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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF  
INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Monday, 10 July 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUÉ (Côte d'Ivoire)  
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Donigi (Papua New Guinea) Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

QUESTION OF NEW CALEDONIA (A/AC.109/2000/4; A/AC.109/2000/L.7)

Hearing of a petitioner

2. The CHAIRMAN recalled that, at its fifth meeting, the Committee had decided to hear a petitioner on the question.

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Néaoutyne (Front de libération nationale kanak socialiste took a place at the petitioners' table.

4. Mr. NÉAOUTYNE (Front de libération nationale kanak socialiste (FLNKS)) said that the Nouméa Accord had ushered in an important phase, which had been reflected in the development of the relations among the United Nations, France and New Caledonia. The Nouméa Accord stipulated that the process of emancipation would take place with the full knowledge of the United Nations, and all parties to the Accord were obliged to submit relevant information in a transparent form.

5. France's national representative organs had approved almost unanimously the gradual process of decolonization provided for in the Nouméa Accord and had incorporated it in the Constitution, stipulating the following elements: restoration of the Kanak identity; establishment of a citizenship of New Caledonia; gradual and phased transfer of sovereign powers, except in the areas of justice, defence, public order, finance, foreign relations and establishment of citizenship on the basis of national origin; transfer by France to the jurisdiction of New Caledonia of development mechanisms; and establishment of a legislature and a government of New Caledonia.

6. In the referendum held on 8 November 1998, 72 per cent of those entitled to vote had approved that process. The reflection in the Nouméa Accord of the sui generis principle in the context of French legislation had in fact been the result of the persistent political negotiations conducted by FLNKS. Following the restoration of their identity and dignity, the Kanak people could consent to have a common future with the other cultural groups with which it was to share a common citizenship. For that purpose, New Caledonia had rich natural resources, particularly nickel - the prospects for its industrial exploitation were currently being studied in the North and South provinces.

7. Over the past year, the following results had been achieved in implementing the Accord: a customary Senate had been established; the organs of power were being elected on an equitable basis; a system of social services was operational; prospects for the implementation of projects in the economic field were being studied; and the citizens, having approved the Accord, were seeking

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various ways of realizing the goals set forth therein. FLNKS wished to call on the United Nations to be vigilant and to warn its partners under the Accord of the danger that it might collapse as a result of such factors as the failure to resolve the issue of the composition of the electorate; non-compliance with the principle of collegiality in the work of the Government of New Caledonia; delays in the implementation of the agreements on development issues to which the State and local groups were parties; delays in the transfer of the Eramet/SLN group to the partial jurisdiction of the provinces of New Caledonia; attempts to undermine the Bercy Agreement setting out the process for the establishment in the North province of a metallurgical plant for the treatment of nickel; and non-compliance with a range of provisions of the Nouméa Accord and the organic law. FLNKS considered it crucial that the United Nations should continue to follow closely the developments in New Caledonia until it achieved full emancipation.

8. Mr. Néaoutyne withdrew.

Hearing of a representative of a Non-Self-Governing Territory

9. The CHAIRMAN informed the Special Committee that he had received a communication from the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations to the effect that the President of the Government of New Caledonia wished to address the Committee on the question. He suggested that, with the consent of the Committee and in accordance with established procedure, the request should be granted.

10. It was so decided.

11. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Leques (President of the Government of New Caledonia) took a place at the table.

12. Mr. LEQUES (President of the Government of New Caledonia) said that the road to the 1998 Nouméa Accord had not been smooth. In the wake of the strife that had rent the archipelago, the Matignon Accords had been signed in 1988. The subsequent period had been devoted to correcting imbalances and assigning responsibilities. There had been noteworthy efforts in the field of economic development, largely thanks to substantial financial support from France. The Accords had provided for the holding of a referendum on self-determination in 1998. However, since the majority of the population would have favoured remaining within the French Republic, such a referendum would have led in reality to renewed strife and would have jeopardized the successes achieved. Therefore, since 1991, Jacques Lafleur, the deputy representing New Caledonia in the French Parliament, had advocated a consensus solution that would be accepted by all sections of the population.

13. The Nouméa Accord had been a consensus solution that took fully into account New Caledonia's specific features. It provided for a considerable broadening of New Caledonia's responsibilities, the transfer of executive power to a collegial local government and the establishment of a customary Senate. There was a strong focus in the Accord on issues of Kanak identity, but at the same time it was firmly oriented towards the future, towards the forging of a common destiny accepted by all. France would accompany New Caledonia on that

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road, which led first through social and economic development for the benefit of all. In its one year of existence, the Government of New Caledonia had held 55 meetings and considered no fewer than 1,250 issues, and almost all decisions had been adopted unanimously. The decisions taken had concerned, *inter alia*, restructuring of customs duties, conclusion of fishing agreements, establishment of an air service, introduction of a common system of social coverage, enhancement of road safety, development of a blueprint for employer-labour relations and preparations for a festival of Pacific arts.

14. Regarding legal aspects, the Accord allowed the Congress of New Caledonia to pass resolutions of a legislative character. That had necessitated the amending of the French Constitution, and France had done so without hesitation. That decision, which broke with traditional models and acknowledged New Caledonia's specific features, would ensure political and social stability for the next 20 years, although daily effort would be required to overcome conflicts and difficulties. Recently, a committee consisting of the three sides that had signed the Nouméa Accord had met for the first time. The sides had expressed unanimous support for what had been achieved and had begun to plan the next stage.

15. The United Nations mission that had visited New Caledonia in August 1999 had expressed keen interest in the innovative system functioning there.

16. Foreigners often perceived the population of New Caledonia as consisting of only two communities. In fact, it was a multi-ethnic society (Melanesians, Europeans, Wallis islanders, Indonesians, Vietnamese, Polynesians and others) in which there was room for everyone.

17. In future, New Caledonia would play its part, alongside France, in foreign relations at the international and regional levels. In an era of globalization, the Nouméa Accord gave New Caledonia the opportunity to act as a bridge between Oceania and Europe. On 6 October 1999, New Caledonia had been granted observer status in the South Pacific Forum, thus paving the way for increased cooperation among the countries of the region. In addition, New Caledonia was linked to the European Union through an association provision.

18. In 20 years' time, New Caledonians were to undertake an act of self-determination, deciding on the future of the Territory. He was counting on the support of the French State, in which the vast majority of the population of New Caledonia had decided to remain, and of the United Nations and the international community as New Caledonia advanced on the road mapped out in the Nouméa Accord. The periods of strife on the archipelago must never return.

19. Mr. Leques withdrew.

20. The CHAIRMAN said that consultations on draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.7 were continuing and suggested that action on the draft resolution should be deferred until the completion of the consultations.

21. It was so decided.

QUESTION OF THE NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES OF AMERICAN SAMOA, ANGUILLA, BERMUDA, THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS, THE CAYMAN ISLANDS, GUAM, MONTSERRAT, PITCAIRN, ST. HELENA, THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS AND THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS (A/AC.109/2000/2, 3, 6, 8, 9 and 13-18; A/AC.109/2000/L.9)

Hearing of a representative of a Non-Self-Governing Territory

22. The CHAIRMAN said that he had received a request for a hearing in relation to the item submitted on behalf of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands. He suggested that, with the Committee's consent and in accordance with established procedure, that request should be granted.

23. It was so decided.

24. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Corbin (Minister of State, United States Virgin Islands) took a place at the table.

25. Mr. CORBIN (Minister of State, United States Virgin Islands) said that, despite the efforts of the General Assembly to give greater impetus to the process of decolonization in the context of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, events in the 1990s had not facilitated the speedy implementation of that process in the small island Non-Self-Governing Territories. In particular, a trend had emerged of seeing the peoples of those Territories as satisfied with the existing relations of dependency, even though the statements of their representatives in the Special Committee and at regional seminars had pointed to the reverse. Given the predominance of other issues on the agenda of the international community, it was not surprising that most of the activities envisaged in the plan of action of the Decade had not been implemented. However, there was reason to believe that Member States were becoming increasingly aware that the Organization's work in the field of decolonization was not complete, and that that awareness could be operationalized by organizing a second decade. In that connection the Department of Political Affairs should allocate resources in its budget proposal for the next biennium for the implementation of specific elements of the plan of action. It should make active use of extrabudgetary resources and implement programmes jointly with other United Nations bodies, regional institutions and educational establishments and other such mechanisms.

26. Closely related to the plan of action of the Decade were the General Assembly resolutions on the small island Territories, which called, inter alia, for the facilitation of programmes of political education in order to foster an awareness among the people of their legitimate political status options. Such assistance must continue to be extended to the small island Territories in the future, perhaps in conjunction with the United Nations Electoral Assistance Unit. Among other recommendations, it was proposed that the Special Committee should submit to the General Assembly a report on appropriate ways to assist the peoples of the Territories in exercising their right to self-determination. Information on such steps should be incorporated in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of resolutions concerning decolonization adopted since the declaration of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

27. In that connection a number of recommendations made at the regional seminars on decolonization were worthy of mention. It had been proposed, in particular, that the Territories should be granted observer status in the Special Committee, that a group of experts on specific Territories should be established and that financial resources should be allocated to facilitate the participation of representatives of the Governments of the Territories in the work of the Special Committee. There was also an urgent need to review the lengthy guidelines governing the allocation of resources for facilitating participation in the meetings of the Special Committee, since the existing mechanism made it extremely difficult to obtain reimbursement of the corresponding sums. In that regard, he recommended that the "Rules governing payment of travel expenses and subsistence allowances" applied in respect of participation by representatives of the Territories in regional seminars should be used in place of the current procedure, so that the Special Committee's decisions on the financing of travel by representatives could be taken prior to the meetings, rather than on a reimbursable basis. There had also been a recommendation for the development of collaboration between the Special Committee and the regional economic commissions in carrying out research and for closer cooperation between the Special Committee and the Economic and Social Council. It was expected that those issues would be addressed again during the current session.

28. In addition to the General Assembly's resolutions and recommendations on decolonization, note should be taken of developments in the Territories themselves, which raised a number of questions. The referendums held in Bermuda and the United States Virgin Islands in 1993 could not be considered valid acts of self-determination. A request had been received from the Governor of Puerto Rico for the reinclusion of that Territory in the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. The consultations/negotiations between Guam and the United States of America on the question of an interim status had ended inconclusively. There had been no change in the political status of the British Territories in the Caribbean as a result of their reclassification as "overseas", rather than "dependent" Territories. The unique process taking place in New Caledonia, which involved the gradual transfer by the French authorities of their powers, was being closely followed as an experiment that might be emulated. The questions arising from the above-mentioned events were precisely those with which the Special Committee would be faced in the years ahead. In the absence of a legitimate act of self-determination, it was difficult to know just what the population of a particular Territory wanted. It was not enough that the Territories had general elections, since in elections economic issues were raised more often than political ones.

29. The General Assembly had recognized in its approach to the process of the self-determination of peoples that independence was not the only option. It had emphasized with equal conviction that that did not mean that the existing arrangements of political dependency or variations on them that did not meet the minimum requirements of full and absolute political equality could be redefined as fully self-governing. A similar approach had been adopted in the recommendations of almost all the regional seminars and in the resolutions of the General Assembly. The time had come to direct all efforts towards the

attainment by the peoples of the remaining small island Territories of full self-government and full and absolute political equality.

30. Mr. Corbin withdrew.

31. Mr. LEWIS (Antigua and Barbuda) expressed concern at some of the issues raised by the previous speaker. In particular, he was alarmed at the situation with respect to the funding for representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories who wished to address the Committee, but were unable to bear the costs of the associated travel and of participation in the meeting. In the past, letters sent to representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories through the administering Powers had often not reached the addressee, as a result of which such representatives had frequently turned to the members of the Committee themselves for assistance. In addition, there were cases in which expenses incurred by representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories were not reimbursed for years, although the Special Committee was under a certain obligation in that regard.

32. It could not be ignored that considerable resources were expended to pay for the services of "experts", who in many cases repeated the same statements year after year, whereas, from a practical standpoint, more useful assistance in the political, economic and legal spheres could be obtained from representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. In that context, the recommendations of the regional seminars also merited closer attention and more careful consideration.

33. The CHAIRMAN said that he would take note of the comments by the previous speaker. Some of them related to the Committee's methods of work, while others, such as the issue of funding, came within the Secretariat's sphere of competence.

Hearing of a petitioner

34. The CHAIRMAN recalled that, at its 5th meeting, the Committee had decided to hear a petitioner on the item.

35. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Morgan (Citizenship Commission of St. Helena) took a place at the petitioners' table.

36. Mr. MORGAN (Citizenship Commission of St. Helena) said that, as indicated in the brief submitted to the Special Committee in connection with the consideration of the question of St. Helena, the Citizenship Commission represented the interests of all segments of the island's population. The brief had been prepared by him, together with Professor Janisch of Toronto University and in close cooperation with the Commission, and had been endorsed by a majority of the elected members of St. Helena's Legislative Council.

37. St. Helena was distinguished by its unique history and geography and its political and economic needs. The island had been discovered in the early sixteenth century and, before that, had been uninhabited. In the mid-seventeenth century, it had been settled by employees of the British East India Company and, since 1834, it had been a colony of the United Kingdom.

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Since 1968, a system of limited self-government, exercised by the Legislative and Executive Councils, had functioned on the island, although the most important powers were held by the governor appointed by the United Kingdom.

38. As the members of the Special Committee were aware, decolonization was a mandatory procedure provided for in international law and, in particular, in article 2 of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples contained in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article 21, paragraph 3, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights contained a call for the self-determination of the Territories remaining under colonial rule based on the will of their peoples. Furthermore, decolonization was the stated goal of the Government of the United Kingdom. The White Paper published by the United Kingdom Foreign Office in March 1999 recognized that the position of each of the United Kingdom's dependent Territories was unique and required a special approach corresponding to the specific conditions. The Commission, on whose behalf he was speaking, urged the Special Committee to call on the Government of the United Kingdom to achieve its stated goal and to enter into negotiations with the population of St. Helena on a constitutional mechanism that would correspond to modern conditions.

39. For all the importance of St. Helena's unique historical, political and economic circumstances, their significance depended today on the will of the people itself. The fate of the Territory must be determined by the people, and not the other way round. The only legitimate form of decolonization or other change in the political status at the current time was self-determination. The fact that the island had initially been settled and used to secure the passage of vessels from England to the Orient did not mean that the current United Kingdom Government could cast it off and abandon its population, who were unable to become economically self-sufficient, to the whim of fate. Likewise, the fact that the most vivid event in the life of the island had been its use as a prison for Napoleon in no way meant that the current United Kingdom Government, which had arbitrarily changed the law on citizenship, could use it as a prison for its inhabitants by prohibiting them from travelling to other parts of the United Kingdom. The principle of self-determination meant that it was necessary to take into account the political will of the people of St. Helena. In accordance with that principle, the will of the United Kingdom as the administering Power could not be imposed on the island's inhabitants. Of course, the views of the United Kingdom as the colonial Power were important in that regard, but the views of the island's population were and continued to be no less important.

40. With regard to the question of citizenship, as was clear from the brief, since 1981 successive United Kingdom Governments had consistently pursued a policy aimed at depriving the inhabitants of St. Helena of full British citizenship. The island's inhabitants had been the victims of the United Kingdom's restrictive policy with regard to the granting of citizenship and permanent residency rights. That policy was at odds with the obligations assumed by the British Crown in the Royal Charter of 1673 and with established practice up to the early 1980s. Although the current United Kingdom Government had undertaken to restore full British citizenship to the inhabitants of St. Helena, it had been very slow in introducing the necessary bill.



41. Furthermore, the United Kingdom Government had delayed without justification a decision on the issue of whether it would be necessary for the inhabitants of St. Helena to apply for citizenship or whether citizenship would be granted to them automatically by birthright. The Citizenship Commission of St. Helena asked the Special Committee to call on the United Kingdom Government to restore full citizenship without further delay and on an automatic basis and to establish a formal consultative mechanism to ensure that the new constitutional status corresponded to the aspirations of St. Helena's population. The island's inhabitants desired a new constitutional status modelled on the United Kingdom's relationship with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The Commission would of course support the holding of a referendum on that issue. The United Kingdom's response to the proposal thus far had been the argument that the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man could not serve as an example for St. Helena because they had their own unique history in terms of the development of their constitutional relationship with the United Kingdom. However, if one were to set oneself the task of finding some Territory in the world with a history similar to St. Helena's, one would never manage to do so because each Territory had its own unique history. Today, the aspirations and needs of the population, rather than formal historical parallels, should be the paramount consideration.

42. The Commission considered that the basic components of a political status acceptable to St. Helena were: internal self-government; full British citizenship for St. Helena's population; full access, together with other United Kingdom citizens, to the economic benefits that accompanied United Kingdom citizenship; readiness on the part of the population of St. Helena to fulfil the obligations deriving from United Kingdom citizenship, in particular, in respect of taxation; and representation of St. Helena in the United Kingdom Parliament. The Commission requested the Special Committee to urge the United Kingdom Government to enter into negotiations with the representatives of St. Helena in a spirit of goodwill and on the basis of the aforementioned principles.

43. Mr. OVIA (Papua New Guinea) said that he would be interested to know whether the problems relating to citizenship of which the petitioner had spoken had been submitted to the United Kingdom Government, and why those issues were before the Special Committee.

44. Mr. MORGAN (Citizenship Commission of St. Helena) said that those proposals had been submitted to the United Kingdom Government, but no official response had been received. Nevertheless, the Commission's members were conducting informal consultations in London and had come to the conclusion that the United Kingdom did not wish to consider the entire range of options.

45. With regard to the range of options for the future political status of St. Helena, he believed that independence was not a possibility, since the island, whose population numbered fewer than 5,000, was not economically self-sufficient, and full independence would lead to a mass exodus of the population, after which the island would again become uninhabited. Full integration with the United Kingdom was also not an acceptable option because of social and demographic factors. Without local self-government and control over migration from the United Kingdom, St. Helena's society would not survive in its current form. The only viable option was therefore the holding of talks aimed

at developing a free association mechanism acceptable to both sides. He regretted that the United Kingdom Government did not wish to consider the possibility of establishing a relationship with St. Helena modelled on its relationship with the Channel Islands, and observed that the United Kingdom had yet to propose an acceptable alternative.

46. Mr. MANONGI (United Republic of Tanzania) asked the petitioner whose opinions should be taken into account in resolving the issue of the citizenship of the inhabitants of St. Helena - the opinions of the population and the United Kingdom Government or only the opinions of the population of the island itself. He also wished to know how internal self-government on St. Helena differed from the self-government exercised in the administrative entities of the United Kingdom proper.

47. Mr. MORGAN (Citizenship Commission of St. Helena) said that the issue of citizenship and the issue of the political ties between St. Helena and the United Kingdom were two separate problems. The inhabitants of St. Helena had been full citizens of the United Kingdom from the seventeenth century until 1981, when their citizenship had been suddenly and unilaterally altered, without any consultations with them. Thus, in requesting the Government of the United Kingdom to grant them full citizenship, the island's inhabitants were merely requesting the return of that which had previously been theirs by law.

48. Mr. LEWIS (Antigua and Barbuda) said that he would be interested to know whether the United Kingdom's dependent Territories had addressed a collective petition to its Government on the granting to their inhabitants of rights in respect of entry into the territory of the United Kingdom, participation in election and other aspects of citizenship. He considered that all residents of the United Kingdom's dependent Territories should have equal rights in respect of citizenship.

49. Mr. MORGAN (Citizenship Commission of St. Helena) said that, as far as he knew, the inhabitants of St. Helena had not held meetings with representatives of other dependent Territories of the United Kingdom, although such consultations would undoubtedly be useful since the immigration legislation introduced in the United Kingdom in 1981 affected all such Territories. The solutions to the problems might differ, however, taking into account the specific characteristics of individual Territories.

50. Mr. Morgan withdrew.

51. The CHAIRMAN said that consultations on draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.9 were continuing, and suggested that action on it should be deferred until the consultations had been concluded.

52. It was so decided.

QUESTION OF TOKELAU (A/AC.109/2000/5; A/AC.109/2000/L.10)

53. The CHAIRMAN informed the Special Committee that he had received a communication from the Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the effect that the Administrator of Tokelau would address the Committee on the question.

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54. Mr. WATT (Administrator of Tokelau) said that, in accordance with Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Government of New Zealand had long been committed to developing self-government in Tokelau taking into account the aspirations of its people and to assisting it in the progressive development of its own political institutions. The practical question was how to realize that idea. Three earlier United Nations visiting missions - in 1976, 1981 and 1986 - had heard the extremely cautious position of Tokelau's inhabitants on the subject of further political development. Finally, in 1994, a fourth mission to Tokelau had been informed that both a draft constitution of a self-governing Tokelau and an act of self-determination were then under active consideration.

55. It must be remembered that it was a question of three atolls separated from one another by vast expanses of ocean and inhabited by some 1,500 persons living in three villages. They had been able to sustain life on the atolls in precarious circumstances for approximately 10 centuries. The core problem for Tokelauans today stemmed from their contact with the modern world, which had rendered any reversion to the times of subsistence agriculture unviable. At the same time, the island's population wished instinctively to recover the sense of autonomy that Tokelauans had enjoyed in previous centuries, when decisions had been reached through the traditional mechanism of consensus at the level of the village, which was the foundation of their society. It was precisely within that context that self-determination - the international community's goal for Tokelau - had become a realizable objective for Tokelauans themselves. Tokelau must decide which practical and political mechanisms would be appropriate for safeguarding those interests that all three villages had in common and, in particular, for addressing those tasks that could be realized only by all three villages acting together.

56. Given those factors, the "Modern House of Tokelau" project was a prerequisite for Tokelau's self-determination. Simply transplanting alien models of governance would not achieve the desired outcome. The centre of Tokelau's political life must remain the traditional leaders, but they must be equipped to address modern tasks, as well as meeting traditional imperatives. It must be recalled that the world of Tokelauans was limited to that which lay within their everyday experience and that the only book read and understood by them was the Bible.

57. The "Modern House" project was aimed at addressing practical tasks with a view to moving forward. It focused on village-level governance and building capacity and appropriate support structures. In June 2000, the traditional and elected leaders had taken the final decision to continue to advance on the path to self-determination. For the traditional leaders, the task ahead was immensely complicated. For a community as isolated as Tokelau, contact with the modern world did not necessarily bring a desire or a readiness to make changes. But those changes would undoubtedly come, particularly in administrative practice, standards and expectations, without which Tokelau could not be sure of joining the global village. The elected leaders such as the Faipule must also take account of the inevitability of those changes in planning their future actions.

58. The "Modern House of Tokelau" project was being implemented with substantial external support, particularly from New Zealand, which had approved additional funding for that purpose for the period 2000-2001. The participation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which was implementing a governance project in Tokelau, was also very significant. In the context of the changes that lay ahead, the economic dimension would be of the utmost importance. All external assistance programmes were aimed at supporting the instinctive wish of Tokelauans to increase the Territory's economic self-sufficiency. Yet, donors as much as Tokelauans faced such fundamental questions as whether the culture and the traditional way of life of Tokelauans would be preserved in the new century; whether life on the atolls would become less viable, say within 50 years; and what levels of investment in basic infrastructure could be considered appropriate, taking into account both the pessimistic and optimistic scenarios? Such questions made it necessary to consider the various elements of the "Modern House" project in an integrated manner, with due regard for both the governance and the economic dimensions.

59. Currently, there was a strong emphasis in Tokelau on addressing real economic tasks, mainly in the area of fishery. It was precisely on this basis that the concept of a living community was being built, the community being the sole repository of a distinctive language and culture whose preservation was also vital for the 6,000 plus Tokelauans living in other countries of the world. One of the distinctive features of Tokelau, as the Special Committee had already noted, was that the administrator at one and the same time protected the interests of both Tokelau and New Zealand. That aspect of his role had been reflected in the report on the outcome of the seminar held recently in Majuro, Marshall Islands.

60. The resolution on the question of Tokelau to be adopted by the Special Committee should support the people of Tokelau on their difficult journey. The administering Power and the Territory had developed a number of consensus proposals in that regard, which were to be submitted at a later date. The complexity of the task facing the Special Committee lay in the fact that it was necessary to reflect simultaneously in the wording of the resolution both the special features of the current phase of heightened activity and the dynamics of the process, which would not simply lead to self-determination but would also ensure that there was the capacity necessary to that end.

61. In conclusion, he recalled that the importance of the process under way in Tokelau lay in the fact that it could serve as an example of successful work undertaken by the United Nations in the field of decolonization. The remnants of colonialism that had to be dealt with in 2000 were scarcely in the same qualitative league as most of the colonies of the past, and independence would probably less often be the end result of the process of decolonization. In the case of Tokelau, the most likely end result in terms of its political status would be the maintenance of the status quo; however, that status would be codified in an appropriate manner, taking into account the politically and practically innovative aspects of the situation. Probably, Tokelau would have to decide on a range of desirable features in its future relationship with its chosen external partner, for Tokelau had effectively ruled out the independence option. Then, Tokelau would seek the international community's assistance in putting the best label on that relationship.

62. Overall, Tokelau's experience demonstrated that it was possible to work through the issue of decolonization if both the administering Power and the Territory itself had the necessary political will; that, in the absence of strong support for independence, it was necessary to define possible alternatives, with seminars playing a constructive role in that connection; that it was important to resolve issues of governance and the policy on external association; and that the capacity of the Territories, the administering Powers and the United Nations system to arrive at the point at which self-determination would be politically feasible depended on the quality of the process itself.

63. Mr. OVIA (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation looked forward to seeing the amendments to the draft resolution on Tokelau that were to be proposed by New Zealand and Tokelau. Noting the important role of New Zealand's efforts to assist the people of Tokelau in their self-determination, he asked what specific time-frame had been set for the completion of the building of the "Modern House of Tokelau".

64. Mr. WATT (Administrator of Tokelau) referred to the statement of the Council of Faipule, which had been circulated informally. That statement contained a very precise description of the process taking place in Tokelau. He expressed the hope that the next report, which was to be submitted in 12 months' time, would contain very positive information concerning the date for the completion of that process. Elections for Faipule would be held in February 2002, and he was convinced that it would be possible within the next 12 months to talk with greater certainty about a time-frame for the completion of the building of the "Modern House of Tokelau".

65. The CHAIRMAN said that consultations on draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.10 were still being conducted, and suggested that action on the draft resolution should be deferred until their completion.

66. It was so decided.

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS (Aide-Mémoire 15/00)

67. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Special Committee had initiated the holding of annual discussions on the item "Special Committee's decision of 6 July 1999 concerning Puerto Rico", including hearings of organizations having an interest in the matter. The Committee had received 27 requests for such hearings. He suggested that, in accordance with the Committee's usual practice, those requests should be granted.

68. It was so decided.

69. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to aide-mémoire 15/00, in which there were a number of communications containing requests for hearings on the item in question. If there were no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to accede to those requests.

70. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.