political solution. The Spearhead Group looked forward to joining the next visiting mission to New Caledonia to build on the recent positive developments, and it remained committed to the self-determination process. The Group still had concerns about the third self-determination referendum and looked forward to exploring options for action at the United Nations level. As regional neighbours and partners, the Group remained committed to working in a spirit of constructive engagement, with the people of New Caledonia and the administering Power, with a view to enabling the people of New Caledonia to decide freely and voluntarily on their future.

19. Speaking in his national capacity, he said that his delegation welcomed the dialogue on the question of French Polynesia initiated at the current session by France, the administering Power, and encouraged all parties to continue with such dialogue in order to find a lasting and peaceful political solution. On the question of Western Sahara, Papua New Guinea supported the political process under the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to achieve a mutually acceptable and negotiated political settlement involving all relevant parties. The proactive efforts made in that regard were encouraging, including the bilateral consultations held in New York in March 2023 with Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario, and his visits to Morocco, Laayoune and Dakhla, Algeria and Mauritania for dialogue with local communities and authorities. Papua New Guinea supported efforts to resume the round-table process, which should be based on political realism and a spirit

of good faith and compromise, as articulated in the Moroccan autonomy initiative, and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions. There was growing international support for that proposal. Inclusive dialogue between all stakeholders was key to fostering mutual understanding and paving the way for a political settlement to the issue. Papua New Guinea commended the sustainable development efforts made by Morocco in Western Sahara, which were improving quality of life in the region.

20. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the Central American Integration System, said that the system remained committed to ensuring that the Latin American and Caribbean region became a colonialism-free and colony-free zone. It therefore reiterated its position on the question of the Malvinas Islands. The Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom should resume negotiations with a view to finding a peaceful and lasting solution to the dispute as soon as possible. It was important to comply with the General Assembly resolution 31/49, in which the two parties were called upon to refrain from taking decisions that would imply introducing unilateral modifications in the situation while the islands were going through the process recommended by the General Assembly. The Special Committee on decolonization had made a significant contribution in its consideration of the issue in the 58 years since the General Assembly had adopted resolution 2065 (XX).

21. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that Nicaragua remained firmly committed to defending the right of the people of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to freedom, self-determination and national sovereignty. It congratulated the Sahrawi people on the 50-year anniversary of the establishment of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) and the beginning of their struggle against Spanish colonialism, in which they had made it clear that they rejected foreign occupation. A referendum must be held under United Nations auspices to resolve that colonial situation.

22. Nicaragua advocated the full decolonization of Latin America and the Caribbean. It expressed its solidarity with the people of Argentina, as they asserted their sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, and with Puerto Rico in its just struggle for independence. The United States must promote a genuine decolonization process as a matter of urgency, to allow the people of Puerto Rico to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

23. In September 2023, Nicaragua had celebrated the 202nd anniversary of its victory over colonialism and imperialism. It remained firmly on the side of all peoples of the world in their struggles against colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism in all their forms and manifestations.

24. **Mr. Szczerski** (Poland) said that, as a country that had been subject to the expansionism and ambitions of neighbouring powers throughout history, Poland paid special attention to the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. Manifestations of neocolonialism could be seen in the activities of the Russian Federation, which aimed to maintain political, economic and military dependence on Moscow among the States of the former Soviet Union. In cases where such efforts failed, the Government of the Russian Federation intervened directly, including through the de facto occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia in 2008; the illegal annexation of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine in 2014; and the open aggression and brutal war against Ukraine since 2022.

25. African countries faced a number of political, socioeconomic, security and climate challenges resulting from neocolonialism, which was the domain not only of States, but also of private entities. For example, Russian involvement in African countries included the export of arms and the presence of mercenaries such as the Wagner Group, intended to enable the exploitation of natural resources. The Russian aggression against Ukraine had created a food crisis, which posed a significant additional security threat to Africa, constituted an extension of colonial practices and could lead to a global humanitarian catastrophe. Poland sought to deepen relations with African countries based on their individual needs with a view to breaking negative trends and assisting the countries of the Global South. However, aid should not be donor-dependent, and such countries should be empowered to free themselves from debt traps and to receive debt relief before a debt spiral could occur.

26. Poland was committed to supporting processes to transform the development models of countries affected by colonialism, while continuing its development assistance to partner countries. Building resilience was key to reducing economic and social inequalities, particularly between women and men, and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and ending poverty. For that purpose, it was essential to mobilize domestic resources to ensure predictable financing and reduce dependence on external aid, help partner countries to tackle illicit financial flows and make taxation systems more efficient. Poland remained committed to providing

development assistance and making voluntary contributions to various United Nations agencies.

27. *Ms. Joyini (South Africa), Chair, took the Chair.*

28. **Ms. Badjie** (Gambia) said that her delegation welcomed the efforts made by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General to relaunch the political process in the Moroccan Sahara and to engage all relevant stakeholders, and commended the inclusive approach taken during his recent visit to the Moroccan Sahara. The round-table process should resume with all relevant stakeholders, in line with Security Council resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#), in a spirit of positive engagement aimed at reaching a practicable and sustainable political solution based on realism and compromise.

29. The Gambia firmly supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Morocco over the Sahara region and recognized the cooperative approach demonstrated by Morocco towards resolving the dispute. The Sahel region was facing unprecedented security and socioeconomic challenges that required timely solutions. Her delegation strongly supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was a viable compromise solution to the dispute. The initiative took into account the question of self-determination, was in conformity with international law and had been described as serious and credible in successive Security Council resolutions.

30. The compliance of Morocco with the ceasefire in the Sahara region was encouraging; the other parties should respect the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and stop obstructing its freedom of movement. Despite the prolonged conflict, the Sahara region was witnessing a transformational development trajectory as a result of the huge investments made by Morocco as part of the new development model, which was transforming the region into a hub for development and economic opportunities, and had the potential to contribute towards lasting peace in the region.

31. **Mr. Benard Estrada** (Guatemala) said that his delegation commended the political will of Argentina to resolve the sovereignty dispute over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas through negotiation and dialogue, in line with the Charter. Despite the efforts of Argentina and the United Nations, however, the United Kingdom systematically refused to resume negotiations, acting against the purposes and principles of the Charter. The situation had been further aggravated by the illegal exploration and exploitation of renewable and non-renewable natural resources by the United Kingdom in the disputed area, as well as its

military presence. Such activities did not contribute to the search for a peaceful solution to the dispute by way of multilateralism and were contrary to the letter and spirit of the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 31/49, in which the two parties had been called upon to refrain from taking decisions that would imply introducing unilateral modifications in the situation while the islands were going through the process recommended by the General Assembly.

32. While colonized peoples had the right to decide freely on their political status and future, the principle of self-determination was not absolute and, as established in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), must not be used as a pretext to undermine the territorial integrity of existing States. In the case of the sovereignty dispute over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas, the colonial situation had been recognized as “special and particular” by the United Nations because of its distinctive characteristics. The case involved a colonized territory, not a colonized people. It was regrettable that, despite broad international support for negotiations between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom, the relevant General Assembly resolutions remained to be implemented. The Secretary-General should continue to extend his good offices with a view to assisting the parties for that purpose. For Guatemala, it was clear that the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas were Argentine.

33. His delegation expressed its solidarity with the Government and people of Morocco following the devastating earthquake in that country, which had led to loss of life, injuries and serious structural damage, and commended the United Nations for providing humanitarian aid to the affected areas. On the question of Western Sahara, Guatemala supported the efforts of Morocco towards finding a peaceful and political solution to the regional dispute over the Sahara and endorsed the Moroccan autonomy initiative presented in 2007, which constituted a realistic, credible and serious basis for reaching a negotiated solution between the parties while respecting the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Morocco. His country supported the General Assembly resolutions on the question of Western Sahara and the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to implement those resolutions, including through the Personal Envoy’s recent visit to Morocco. A solution was necessary, not only for the people of Western Sahara, but also for the stability, security and integration of the Maghreb region. The

round-table process should resume in accordance with Security Council resolution 2654 (2022), with the same four participants, namely, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario.

34. **Mr. Luemba** (Angola) said that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must include the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, who faced economic, social and climate challenges exacerbated by the uncertain global economic landscape and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

35. A lasting, peaceful and political solution to the question of Western Sahara required the urgent and unconditional implementation of all relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and African Union decisions. For that purpose, closer cooperation should be encouraged between the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and the African Union Special Envoy for Western Sahara, Joaquim Chissano, to enhance interaction among all concerned parties, including the Security Council.

36. The parties involved in the question of the Malvinas Islands should resume bilateral negotiations in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant General Assembly resolutions, with a view to achieving a peaceful and lasting solution as soon as possible. With regard to Palestine, Angola welcomed all initiatives to reach a comprehensive and peaceful two-State solution in the Middle East, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

37. **Mr. Ray** (Nepal) said that the Special Committee was the primary vehicle for fostering the decolonization process and monitoring the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The administering Powers should cooperate and collaborate with the Special Committee, including by facilitating visiting missions and transmitting information in a timely fashion. The Non-Self-Governing Territories should be more involved in United Nations activities, and information on the challenges they faced should be more widely disseminated.

38. The Non-Self-Governing Territories were especially vulnerable to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and economic inflation. The international community should therefore ensure that they had the necessary resources to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. The administering Powers should fulfil their responsibilities under the Charter and relevant resolutions, including by developing time-bound work programmes on a case-by-case basis. The United Nations development system also

had a vital role in supporting the inhabitants of those Territories to meet their economic needs.

39. **Mr. Akakpo** (Togo) said that his delegation commended the efforts of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara to facilitate the relaunching of the political process under the auspices of the Secretary-General. For that purpose, all parties should remain committed to reaching a pragmatic political solution based on compromise. His delegation commended Morocco for respecting the ceasefire in the Moroccan Sahara and its full cooperation with MINURSO, and called upon all parties to do the same. Moreover, all parties should preserve the fundamental and vital interests of the people of Western Sahara.

40. Togo commended the human rights achievements of Morocco and welcomed the socioeconomic development made possible by the new development model for the Moroccan Sahara, which had helped empower the population. The opening of several consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla, including that of Togo, would help to foster socioeconomic opportunities and promote regional development and stability. His delegation continued to support the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was a compromise solution to the regional dispute.

41. **Mr. Van Schalkwyk** (South Africa) said that South Africa would not have attained freedom in 1994 without the commitment of the Committee. Unfortunately, many Territories and peoples continued to yearn for freedom and justice. The people of Western Sahara must be accorded their right to self-determination and independence, the denial of which was unsustainable. The African continent, with its history of struggle, could not continue to witness such an injustice against its citizens. The Committee should fully support the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara in his quest to resuscitate dialogue among the parties to the territorial dispute. A referendum should be held as a matter of urgency, in line with Security Council resolution [690 \(1991\)](#).

42. The decolonization of Mauritius should be completed. The Chagos Islands belonged to the people in whose land and continent they were located, and the relevant decisions of the International Court of Justice and the General Assembly formed a clear basis for collective action in that regard. In addition, South Africa called for the relevant parties to the question of the Malvinas Islands to resume bilateral negotiations with a view to finding a political solution.

43. The people of Palestine continued to be denied their right to coexist as a State, despite the many decisions of the Committee on the matter. Palestinians

must live independently and within internationally recognized borders. South Africa would continue to work with the United Nations towards finding a just and lasting solution to the conflict and called on all Member States to amplify their support for the Palestinian cause. The work of the Committee would remain incomplete until East Jerusalem was declared the rightful capital of the Palestinian State.

44. **Mr. Sepe** (Central African Republic) said that, with regard to the question of Western Sahara, the Central African Republic had consistently supported the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to relaunch the political process based on the relevant Security Council resolutions. His delegation welcomed the visit conducted to the Moroccan Sahara in September 2023, commended Morocco for its cooperation in that regard, and called all parties to the dispute to resume the round-table process.

45. His delegation welcomed the implementation of the new development model in the Moroccan Sahara, the opening of several consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla, the commitment of Morocco to the ceasefire and its full cooperation with MINURSO. It condemned the Polisario for unilaterally disregarding the ceasefire and restricting freedom of movement, particularly for MINURSO. The United Nations should find a timely and appropriate solution to end the suffering of those affected.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

46. **Ms. Meyrick** (United Kingdom), replying to the comments made by the representatives of El Salvador on behalf of the Central American Integration System, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Angola and South Africa, said that the United Kingdom had no doubt about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and surrounding maritime areas. The United Kingdom was steadfast in its support for the right of the Falkland Islanders to self-determination as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in article 1 of the two International Covenants on human rights. The Falkland Islanders had as much right as any other people to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

47. **Mr. Alvarez** (Argentina), replying to the comments made by the representative of the United Kingdom, said that his delegation reiterated the statements made by the President of Argentina to the General Assembly on 19 September 2023 ([A/78/PV.5](#)) and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina to the Special Committee on 20 June 2023 ([A/AC.109/2023/SR.7](#)). The Malvinas

Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas were an integral part of the national territory of Argentina and, being illegally occupied by the United Kingdom, were the subject of a sovereignty dispute between the two parties, which had been recognized by a number of international organizations. 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 and called on the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom 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 the resolution adopted on 20 June 2023.

48. 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, as affirmed in the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Special Committee. In line with the Charter of the United Nations, all Member States had a responsibility to resolve disputes peacefully and negotiate in good faith. The interests and way of life of the inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands were adequately addressed by resolutions of the General Assembly and by the Constitution of Argentina. Lastly, 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 5.25 p.m.