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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 4 October 1999, at 10 a.m.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Election of officers

1. **Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue** (Côte d'Ivoire) nominated Mr. Rodríguez San Martín (Bolivia) for the post of Rapporteur.
2. *Mr. Rodríguez San Martín (Bolivia) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*
3. *Mr. Rodríguez San Martín (Bolivia), Rapporteur, took a place at the Committee table.*

Agenda item 18: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (A/54/23 (chapters VI, IX-XI and XIII, D-F and H), A/54/58-S/1999/7, A/54/151-S/1999/718, A/54/219, A/54/337; A/AC.109/1999/1, 3-9, 11 and 13-18)

Agenda item 92: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations (A/54/23 (chapter VIII and XIII.A), A/54/343)

Agenda item 93: Economic and other activities which affect the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories (A/54/23 (chapters V and XIII.B))

Agenda item 94: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations (A/54/3 (chapter VII.D), A/54/23 (chapters VII and XIII.C), A/54/119; E/1999/69)

Agenda item 12: Report of the Economic and Social Council (A/54/3 (chapter VII.D))

Agenda item 95: Offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories (A/54/267)

4. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, introduced chapters III to XIII of the report of the Special Committee on its work in 1999 (A/54/23). The Special Committee had formulated a number of specific proposals for the elimination of the remaining manifestations of colonialism. The proposals were based

on a case-by-case examination of the Territories under the Special Committee's mandate. The Special Committee had also continued to examine the implementation by Member States, particularly the administering Powers, of resolution 1514 (XV) and other General Assembly resolutions related to decolonization. The Special Committee had been kept informed of developments in the Territories by means of the working papers prepared by the Secretariat, which contained information provided by the administering Powers under Article 73 e of the Charter and from the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories who participated in meetings of the Committee and in its regional seminars. An effective way of obtaining first-hand information was the sending of visiting missions. Informal consultations with the administering Powers held during the period under review had included discussions on the cooperation of the administering Powers in the review of the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

5. After briefly reviewing the Special Committee's recommendations contained in chapter XIII of its report, he stressed that the Committee had benefited greatly from the active participation in its work of representatives of territorial Governments, regional intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, as well as experts and representatives of some administering Powers. Only a little more than one year remained until the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, but much remained to be done. The critical review of the Special Committee's activities, undertaken with the aim of improving its effectiveness, had already begun to bear fruit. It was to be hoped that the Fourth Committee would support all the recommendations of the Special Committee.

6. **Mr. Donigi** (Papua New Guinea), Chairman of the Special Committee, said that the conclusion of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism invited reflection as to its achievements but also as to the United Nations work on decolonization beyond the Decade. The objective of the Special Committee in carrying out a critical review of its work was to develop a results-oriented programme of work that would enable it to fulfil its obligations towards the people of the Non-Self-Governing Territories as set out in the Charter of the United Nations and in the resolutions of the General Assembly, particularly resolution 1514 (XV).

7. Over the past year, members of the Special Committee had worked intensely to establish the conceptual framework for the Committee's future work and guidelines for consultations on the question of decolonization. That was still a work in progress but it was gratifying that the Special Committee had made progress

in examining its working methods and strengthening the mechanisms of consultation with the administering Powers.

8. Throughout the period under review, the Special Committee had continued to work in close consultation with the representatives of the Territories, who had participated in the hearings held by the Committee on various items and in the regional seminar held in the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. The regional seminars offered a particularly useful forum for focused discussion on issues of concern to the Territories. In addition to the representatives of the Territories, the seminars benefited from the participation of representatives of civil society and experts. The report on the St. Lucia seminar had been adopted by the Special Committee at its 15th meeting on 21 July 1999 and the entire report had been annexed to chapter II of the Special Committee's annual report.

9. A matter which continued to receive the Special Committee's special attention was the situation of the small island Territories which constituted the majority of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The particular vulnerabilities and needs of those Territories had been discussed not only in the Special Committee but also in the Economic and Social Council. For example, in July 1999, he had met with the President of the Council to explore ways in which the Council and the Special Committee could encourage programmes and specialized agencies to continue and expand their assistance to Non-Self-Governing Territories. In that connection, the possibility had been discussed of holding a joint meeting of the Council and the Special Committee.

10. As in previous years, the Special Committee was submitting recommendations to the General Assembly on the implementation of the Declaration by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations. In that regard, mention should be made of the adoption by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean of resolution 574 (XVIII) calling for the necessary mechanisms to permit its associate members, including small island Non-Self-Governing Territories, to participate, subject to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, in the special sessions of the Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the programmes of action of those United Nations conferences in which the Territories had originally participated in the capacity of observer and in the work of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/189 of 15 December 1998, several Non-Self-Governing Territories had participated as observers in the recent special session of the General Assembly devoted to the review and appraisal of the

implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

11. The popular consultation conducted by the United Nations in East Timor had provided the East Timorese people with an opportunity to choose their future status. By an overwhelming vote, the East Timorese people had chosen the path of independence and that decision must be respected. In that regard, the Special Committee would continue to review the situation in the Territory, subject to any directives by the General Assembly at its current session.

12. In August, he had visited New Caledonia, together with the representatives of two other Member States, at the invitation of the French Government. Papua New Guinea had been pleased to participate in that historic event as a country of the South Pacific which was also a member of the Special Committee. The countries which had participated in the mission would submit a brief report on their visit.

13. In accordance with the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Special Committee intended to continue during 2000 its efforts to achieve a speedy and unconditional end to colonialism. It looked forward to the involvement and cooperation of the administering Powers in its work and to the continued participation of the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories in the discussion of all matters relating to the future of the Territories.

14. In conclusion, he urged members of the Fourth Committee to consider positively the recommendations submitted to the General Assembly by the Special Committee.

15. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that the last debate of the century on the question of decolonization was especially significant and poignant and gave rise to special hopes. That was mainly because the dying century should have been the century of the liberation of peoples and the restoration of their rights, in which the images of bondage and the clanging of chains would be banished from the collective memory. On the threshold of the new millennium, it was particularly painful for the countries which had only recently themselves thrown off the colonial yoke to witness the fate of other peoples whose historical aspirations had still not been fulfilled. The following year would mark the fortieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples — that second charter of the United Nations, which had opened the way to the liberation of the colonial

peoples and had become a symbol of the Organization's second birth. That called for an impartial look at what had been achieved in the general struggle for freedom and an appraisal of what still remained to be done. On the whole, one must rejoice at what had been achieved, but it was impossible not to feel dissatisfied when one considered the unfinished business.

16. Only a few weeks previously, a referendum had been conducted in East Timor under United Nations auspices, which had allowed the inhabitants of that Territory to choose the route of independence and freedom, thus giving new grounds for hope to the peoples which had still not been delivered from their yoke. The historic victory of the Timorese and the rocky road to their liberation reminded one of the struggle being waged by another proud and courageous people — the people of Western Sahara. One year previously, it would have been difficult to predict that the people of East Timor would be able to exercise their right to choose their own destiny. It would have been similarly difficult three years previously to foresee that the stalled peace process would be revived in Western Sahara.

17. In that connection, a tribute should be paid to the Secretary-General, who in both cases had acted with singular boldness and resourcefulness to ensure that the United Nations did its duty towards the last peoples on the planet who had not exercised their inalienable right independently to decide their future. Despite numerous obstacles, the process of implementing the settlement plan and the Houston agreements was back on track — after five rounds of direct negotiations between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el-Hamra y de Rio de Oro (POLISARIO) — yielding to the irreversible course of history and the general belief that the conflict could be resolved by the only worthy means, on the basis of the free and sovereign expression of its will by the Saharan people.

18. Whenever the process had faltered, the Secretary-General, his Special Representative, his Personal Envoy, and Mr. Miyet and his staff with unparalleled persistence and devotion had redoubled their efforts to overcome the difficulties which had arisen, encourage the two sides and give new impetus to the flagging process.

19. Nevertheless, after the adoption without a vote in the Fourth Committee of the resolution on Western Sahara, new complications had arisen which were threatening to paralyse and jeopardize work on the implementation of the settlement plan and the Houston agreements. In those circumstances, the Secretary-General had again taken a bold initiative and proposed to the two sides a package of

measures, as an indivisible whole, designed to jump start the process. Those proposals, which had been endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 1204 (1998) of 30 October 1998, had been adopted by the Frente POLISARIO, which had thus made a major concession in the issue of the identification of the contested groups, and had been supported by the observer States, Algeria and Mauritania.

20. Lengthy and difficult negotiations under United Nations auspices had, however, been required before it had been possible in May 1999, on the basis of the introduction of substantive changes in the Secretary-General's original proposals concerning the identification process, the appeals procedures and the new timetable, to formulate a final agreement. In that connection, the Security Council, noting the need for the referendum to be held at the appointed time — in July 2000, had particularly stressed that the process of consideration of appeals should not be transformed into a second phase of the identification process.

21. The agreement officially adopted by the Frente POLISARIO and Morocco represented a turning point in the process, which should lead to the holding of a free and impartial referendum under United Nations auspices on the question of self-determination, without any administrative or military interference. At the current stage, the agreement had to be implemented by its signatories.

22. In that connection, Algeria, which had spared no effort to achieve a final settlement of the conflict between two brother countries, appealed for sincere and honest implementation of the provisions of the settlement plan, the Houston agreements and the agreement endorsed by the Security Council in May 1999. The authority of the United Nations was at stake. The entire international community must witness the fulfilment by the two sides of the commitment which they had made and of the Organization's commitment to bring to a conclusion the process of the organization of a referendum in Western Sahara.

23. The peace process had never been at such a decisive stage and had never been so close to a final conclusion. However, it was currently more important than ever to be vigilant and circumspect and to mobilize all forces to ensure that the process did not again become sidetracked and that the long-awaited referendum was finally held in conditions of impartiality, transparency and freedom.

24. In the period preceding and following the Saharan people's exercise of its right to self-determination,

complete security must be ensured, including the physical protection of persons, their property and belongings.

25. The experience of East Timor should show both sides what route should be followed and what obstacles should be avoided on the road to the free, sovereign and unimpeded expression of the will of the Saharan people. The settlement of the Saharan problem would be beneficial not only to the fraternal Saharan and Moroccan peoples but also to all the peoples of the region wishing to live in the Maghreb, to the attainment of domestic peace, to a unified, stable and prosperous Maghreb truly able to solve the countless complex problems arising in a world embarked on globalization.

26. **Mr. Powles** (New Zealand) said that the current year had seen further progress on the question of Tokelau, the South Pacific Territory for which New Zealand was the administering Power. On 29 June, the Ulu-o-Tokelau or Titular Head, had appeared before the Special Committee. In his statement, the Ulu had described how the organs of national self-government of Tokelau were progressively being given functions and powers previously exercised by the New Zealand Government and the growing readiness of Tokelau's traditional leaders to join in building new structures to meet the Territory's governance needs. In addition, legislation had been adopted to transfer responsibility for the Tokelau Public Service from the New Zealand authorities to Tokelau. That significant step forward had been reflected in the draft resolution on the question of Tokelau contained in chapter XIII.E of document A/54/23.

27. As far as the history of Tokelau was concerned, it was hardly a typical example of decolonization. The Territory consisted of three atolls covering a total area of 12.2 square kilometres, with a population of 1,507 people. Administrative control over the atolls had been transferred to New Zealand in 1926 at the initiative of the United Kingdom Government, which had annexed the Territory in 1916 at the request of the inhabitants. Tokelau had never been a single political entity in a contemporary sense, but comprised three villages which had largely been autonomous for hundreds of years.

28. There was no doubt that Tokelau was on track to undertake an act of self-determination in the conventional sense. However, the particular features of its situation could mean that the Territory might not be ready to take that step in the very near future. As the Ulu had noted in his statement, in 1994 Tokelau had expressed a preference for a status of free association with New Zealand, but since that time the emphasis on governance-related issues had

relegated political status issues to the background. The Ulu had also expressed the wish that the United Nations and New Zealand should work together with Tokelau as partners in the process of decolonization. New Zealand, for its part, was committed to assisting Tokelau towards a greater degree of self-government and economic self-sufficiency. New Zealand official development assistance to Tokelau in the 1999/2000 financial year was projected at about US\$ 3.3 million, which amounted to over US\$ 2,100 per person.

29. New Zealand welcomed the intention of the Special Committee to pay special attention to the specific problems of the small island Territories, which constituted the majority of the Territories that had not yet achieved self-determination. It also welcomed, and willingly participated in, the process of informal contacts initiated by the Chairman and the Bureau at the request of the Special Committee to explore means to improve cooperation between the Special Committee and the administering Powers.

30. In New Zealand's view, the Special Committee faced a key challenge in the new millennium: how the United Nations could provide the reassurance over a longer term that some of the smallest and most remote remaining Territories, such as Tokelau, so clearly sought. The response to that challenge would require the fullest cooperation among the Special Committee, the Territories themselves and the administering Powers. New Zealand looked forward to making its contribution to that process.

31. **Mr. Lacanilao III** (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the Association was deeply concerned that the Plan of Action for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism had not, as originally envisaged, been concluded by the year 2000. ASEAN therefore urged the international community to redouble its efforts to bring as many as possible of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories towards the path of independence by the year 2000.

32. During the next few years, the work of the Special Committee would be extremely crucial. ASEAN would continue to provide strong support to enable the Special Committee to attain its goals as soon as possible.

33. The United Nations must deal with the question of decolonization with urgency and resolve. The Special Committee must relentlessly pursue its mandate through innovative approaches until colonialism was totally eradicated. New strategies would be needed to complete the task of decolonization.

34. The Special Committee had the resources to generate new ideas. One such resource was the various seminars held between 1990 and 1999.

35. As ASEAN had stated in the past, the decolonization process was a multifaceted effort, and not merely a set of political and legal measures. It must be accompanied by effective social and economic development efforts. The Non-Self-Governing Territories, most of which were small island Territories, required and deserved the comprehensive support of the international community, which must assist the Territories to fulfil their aspirations to achieve not only political but also economic, social and cultural well-being. In that connection, emphasis should also be placed, among other things, on promoting effective education and human resources development for the entire population of the Territories.

36. In its desire to promote globalization with a human face, ASEAN strongly supported the constructive cooperation between the Special Committee and other United Nations specialized agencies, international institutions associated with the United Nations and regional organizations to facilitate the effective implementation of assistance programmes by those bodies to Non-Self-Governing Territories, especially small island Territories.

37. The future success of the decolonization process depended largely on the unreserved cooperation of the administering Powers in fulfilling their responsibilities under the United Nations Charter and the relevant General Assembly resolutions. ASEAN called on the administering Powers to help strengthen their dialogue and cooperation with the Special Committee.

38. ASEAN joined others in resolve and commitment to pursue the efforts of the United Nations to bring about the unconditional end, in the shortest possible time, of all forms and manifestations of colonialism in accordance with Article 73 *e* of the United Nations Charter and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

39. **Mr. Snoussi** (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that a specific distinction must be made in discussions of the armed clashes in Western Sahara. At the end of the 1950s, there had been a liberation struggle against the French and Spanish colonizers, in which incidentally the current Prime Minister of Morocco had taken part. In the case of events which had occurred after Spain's departure from Western Sahara, the clashes had been mainly inspired by the principal protagonists in the "cold war".

40. In his statement, the representative of Algeria had mentioned the delays in the implementation of the settlement plan. Those delays had never been the fault of the Moroccan side. Indeed, it was the other side which in 1991 had rejected the criteria approved by the Security Council, in 1993 had refused to accept the compromise put forward by the Secretary-General and in 1997 had opposed the identification of the tribal groups which had in the 1950s taken part in the struggle with the colonizers but had subsequently moved further to the north.

41. With regard to the protection of the population of the region, it should be noted that Morocco was ensuring human rights and all kinds of freedoms, including the right to own property.

42. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that in his statement he had made no accusations against any of the sides and had not spoken of armed clashes in Western Sahara. He had spoken equably and calmly and appealed for cooperation in moving forward. It was to be hoped that the debate in the Fourth Committee would also take place in an equitable and calm spirit.

43. **Mr. Snoussi** (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he had merely wished to make a clarification and that he fully agreed with the Algerian representative about the need to act equably and calmly.

Requests for hearings (Aide-mémoire 1/99 and Add.1)

44. **The Chairman** drew attention to aide-mémoire 1/99 and Add.1, which listed 11 requests for hearings on agenda items 18, 94 and 96.

45. **Mr. Snoussi** (Morocco) noted that the persons wishing to speak on the question of Western Sahara included a certain Mr. Lecoq, the mayor of a French town twinned with a camp of Saharan refugees. He personally was puzzled about the petitioner's motives and had doubts about the usefulness of granting the request for a hearing.

46. **The Chairman** said that it was the usual practice of the Committee to hear petitioners.

47. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that it was his understanding that the Moroccan representative was not objecting to the firmly established practice but was simply interested in what was motivating the petitioner.

48. **Mr. Snoussi** (Morocco) thanked the Algerian representative for his courtesy but said that he would still like to hear the views of the Chairman.

49. **The Chairman** said that requests which were received were circulated as Committee documents and a decision concerning hearings was taken at the following meeting. An additional request for a hearing on agenda item 96 had just been received. In accordance with the usual practice, he suggested that all 12 requests for hearings should be circulated as Committee documents and considered at the following meeting.

50. *It was so decided.*

51. **The Chairman** suggested that, in view of the time constraints and in conformity with the approved timetable for the Committee's work, any additional requests for hearings should be processed as Committee documents and considered at the following meeting.

52. *It was so decided.*

53. **The Chairman** announced that he had received communications from the Chief Minister of Gibraltar and the Governor of Guam, who wished to make statements on Gibraltar and Guam, respectively.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.