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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 3rd meeting

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

Chair: Ms. Joyini (South Africa)
later: Mr. Woszczek (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 58: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*Territories not covered under other agenda items*) (continued) (A/78/23, A/78/65 and A/78/249)

Hearing of representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories and petitioners

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

Question of the British Virgin Islands (A/C.4/78/2)

2. **Mr. Natalio Wheatley** (Premier and Minister of Finance of the British Virgin Islands) said that a general election had been peacefully held in the British Virgin Islands on 24 April 2023. On the basis of the results, he and his colleagues had formed the current Government. In July 2023, he had held a very constructive discussion with the newly appointed Minister for the Overseas Territories of the United Kingdom and had been very encouraged by the Minister's keen interest in how the relationship between the British Virgin Islands and the United Kingdom could be improved. Since that initial meeting, there had been a welcome shift in the engagement of the United Kingdom with the British Virgin Islands and in the tone of communications. He also welcomed the constructive approach taken by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations. Nevertheless, he remained firmly opposed to the Order in Council held in reserve, which had the potential to remove democratic governance in the British Virgin Islands. The Order was unnecessary and should be lifted immediately. The United Kingdom had indicated that it foresaw the order being removed by May 2024. The tone set by the Minister for the Overseas Territories was a positive development and his administration would continue to engage constructively with the United Kingdom.

3. His Government had been following through on its commitment to the people of the British Virgin Islands to build a model democracy. The elected branches of government were working diligently in their respective areas of constitutional responsibility to strengthen the systems and institutions of government. The Governor and his team were doing likewise in his areas of constitutional responsibility. The technical assistance provided by the Government of the United Kingdom

thus far in select areas had been helpful. A collaborative approach on the part of the United Kingdom, combined with ongoing consultation with the Territorial Governments, was the best way to address capacity constraints and other challenges faced by small Governments. At the upcoming Joint Ministerial Council between the United Kingdom and the overseas territories, he would discuss further the relationship of the British Virgin Islands with the United Kingdom.

4. The British Virgin Islands continued on its path towards self-determination. That process had come in stages, driven by the growth and development of the society and the aspirations of the people. The British Virgin Islands would shortly arrive at another historic juncture, when four other constitutional advances must be considered. The constitutional review would be concluded in the very near future. At that point, the people of the British Virgin Islands, the Territorial Government and the Government of the United Kingdom would prepare for the subsequent constitutional steps in the self-determination process. The key issue would be the devolution of additional powers to the elected branches of government and whether a change in political status would be sought.

5. The United Nations had a responsibility to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories in raising the awareness of their peoples regarding their options for achieving a full measure of self-government, including integration, free association and independence. The British Virgin Islands would greatly appreciate the support of the relevant United Nations agencies and departments in that regard. He also wished to reiterate the request for a visiting mission 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 to the British Virgin Islands, a request that had been made every year since 2019 and had been included in successive General Assembly resolutions. From 2019 to 2022, there had been no progress in that regard. The Chair of the Special Committee had been working hard on that issue, but the robust support of the members of the Special Committee and the Fourth Committee would be required in order to make the visit a reality within the following five months. The full list of requests was given in the draft resolution on the question of the British Virgin Islands, and he encouraged the Committee and the General Assembly to adopt it; however, it would mean very little to the people of the Territory if those requests were not acted upon.

6. **The Chair** said that the petitioner who had requested to address the Committee on the question of

the British Virgin Islands, Eliezer Benito Wheatley, had withdrawn his request.

Question of French Polynesia (A/C.4/78/3)

7. **Mr. Brotherson** (President of French Polynesia) said that 2023 marked the tenth anniversary of the reinscription of French Polynesia on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, which had been decided by consensus. The Territory would continue to pave a peaceful yet determined path to self-determination, with the help of the United Nations. In a continuation of a wave that had started in June 2022 with the election of representatives of his party, Tavini Huiraatira, to the three seats in the National Assembly of France, the party had won 38 out of 57 seats in the Assembly of French Polynesia in the elections of April 2023, as would be mentioned in the draft resolution on the question of French Polynesia. Yet there had been a decade of silence from the administering Power, from whom nothing had been heard except for an echo from its empty seat. However, the balance in the world was shifting, and he welcomed the presence of the representative of France in the current meeting.

8. It was a historic day, when a dialogue would be established between French Polynesia/Ma'ohi Nui and the administering Power, and he wished to thank the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, for keeping his word. He knew he could count on President Macron to carry out the dialogue, since France was a bastion of human rights and had always stood up for democracy, as had Tavini Huiraatira. At a time when multilateralism was being tested, the Indo-Pacific region was coveted and post-colonial tensions were growing, new pathways must be found, under the auspices of the United Nations. The relationship with France since his election had been based on trust and mutual respect; he did not seek confrontation or a cutting of ties, only a frank and constructive discussion between partners. Decolonization would mean pursuing socioeconomic development that was consistent with the Territory's culture, identity, resources and limitations. He did not doubt the willingness of France to accompany French Polynesia on that path to development, which would be based on four key sectors: tourism, the primary sector, renewable energy and the digital economy.

9. His Government fully supported a proper decolonization and self-determination process under the scrutiny of the United Nations and with the administering Power. The time had come to agree on a method. He urged the administering Power to transmit the information required under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations; French Polynesia would also fulfil its obligations.

10. Some of the wording in the annual resolution needed to be amended. First, the Ma'ohi people's ownership over their natural resources, including marine resources and undersea minerals, was fundamental. Those rights must not be eroded by a legislative expansion of the list of strategic materials over which only the administering Power had control. The relevant paragraphs in the draft resolution should therefore be strengthened. Second, French Polynesia had agreed not to include a reference to General Assembly resolution 77/53 on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. However, all consequences of the 193 nuclear tests should be mentioned, to take account, for example, of the possible transgenerational harm caused by the nuclear testing. Dialogue must also be renewed on that issue.

11. Third, it was crucial to stress in the draft resolution the need to develop a political education programme for youth, to foster awareness of the right to self-determination. The administering Power should co-construct such a programme together with his Government. A new paragraph 8 should be included, to read as follows: “*Decides to initiate a constructive programme of work for French Polynesia to facilitate the implementation of the mandate of the Special Committee and relevant resolutions on decolonization, including resolutions on specific Territories in accordance with paragraph 8(d) of General Assembly resolution 77/149, and requests the Secretary-General to provide the necessary support to ensure the implementation of the constructive programme of work for the Territory*”.

12. In addition, some wording in the resolution had become irrelevant, such as the reference to previous calls to delist French Polynesia. His party had won the previous two elections having made it very clear, in its campaign, that it would start the decolonization process under the scrutiny of the United Nations. That meant initiating a dialogue with France on a process leading to a future referendum on self-determination. The outdated reference to calls for delisting should therefore be deleted to reflect the democratic result.

13. It was time to initiate an honest discussion with the administering Power with a view to facilitating rapid progress towards a fair and effective self-determination process. In that regard, he wished to call once again for a visiting mission by the Special Committee, which would provide an opportunity for all voices to be heard and for a fair and balanced review of the Territory's governance and its relationship with the administering Power to be conducted.

14. **Mr. de Rivière** (France) said that France was attending the meeting in the spirit of dialogue and to recall that French Polynesia had no place on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. The decision to reinscribe it on the list had been taken in spite of the views expressed by the democratically elected local Government of French Polynesia and France.

15. A spirit of dialogue prevailed in the relations between the national and Polynesian authorities. When the Tavini party had been elected in April 2023, the French authorities had immediately taken note of that democratic choice, and a dialogue had swiftly been initiated at the highest level. The Minister of the Interior had travelled to French Polynesia on 17 August 2023, and the quality of dialogue with the new President reflected a continuation of the relationship of trust established with the previous President, Edouard Fritch. The population had broadly supported the President of the Republic in the presidential elections of 2022.

16. The situation of French Polynesia could not be compared to that of New Caledonia, and there was no role for the United Nations. The political process under way in New Caledonia, which was a source of collective pride for the national and local authorities, reflected a unique, non-replicable context. He was therefore taking the floor to signal that there had been a change of approach, but no change of position. France would continue to request the withdrawal of French Polynesia from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. It was simply a fact that French Polynesia was self-governing. It had a unique status within the French Republic under article 74 of the Constitution, and that status respected its history and aspirations. It received considerable financial and human support from the French State to accelerate its economic and social development, including for climate change adaptation. State expenditure in 2022 had totalled almost 2 billion euros, or around one third of Polynesian gross domestic product. That sum funded the exercise of State powers, and also those of French Polynesia in such areas as health and education.

17. The people of French Polynesia enjoyed the same rights as all French citizens under the Constitution. Institutions and public policies could be adapted to the Polynesian context without undermining full integration with the French Republic and what it offered to its citizens. The self-governing status was also evident in the context of regional diplomacy, since the French State supported French Polynesia in its integration in the Pacific region. In early 2023, France had organized a business forum in New Zealand with companies from French Polynesia.

18. He had listened closely to the concerns regarding the consequences of the nuclear testing. Much had been done in that area since the testing had ended in 1996, such as the opening up of the archives and the payment of compensation to victims. The President of the Republic had made several remarks on the subject during his visit to French Polynesia in July 2021. As in other areas, the State was working with the elected representatives of French Polynesia in a constructive spirit and with respect for its self-governing status, but also with respect for the sovereignty of France, on which it would not compromise.

19. **Mr. Tarakinikini** (Fiji) said that initiating a peaceful decolonization process through democracy and dialogue in a world full of conflict was an admirable undertaking. He commended French Polynesia and France on the decolonization path they had chosen to build together and encouraged them to engage in peaceful dialogue as part of that process. He asked if more information could be provided regarding the request to include in the draft resolution a reference to the development of a programme.

20. **Ms. Waetara** (Solomon Islands) said that the right to self-determination of the Ma'ohi people remained paramount. The Tavini Huiraatira party had won two consecutive elections, and democracy had spoken. Her delegation supported the request to delete the outdated reference in the draft resolution to the previous calls to delist French Polynesia. It also welcomed the decision of the administering Power to initiate a dialogue with French Polynesia at long last, and expected it to cooperate fully with the Special Committee on the implementation of Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The international community must not lose sight of the question of self-determination for the Non-Self-Governing Territories, nor must it ignore the calls from the people at the heart of the matter who would be addressing the Committee in the present and following meetings.

21. **Mr. Brotherson** (President of French Polynesia) said that it was crucial to develop a political education programme that would foster awareness among young people of the right to self-determination. Most people in French Polynesia did not know how the United Nations worked, what decolonization meant or what the different options would be in a referendum on self-determination. The aim was to ensure that they understood the process by the time campaigning began ahead of the referendum.

22. **Ms. Morgant-Cross** (ICAN France) said that she wished to note that the Permanent Representative of

France had left the room. She welcomed the Committee's willingness to investigate the impact of the 193 nuclear bombs. However, of the two reports brought to the Committee's attention, which had been issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Health Organization, one spoke of negligible risks, while the other was based on biased reports of the Institut de radioprotection et de sûreté nucléaire, an institution funded by France. Neither report reflected the reality on the ground. Babies born with physical anomalies or children suffering from cancer were not negligible risks. Yet France claimed that obesity was the cause of the countless cases of cancer. The interests of France had been placed above the health, environment and future of the colonized peoples of Algeria and French Polynesia, and France should accept its responsibility once and for all.

23. **Mr. Pihaatae** (Ma'ohi Protestant Church) said that his life's calling was to restore the dignity of his people, who had their own culture, language and vision of the world. One day they would enjoy full sovereignty and independence, following a path traced by their ancestors. He rejected the label "Tahitian", which was an assimilationist concept that was the result of colonization and deprived him of his Ma'ohi identity.

24. **Mr. Puarai** (Association Moruroa e Tatou) said that, since its foundation, Association Moruroa e Tatou had fought for France to recognize and make reparations for the harm it had caused through the ecocide of Ma'ohi Nui and the genocide of its people. The new generation of members of the Association was committed to raising awareness among a people that had been colonized and exploited for its riches, and building a better and fairer world. It had been recognized by French law that the whole of Ma'ohi Nui had been contaminated by French nuclear testing; the whole of Ma'ohi Nui must therefore awaken its consciousness and rewrite its relationship to that nuclear history. His Association would fight tirelessly for the administering Power to free the people from the colonial chains that poisoned their thoughts and their humanity.

25. **Ms. Tairua** (Union chrétienne des jeunes gens) said that her country had not only been colonized and occupied; it had also been subject to destructive experimentation. The new generation must assess the extent to which the truth regarding the consequences of the testing had affected the collective consciousness of the Ma'ohi people. It was also worth asking whether, in the light of the health and environmental consequences of the testing, the new generation had begun to understand the policy of silent assimilation pursued by the administering Power. It was not possible to force someone to understand a message they were not ready

to receive, but a seed could be planted. The Committee and the petitioners should persevere in the task of planting a seed of truth in the hearts of future generations of Ma'ohi Nui to awaken their consciousness, strengthen their capacity and enable them to take responsibility for effecting positive change.

26. **Mr. Neuffer** (Conseil d'administration Enseignement protestant) said that, although education was one of the delegated powers, there was a lack of public awareness about colonialism and the entire decolonization process. That was unsurprising given the regulations in place and the bilateral agreement with the local Government. The administering Power bypassed the local delegated authority in an insidious way: it paid the costs, such as teachers' salaries. It also made it mandatory to follow the curricula of mainland France. Textbooks did not mention the French nuclear testing in Ma'ohi Nui or the annexation treaty. If education was a constitutional duty, then the true history of Ma'ohi Nui should be told and its education styles and traditions should be respected.

27. **Ms. Neuffer** (Enseignement protestant) said that she had often been treated as though she was from another planet. People were divided in so many ways, including by education and way of life. She called on all those present to overcome the biases that prevented them from seeing the truth.

28. **Ms. Normand** (Association 193) said that the nuclear tests conducted by France constituted crimes against humanity. The atoll of Moruroa could collapse at any time, but France did not consider that to be a problem. Studies carried out by researchers at Princeton University showed that more than 115,000 people had potentially been contaminated. No family had been spared; all had stories of relatives with cancer. Yet, according to France, the risk was negligible. Association 193 represented free of charge and without distinction all the victims of the nuclear tests from the five archipelagos and demanded reparations and compensation on their behalf from France. France must provide a full account of the consequences of the nuclear tests. The international community should ensure that France reinstated the registers of those with cancer; removed the dose threshold of 1 millisievert a year from its law, which was preventing victims from being recognized and receiving compensation; reimbursed in full the social security fund; and conducted research on transgenerational diseases.

29. **Ms. Temaui** (Association Na Papa e Vaù) said that the identity of her people was closely bound up with the land, and protecting it was therefore a priority. However, that bond had been damaged by the 193 nuclear tests carried out by France between 1966 and

1996, and their impact on the environment and human health would continue for several generations. Nearly 1,000 people of all ages developed radiation-induced cancer every year. To that toll must be added the babies who were stillborn or born with malformations. During his visit to French Polynesia in 2021, President Macron had declared that he wanted truth, transparency and better compensation for victims. Yet that would be possible only after all the demands cited by Association 193 had been met. The international community should provide scientific assistance to analyse the declassified archives and study transgenerational disease.

30. **Mr. Temaru** (Commune of Faa'a) said that he was speaking on behalf of the people of French-occupied Polynesia, in his capacity as a former President of Ma'ohi Nui and a current representative in the Assembly of French Polynesia. The two most pressing issues were the nuclear tests and the never-ending decolonization process. In retaliation for the complaint which he had filed against France at the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity over the nuclear tests conducted in French Polynesia, the administering Power had made multiple attempts to prevent him from being politically active in French Polynesia, including by exerting legal, financial and administrative pressure. He had lost one of his mandates as an elected official, his assets had been frozen and his family had been harassed and stigmatized. Radio Tefana had for years been embroiled in a lawsuit that had only recently been resolved. Although the people of Ma'ohi Nui had been petitioning the Committee since 2013 for a peaceful decolonization process to be negotiated with France, no progress had been made from 2013 to 2022. The Committee should live up to its responsibility. The procrastination must end, and France must return democracy to his people.

31. **Mr. Geros** (Assembly of French Polynesia), speaking in his capacity as Speaker of the Assembly of Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia, said that, in view of the victory of the pro-independence party, Tavini Huiraatira, in the elections held in 2023, the people should intensify their efforts to attain the full measure of self-government. The administering Power must respect the integrity of Ma'ohi Nui, which was composed of five archipelagos, and the decolonization process should be truly inclusive. Given that France had finally agreed to come to the table at the United Nations, he expected the dialogue on decolonization to begin as soon as possible and all relevant General Assembly resolutions to be implemented. The Assembly of Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia would establish, for the first time, a committee on decolonization to foster dialogue between the Territory and the administering Power at the

local level. His people were committed to engaging in a fair, equitable and genuine decolonization process.

32. **Ms. Labrousse** (Amazones Pacific) said that she had been born in France and raised in French Polynesia. However, on returning to France to study as a young adult, she had been shocked at the way she had been treated. Although equality was supposedly such an important value to France, it seemed that it worked in only one direction. French civil servants arrived in French Polynesia with tremendous advantages, yet people coming to France from the Territory experienced difficulties in gaining access to basic services such as housing. Students in French Polynesia learned all about France, while the French knew nothing about French Polynesia. Ten years on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories was long enough. The hypocrisy must stop; it was time to start discussing the Territory's legal and political status.

33. **Mr. Chailloux** (National Assembly of France) said that colonization was a crime against humanity and contributed to a destruction of the original identity of those who came under foreign domination. The French language had become an instrument of colonialism to which the Ma'ohi people had been subjected. In 1992, wording had been added to article 2 of the French Constitution declaring that the language of the Republic was French. A few years later, France had refused to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which it had identified as a threat to the French language and thus to national unity. The Molac Act passed in France in 2021 aimed to promote regional languages, which included the Polynesian languages. However, many of its provisions had been overturned by the French Constitutional Court, including the option of immersion in a regional language at school. People had the right to communicate in their mother tongue and regional languages must be accorded the same respect and value as the French language. Monolingualism was a relic of colonialism.

34. **Mr. Le Gayic** (Finance Committee of the National Assembly of France) said that he had come before the Committee to seek support and solutions for addressing colonialism in all its forms. When other countries had gained their independence, they had succeeded in awakening the consciousness of their young people and thus been able to construct a sovereign nation. It was questionable whether the administering Power had any real interest in educating the youth of Ma'ohi Nui, since they were expanding the ranks of its army. The minds of the young people must be decolonized to be able to meet the country's needs. Under the auspices of the United Nations, his country wished to draw up decolonization agreements with the administering Power that would

give it the status of a sovereign nation and thus enable it to engage in a dialogue of equals.

35. Although the Territory was situated in a region that was at the centre of world economic growth, it still imported 40 per cent of its goods from metropolitan France, a trade imbalance that benefited France but was detrimental to his country. Interest rates on loans were less favourable than those offered in mainland France. Positive discrimination was needed in the areas of employment and housing, while political decision-making must be the exclusive preserve of the Ma'ohi people.

36. **Mr. Hoïore** (Centre de jeunes adolescents de Vaiare Moorea) said that, as had been seen in Kanaky/New Caledonia, the United Nations could not rely on the administering Power to conduct a credible decolonization process, given its obvious conflict of interest. France had not concealed its preference for a modernized colonial version of the current arrangement in the context of any referendum or public consultation on the political future of the Territory. That preference was first and foremost motivated by its geostrategic interests in the region. The stationing of French military bases in Ma'ohi Nui and Kanaky was a gross violation of General Assembly resolutions, which called upon administering Powers to terminate military activities and eliminate military bases in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. That was particularly important in light of the growing tensions in the Asia-Pacific region.

37. *Mr. Woszczek (Poland) took the Chair.*

38. **Ms. Hauata Ah-Min** (Housing Committee of the Assembly of French Polynesia) said that an overall decolonization plan for Ma'ohi Nui must be undertaken by the United Nations as a matter of urgency pursuant to the annual General Assembly resolutions, in order to advance towards a full measure of self-government. Leaving the process to France as the administering Power would not be consistent with a free and fair process and would call into question the authenticity of the decolonization process. Given that France had already expressed a preference for retaining control of the Territory in a modernized version of colonialism, it could not be expected to conduct a free and fair decolonization process. The annual resolutions adopted by the General Assembly over the previous decade had made clear that Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia remained a Non-Self-Governing Territory and that its people had a right to self-determination and independence. Those resolutions had been adopted following a careful review of the existing colonial relationship. Since its reinscription on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 2013, the political status of French

Polynesia had not changed, with the exception of a few modifications imposed by France aimed at modernizing the colony while maintaining its unilateral authority.

39. **Mr. Homai** (Association Tamariki Teavaroa) said that Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia remained a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations. Reforms imposed by France in 1996 and 2004 had not changed, nor had they been intended to change, the colonial nature of the Territory's political status. Colonial reform must not be allowed to serve as a substitute for true decolonization. Colonialism by consent remained colonialism. In 2023, the people of Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia had rejected the colonial narrative and had elected a pro-sovereignty party by an overwhelming majority. Efforts would be intensified to establish a genuine self-determination process under the auspices of the United Nations in order to raise public awareness of the options available in terms of political status, while also rejecting the illegitimate, outdated colonial models.

40. **Ms. Tiatoa** (Association Tumu Ra'i Fenua) said that the democratic deficit and the power imbalance in the relationship with France was the political reality in Ma'ohi Nui, as also evidenced by the absolute authority of the French with respect to virtually all key powers. Characterizing such political inequality as self-government made a mockery of democratic governance. In fact, the system of dependency governance in French Polynesia was an illegitimate form of autonomy that did not meet any recognized minimum standard of self-government. France itself had acknowledged that French Polynesia had no political autonomy, only administrative autonomy, and was subject to specific unilateral French legislation. Colonial legitimization forces had previously been installed as the Government of the Territory by means of various electoral machinations since 2013, in a futile attempt to convince the people and the international community that Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia had undergone some kind of evolution in self-governance.

41. **Ms. Tarahu** (Association Te Utuafare No Mahaena) said that the people of Ma'ohi Nui had rejected the fallacious argument that a sufficient level of autonomy had been granted by the administering Power. In 2023 they had elected a new pro-sovereignty Government and Assembly that supported a genuine decolonization process under the auspices of the United Nations, thus rejecting the current colonial governance model. Paragraph 3 of the draft resolution was outdated. The true colonial nature of the current arrangement had been revealed in an independent self-governance assessment, which had found that there remained a significant political imbalance and that France

continued to exercise a high degree of unilateral authority. It had also found that the political relationship was based on a delegation of authority, which could be reversed at any time. The assessment had concluded that the agreements proposed by France constituted efforts to modernize the colonial relationship but did not rise to the level of decolonization. A modernized model was not designed to alter the existing power imbalance and would not result in the full measure of self-government.

42. **Ms. Cross** (Commune of Teva i Uta) said that the Ma'ohi people had not been fooled by the persecution by France of the pro-independence leader Oscar Temaru. Those tactics were clearly intended to attack the pro-independence movement itself and prevent the establishment of the self-determination process. France had accordingly been punished in the elections. The Ma'ohi people had elected pro-independence representatives to three seats in the National Assembly of France in June 2022, and had given his party an absolute majority in the Assembly of French Polynesia in the legislative elections of April 2023, returning Mr. Temaru to his seat. In May 2023, the appeals court had acquitted Mr. Temaru.

43. **Ms. Vaianui** (Standing Committee of the Assembly of French Polynesia) said that the self-governance assessment referenced in paragraph 4 of the draft resolution had concluded that French Polynesia did not meet the recognized international standards for a full measure of self-government. That finding separated facts from opinions concerning the colonial situation in the Territory and had been endorsed by the General Assembly in successive resolutions. An updated assessment was expected to be carried out and submitted to the Special Committee at its 2024 session, in order to provide it with independent, in-depth analysis. That was important because the analyses referenced in the plans of action for the First, Second Third and Fourth International Decades for the Eradication of Colonialism had never been undertaken.

44. **Ms. Flores** (Health Committee of the Assembly of French Polynesia) said that, for a quarter of a century, the General Assembly had been calling on the Special Committee, in its annual resolution on the implementation of the Declaration, to develop a constructive programme of work on a case-by-case basis for the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Yet there was no accountability for the implementation of that or other decolonization mandates. Every year since the reinscription of French Polynesia on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 2013, petitioners had been calling for the development of that programme of work in the Fourth Committee and the Special Committee. She could not understand how the

implementation of a United Nations mandate could be persistently ignored by the United Nations itself, without explanation. In the absence of a programme of work, Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia would be subject to a process controlled by the administering Power. It was questionable whether the administering Power could be trusted to implement a free and fair decolonization process when it had expressed its intention to retain control of the colony. Fortunately, an independent assessment was available to take the place of the analyses that the United Nations had not wished to conduct. In the meantime, the United Nations should pay closer attention to implementing its decolonization mandate.

45. **Mr. Teremate** (Education Committee of the Assembly of French Polynesia) said that the independent self-governance assessment, which employed the Corbin self-governance indicators and had already been recognized by the General Assembly, represented a fundamental baseline analysis upon which a decolonization work programme could be initiated. The format for a decolonization work programme for Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia had been shared in repeated representations to the Special Committee and the Fourth Committee; but the United Nations had failed to take action. A programme of work to be initiated, paving the way for a genuine self-determination process with the direct involvement of the United Nations. The process could not be carried out objectively by the administering Power, which had a clear conflict of interest. France had publicly given geostrategic and geoeconomic reasons for maintaining its territories, as the Pacific region was becoming increasingly militarized. Military-strategic interests of administering Powers had been identified by the General Assembly as an impediment to the decolonization process and a violation of the inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

46. **Ms. Vanaa** (Economic and Finance Committee, Assembly of French Polynesia) said that there was a conflict between French law, which allowed for the management and exploration of natural resources to be monitored by the Territorial Government, and the provisions of article 2, paragraph 2, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which appeared to extend sovereignty over the exclusive economic zone of Ma'ohi Nui, including the seabed and the airspace above the zone, to France as the administering Power. In that regard, the French Government had created two taxes: a fee charged to all airlines whose planes crossed the airspace and an airport tax collected on every ticket for entry into or travel from Ma'ohi Nui. By claiming the exclusive economic zone

and exploiting the Territory's considerable natural resources, France had been able to generate significant revenue, gain geopolitical influence and become the second largest maritime power in the world. French law gave the administering Power unilateral control over the market of strategic raw materials, in violation of International Court of Justice decisions and General Assembly resolutions. The Committee should reaffirm that ownership of natural resources lay with the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

47. **Mr. Loussan** (Tourism Committee, Assembly of French Polynesia) said that the administering Power must not be permitted to effectively veto the fulfilment of the decolonization mandate, including whether to initiate a programme of work for Ma'ohi Nui, as requested by petitioners since 2013. The failure to initiate such a programme impeded the decolonization process, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration. The proposed programme would be divided into five stages, including an in-depth analysis of the complex dependent relationship between the Territory and France and an extensive public education programme in the Territory, and should lead to an act of self-determination, which would provide for the choice of a legitimate political status, followed by the transition to the full measure of self-government. That process must be carried out with the direct participation of the United Nations to avoid any risk of conflict of interest.

48. **Mr. Hamblin** (Commune of Tautira) said that France had conducted 193 nuclear tests in French Polynesia from 1966 to 1997, which had discharged the equivalent of 720 Hiroshima bombs in the atmosphere and 210 underground. While nuclear testing had ended in 1997, the aftermath of 30 years of testing continued to pose major health and social challenges for the people of French Polynesia. Given the immediate, indiscriminate and massive death and destruction caused by any nuclear weapon detonation and its long-term catastrophic consequences on human health, the environment and other vital economic resources which endangered the life of current and future generations, he supported the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

49. **Ms. Brown** (Marine Resources Committee, Assembly of French Polynesia) said that Kiribati and Kazakhstan had submitted a working paper to the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT/CONF.2026/PC.I/WP.27), in which they called upon the nuclear-weapon States to provide adequate justice to the victims of nuclear weapons-related activities and emphasized the responsibilities of those States for the humanitarian and

environmental consequences of nuclear weapons-related activities. As noted in the working paper, such activities inflicted physical harm, long-term genetic disturbances and trauma, and resulted in long-term or permanent displacement, disruption of cultural practices and environmental damage. The victims of nuclear tests must not be forgotten and their requests for justice and assistance must be met. French Polynesia called upon the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence to conduct a study on the impact of the nuclear tests conducted in the Pacific region and to recommend reparations for those affected and their descendants. The mishandling of nuclear waste generated by those tests also posed a lingering danger.

50. **Ms. Homai** (Commune of Takaroa) said that according to the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere had involved unrestrained releases of radioactive materials directly to the environment and had caused the largest collective dose to date from man-made sources of radiation. The General Assembly had taken note of the two reports of the Secretary-General on the environmental, ecological, health and other impacts of the 30-year period of nuclear testing in French Polynesia (A/69/189 and A/72/74) and had requested continuous updates on those impacts. Petitioners had expressed deep concern about the inadequacy of those reports, which consisted of replies from Member States and various United Nations agencies, and barely addressed the issue. For instance, in its reply, IAEA had cited a decades-old study stating that the impact on the health of the population had been negligible, a finding that had been disproved by independent scientific investigations and the admissions of the French authorities. Indeed, newly declassified information and independent analysis had revealed that the testing had had a far greater impact on the health of the population than stated in the United Nations reports.

51. **Mr. Jordan** (Association de football Otemanu, Bora Bora) said that an independent scientific report on French nuclear testing, published in 2014, had provided a comprehensive analysis of the human impact of such testing. The Secretary-General should prepare a similarly substantive report. The world needed to know about the genetic, environmental and social consequences of the crimes perpetrated against the people of Ma'ohi Nui, in particular the Centaur nuclear test of 17 July 1974. France had a duty to repair the damage caused by its crimes and to restore the property rights and sovereignty of the people of Ma'ohi Nui. He was pleased that the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum had adopted a communiqué in 2019 acknowledging the

importance of addressing the nuclear testing legacy in the Pacific, calling for the operationalization of the provisions of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and endorsing the need to commission an appropriate body to undertake a comprehensive, independent and objective scientific assessment of the contamination issue in the Pacific.

52. **Mr. Terou** (Commune of Uturoa) said that the people who continued to pay the price of nuclear tests carried out decades earlier must be fairly compensated, in accordance with articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Many organizations around the world had expressed solidarity with the efforts of Ma'ohi Nui to address the nuclear legacy. One example was the message of support delivered by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons at an event on 17 July 2021 to mark the anniversary of the Centaur nuclear test. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had recognized that States that had conducted nuclear tests were responsible for their harmful effects, including in the Trust and the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Fourth Committee should work closely with the First Committee, which dealt with questions relating to nuclear tests and compensation. Ironically, only the perpetrator of the nuclear tests could provide information on the effects of those tests to the First Committee; the Territory was prevented from doing so owing to its colonial status.

53. **Mr. Salmon** (Commune of Paea) said that education was the most powerful weapon of the colonizer. In 2005, the National Assembly had adopted a law that, among other things, required schools to teach students about the "positive role" of the French presence overseas, although fortunately that particular provision had subsequently been repealed. In Ma'ohi Nui, France had established an education system that was unsuitable for the Indigenous population, resulting in a high rate of academic failure. Mastery of French continued to be required and there were only a small number of bilingual schools. The content of the education provided to the children of Ma'ohi Nui continued to be decided 20,000 km away, in Paris. One might ask whether such actions reflected a desire to repress the language, values and culture of Ma'ohi Nui. As a former teacher himself, he dreamed of an education system that was better adapted to the needs of his people.

54. **Mr. Cowan** (Roberto Gym) said that he welcomed the progressive recognition by the General Assembly of the inalienable right of the people of Ma'ohi Nui to own, control and dispose of their natural resources, including marine resources and undersea minerals. In several resolutions, including the resolution adopted annually concerning the implementation of the Declaration, the

Government of France had been urged to ensure such permanent sovereignty. In addition, the relevant decisions of the International Court of Justice had confirmed that the peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories were the rightful owners of their natural resources. The wilful absence of the representatives of France from the work of the Special Committee on the question of French Polynesia precluded the possibility of assessing that country's level of compliance with international law, which clearly confirmed that ownership of those resources lay with the people of Ma'ohi Nui.

55. **Mr. Tapati** (Committee on Agriculture, Assembly of French Polynesia) said that Te Henua 'Enana (the Marquesas Islands) continued to experience persistent colonial ties. The mayors of the six communes of Te Henua 'Enana were opposed to the decolonization process led by the ruling pro-independence party, Tavini Huiraatira, and instead sought the disguised "departmentalization" and separation of Te Henua 'Enana from the rest of Ma'ohi Nui, similar to the case of Mayotte. That intention, guided by France, was political madness and blindness. Three quarters of the population of Te Henua 'Enana had been displaced to Tahiti and elsewhere because the administering Power and its political allies had not developed Te Henua 'Enana since the end of nuclear testing in 1994. In 1966, aged six, he himself had been the victim of a blatant crime against humanity, when fallout from nuclear tests had reached Te Henua 'Enana. The independence of the whole of Ma'ohi Nui was the only decolonization option that would allow Te Henua 'Enana to regain its identity at last.

56. **Ms. Kohumoetini** (Commune of Ua-Pou) said that she condemned the subtle neocolonial attempts of France to break up Ma'ohi Nui and seize Te Henua 'Enana, which was strategically located and had considerable underground and undersea resources. An inclusive decolonization process should take place, one that respected the indivisibility and unity of Ma'ohi Nui. France was covertly attempting to extend its influence by manipulating the mayors of Te Henua 'Enana to promote an outdated political vision that served the interests of France. Its efforts to divide the people of Ma'ohi Nui in order to better rule over the exclusive economic area brought to mind the actions of France in the case of the Comoros, when Mayotte had been pressed to become a department of France. She did not wish to see the same thing happen to Te Henua 'Enana. Ma'ohi Nui was indivisible and it was up to the people of the Territory to decide their own future.

57. **Ms. Maamaatuaiahutapu** (Committee on Budgetary and Fiscal Oversight, Assembly of French

Polynesia) said that President Macron had declared, during his visit to French Polynesia in 2021, that France was an Indo-Pacific power. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific region was a key element of French foreign and security policy. France had a significant geographical presence in the region that included Reunion, Mayotte, the Wallis and Futuna Islands, New Caledonia and French Polynesia, which alone accounted for some 5 million km² of the exclusive economic zone of France. That gave France a vital strategic position on the international political chessboard as against China and the United States of America, although it refused to side with either State. While France claimed to want stability and cooperation, its real goal was to maintain its presence in the region. President Macron had said that French Polynesia had a central role to play in its Indo-Pacific strategy, but it was time for the people of Ma'ohi Nui to decide their own future. Ma'ohi Nui had nothing to learn from a State that had used colonization to exert control over foreign territories, the legacy of which continued to affect their politics, culture, economy and international relations. France should support the people of French Polynesia in resolving their challenges before trying to assert itself in the Indo-Pacific region as a peacemaking nation.

58. **Mr. Flores** (Commune of Raivavae, Australes) said that colonial reform and modernization, through attempts to justify colonialism, did not constitute decolonization. The failure to implement actions mandated by the General Assembly threatened to relegate the debate to an exchange of opinions between those who recognized the true nature of contemporary colonialism and those who had made an accommodation with it. However, the purpose of the process was not to air differing opinions but instead to provide Member States with the opportunity to examine the extent of genuine self-governance in the Territories. The reinscription of Ma'ohi Nui on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 2013 had been a historic moment achieved with great expectations that the United Nations would live up to its promise. He remained optimistic that the mandate would be implemented with the renewed energy and political will to advance the Territory to the full measure of self-governance with equal rights and justice.

59. **Mr. Chong** (Kea Consulting) said that the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes should examine the impact of nuclear waste generated by 30 years of French nuclear testing. In its national report to the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

([NPT/CONF.2020/42/Rev.1](#)), France stated that it had dismantled completely and irreversibly its Pacific testing centre in 1998 and had conducted clean-up operations to eliminate any radiological risk, with IAEA concluding that there was no health risk. It was striking that the report contained no references to the health effects of nuclear testing or to compensation for victims. IAEA and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation should work together to provide substantive contributions to a new, more in-depth report of the Secretary-General on the effects of nuclear testing in French Polynesia. A neutral assessment of those effects by the relevant United Nations entities was essential given that the administering Power had historically withheld such information. According to newly declassified documents from the French Ministry of Defence, the population had been exposed to 500 times the maximum accepted levels of radiation.

60. **Ms. Vaianui** (Association Vaihau) said that French policy was driven by its geostrategic and geoeconomic interests. Through its colonial holdings, France sought to ensure long-term access to strategic resources that belonged to the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. France had the second largest exclusive economic zone in the world, covering 11 million km², including 5 million km² in Ma'ohi Nui, territory claimed by France in violation of international law. Without those Territories, the French exclusive economic zone would rank just forty-fifth in the world. French control of the exclusive economic zone of Ma'ohi Nui would lead to the exploitation and degradation of its marine resources, with profits going to France. However, such natural resources were critical for the future development of Ma'ohi Nui. Whether or not France considered them to be strategic was irrelevant to the applicability of international law. The General Assembly had declared that any administering Power that deprived colonial peoples of their legitimate rights over the natural resources of their Territories violated its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. The Assembly had also recognized the inalienable right of the people of French Polynesia to the ownership, control and disposal of their natural resources, including marine resources and undersea minerals.

61. **Ms. Tokoragi** (Baku Initiative Group) said that the Baku Initiative Group had been established by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, which had long supported Ma'ohi Nui in its struggle to liberate itself from the colonial tutelage of France. In 2013, following decades of peaceful activism, Ma'ohi Nui had been reinstated in the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, a fact that the administering Power had yet to

acknowledge. The French Government should recognize the full sovereignty of Ma'ohi Nui over all its natural resources, including marine resources in the exclusive economic zone. France had yet to initiate a genuine and sincere process of material, environmental, health and social reparations for the damage caused by its nuclear tests. While colonization was indeed a crime against humanity, as had been noted by President Macron, the people of Ma'ohi Nui would likely to be able to forgive it if the administering Power started paying reparations and made an official commitment to cede control of the seabed resources of Ma'ohi Nui.

62. **Ms. Kohumoetini** (Commune of Faa'a) said that the Ma'ohi Nui people relied heavily on the Pacific Ocean for food and other resources and were determined to preserve it for future generations. The vast exclusive economic zone was rich in ecological and mineral resources that had significant commercial, scientific and environmental value. French Polynesia and the administering Power had attempted to work together in their respective areas of expertise to protect the Pacific Ocean, but that cooperation had come up short. France must first recognize the inalienable rights of the people of Ma'ohi Nui to the ownership, control and disposal of their natural resources, including marine resources and undersea minerals, in accordance with its international commitments and General Assembly resolution 77/139.

63. **Mr. Tuheiava** (Office of the President of the Assembly of French Polynesia) said that despite repeated requests for the initiation of a programme of work, such a programme continued to be omitted from the relevant resolutions. The decision to initiate a programme must not be left to the administering Power, which had a vested interest. The proposed programme, which had already been presented to the Special Committee, would be divided into five stages: a self-assessment of the existing political status arrangement; a public education programme; an official visiting mission from the Special Committee; the act of self-determination, under the supervision of the United Nations; and the implementation of the political status option chosen by the people, including a timetable for the transfer of authority. The programme would also provide for the development of a targeted United Nations technical cooperation plan to support capacity-building in the new State. While it was significant that the representative of the administering Power had taken the floor at the current meeting and called for dialogue, it was regrettable that he had also repeated the request for French Polynesia to be removed from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Question of Guam

64. **Mr. Won Pat-Borja** (Commission on Decolonization, Government of Guam), speaking on behalf of Lourdes Leon Guerrero, the Governor of Guam, said that the Government of Guam was committed to achieving full self-governance through one of the three internationally recognized political status options. However, the administering Power had asserted that decolonization must be undertaken within the confines of its domestic legal framework, which was not designed to address the colonial status of Guam. The administering Power's unilateral authority over Guam perpetuated the democratic deficiencies inherent in that status.

65. Colonization presented a significant obstacle to achieving sustainable development, as had been recognized by the General Assembly. Increased military activity, including the relocation of United States marines from Okinawa, would have environmental, cultural, social and economic consequences for Guam. It was doubtful whether the infrastructure of Guam could withstand expanded military activity and a population increase. Most concerning of all, however, was the lack of agency and meaningful representation of Guam in decision-making about how the Territory was used for military activities. As part of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, Guam was working to develop its diplomatic capacity, and urged the United States and other Member States to develop diplomacy training for Non-Self-Governing Territories.

66. Guam was at the centre of regional tensions, and its people bore the most immediate and significant burden of conflict. While the United States authorities had begun scoping sites in Guam for a missile defence system, the security of Guam extended beyond military and defence considerations, and encompassed infrastructure resilience, climate change mitigation and regional peace and prosperity. There was great potential benefit to a unified Micronesia and Pacific region. Guam must be empowered, through the attainment of full self-governance and sovereignty, to participate in regional and international bodies alongside other Pacific island nations and the United States, with a view to repositioning Guam as a centre of regional and global peace and security. He was hopeful that the recent statement by the United States Secretary of State reaffirming the Administration's support for territories in their right to self-determination would elevate the engagement of the Government of Guam with the administering Power and bring Guam closer to realizing its political aspirations.

67. He was pleased to report that the Administration had also confirmed its support for a visiting mission to Guam, assuming that resources were available. The Commission on Decolonization had made great strides in its work to prepare for such a mission, including the publication of a study on self-determination, which available on its website. He called on the Committee to continue supporting the process and to implement the appropriate mechanisms in connection with the mission, including formal consultations between Guam, the Committee and the administering Power.

Question of New Caledonia

68. **Mr. Forrest** (Government of New Caledonia) said that, with the ending of the Nouméa Accord, which had provided for a modern and innovative emancipation and decolonization process, New Caledonia was entering a critical phase. The United Nations had supported that process through visiting missions and electoral observer missions and by monitoring and supporting the implementation of the Nouméa Accord. The Government of New Caledonia welcomed the work of the Special Committee and the involvement of the administering Power.

69. The Government of New Caledonia was committed to fostering a fairer and more resilient society, protecting the rights of women, young people and vulnerable people, and combating inequalities, including by promoting the active participation of civil society and local communities to ensure that decision-making took into consideration their needs and aspirations. However, New Caledonia faced challenges, including recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, socioeconomic problems, the climate crisis and supply chain difficulties, and would need to establish partnerships to ensure the prosperity of its people. In response, the Government of New Caledonia had adopted policies and plans on a variety of issues, including water management, the digital economy, support for young people, exports and adaptation to climate change. To mobilize resources and finance its development priorities, the Government was carrying out tax reforms, strengthening governance, and reviewing its laws and policies on the development of natural resources.

70. The Government was also committed to the protection and sustainable use of the Pacific Ocean, which was the Territory's main source of income and jobs. At the regional level, New Caledonia continued to work with the Pacific Islands Forum with a view to adopting a declaration on the protection of people facing climate-induced sea-level rise. New Caledonia supported General Assembly resolution [77/276](#),

spearheaded by the Government of Vanuatu, requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the obligations of States in respect of climate change.

71. Discussions on the institutional future of New Caledonia had begun in March 2023 among the signatories of the Nouméa Accord. The Government of New Caledonia must play a fundamental role in those discussions to ensure that process went smoothly and peacefully and that the will of the people was respected.

72. **Mr. Sarufa** (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation welcomed the participation of representatives from the administering Power and the Non-Self-Governing Territories at the current meeting. Regrettably, the scourge of colonialism persisted in the 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, including French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Guam.

73. His delegation congratulated Robert Xowie, the mayor of Lifou Island in New Caledonia and the first pro-independence politician to win a seat in the French Senate, on his historic election. The ending of the Nouméa Accord marked the start of a seminal phase for New Caledonia, which had been at a crossroads since the third self-determination referendum, held during the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2021. It was important to hold a constructive dialogue and cooperation between the people of the Territory, the administering Power and, where necessary, the United Nations to find a politically amicable and lasting solution. Ultimately, it was for the people of New Caledonia to determine their destiny. At the subregional level, his delegation would continue to work with the States members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group on the question of New Caledonia and to engage with petitioners.

74. **Mr. Forrest** (Government of New Caledonia) said that his Government stood ready to work with all stakeholders, including the United Nations and the Melanesian Spearhead Group, as it prepared for the transition from the Nouméa Accord. New Caledonia had benefited from visiting missions and electoral observer missions, but other cooperation mechanisms were set out in General Assembly resolution [75/123](#) on the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

75. **Ms. Falao** (L'Éveil océanien political party) said that the proposed successor to the Nouméa Accord, the Nouméa pact, had been proposed by the Government of France in the absence of proposals from New Caledonian politicians. It was merely an extension of the original Accord and would lead to an uncertain future. The pro-independence and anti-independence

movements would never go away, as neither side would ever accept the result of a referendum. The only solution was for each side to take a step towards the other, in the manner of the loyalist leader Jacques Lafleur and the separatist leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou. For her party, L'Éveil océanien, the most realistic and acceptable solution was the establishment of a partnership between France and New Caledonia towards the year 2053. That solution would satisfy the pro-independence movements by ensuring precolonial status for New Caledonia, and the anti-independence movements by safeguarding a new relationship with France. The aim would be to create a New Caledonian State that shared sovereignty with France. The long horizon of the project would give New Caledonia the time it needed to undertake necessary reforms and redefine its relationship and sovereignty with France.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.