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FOURTH COMMITTEE  
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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. VAN LIEROP (Vanuatu)

CONTENTS

REQUESTS FOR HEARING

AGENDA ITEM 117: ACTIVITIES OF FOREIGN ECONOMIC AND OTHER INTERESTS WHICH ARE IMPEDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES IN NAMIBIA AND IN ALL OTHER TERRITORIES UNDER COLONIAL DOMINATION AND EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE COLONIALISM, APARTHEID AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Hearing of a petitioner

General debate

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

REQUESTS FOR HEARING (A/C.4/44/2, A/C.4/44/3 and Add.1-6, A/C.4/44/4-8)

1. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that he had received requests for hearing concerning foreign, economic and other interests (A/C.4/44/2), New Caledonia (A/C.4/44/3), Western Sahara (A/C.4/44/4), Guam (A/C.4/44/5), Pitcairn (A/C.4/44/6) and the United States Virgin Islands (A/C.4/44/8). If he heard no objection he would take it that the Committee wished to grant the requests.
2. It was so decided.
3. The CHAIRMAN said he had also received a request for hearing concerning the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (A/C.4/44/7).
4. Mr. RUSSEL (United States of America) stressed that, under Article 83 of the Charter of the United Nations concerning strategic areas, it was the function of the Security Council and the Trusteeship Council, rather than the General Assembly, to examine the question of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The hearing of petitioners on that subject therefore would run counter to the provisions of the Charter and would only uselessly delay the work of the Committee. All those who had wished to intervene on that point had had an opportunity to do so previously during the recent session of the Trusteeship Council.
5. Mr. SMITH (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Mr. MENAT (France) and Mr. CISTERNAS (Chile) supported the United States delegation and stressed that the General Assembly and its Committees were not competent to deal with the question of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.
6. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, if he heard no other objection, the Committee should grant the request for hearing.
7. It was so decided.
8. Mr. TROLLE (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries, emphasized the fact that those countries agreed to grant the request for hearing concerning the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands did not mean that they recognized the competence of the General Assembly in respect of that Territory. Article 83 of the Charter was very clear on that point.

AGENDA ITEM 117: ACTIVITIES OF FOREIGN ECONOMIC AND OTHER INTERESTS WHICH ARE IMPEDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES IN NAMIBIA AND IN ALL OTHER TERRITORIES UNDER COLONIAL DOMINATION AND EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE COLONIALISM, APARTHEID AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (A/44/23, Part III; A/AC.109/976, 984, 987, 989, 990, 994, 996 and 997)

Hearing of a petitioner

9. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. González González took a place at the petitioners' table.

10. Mr. GONZALEZ GONZALEZ said 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 discussed the question of the activities of foreign interests that impeded the implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) in 20 colonial territories, including Martinique, Guadeloupe and Tahiti. Those 20 territories were divided into three categories: trust Territories, Non-Self-Governing Territories and all other Territories that had not yet achieved independence. The foreign activities conducted in those Territories constituted, whatever their nature and above all, an obstacle.

11. He suggested that, in order not to overlook any aspect of the question, the title of the agenda item should be amended to read: "Foreign activities which are impeding the implementation of the Declaration, etc." - first subparagraph: "economic and military questions"; - second subparagraph: "diplomatic terrorism"; - third subparagraph: "moral, religious and social questions and questions relating to education and information".

12. His own country, for example, had a Protestant sect that maintained close links with the United States and used religion to persuade populations that independence was contrary to their interests. That situation must certainly exist in other countries. Moreover, the education provided by the private and public schools, the radio, the press and television taught children and adults to obey and not question the established order. It would be wise in that respect for missions visiting colonial territories to be given more time and resources, and instead of just monitoring elections, also to immerse themselves in the way of life of the populations. That proposal could be included in the context of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism which was to start in 1990. Political persecution which prevented one person from getting a job and another from keeping one, and, by virtue of which the authorities drew up lists of subversive elements, was also a major obstacle to decolonization.

13. Diplomatic terrorism, too, was an imperialist device for preventing the countries of the third world from maintaining the fight for independence. The letter from the United States Ambassador at Dar es Salaam to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tanzania, threatening the Minister with reprisals against his country if he dared to support the cause of the one remaining Spanish-speaking colonial territory in the Caribbean, and an article in the Washington Post reporting a similar case, were excellent examples.

(Mr. González González)

14. A single, internationally recognized definition of the concept of self-determination must be found in order to prevent the imperialists from hiding behind the existing obscurity in order to evade compliance with the resolutions of the Special Committee of 24, the Fourth Committee and the General Assembly. Perhaps the United Nations Legal Counsel or the Sixth Committee could draft a definition. The Legal Counsel had already pointed out on 9 April 1986, in response to a letter from a petitioner on the subject, that no single definition existed. A single definition must now be found which would provide a sound basis.

15. Mr. González González withdrew.

General debate

16. Mr. OGUNSANWO (Nigeria) expressed his deepest sympathy to the victims of the devastation recently caused by Hurricane Hugo in the Caribbean and North America. He assured them that the Government and people of Nigeria were ready to participate in international relief efforts.

17. Nigeria, itself a victim of colonialism and belonging to a continent which had suffered most, and continued to suffer, from colonialism in its various forms, unequivocally condemned all activities of foreign economic and other interests which impeded the enjoyment of the natural right of self-determination by colonial and non-self-governing peoples. It condemned particularly the activities of foreign economic interests in those colonial territories where racism and racial discrimination had been raised to the level of official policy or encouraged by the administering Powers for financial gain. The wanton exploitation and the impoverishment of the economies of Non-Self-Governing Territories - where economic activities were concentrated in mining, farming and fishing - were distorting their economic structure and integrating their economies into those of the metropolitan Powers.

18. It had often been argued that not all foreign economic activities impeded the exercise of the right of the colonial and subject peoples to self-determination, that they were in fact vital and indispensable to the development of the colonial Territories and should therefore be encouraged. While those arguments might appear valid on the surface, they did not stand up to closer examination. Foreign economic interests were not and never could be charitable organizations since they were in the business of making huge profits by capitalizing on the existence of cheap factors of production in the colonial Territories. In most cases the colonial people were dispossessed of their land and their economy was structured so as to ensure the existence of cheap skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour.

19. General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) set forth clearly the terms of reference of the Fourth Committee and stipulated that neither the size of a colonial Territory nor the level of its economic or social development should determine or delimit the inalienable right of its people to self-determination and independence. While no one could deny that the activities of foreign economic interests could sometimes have beneficial effects, if and when properly regulated

(Mr. Ogunsanwo, Nigeria)

and channelled, what mattered was that the people of the colonial and Non-Self-Governing Territories should be allowed to seek their political destiny first. Only then could the nature and orientation of their national economies be determined. A country's economic destiny must be decided by the people themselves, not by external bodies, however well-intentioned.

20. His delegation was disturbed by media and other reports of the uses to which some of the Non-Self-Governing Territories were being put, such as drug trafficking, dubious offshore banking operations and other illicit activities which made fortunes for foreigners while the local population languished in the most abject poverty. In face of the inevitable corruption, and disrupted societies, Nigeria called upon the administering Powers to assume the responsibilities imposed upon them by the Charter and protect the natural and human resources of the Territories under their administration against all abuse.

21. It was well-known, too, that the character and integrity of some of the Non-Self-Governing Territories were fast changing. Apart from their use as havens for laundering money, gambling centres and staging grounds for drug trafficking, military bases had been established in some of the Territories and in others there was an emerging pattern of clandestine dumping of toxic and radioactive waste by the industrialized countries. The situation posed grave dangers to the colonial and dependent Territories and the international community must be vigilant in detecting, exposing and halting such activities, which had far-reaching environmental and health implications for present and future generations.

22. Namibia was a particularly glaring example of the presence of foreign economic and other interests impeding the implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). There was no need to repeat the unhappy history of Namibia's loss of freedom and the rape of its resources by foreign economic interests. The only way to end the deplorable situation was to insist that the settlement plan embodied in Security Council resolution 435 (1978) was implemented and that South Africa's efforts to thwart or otherwise distort the process of decolonization of Namibia were frustrated. It was only when Namibians took their destiny into their own hands that they could use the vast wealth of their land for their own benefit. The elections planned for November 1989 were critical to Namibia's march towards freedom and independence, and must not only be free and fair, but must be seen to be so. No effort must be spared to facilitate and guarantee Namibia's emergence as the latest sovereign member of the international community.

23. But even when Namibia had become a free and independent nation, the international community must not rest on its laurels. Apartheid remained the source of instability and crisis in southern Africa and there would be no end to the suffering of the people of the region until the pernicious disease of apartheid had been completely eliminated. Apartheid could be neither reformed nor beautified. The only way to dismantle it remained the application of universal, effective and mandatory sanctions under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Nigeria therefore urged all members of the international community to embrace that peaceful option.

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(Mr. Ogunsanwo, Nigeria)

24. Lastly, he stressed that there could be no moral or legal justification for the exploitation of a people's wealth in a manner that did not benefit the people concerned. The true economic development of the Territories entrusted to the administering Powers should go beyond the creation of captive markets, sources of cheap labour and raw materials and plush holiday resorts; development must involve the people of the dependent Territories at every stage of the project planning and execution process. Above all, the economic development and social progress of dependent peoples must be designed to promote their freedom, dignity and independence in a manner consistent with their democratically expressed wishes.

25. Mr. GRILLO (Colombia) said that, although it was true that colonialism based on bloody conquest seemed to belong to the distant past, the colonialism which gave rise to violence and racism was still a contemporary phenomenon.

26. Although Colombia attached great importance to the independence process taking place in Namibia, it did not share the enthusiasm of those who claimed that colonialism was a thing of the past. One need only look at the situation prevailing in certain Territories in Africa, Asia and America to see that, although there had indeed been great progress in the process of decolonization in the last few decades, there were still Territories which were in a political situation of total dependence and were often subjected to decisions contrary to their interests by metropolitan Powers sometimes situated thousands of kilometres away and whose ethnic and cultural characteristics those Territories did not share.

27. The activities of multinational corporations and their unbridled exploitation of the natural resources of colonial Territories was also a cause of much concern for Colombia. The pillaging of renewable and non-renewable natural resources and the degradation of the environment constituted a direct violation of the rights of peoples subjected to colonial domination and limited their possibilities for achieving independence and self-sufficiency. Colombia strongly supported the principle that such resources belonged exclusively to the populations of those Territories.

28. The United Nations had played a useful and effective role in the recent decolonization process and the Secretary-General and those who worked with him, who had been able to identify clearly the opportunities for supporting the ongoing processes while recognizing the limitations of the Organization, should be commended.

29. Colombia, a democratic and peace-loving country where persons of different ethnic origins lived together, had rejected in all international forums the abominable form of racial discrimination existing in South Africa. His delegation reaffirmed its solidarity with the African people in their struggle to put an end to the horrible system of apartheid which had been rejected by all States Members of the Organization and constituted a violation of the most fundamental human rights. Eliminating that heinous practice should be one of the priorities of the international community.

(Mr. Grillo, Colombia)

30. Colombia, faithful to its principles, would continue to serve the cause of independence and freedom not only in the General Assembly but also in the Security Council and the United Nations Council for Namibia.

31. Mr. MALAPA (Vanuatu) said that the Fourth Committee had less work to do each year and hoped that its work could be completed by the end of the century.

32. It was nevertheless still true that colonialism continued to exist in various forms, for example in Namibia, where transnational corporations were pillaging the natural resources of the Territory. The Committee had repeatedly noted that the accumulation of huge profits for the enrichment of foreign settlers and multinational corporations constituted a major obstacle to political independence in Namibia. That situation was reprehensible and must be condemned since it could only lead to the depletion of that country's natural resources and to a state of dependency in relation to outside interests; that could only be characterized as neo-colonialism.

33. The fact that all States had permanent sovereignty over their natural resources was an unquestionable principle of international law. The right to dispose of those resources was crucial for the economic well-being of most States and would be of supreme importance to a free and independent Namibia. Nevertheless, the mines of Namibia, which possessed a wealth of minerals, had long been exploited by transnational corporations operating under licences granted by South Africa, which were invalid because the International Court of Justice had ended South Africa's mandate over Namibia. Moreover, that exploitation was being conducted in defiance of Security Council resolution 435 (1978) and Decree No. 1 for the Protection of the Natural Resources of Namibia, adopted in 1974 to protect precisely those resources.

34. Vanuatu did not intend, however, to condemn all foreign investment or all activities of transnational corporations. Every sovereign State had the right, as an essential part of its sovereignty, to admit foreign nationals for the purpose of direct investment. Such investment could sometimes help the country promote its development process. The consent of the people of the country to the use of their resources was the key element. That was certainly not the case in Namibia; rather, it was a situation where an occupying Power utilized its position to despoil a country and its people of their resources and natural wealth in conjunction with multinational corporations which were all too willing to extract huge profits, leaving nothing for the people. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the progress of the Namibian people towards self-determination was unquestionable.

35. Lastly, his delegation expressed its profound hope for the freedom of the heroic Namibian people and the people of New Caledonia, and looked forward to the day when Namibia and New Caledonia could take their rightful places in the community of nations.

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36. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that he had received five communications containing requests for hearings, relating to New Caledonia, on agenda item 18. He suggested that, in accordance with the usual practice, the communications should be circulated as Committee documents for consideration at a subsequent meeting.

37. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.