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FOURTH COMMITTEE

12th meeting

held on

Monday, 1 November 1976

at 10.30 a.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. VRAALSEN (Norway)

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4 November 1976

ENGLISH

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 25: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES: REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (A/31/23 (Parts II, IV and V), A/31/23/Add.1, A/31/23/Add.4, A/31/23/Add.5, A/31/23/Add.6, A/31/23/Add.7 (Parts I and II), A/31/23/Add.8 (Parts I and III), A/31/23/Add.9 (Parts I to III), A/31/23/Add.10, A/31/42, A/31/48, A/31/52, A/31/55, A/31/56, A/31/59, A/31/91, A/31/106, A/31/109, A/31/112, A/31/114, A/31/121, A/31/136, A/31/138, A/31/197, A/31/269, A/31/283, A/31/286) (continued)

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(a) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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

AGENDA ITEM 88: 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/31/23 (Part V), A/31/65 and Add.1 to 5, A/31/197, A/31/238) (continued):

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1. Mr. ADAMS (New Zealand) said that his delegation wished to refer to the decolonization process in the South Pacific, where significant developments had occurred during the past year. However, he would not allude to Tokelau, the one Territory for which New Zealand had responsibility, as his delegation would report to the Committee in detail when that item was taken up.

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(Mr. Adams, New Zealand)

2. His delegation viewed with satisfaction the continuing progress made in a number of Territories in the Pacific region and had listened carefully to the recent statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on four of those Territories which were progressing towards self-determination and independence: the Gilbert Islands, Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides.

3. The Gilbert Islands were due to attain full internal self-government on 1 January 1977 and to achieve independence in 1978. Accordingly, his delegation congratulated the Governments of the Gilbert Islands and the United Kingdom.

4. Tuvalu, which had become a separate Territory in 1975, had a Council of Ministers, an elected House of Assembly and a public service made up almost entirely of Tuvaluans. The Special Committee had noted in its report (A/31/23/Add.8 (Part III)) that the Chief Minister of Tuvalu had made a statement to the effect that independence might be achieved in two or three years with the assistance of the administering Power. The New Zealand Government had welcomed the Chief Minister of Tuvalu as an official guest earlier in the year, when that Territory had participated for the first time in a meeting of the South Pacific Forum as an observer. It should be noted that the Forum, which was a regular meeting of the Heads of Government of the independent nations in the Pacific region, received a Territory as an observer only when that Territory had embarked on the process of self-determination.

5. In noting recent political developments in the Gilbert Islands and Tuvalu, his delegation was aware of the paucity of their natural resources and their limited economic base. His Government had established aid programmes in both Territories and welcomed the pledge of the administering Power to continue its programmes of development assistance, in the conviction that the United Kingdom would show the same sensitivity to the economic needs of the Gilbert Islands and Tuvalu as to their aspirations for self-determination.

6. His delegation noted with particular satisfaction the rapid political progress of the Solomon Islands, which had become internally self-governing on 2 January 1976. A Constitutional Committee had consulted the people on the form of constitution that they favoured and the recent general elections had led to the formation of a new Government. It was expected that the constitutional conference to be held at the end of 1976 would determine the exact date of independence. Consequently, it was probably the last time that the Committee would consider the situation in the Solomon Islands. His delegation congratulated the Government of the Solomon Islands and the administering Power on the progress made.

7. In the New Hebrides, the hopes that the Representative Assembly, elected in November 1975, would allow the inhabitants to play a greater part in governing themselves had been disappointed. His delegation shared the view of the inhabitants of the New Hebrides and of the administering Powers that it was important for the political advancement of the Territory that the Representative Assembly should meet as soon as possible and commence the exercise of its powers. His delegation was aware of the magnitude of the problems facing the Territory's administration, but hoped that the administering Powers, in co-operation with the United Nations, would

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(Mr. Adams, New Zealand)

continue their efforts to accelerate the political and economic development of the New Hebrides.

8. American Samoa, too, had taken a significant step forward in August 1976, by showing itself to be in favour of the election of the Governor and Lieutenant-Governor, who had previously been appointed by the administering Power. That decision revealed an advance in the political education of the inhabitants and showed their desire to participate more fully in the administration of the Territory. In the economic sphere, American Samoa faced a number of problems typical of the small Territories in the region. His delegation reiterated the view expressed the previous year that a visiting mission would be as instructive for the Special Committee as it would be helpful to the administering Power and the inhabitants of American Samoa.

9. The Fourth Committee and the Special Committee had had a long and rewarding association with the Non-Self-Governing Territories in the South Pacific and with their administering Powers. In 1976, the Special Committee had increased its direct experience and knowledge of the area by accepting New Zealand's invitation to send a visiting mission to Tokelau.

10. The New Zealand Government had consistently welcomed and encouraged United Nations involvement in the Non-Self-Governing Territories of the Pacific, not simply because it found it beneficial as an administering Power, but because New Zealand itself was a Pacific nation.

11. In conclusion, he referred to the South Pacific Festival of Arts, held in the city of Rotorua in March 1976 with the support of the New Zealand Government. He emphasized that an event of that nature showed not only the great diversity and individuality of Pacific nations and cultures but also the common bonds arising out of a shared experience and environment. The South Pacific Arts Festival, and all the other events fostering a sense of regional identity, which had been growing in recent years, helped to strengthen the process of political development by providing an opportunity for the people of Non-Self-Governing Territories in the region to make contact with independent nations. Thus, a cultural event promoted the spread of political awareness, and it was well known that the free growth and expression of a people's culture was often a function of the political freedom of the system under which they lived.

12. Mr. HOYLE (Australia) said that his delegation's interest in the welfare and advancement of small Territories had been particularly evident in 1976, when the representative of Australia had had the honour of serving as Rapporteur of the Special Committee's Sub-Committee on Small Territories.

13. His Government welcomed the independence of Seychelles and hoped that the ties of friendship which united Australia with the new Republic would grow stronger.

14. As for the Pacific region, in January 1976 the Solomon Islands had established a ministerial system of Government and had attained internal autonomy as a prelude to

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(Mr. Hoyle, Australia)

independence. After the election of Mr. Peter Kenilorea as Chief Minister of the Solomon Islands on 14 July 1976, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Malcolm Fraser, had sent a message of congratulation and had given assurances of Australia's willingness to go on contributing to the progress and development of the Solomon Islands. The Australian Prime Minister had also reiterated the intention of his Government to develop further the friendly relations which existed between the two countries.

15. During 1976, the Committee of 24 had had an opportunity to hear directly from leaders of two New Hebridean parties. The presence of the petitioners in New York had given the Committee a better understanding of recent developments in the Territory. He welcomed the fact that the administering Powers had circulated a communiqué in which they indicated their common commitment to ensuring early progress towards self-determination for the people of the New Hebrides.

16. In 1976, the Committee of 24 had dispatched a visiting mission to Tokelau in order to look into the situation of the Territory and to consult with the people. The report of the visiting mission, which provided a most useful insight into the way of life and aspirations of the Tokelauans, had been considered and endorsed by the Committee. The Tokelauans had made it known to the visiting mission that, in view of the limited economic base of the Territory, they wished to maintain a relationship with New Zealand and were somewhat apprehensive that New Zealand might wish to leave the Territory to its own fate. The confidence of the people of Tokelau in New Zealand was in itself a reason to commend the New Zealand administration. His delegation also wished to commend the members of the visiting mission, who had approached the problems of Tokelau with sensitivity and openness. Some recent visiting missions had found that the inhabitants of the Territories were concerned by the idea that the United Nations wished to impose a particular point of view on them and to force them to see their future in one particular way. The visiting missions to Tokelau and to the British Virgin Islands, as well as other missions in recent years, including the one to the Cocos Islands, had gone a long way towards reassuring the people of small Territories that the United Nations wished to listen and not to dictate.

17. As noted in the Declaration of the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries held in Colombo, the process of decolonization was coming to a successful end. When majority rule came to Zimbabwe and Namibia, the remaining colonial Territories would, for the most part, be small Territories and the work of the Committee of 24 would increasingly focus on them. As a result of visiting missions over the past few years, the Committee of 24 was beginning to appreciate the complexity of those Territories and the need for flexibility in considering their problems. The ultimate goal in the case of all dependent Territories should be to ensure the free exercise of the right of self-determination of colonial peoples; in the case of small Territories, however, self-determination must be preceded by careful study, adequate preparation and close consultation between the United Nations, the administering Powers concerned and the people of the small Territories in question. It was beginning to emerge from more detailed studies and from consultations with the people of small Territories that, in many cases, those people did not want independence and were often apprehensive about it.

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(Mr. Hoyle, Australia)

18. Many of the small Territories had unique problems and had to face major practical difficulties. Most of them were troubled by limitations imposed by small populations, reliance on a single economic resource and distance from major centres of population and economic activity. The communities of small Territories had been self-supporting for hundreds of years, but the desire for social and economic advancement had led them to seek external support.

19. It was the duty of the United Nations to ensure that the people of small Territories took decisions on their future in full awareness of their right to self-determination, the range of options open to them and the implications and benefits involved in each of those options; the options were independence, free association with another State and integration with another State. In the Pacific region, Niue and the Cook Islands, in exercise of their right to self-determination, had chosen free association with New Zealand. The United Nations specialized agencies and other international bodies should play a greater role in the development of resources so that small Territories might attain economic self-sufficiency more rapidly.

20. Even after the people of small Territories had exercised their right to self-determination, they would have an opportunity to pursue their interests in the United Nations. The Territories which had chosen independence could apply for membership in the United Nations if they so wished. All Territories could associate themselves with the various specialized agencies or regional bodies, and all Territories, including those which had chosen integration with or association with another country, could still petition the Commission on Human Rights in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1503 (XLVIII).

21. The decolonization process of small Territories was in many respects more complex than the liberation of larger Territories, and each Territory must therefore be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Committee of 24 had begun to develop flexible procedures to deal with the particular problems of small Territories and it was expected that visiting missions would play an increasingly important role in assisting the Committee in its consultations with administering Powers and the peoples of the Territories. By emphasizing flexibility and practical solutions, the United Nations would be able to show the people of small Territories that the goal of the Organization was to help them and to assure them of their right to self-determination.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.