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Summary record of the 3rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 7 October 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Pavluta-Deslandes (Latvia)

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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/79/23](#), [A/79/66](#), [A/79/229](#) and [A/79/229/Corr.1](#))

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

1. **The Chair** said that, in line 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.4/79/3](#))

2. **Mr. Natalio Wheatley** (Premier and Minister of Finance of the British Virgin Islands) said that the United Nations was playing an important role in the decolonization of the British Virgin Islands by providing a forum for the Territory to provide official updates on the process and supporting the people of the islands using the available tools within its mandate. He was pleased that the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples had conducted a visiting mission to the Islands on 26 and 27 August 2024. The visiting delegation, comprised of high-level diplomats, had assessed the status of decolonization on the ground and heard local views on the Territory's political future. It had also witnessed the Territory's extreme vulnerability to climate change and the development challenges it faced as a group of small islands. The mission had been conducted professionally and impartially. All stakeholders had been able to freely express their views, and it had become clear that there was a strong desire for a public information and education campaign, as greater clarity was needed with regard to the options available under international law for achieving a full measure of self-government, including integration, free association and independence. His Government looked forward to the official report of the visiting mission being shared with the people of the British Virgin Islands, particularly as preparations were under way for the next round of negotiations on constitutional advancement.

3. His Administration was hoping that its relationship with the new Labour Government of the United Kingdom would be based on democracy, consultation, sustainable development, climate resilience and self-determination. In September 2024, he had held initial discussions with the newly appointed Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories of the United Kingdom and several parliamentarians, and had expressed his Administration's desire for an improved relationship. However, despite being undemocratic and unnecessary, the Order in Council held in reserve, by means of which the United Kingdom could suspend the Constitution of the British Virgin Islands, remained in place. Lifting the Order in Council would not only improve the relationship between the United Kingdom and the British Virgin Islands; it would also enhance the former's regional and international reputation.

4. His Administration's governance reform programme was in its final phase; the core bills on the legislative agenda had been passed by the House of Assembly. The Administration was preparing a longer-term plan to strengthen areas of governance that did not require immediate attention. The reforms were the most comprehensive in the history of the British Virgin Islands, and were positioning the Territory to achieve a full measure of self-government in due course.

5. Later in 2024, he would meet the Minister of State for the annual Joint Ministerial Council between the United Kingdom and the Overseas Territories. A modern partnership between the United Kingdom and the Overseas Territories would be high on the agenda, alongside climate change and sustainable development. The British Virgin Islands was still recovering from two category 5 hurricanes that had taken place seven years earlier, and had already experienced three extreme weather events in 2024. He hoped that the British Virgin Islands would be included in the United Nations multidimensional vulnerability index, when it was next updated. In the meantime, the Territory was working with the United Nations system to advocate for additional technical assistance and access to development and climate finance.

6. **Mr. Eliezer Benito Wheatley** (University of Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy) said that the Special Committee's visiting mission had been an important development in the national life of the Territory. Several of the participants had stated that it had been the first serious dialogue on the islands' political future in their lifetimes; the previous such mission had been in 1976. The mission had been conducted professionally and impartially, and societal stakeholders had been able to freely express their views.

7. The people of the British Virgin Islands largely understood that the Territory was already financially self-sufficient and economically independent; now, it was for them to decide which of the options recognized by the United Nations for achieving a full measure of self-government was the most appropriate and desirable. A better understanding of what integration, free association and independence meant in practice would help them to choose. The current Overseas Territory status was not an option because the relationship between the Territory and the United Kingdom was unequal and had not led to decolonization. An important component of the Special Committee's mandate was to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories in providing their people with information on the decolonization process. The people of the British Virgin Islands would benefit from such information as they sought to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. As the administering Power, the United Kingdom should embrace further national dialogue on decolonization in the Territory. The Caribbean Community and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States should also continue to play a role.

Question of French Polynesia (A/C.4/79/4)

8. **Mr. Brotherson** (President of French Polynesia) said that he felt a deep sense of responsibility, driven by the aspirations of the people of French Polynesia – both those who yearned for self-determination and those who were content with the status quo. On 17 May 2024, French Polynesia had commemorated the eleventh anniversary of its reinscription on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. However, there had been a change: after a decade of silence, France had finally initiated dialogue with his Government at the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly (see [A/C.4/78/SR.3](#)) and at the June 2024 session of the Special Committee (see [A/AC.109/2024/SR.3](#)). In French Polynesia, the voting patterns in the recent elections in Tahiti demonstrated the people's engagement and commitment to democratic principles.

9. His Government continued to support a comprehensive, transparent and peaceful decolonization process under the scrutiny of the United Nations. The process should be rooted in innovation, peace and mutual respect, and serve as an example to the world. For such a decolonization process to take place, it was necessary to jointly construct a clear road map, with specific steps and milestones, and to establish a timeline for its implementation. The road map should be clearly referenced in the General Assembly resolution concerning French Polynesia in order to ensure that the administering Power and the United Nations were committed to it. His Government

was dedicated to working with all political forces in French Polynesia, including the opposition forces, to design a road map in a spirit of unity and respect for political differences.

10. The admission of French Polynesia to the International Organization of la Francophonie, on 5 October 2024, had been a milestone; it represented a greater opening to the francophone world and a commitment to the shared values of peace, solidarity and democracy. As a new observer member, French Polynesia hoped to be the voice of a decolonial francophone world, one in which those fundamental values prevailed. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, had, for his part, emphasized the right of all peoples and States of the Pacific Ocean region to self-determination. A successful decolonization, in a spirit of collaboration and peace, was possible.

11. Decolonization was closely connected to sustainable development. In its resolution 77/130, the General Assembly had reaffirmed the obligation of administering Powers to promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the Territories under their administration. The development of French Polynesia must reflect its identity, history and culture, while protecting its natural resources from external control. The consequences of the nuclear testing in French Polynesia had spanned generations, leaving deep scars on people and the environment, all stakeholders had the responsibility to address those impacts and to ensure the health and well-being of future generations. His Government urged the Special Committee and the administering Power to consider conducting visiting missions to French Polynesia.

12. The recent tensions and challenges in Kanaky/New Caledonia were a reminder of the delicate balance required for peace. The resolve of people seeking sovereignty should never be underestimated when they were confronted with a political dead end. A peaceful and lasting solution could be achieved only when all voices were heard and respected. French Polynesia stood in solidarity with the people of Kanaky/New Caledonia. Peace and unity must be maintained throughout the process.

13. The people of French Polynesia could not achieve self-determination alone; they needed the full support of the United Nations and the cooperation of the administering Power. He therefore hoped that, before leaving New York, his delegation would be able to hold a meeting, guided by the Fourth Committee and the Special Committee, with representatives of the administering Power. The President of the Assembly of French Polynesia and a representative of the parliamentary minority could participate in such an initial dialogue.

14. **Mr. de Rivière** (France) said that in 2023, France had decided to take part in the discussion of the question of French Polynesia for the first time. It wished to continue that practice, which was evidence of its ongoing dialogue with the Government of French Polynesia. However, the new approach did not reflect a change of position; there was no process between France and French Polynesia with a role for the United Nations.

15. France wished to support the development of French Polynesia. It assisted the local Government to evaluate ambitious development plans for the territory and supported their implementation. Each year it transferred nearly 2 billion euros, approximately 30 per cent of the Territory's gross domestic product (GDP), to French Polynesia. France also supported French Polynesia in its integration in the Pacific region and beyond, as evidenced by the Territory's recently becoming an official observer member of the International Organization of la Francophonie. The high degree of autonomy of French Polynesia, which was protected by the Constitution of France, allowed Polynesians to express their ambitions while respecting their particular circumstances. The role of France would remain, first and foremost, to work

toward the development of the Territory alongside the local authorities and to pursue dialogue based on trust on all subjects.

16. **Mr. Pihaatae** (Māōhi Protestant Church) said that in 1963, the Ma'ohi Protestant Church had proclaimed itself independent of the Protestant federation of France and had begun to advocate the liberation of the Ma'ohi people, the recognition of Ma'ohi culture, the official recognition of Reo Ma'ohi, the Indigenous language, and compensation for the damages caused by French colonialism, including support for the victims of the nuclear tests. He called on the administering Power to recognize the independence of the Ma'ohi Protestant Church, with due reference to article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

17. **Mr. Neuffer** (Protestant Maohi Schools) said that education remained a powerful tool for colonialization. Polynesian children were still learning only French and Western history, and education was conducted in French, meaning that the Tahitian language was losing its richness. Although Tahiti needed French funds to raise teachers' wages to the level of those of teachers in French public schools, the Ma'ohi people should not be bound by the French curriculum. Polynesian children should learn their islands' full history, including how their ancestors had fought to sue France for poisoning people with nuclear radiation, and about all the other struggles they had endured. Unbiased education would increase collective wealth, while decreasing poverty, addictions and domestic violence, problems which were largely a result of colonialism.

18. **Mr. Puarai** (Association Moruroa e Tatou) said that the 193 nuclear tests conducted by France in Moruroa and Fangataufa over three decades had contaminated the land, compromised the health of the Ma'ohi people and burdened their spirits. The French Pacific experimentation centre had heavily disrupted the Indigenous way of life and created economic dependency on France, which continued to dictate the livelihoods of the Ma'ohi people. Nuclear colonialism continued to affect them; it was not a relic of the past. His association demanded justice and freedom. The administering Power must fully acknowledge its crimes and take immediate, substantive action to compensate for them. The past must not be a burden, but rather a catalyst for change.

19. **Ms. Tairua** (Union chrétienne des jeunes gens) said that she proudly carried the voices of her ancestors, her elders and peers, and especially her sisters – voices that had been silenced for too long. Ma'ohi women played a vital role in the Ma'ohi people's fight for justice; they were not mere victims, but guardians of life and of the future. A scientist who had dedicated his career to studying the French nuclear tests had warned the Ma'ohi people that they would create monsters. His words had become a painful reality: more and more children were being born sick or dead. The Ma'ohi people had a duty to bring the tragedy to light. France must not continue to turn the Polynesian islands into a field of death. The Ma'ohi women would ensure that such atrocities were never committed again in their lands or oceans.

20. **Ms. Françoise Postma** (Association de Quartier Taahauni) said that she was a Polynesian mother deeply concerned about the future of Polynesian children. In Ma'ohi Nui, many people were unable to buy land, either as a result of the complexity of the land system, a legacy of colonialism, or because most land had already been sold. Her grandparents' generation had been Indigenous landowners, but their descendants were tenants.

21. The French colonial system had been focused on the installation of the nuclear test centre in the early 1960s. Many Ma'ohi people had become involved with the centre, but others, who had not, had found themselves excluded economically, socially and even culturally. Although the land tenure system was a political competency delegated to the local elected Government as part of the so-called

“autonomy status” of the islands, General Assembly resolution [67/265](#) made it clear that the people of Ma’ohi Nui had been misled. The administering Power had never intended for Ma’ohi Nui to be truly self-governing. Steps must be taken urgently to ensure that Ma’ohi Nui attained true autonomy, in accordance with the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

22. **Ms. Keona Postma** (Association Tamarii Anau) said that her people had previously had a strong connection with their lands. Ma’ohi culture overflowed with myths, legends and connections between visible and invisible worlds. However, over time, many young people had forgotten their roots and been drawn in by the Western way of life at the expense of their Polynesian heritage. For years, her grandparents’ generation had been deprived of their culture, and their descendants were conditioned by that legacy of denial. Young Polynesians must learn how to embrace their own culture in the same way they embraced Western culture. The French policy of assimilation, pursued over many years, had largely been successful. However, there was no future for a people who based their identity and destiny on values that were not their own.

23. **Ms. Vaianui** (Permanent Committee of APF) said that, since 2013, the absence of the administering Power in the international discussions on the future of Ma’ohi Nui had effectively stalled the decolonization process, making it impossible for the islands’ young people to envision an independent future. Education, employment and economic opportunities could all benefit from dialogue, while the lack of engagement on the part of France affected young people’s ability to actively participate in the construction of an autonomous and prosperous Ma’ohi Nui. Young people must be able to build their future in a clear, stable political framework unhampered by colonialism.

24. **Ms. Vanaa** (Economic and Finance Committee) said that the failure of France to take part in the discussions on Ma’ohi Nui in the Fourth Committee and in the Special Committee since 2013, when French Polynesia had been reinscribed on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, was not a mere oversight, but rather a deliberate political choice that seriously threatened the ability of the Ma’ohi people to exercise their right to self-determination. France was failing to fulfil its responsibilities as an administering Power and preventing any kind of progress on decolonization. At the same time, as a permanent member of the Security Council which was failing to comply with its legal and moral obligations to the Ma’ohi people, it was jeopardizing its own credibility at the international level. The lack of participation of France, which weakened dialogue, was a pressing problem that the international community should address. The Ma’ohi people had the right to see their situation treated with seriousness and transparency and to be able to freely shape their future.

25. **Mr. Cowan** (Te Aito Bien-Être) said that the silence of France since 2013 was a hindrance not only to decolonization, but also to the justice that the Ma’ohi people deserved. Each year that passed weakened the chances of the Ma’ohi people to choose the future they wanted and weakened the credibility of the United Nations as it failed to follow up on its resolutions on French Polynesia. The refusal by France to participate in dialogue sent a disturbing signal: that administrative Powers could flout their obligations without consequences. Member States should therefore put pressure on France to engage in constructive dialogue. It was not only about the Ma’ohi people’s right to self-determination – the principles of justice, transparency and respect for all peoples’ right to self-determination were at stake.

26. **Ms. Tiatoa** (The Raiatea Nui Folklore Association) said that the struggle of the Ma’ohi people for sovereignty was a struggle for recognition of their dignity and identity and for the future of their children. Since 2013, France had been insisting that

the inclusion of Polynesia on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories was a mistake and that Polynesia could administer itself thanks to its autonomous status. However, upon closer inspection, it was clear that the autonomous status granted by France did not entail full autonomy as defined by the United Nations. All meaningful power in the Territory was vested in the representative of France, and Polynesia had very limited economic and legislative independence. Contrary to statements made by France, there had never been a genuine popular consultation process to allow the Ma'ohi people to decide on their future. France had prevented decolonization from advancing for more than 10 years. It was time for the administering Power to acknowledge the real situation of Polynesia and initiate sincere and equitable dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations.

27. **Ms. Ah-Min** (Housing, Land Management and Sustainable Development Committee) said that Ma'ohi Nui needed a clear framework to advance in its decolonization. However, France continued to refuse to furnish the information necessary for progress. Transparency was the basis of any legitimate decolonization process and the attitude of France was a major obstacle to the freedom of the Ma'ohi people. Without the essential information, the United Nations and the international community as a whole could not properly monitor the status of Ma'ohi Nui and ensure that its people were able to exercise their right to self-determination. The requisite information would also give the Ma'ohi people the chance to claim their rights in a clear and legitimate way. The international community should exert pressure on France to provide the required information so that the crucial decolonization process could resume.

28. **Ms. Kiao Hoa** (Relais BoraBora de l'Association entre deux mondes) said that the refusal by France to discuss decolonization in a constructive and transparent manner and its withholding of key information on political and administrative changes in the Territory hampered the right of the Ma'ohi people to self-determination and undermined the whole decolonization process. Without access to essential data and reports, it was impossible to impartially assess the situation of Ma'ohi Nui. The lack of transparency enabled France to cling to the fiction that Ma'ohi Nui was autonomous, while in reality it was subjugated by France. The deliberate failure to cooperate created a very uncertain environment, in which the Ma'ohi people lacked the information necessary to make informed choices about their collective future. It also prevented the United Nations from fulfilling its mandate to monitor and assess progress on decolonization, and undermined the credibility of the entire decolonization framework, including the Fourth Committee. The international community must hold France to account for its actions and insist that it disclose all relevant information with a view to enabling the Ma'ohi people to exercise their inherent right to self-determination.

29. **Mr. Geros** (Assembly of French Polynesia) said that he had attended the 2024 regional seminar of the Special Committee, held in Caracas from 14 to 16 May 2024, in the hope that the administering Power would show itself willing to begin to engage in some kind of dialogue on the Territory's future. However, France, often lauded as a defender of human rights by the international community, had not taken the high road by honouring the principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations. He had, nevertheless, been pleasantly surprised by the initiative of France, for the first time since the Territory's reinscription on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, to call on all the representatives of the Assembly of French Polynesia to petition before the Committee. The diplomatic letter of 13 September 2024 announcing that initiative constituted proof that France officially recognized the Territory's reinscription. He therefore asked the Committee to take note of that letter in its draft resolution on the question of French Polynesia. Lastly, the representatives of France to the Committee must officially initiate the decolonization dialogue called for in the draft resolution,

as opposed to the institutional dialogue to which the representative of France had alluded earlier in the meeting.

30. **Mr. Tuheiaiva** (Tavini Huiraatira No Te Ao Ma'ohi Party) said that the administering Power had ignored the reinscription of French Polynesia/Ma'ohi Nui on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, instead opting, until recently, for its empty chair policy. The accommodationist political factions of Ma'ohi Nui had also joined forces to seek to deny the legal evidence that Ma'ohi Nui was a Non-Self-Governing Territory within the meaning of the Charter. He wondered why there was such a desire to reject the assessment of the United Nations and cling to the veneer of autonomous status, which the General Assembly had disavowed 11 times since 2013. For the first time since 2013, by its letter of 13 September 2024, France had invited both Presidents of political institutions in Ma'ohi Nui and the political groups represented in its legislative assembly to address the Committee, an indirect recognition of the legal reality of the reinscription of Ma'ohi Nui on the list. It would therefore be logical for France to engage in dialogue on decolonization as called for in the successive General Assembly resolutions on Ma'ohi Nui.

31. **Ms. Vaianui** (The Vaihau Association) said that it was crucial that a visiting mission be sent to French Polynesia now that it had been reinscribed on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories for 13 years. Such a mission constituted an essential step in enabling an impartial assessment of the political, economic and social situation in Polynesia and had been envisaged in the work programme for the Territory, included in the relevant annual resolution, and requested by the President of Polynesia. A visiting mission would make it possible to take into account the legitimate aspirations of the Ma'ohi people to self-determination, and the resulting recommendations would serve to ensure a transparent, fair and equitable decolonization process. The administering Power must provide institutional support to incorporate the right to self-determination into the educational curricula used in the Territory.

32. France must recognize its nuclear debt to Ma'ohi Nui in the light of the 193 atomic strikes it had carried out between 1966 and 1996 with irreversible health, environmental and economic consequences. France must provide compensation for the damage it had caused. Lastly, as part of the work programme, which should be integrated into the text of the draft resolution on the Territory, it was important to decide who would be eligible to vote in a self-determination referendum.

33. **Mr. Teremate** (Agriculture and Marine Resources Committee) said that a visiting mission to Ma'ohi Nui was an essential part of the decolonization process. Since the Territory's reinscription, the Ma'ohi people had been expecting the United Nations to directly take stock of the situation on the ground. The General Assembly had envisaged such a mission taking place, as stipulated in its resolutions on the question of French Polynesia. A visiting mission would give the United Nations the opportunity to hear directly from the Ma'ohi people and to ensure that their aspirations and concerns were taken into account in decisions on the Territory's future. In other Non-Self-Governing Territories, the sending of a mission had often marked a turning point in the decolonization process, as it had enabled United Nations representatives to witness the reality of day-to-day life and the impact of colonial policies. A mission would make it possible to more thoroughly assess the existing institutional and legal framework, which did not reflect true autonomy. An objective report on the situation of Ma'ohi Nui was needed to enable serious dialogue on its future. Moreover, the mission should be organized quickly in order to restore confidence in the decolonization process and ensure transparency.

34. **Mr. Hoiore** (Éducation nationale) said that it was essential to restrict the electorate for the referendum on self-determination to ensure the integrity of the

decolonization process. Only residents with a deep and long-lasting connection to the Territory should be entitled to take part in the historic vote. Restricting the vote was necessary to ensure that the final decision truly reflected the aspirations of those who experienced the day-to-day reality of life in the Territory and understood the economic, environmental and social challenges it continued to face. If participation in the referendum was not restricted, the results might be influenced by external interests, undermining the decolonization process. Clear residency and community engagement criteria must be established in order for the voter rolls to be seen as fair and legitimate. International observers should be present to ensure that the process was conducted transparently and fairly.

35. **Mr. Loussan** (Tourism and Culture Committee) said that French legislation to combat foreign interference effectively restricted freedom of association and the freedom to cooperate. It affected not only independence movements, but any group seeking to establish legitimate partnerships with foreign entities. The planned registry of foreign-influenced activities, due to be established in 2025, would document every activity that was deemed to promote foreign interests, including communications with public officials and fundraising, making any international cooperation more complicated. In addition, the legislation provided for algorithm-based surveillance of perceived foreign interference threats. Under the guise of national security, that legislation was being used to repress movements like Tavini Huiratira, which fought for the independence of Ma'ohi Nui. The extension of assets freezes, previously reserved for terrorist threats, to target Tavini Huiratira, was aimed at blocking all financial support for the organization. The Human Rights Committee of the United Nations and all defenders of freedom must oppose that repressive legislation which threatened the development prospects and the fundamental right to self-determination of the Ma'ohi people.

36. **Ms. Maamaatuaiahutapu** (Committee on Budgetary and Fiscal Oversight) said that the people of Ma'ohi Nui had the right to manage and safeguard the islands' exclusive economic zone, which spanned 5 million square kilometres. Ma'ohi Nui was endowed with precious natural resources: its seabeds were rich in polymetallic nodules and rare minerals. Harvesting those resources from less than 1 per cent of its exclusive economic zone could offer economic benefits much greater than the approximately \$2 billion a year that France allocated to the Territory. The ban that President Macron had signed in 2022 must not be used as a pretext to continue preventing the people of Ma'ohi Nui from managing their own resources. It was time to bring 40 years of false autonomy to an end. Nearly 30 per cent of the population of Ma'ohi Nui lived below the poverty line; health problems including obesity, diabetes and cancer were prevalent; and crystal meth continued to ravage communities. Ma'ohi Nui had the wealth and the will to build a flourishing, independent, free nation; it was time for its people to take their destiny into their own hands.

37. **Ms. Flores**, speaking in her personal capacity as a member of the Assembly of French Polynesia, said that those who supported the current, so-called autonomous status of Ma'ohi Nui had not yet understood that there could be no genuine democracy or economic development while the Territory remained under the guardianship of France. In 2004, when the pro-independence movement had been elected to power, France had twice amended the electoral laws in order to take power from the hands of those who were failing to advance its interests. Those in favour of maintaining the status quo would continue to sow fear, warning that without France there would be economic failure and a lack of military protection. They would request that Ma'ohi Nui be removed from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, failing to see how France was instrumentalizing them. In the future, their children would ask them how they had not had the courage to fight for their own nation, Ma'ohi Nui.

38. **Ms. Teremate** (Association of Descendants of Tautu Tehei Scholermann and Moetua Véronique Peckett) said that the young people of Ma'ohi Nui were at risk of becoming a lost generation. They had inherited an illusory autonomy that merely masked the colonial stranglehold, keeping the Territory in a state of dependence and stagnation. The political status that had been accepted by their ancestors was stifling their aspirations and had failed to foster sustainable, inclusive development for their people. The economy was on life support, and crucial decisions were made thousands of miles away. In order to have a more promising future, the people of Ma'ohi Nui needed to assert their right to self-determination and mobilize to build a strong, sovereign nation that was not subject to externally imposed laws. The Committee should support their struggle to become a sovereign nation.

39. **Mr. Le Caill** (Commission de l'éducation, de l'enseignement supérieur, de la jeunesse et des sports) said that the Maori people of Ma'ohi Nui had suffered under the weight of colonialism for decades, and it was time to correct that injustice. The people of Ma'ohi Nui had the right to freely determine their political status, and should be able to do so advisedly. France, in cooperation with the United Nations, should implement inclusive political education programmes to build awareness among the people of their fundamental rights and help them to understand their options for self-determination under General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV): independence, free association with an independent State, or integration with an independent State. The administering Power must adhere to its international obligations and implement such a programme without delay so that the people of Ma'ohi Nui could freely and transparently exercise their right to self-determination.

40. **Mr. Salmon** (Commission des institutions, des affaires internationales et des relations avec les communes) said that the nuclear tests conducted by France in Ma'ohi Nui had caused irreparable harm to the ecosystem and to the health of the Territory's inhabitants. Several generations were affected by the increased prevalence of radiation-related health conditions, including cancer. The land and the water had been contaminated, and some of that damage was irreversible. France had a responsibility to make reparations, including adequate financial compensation and support for victims, and full transparency about the ramifications of the testing. The compensation measures already in place were insufficient. As a result of overly stringent eligibility criteria, many victims had had their claims denied. Efforts must also be made to restore biodiversity to ensure a healthy and safe future for the people of Ma'ohi Nui. The international community should ensure that the administering Power took tangible steps to remedy the harm caused.

41. **Ms. Teriitahi** (Assembly of French Polynesia) said that, thanks to her dual identity as a Polynesian and a French national, she could embody the values of her ancestors while benefiting from the opportunities offered by the French Republic. The reinstatement of French Polynesia on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 2013 did not reflect the will of the Polynesian people, who had repeatedly expressed their opposition to independence at the polls. Even though the pro-independence party had won the 2023 election, the pro-autonomy vote was greater but had been split across multiple parties. French Polynesia was neither oppressed nor exploited. France made generous financial contributions to the Territory, investing \$2 billion per year in such areas as education, healthcare and security. Independence would only lead to impoverishment, since an independent French Polynesia would not be able to replace those resources. The Committee should send a mission to French Polynesia and remove it from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

42. **Ms. Butcher** (Municipality of Hao) said that she was the mayor of Hao, a small coral atoll located 450 km from Moruroa, the site of the French nuclear tests. While pro-independence advocates had always used the issue of nuclear testing to criticize France, her community had coexisted peacefully with the personnel of the nuclear

testing centre for over 30 years. France maintained a military presence in the area, primarily through the adapted military service regiment, and had contributed greatly to her community in terms of infrastructure, healthcare and education. Residents of her constituency would not have consistently voted for anti-independence mayors like her if living conditions had been as oppressive as pro-independence advocates had claimed. The Committee should send a mission to the Tuamotu-Gambier islands, to see how fortunate her people were. The real issues facing the Tuamotu archipelago were climate change and rising sea levels, which threatened the survival of the islands. Continued support from France would be critical in the struggle against climate change.

43. **Mr. Frébault** (National Assembly of France) said that French Polynesia had an enviable status within the French Republic. France provided consistent support amounting to \$2 billion per year, which was equivalent to one third of the Territory's GDP. Nearly all key positions in the local administration were held by Polynesians, and the trauma of colonization was fading. In 2023, the people of French Polynesia had placed their trust in a pro-independence Government that had promised to combat the high cost of living, but that Government had been unable to fulfil its responsibilities in such areas as employment, taxation and education.

44. If it were to become independent, French Polynesia would not be able to safeguard its exclusive economic zone or defend its territory. Independence did not equate to freedom when it resulted in dependence on other global powers, a situation that would likely arise if French Polynesia severed ties with France in the current economic, social and geopolitical climate. The nuclear testing had caused harm, and the people of French Polynesia had a duty to fight for fair reparations; however, they could do so without demolishing all that French Polynesia and France had built together.

45. **Mr. Rohfritsch** (Senate of France) said that he was the President of Ia Ora Te Nuna'a, one of the parties that had formed the pro-autonomy platform that had won the recent legislative elections, just one year after Tavini Huiraatira, the pro-independence party, had emerged victorious in the territorial elections. The most recent election served to clarify the political context in Polynesia. The outcome of the 2023 election had reflected tensions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, not a desire for independence, as even the President of French Polynesia, Moetai Brotherson, had acknowledged.

46. French Polynesia held a unique place within the nation of France. Its institutions were protected by the French Constitution. While the impact of the nuclear testing should not be ignored, the people of French Polynesia should continue their fight for compensation as French citizens. The people of French Polynesia would be honoured to host a visiting mission so that the international community could see how beneficial autonomy was for the Territory.

Question of Gibraltar (A/C.4/79/5)

47. **Mr. Picardo** (Chief Minister of Gibraltar) said that representatives of Spain regularly invoked General Assembly resolutions adopted more than half a century before. However, Spain had ceded sovereignty in perpetuity in 1713, and the people of Gibraltar had an inalienable right to self-determination. The resolutions of the General Assembly could not alter that fact; they had no legal value and were not declaratory of any principle of international law. Furthermore, those resolutions had limited political weight; when the most recent one was adopted in 1969, nearly half of the States Members of the United Nations had voted against it, abstained or refrained from participating in the vote. The only resolution with any legal force was General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), in which the existence of the right of self-determination was explicitly declared. The right of self-determination had

underpinned the historic agreement recently concluded by the United Kingdom and Mauritius to complete the decolonization of Mauritius by restoring its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. Gibraltar could not be legally decolonized through integration into Spain, because that would amount to recolonization by a different colonial Power. It was, moreover, embarrassing for the socialist, progressive Government of Spain to rely on resolutions which, by its own admission, had been secured by the fascist Government of the 1960s. The only determining factor in the future of Gibraltar would be the expression of the free will of its people.

48. The Government of Gibraltar had been working to give effect to the will of the people of Gibraltar, not only within the United Nations but, alongside the United Kingdom, in negotiations on a new relationship with the European Union. In all, 96 per cent of the population had voted to remain in the European Union in the 2016 referendum, and the people of Gibraltar wanted a strong, positive and fluid relationship with the European Union. In September 2024, alongside the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, he had met in Brussels with the Vice-President of the European Commission and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain. Those actors were working to build an area of shared prosperity in Gibraltar and the surrounding area and find pragmatic solutions to the issues encountered by those who wished to visit their families or pursue an education in one jurisdiction or the other. The people of Gibraltar wanted the United Kingdom and the European Union to conclude a treaty as soon as possible. To that end, the Government of Gibraltar had proposed practical and sovereignty-neutral solutions for the more difficult issues in the negotiations, and the authorities of Spain had to decide whether to accept them. Nevertheless, any solution must respect the right of self-determination of the people of Gibraltar. Gibraltar must be removed from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in keeping with the wishes of the Gibraltarians.

49. **Mr. Buttigieg** (Self-Determination for Gibraltar Group) said that, since he had first appeared before the Committee nearly 10 years ago, it had failed to take any action with respect to his country other than adopting the same resolutions year after year. The Committee seemed uninterested in the future of Gibraltar, as requests for a visiting mission to Gibraltar had been ignored for decades. Gibraltar was not a large or powerful nation, but the Committee must uphold the right of self-determination of its people despite the interests of other, more influential nations. Representatives of Spain claimed that Gibraltarians were not a people, and that they could be traded to Spain; but Gibraltar could not be treated as a colonial possession, and no one could give it away or lay claim to it. The people of Gibraltar had consistently expressed their desire to remain British, and the international community should respect that choice.

Question of Guam (A/C.4/79/6)

50. **Mr. Ridgell** (Deputy Chief of Staff to the Governor of Guam), speaking on behalf of Lourdes Leon Guerrero, Governor of Guam, said that his Government had been requesting a visiting mission to assess progress towards achievement of self-government since 2006, and the Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations had confirmed its support for such a mission in March 2023. The Fourth Committee should provide immediate support and allocate funding for such a mission.

51. Despite a lack of autonomy, the Government of Guam had sought to develop regional and international ties and had been recently accepted as an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum. Rising sea levels and climate-change-induced migration were among the most pressing issues for Guam. Although innovative measures were being implemented through local initiatives, there were constraints on the ability of Guam to take action. At the international level, there was a lack of guidance on

whether Guam could engage in certain forums. The Fourth Committee and the administering Power should support a diplomacy training programme aimed at empowering all Non-Self-Governing Territories to navigate international systems.

52. The Government of Guam was deeply concerned about the removal of wording from the annual resolution recalling that “the most acute threat to the legitimate exercise of the decolonization of Guam was the incessant militarization of the island by its administering Power, and noting the concern expressed regarding the effect of the escalating military activities and installations of the administering Power on Guam”. Since the administering Power continued to benefit from its rule over the island, Guam had experienced decades of stagnation. The United States was able to make decisions without seeking the consent of the people of Guam, as demonstrated by its expansion of its military presence on the island as a result of bilateral negotiations with Japan. That military build-up was of great concern to the people of Guam, especially as the local Government had to mitigate the impacts of the increase of military activities despite its lack of consent. The existing inequitable arrangement with the administering Power must be addressed to ensure that the Government of Guam could act as an equal partner to ensure security for the island and for the Pacific region. The status of Guam as a Non-Self-Governing Territory also enabled the Government of the United States to make decisions that negatively affected the ability of the people of Guam to advance their goals in areas such as food sustainability, trade and environmental and cultural preservation.

53. **Ms. Palaganas** (Commission on Decolonization) said that the people of Guam were hopeful of the prospects of tangible change for their island but remained cognizant of their reality, which was marked by a lack of full self-government and sovereignty. The administering Power imposed policies without including the people of Guam in decision-making processes, resulting in adverse environmental and economic impacts. The United States was increasing its military presence on the island without the consent of the people, something that ran counter to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Climate change endangered the well-being and livelihoods of the people of Guam and their neighbours. The Committee should reinstate the language on militarization in the resolution on Guam, call for the immediate allocation of funding to enable the Special Committee on decolonization to conduct a visiting mission to Guam, and support a diplomacy training programme aimed at empowering the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to navigate international systems in pursuit of solutions, particularly in relation to climate change.

Question of New Caledonia (A/C.4/79/7)

54. **Mr. Gambey** (Chief of Staff to the President of the Government), speaking on behalf of the President of the Government of New Caledonia, Louis Mapou, said that unprecedented rioting had broken out in New Caledonia on 13 May 2024, resulting in the deaths of 11 civilians and 2 gendarmes. Some 3,000 Kanaks had been arrested and 120 detained. The crisis had also been a major shock to the local economy, generating losses equivalent to 20 per cent of GDP. Nearly 750 businesses had been directly affected by fires, looting or property damage. Damage to public buildings amounted to some 180 million euros. The Government of France had provided over €400 million in emergency support, a portion of which would have to be repaid by the Government of New Caledonia or its provinces.

55. At the root of that violence was a lack of consensus on the changes to the voter rolls, which was known to be a sensitive issue. Indigenous Melanesians accounted for 41 per cent of the population, and pro-independence advocates frequently expressed concerns that the Kanak vote was being diluted. The recently appointed Prime Minister of France, Michel Barnier, had staked out a seemingly new approach,

postponing the provincial elections until the end of 2025 to give the parties more time for dialogue.

56. Those tragic events revealed the difficulties surrounding the link between New Caledonia, in its diversity, and the French Republic. The challenge lied in finding a way to continue to build that link in continuity with the Nouméa Accord. All legal avenues should be explored, and it was important not to be afraid to innovate on the basis of domestic and international law.

57. Electoral trends in recent years had highlighted the need to give serious consideration to the option of a path towards sovereignty. While the majority of voters had rejected independence in the three referendums held under the Nouméa Accord, the idea of independence had gained ground, particularly among young people, but also at the national political level and in regional and international bodies. In the 2024 legislative elections, pro-independence candidates had earned 10,000 more votes than anti-independence candidates, resulting in the election of a pro-independence representative to the National Assembly for the first time in decades. The people of New Caledonia had long been presented with a binary choice, “yes” or “no” to independence; the path forward moved away from that debate and towards building a collective future in which the country’s diversity would be respected and its ties with France redefined. Even if New Caledonia remained part of France, their relationship should evolve in accordance with the concept of “shared sovereignty”, with legislative responsibilities transferred to the legislature of New Caledonia and exercise of sovereign powers shared in certain areas, such as foreign affairs. In fact, New Caledonia was already involved in a diplomatic and cooperative role that placed it on the verge of exercising sovereignty.

58. The decolonization process in New Caledonia had consisted of cycles: first the Matignon Agreements, which had brought peace, and then the Nouméa Accord, which had brought an economic, political, social and cultural rebalancing. Now, as in the mid-1980s, history appeared to be faltering, and the 2021 referendum had brought no long-term answers. That situation was a result of an approach based on coexistence; over the coming period, the focus should be on living together and building genuine social bonds.

59. **Mr. de Rivière** (France) said that the violence that had broken out in New Caledonia in May 2024 had had a profound impact on the population. The immediate priority of France had been to restore the peace, and it continued to provide exceptional financial support to help the economy recover. It was necessary to step up the dialogue between the parties, since violence was never a solution. The recently appointed Prime Minister of France sought to rebuild momentum to that end and had announced several measures aimed at finding solutions to the conflict. The Presidents of the National Assembly and the Senate would lead a mission to New Caledonia to help the parties back on track towards the future collectively decided by the people, and the Prime Minister himself would visit the Territory.

60. France had always been eager to cooperate with the United Nations, something that was provided for in the Nouméa Accord. It had engaged with the Special Committee on decolonization and had hosted election observers, who had found no irregularities in any of the three referendums on independence. France had organized a visiting mission of the Special Committee to New Caledonia in 2018 and would welcome another mission. In keeping with its commitment to transparency, a fact-finding mission from the Pacific Islands Forum would visit New Caledonia in the near future. France would pursue the path mapped out in the Nouméa Accord and would respect the right to self-determination. It was for New Caledonians, with the support of the State, to engage in dialogue on all issues concerning their future, over and above institutional matters.

61. **Ms. Wateou** (South Province) said that the New Caledonians had completed their decolonization process, voting against independence three times and thereby expressing their desire to remain part of France. Certain pro-independence groups had resorted to violence to force their will on the rest of the population. Anyone who disagreed with them, not only white settlers, was told to “go home”, an attitude that she could not tolerate as a biracial Kanak-New Caledonian. France, with its universal values of merit and progress, offered each of its citizens the means for his or her emancipation, as demonstrated by the many examples of young New Caledonians who had achieved success in fields such as sport, business and politics. Pro-independence radicals preferred to lie to young people, telling them that they had no future because of France. The primary obstacle for Kanak youth was having a family and clan that did not believe in their success; that harmful narrative led to hatred. New Caledonia would not be able to rebuild while some remained in denial. The only path forward was one of forgiveness, hard work and truth.

62. **Mr. Xulue** (Customary Senate of New Caledonia) said that the Kanak people had suffered from colonial occupation, segregation and systematic discrimination. His own ancestors had been put on display in the human zoo at the Colonial Exhibition in Paris. Lands returned to the Kanak people covered just 27 per cent of the Territory, and the Kanak people continued to be marginalized.

63. United Nations special rapporteurs had called into question the legitimacy of the 2021 referendum, which had been held during the COVID-19 pandemic despite opposition from traditional authorities. Since then, tens of thousands of Kanaks and New Caledonians had mobilized peacefully. In response, the administering Power had deployed over 6,000 soldiers and police officers. Ten Kanak human rights defenders had been killed by special forces or supremacist white settler militias, more than 169 people wounded, more than 2,938 people arbitrarily arrested and more than 60 people deported to mainland France.

64. The Fourth Committee should recommend that the administering Power end its military activities in New Caledonia and recall the soldiers stationed there. Another referendum should be held in consultation with traditional authorities and with respect for the free, prior and informed consent of the Kanak people. The Committee should recommend that the administering Power respect the principle of irreversibility as envisaged in article 5 of the Nouméa Accord.

65. **Ms. Backes**, speaking in her personal capacity as a former member of Government, said that pro-independence radicals, supported by foreign powers such as Azerbaijan, had decided to engulf New Caledonia in chaos on 13 May 2024. Healthcare personnel had fled the Territory after being targeted by attacks. The radicals had portrayed themselves as victims to the media but then had burned down educational facilities and places of worship. Their aim was to achieve, through violence, what they could not achieve at the polls. For weeks, New Caledonians had had to defend themselves against pro-independence militants who destroyed everything while yelling “death to the whites”, in an echo of the racial resentment expressed previously by the President of Congress, Roch Wamytan, who had said that the Territory had met its quota for whites.

66. Loyalists and pro-independence moderates in New Caledonia were waiting for the Committee to condemn the violence. The people of New Caledonia would not abandon their homes and would not stop fighting to maintain democracy in New Caledonia. They had freely decided that the decolonization of New Caledonia would take place within the French Republic when they voted three times to remain part of France, and their decision must be respected.

67. **Mr. Frogier**, speaking in his personal capacity as a former member of Government, said that he spoke on behalf of the business owners and workers who had

lost everything on 13 May and who had been targeted by attacks by pro-independence radicals since then. The economy of New Caledonia had been devastated, and businesses and livelihoods destroyed, all in an attempt to make New Caledonians of non-Melanesian ancestry flee. The international community must wholeheartedly condemn the violence. One of the hardest aspects of rebuilding would be restoring the belief among the people of New Caledonia that all communities and people of all political opinions could live together peacefully. New Caledonia was currently able to survive only because of the financial support provided by France; but New Caledonian entrepreneurs, with their tremendous work ethic, would rise to meet the challenges ahead. First, however, the violence must end.

68. **Mr. Tacita** (Alyans Nasyonal Gwaddloup) said that he and his compatriots in Guadeloupe took great interest in the question of New Caledonia. The problem of colonization in New Caledonia should have been settled through the Matignon Agreements and Nouméa Accords. Over the course of the first two referendums, the pro-independence vote had been growing. The conditions in which the third referendum had been held, however, went against the spirit of democracy. It was difficult to understand why the administering Power had insisted on holding the referendum in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the people of New Caledonia were not able to participate. The administering Power's attempt to unfreeze the voter rolls was a continuation of the colonization process aimed at making the Kanak people a minority in their own Territory, and that measure had led to the legitimate uprising of the Kanak people, particularly young Kanaks.

69. **Mr. Sinewami Htamumu** (Inaat ne Kanaky) said that, as the King of the Gureshaba Kingdom, he had come to speak on behalf of the Kanak High Chiefs. In a statement issued on 20 August 2024, Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations had urged France to safeguard the rule of law and continue to work with the Special Committee and Kanak customary authorities to ensure respect for the principle of irreversibility. Given that France had failed to uphold its commitments and in the light of its military and legal response to the Kanak people, the National Council of Kanak High Chiefs had adopted a unilateral declaration of sovereignty over their ancestral lands on 24 September 2024. The Kanak people had suffered from 171 years of colonial occupation, slavery and violence. After 40 years of political, diplomatic and institutional struggle and the implementation of decolonization measures, conditions for the Kanak people had not improved. Hundreds of Kanaks had lost their lives in the struggle to uphold their sovereignty, including the 11 children of Kanaky executed since May 2024. The Committee and all members of the General Assembly should recognize the autonomy and independence of Kanaky and enforce the irreversibility of the declaration of sovereignty.

70. **Mr. Boula**, speaking in his personal capacity as a member of the Customary Senate, said that tens of thousands of Kanaks and New Caledonians had been mobilizing peacefully since February 2024, protesting the conditions in which the third referendum had been held as well as the draft law on unfreezing the voter rolls. For the Kanak people and all New Caledonians, 13 May 2024 would be remembered as the day that France revealed its colonial posture, reneging on its commitments and flouting the right of the Indigenous Kanak people to self-determination. Since then, the administering Power had been using force against the pro-independence movement and had been criminalizing defenders of Indigenous rights. Mothers and children had been wounded in unjustified police action in working-class neighbourhoods in Nouméa. Racist and terrorist anti-Kanak militias had moved around freely, often with support from State authorities, which had led to the assassination of Kanak human rights defenders. The Customary Senate was working to prevent any further escalation of violence, but their efforts were being undermined by the Prosecutor of Nouméa and the High Commissioner. The Government of France

was determined to restore order through violence, ignoring the requests of the Customary Senate. The Fourth Committee should ensure that France adhered to the principle of irreversibility, conduct a mission to New Caledonia, open an international investigation into the human rights violations committed there and place the Territory under trusteeship.

71. **Mr. Bouquet-Elkaim** (JBE Avocat), speaking as a member of the Customary Senate of New Caledonia, the customary councils of Djubea Kapume and Drehu and the non-governmental organization Rhéébu Nùù, said that New Caledonia had been shaken by a major crisis that had reawakened the trauma of colonial rule, but there had been no foreign interference, no attempted coup d'état and no radicalization of the Melanesian community. If discrimination had occurred, it had not affected the European settlers, who continued to hold economic and political power. The decolonization process had failed. Colonial modes of thought contrary to the norms of *jus cogens* persisted; some advocated for assimilationist reforms aimed at suppressing the rights of the Kanak people, while others had argued for the territory to be divided, contrary to the principle of *uti possidetis juris*. The Committee should take the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into account in its assessment of the ongoing decolonization process, should ensure that the Customary Senate was systematically involved in that process, should encourage France to implement a transitional justice programme or a truth and reconciliation commission to eradicate colonial practices and should insist that France implement, in good faith, the Nouméa Accord and General Assembly resolutions [1514 \(XV\)](#) and [2625 \(XXV\)](#). The people of New Caledonia had neither voted to remain part of France nor opted for full sovereignty; that was an important nuance, because the process of self-determination was irreversible.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.