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Chairman: Mr. Franz MATSCH (Austria).

**AGENDA ITEM 59**

**Question of Algeria (A/4140) (continued)**

**GENERAL DEBATE (continued)**

1. Mr. SHUKAIRY (Saudi Arabia) observed that, unlike many other critical problems with which the United Nations had dealt in the past, the question of Algeria was of particular delicacy in that it involved the susceptibilities of France, which was acutely conscious of its historic role and national dignity. Attempts to discuss the Algerian question in the United Nations were consistently met with French protests and threats to leave the United Nations. While there was sometimes a temptation to give in to those susceptibilities, it was important to bear in mind that the issue of Algeria was itself fraught with human susceptibilities and also involved the dignity of the United Nations.

2. The Saudi Arabian delegation did not propose to debate the question of Algeria in a spirit of recrimination, but would confine itself to a discussion of the terms of the statement made by the President of France, General de Gaulle, on 16 September 1959. In principle, that statement, which recognized the right of the people of Algeria to self-determination on the basis of a free choice, was to be welcomed as a victory for the cause of freedom. Should that victory materialize, the credit should go first to the government of Algeria which, from the beginning, had declared its readiness for a negotiated settlement in accordance with the principle of self-determination, and to the Algerian people, who had paid dearly in human sacrifices; it should go secondly to the United Nations, which had spared no effort in seeking a peaceful solution in accordance with the principles of the Charter; and, lastly, it should go to President de Gaulle who, as a distinguished soldier, could not but admire the Algerians' determination to achieve independence or fail to appreciate their contribution to France in the two world wars—or the fact that the struggle would inevitably end in a victory for Algeria. All those factors had contributed to the positive aspects of President de Gaulle's statement.

3. It was necessary to consider, however, how far that statement as a whole was consistent with the United Nations Charter and likely to satisfy the wishes of the international community for a just and peaceful solution to the problem.

4. In the introductory phrases, President de Gaulle stated that the problem would be solved by the free choice of the Algerians themselves. If that were to be so, then France and President de Gaulle would be deserving of the highest commendation. President de Gaulle had gone on to make the equally unexceptionable statement that three alternative solutions would be put to the vote namely, independence, integration or federation.

5. A closer examination of that statement, however, revealed that, while the French President admitted free choice as a principle, he denied the very existence of the people to whom that choice was offered and the territorial integrity of the country in respect of which it was to be exercised. He had, in fact, stated that the question would be put to the Algerians as individuals since there had never been any Algerian unity, far less sovereignty, and, in support of that contention had enumerated the succession of foreign invasions to which Algeria had been subject throughout its history.

6. However, the United Nations Charter proclaimed the right to self-determination of peoples, large and small, but not of individuals. Thus France, if sincere in its willingness to recognize the right of self-determination, would have to recognize the nationhood of Algeria as the only basis upon which to build a solution of the Algerian question.

7. As for the question of Algerian unity, the existence of an Algerian State was a fact of history which could not be seriously questioned. In any case, the notion of statehood in its present form dated back no further than the emergence of nationalism after the disintegration of the system of empires. Incidentally, of all the Members of the United Nations, no fewer than seventy had not been States at all 200 years earlier.

8. As to the invasions referred to in President de Gaulle's statement, they could hardly be considered an obstacle to Algeria's statehood as wars and invasions had occurred throughout history in all parts of the world including Europe. Curiously enough, all the invaders referred to by President de Gaulle in connexion with Algeria had at one time or another also invaded France. But that was no reason for denying France's statehood, national unity or territorial integrity. Algeria, in spite of so many invasions, still maintained its Arab character and formed an integral part of the Arab world. Only on recognition of that basic truth could a real friendship be built—not only between Algeria and France, but between all the Arab States and France.

9. On careful examination, the free choice offered to the Algerian people appeared somewhat diluted. Although three solutions were offered in theory, in effect the first—independence—was vehemently denounced and the other two advocated in glowing terms.

10. General de Gaulle had stated his personal conviction that independence would be disastrous as it would lead to appalling poverty, political chaos, wide-spread slaughter and communist dictatorship. He had also indicated that those Algerians who wished to remain French would be regrouped and resettled.

11. The assertion that independence would lead to bloodshed and chaos was so far from the truth that it could only be intended as intimidation. Independence, far from entailing chaos or slaughter, led to prosperity and progress and satisfied the highest national aspirations. Similar warnings had been uttered in connexion with all colonial problems which had come before the Committee, but the moment independence was achieved the warning voices had been stilled. If the settlers in Algeria behaved as good citizens and peaceful residents, the situation there would be as normal as it was now in Morocco and Tunisia. The charge of communist dictatorship was too insubstantial and outmoded to deserve serious consideration.

12. The argument that poverty would follow independence was equally unsound. Many Members of the United Nations were receiving various forms of assistance and France was no exception. Nor was Algeria a poor country; for six years it had endured the costs of a war without any outside financial assistance, and it was rich in natural resources. In a recent article, <sup>1/</sup>Mr. Soustelle, the French Minister in charge of Saharan affairs, had referred to the Sahara's large reserves of oil, natural gas and minerals, and, in a speech to the Senate on 21 July 1959, the same Minister had predicted that France would be self-sufficient in oil by 1963. It was thus difficult to classify Algeria as a poor country. Algeria could successfully develop its resources if it were allowed to keep them; the Algerians should be allowed to build up their national economy to the best of their judgement and interests. That would not necessarily preclude Algeria's seeking assistance and co-operation from the more technically developed nations.

13. Should France recognize the independence of Algeria, it would no doubt find Algeria's friendship of value.

14. The gravest threat to Algerian independence was, according to President de Gaulle, partition and the loss of the Sahara. At the same time, President de Gaulle had held out to the Algerians the prospect of social, economic and other benefits if they voted for integration or federation, and he had dwelt on the advantages of each of these systems. It could scarcely be said that the Algerians were being offered a free choice when an attempt was being made to influence them by threats or the promise of rewards.

15. President de Gaulle had also stated that Algeria's decision must be endorsed by the French people, which meant giving France the right to exercise a veto over the will of the Algerian people. If the French voted to deny Algeria independence, as they surely would, the cease-fire for which France was calling would have served merely to bring about Algeria's surrender and the continuation of French rule.

16. President de Gaulle's statement that the Algerian referendum would not be held until four years after

the restoration of peace also nullified the principle of self-determination. Obviously, the referendum could not be held immediately; however, the Algerians could not possibly be expected to lay down their arms and then enter upon a four-year waiting period, not knowing what might occur in France or elsewhere during that time.

17. The Algerian Provisional Government's statement of 28 September 1959 had presented in precise, simple terms its attitude towards the policy enunciated by President de Gaulle. The Provisional Government had no desire to impose itself on the Algerian people; it wished only to afford Algeria the opportunity to exercise the rights of a sovereign State. Instead of rejecting President de Gaulle's offer and demanding the immediate recognition of Algeria's right to independence, as it might with good reason have done, the Provisional Government had taken a balanced, constructive approach. It had declared its willingness to accept the principle of self-determination on the basis of Algerian national unity and territorial integrity and to enter into "pourparlers" with the French Government in order to discuss the political and military conditions of a cease-fire and the conditions and guarantees for application of the principle of self-determination.

18. Such guarantees were essential in order to allay the fears of the Algerian Provisional Government, for France's conception of self-determination did not appear to be the same as the Provisional Government's. President de Gaulle had stated on 30 April 1959 that Algeria was French, and on 3 August Mr. Debré, the French Prime Minister, had declared in Parliament that the departments of Algeria and the Sahara were as much a part of the French Republic as were the metropolitan departments. The Algerian Provisional Government was therefore anxious to learn, through political negotiations, whether President de Gaulle's statement of 16 September had represented a sudden shift from a policy of integration to one of self-determination, or whether it was merely a tactical manoeuvre.

19. Since 16 September, France's leaders had continued to undermine by their public utterances the principles of free choice and self-determination. On 28 October, in a message to the French administration and armed forces in Algeria, President de Gaulle had stressed the importance of promoting economic and social development in order to give the Algerians every possible reason to desire union with France; presumably, he hoped to achieve that objective during the four-year waiting period which he had stipulated. In the same message, President de Gaulle had spoken of France's sacred mission in Africa—a statement which appeared to be incompatible with the principle of self-determination. On 23 November, he had declared that France's aim was to remain in Algeria, although under conditions different from those which had previously existed.

20. On 13 October, Mr. Debré had asserted that a decision by Algeria to choose independence would represent the negation of law. If that was the case, the Algerian Provisional Government could scarcely trust the French administration to carry out a free referendum in which independence was one of the choices. The Provisional Government sought suitable guarantees that the Algerian people would be permitted, under conditions of complete freedom, equality

<sup>1/</sup> Jacques Soustelle, "The Wealth of the Sahara", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 37, No. 4 (July 1959), p. 626.

and impartiality, to choose one of the three solutions put forward by President de Gaulle.

21. On 26 October, in a directive to the French Delegate General of the French Government in Algeria (under whose authority the referendum would be held), Mr. Debré had stressed the necessity of ensuring that the Algerian people chose close union with France. Shortly thereafter, the Delegate General had declared that the great majority of Algerians had already made their choice and that France and its army would remain in Algeria. On 29 October, the leader of the French paratroopers in Algeria had said that the process of pacification would continue by the same methods as before and that the word "self-determination" was needed for foreign consumption. In the following month, the French Minister of the Armed Forces had asserted that, after Algeria's political future was settled, the French Army would remain to carry out its permanent mission of ensuring the common defence of France and Algeria.

22. In the light of those statements, the Algerian Provisional Government could hardly be expected to agree to negotiations looking only to a cease-fire. The Algerian people had taken up arms, not in order to maintain French rule, but in order to liberate their country. The Provisional Government was prepared to accept an honourable peace based on the freely expressed will of the Algerian people; however, as it had pointed out in its statement of 28 September, that will could not be freely expressed under the pressure of an occupation army of more than half a million men or in conditions where more than two million Algerians were imprisoned or in exile. It was essential that the two parties concerned should come to an agreement, both in principle and in detail, on the guarantees necessary to ensure the holding of a free referendum.

23. The Algerian Provisional Government was seeking direct negotiations with France on the political and military conditions of a cease-fire. It was not seeking recognition by France, nor was it proposing to discuss the political future of Algeria. Its purpose was to reach agreement with France regarding the establishment of conditions under which the Algerian people would be enabled to express its will freely and democratically. France, on the other hand, through its Prime Minister, was insisting that political negotiations between the French Government and the rebel organization would be wholly incompatible with the freedom of choice given the Algerians and that only the practical problems of a cease-fire were open to negotiation. Mr. Debré was making a cease-fire an end in itself instead of recognizing it as an essential pre-condition for negotiated settlement. He failed to appreciate the fact that the real issue was not the fate of the rebel fighters and their arms, but the necessity of instituting measures which would safeguard the exercise by the Algerians of their freedom of choice. If the Algerian Provisional Government were to accept the French argument of incompatibility and base its action solely on the political, moral and juridical considerations relating to the Algerian question, as the French Prime Minister had requested, it would be forced to prosecute the war until the end and to refuse negotiations until the French had been ejected.

24. The Algerian Provisional Government's insistence on guarantees for free expression in the refer-

endum on self-determination was justified by past experience and by prevailing conditions in Algeria. No one with a sense of justice could conceive that any choice, except for integration with France, could be exercised under the present French administration. The three elections which had been held in Algeria since President de Gaulle came to power had been fraudulent; their outcome had been assured in advance by the French authorities. With regard to the September 1958 referendum on the new French Constitution, for example, Mr. Pierre Mendès-France, a former French Prime Minister, and Mr. Gaston Defferre, a former Minister for Overseas France, had stated that the elections would have no real value, that there would be no real choice. Mr. Mendès-France had questioned the possibility of genuinely free elections in a "pre-conditioned Algeria". Those views had been shared by certain United States newspapers. Indeed, the fraudulent nature of elections in Algeria had become proverbial. In the circumstances, it was not intransigence on the part of the Algerian Provisional Government which motivated the demand for electoral safeguards.

25. France had had no legitimate reason for rejecting the five-member delegation appointed by the Provisional Government to initiate talks with the French Government. The delegation consisted of the First Deputy Prime Minister and four Ministers of the Algerian Provisional Government. The circumstance that they were being detained in France as political prisoners should present no difficulty; there were many historical precedents for entering into negotiations with the imprisoned leaders of liberation movements. France itself had in recent years invited both the present King of Morocco and the present President of Tunisia to negotiate while they were still being held as French prisoners. The emphasis on that aspect of the Algerian nationalist delegation merely recalled the act of what could only be called "international piracy" committed by the French authorities in intercepting an aircraft carrying the five leaders on a mission of peace in behalf of Algeria, and abducting them. The Algerian Provisional Government's decision to appoint them as its delegates was not a joke in bad taste; the Provisional Government was bent on a serious mission, namely, to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Algerian question under just and honourable conditions; it did not permit itself the luxury of a frivolous gesture.

26. At the present juncture, the role of the United Nations should be not to condemn or offend France, but to reaffirm the principles which would ensure the free exercise of self-determination by the Algerian people. The United Nations should stand firm against any attempt to divide the people of Algeria or to partition their country. It should unreservedly support their inherent right to self-determination. It should urge the two parties to enter into "pourparlers" as rapidly as possible with a view to reaching agreement on the political and military terms of a cease-fire. Lastly, it should urge them to agree on the guarantees which would ensure the free and democratic expression of the will of the Algerian people.

27. The Algerian Provisional Government had been grateful for past United Nations efforts to exert moral pressure on France to settle the question of Algeria in accordance with the principles of the Charter. It had never hesitated to accept the United

Nations position in the matter. It was now the turn of France to respond to the United Nations and to remove the last obstacles to negotiations. France had two possibilities: either to reach agreement with the Algerian Provisional Government regarding the guarantees for freedom of choice in the future referendum, or to agree that the necessary procedures should be worked out and implemented under the auspices of the United Nations. A choice exercised under United Nations arrangements would inevitably be free, honest and democratic.

28. He appealed to President de Gaulle as the hero of French national liberation to recognize the independence of Algeria and, subsequently, to sponsor Algerian membership in the United Nations. He reaffirmed the Algerian people's determination to realize its national aspirations by continuing the war, if necessary; it was prepared, however, to end hostilities forthwith if its aspirations could be attained by negotiation. He expressed the hope that the success of negotiations would be manifested at the fifteenth session of the Assembly by the presence of a delegation representing the Republic of Algeria.

29. Mr. VAKIL (Iran) said that as a nation bound by ties of friendship and culture with both France and Algeria, and as a Member of the United Nations, Iran considered it a duty to persuade the two parties to abandon the warfare in Algeria and settle their dispute in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The United Nations had an undeniable right to deal with the question; its previous resolutions had evoked a favourable response. It was therefore all the more regrettable that France was not participating in the present debate; its contribution would have been especially valuable and might have clarified a number of ambiguities and thus accelerated progress towards a solution.

30. While the warfare in Algeria had not abated, agreement appeared to have been reached on the substance of the problem following President de Gaulle's recognition of the principle of self-determination for the Algerian people and his assurances that the Algerians would have a free choice, that they would all be permitted to participate in the future referendum free of pressure, and that there would be full opportunity to discuss election procedures.

31. There appeared to be agreement on the urgency of the need to negotiate a cease-fire; the only difficulties which remained were the establishment of procedures and of a time-table for the exercise of self-determination. Only after a cease-fire had been made effective could these questions be discussed. Nevertheless, the Algerian leaders were demanding preliminary clarifications and assurances that the Algerian people would be consulted in conditions of full impartiality and objectivity. Their demands were motivated by the distrust generated by five years of war; if the French delegation had been present, it might have clarified those questions of procedure and dispelled the apprehensions of the Algerian leaders. Mutual confidence had to be restored if the negotiations between the two parties were to be fruitful.

32. He hoped that the Committee would conduct its debate in an atmosphere of moderation and calm and that it would concentrate on the remaining obstacles to the initiation of talks between the parties. As matters stood at present, traditional diplomacy might well prove effective: the United Nations should endeavour to bring the parties closer together and help them to lay the basis for co-operation in achieving their aspirations, in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.