

United Nations
**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

FIFTEENTH SESSION

Official Records



**FIRST COMMITTEE, 1116th
MEETING**

Friday, 25 November 1960,
at 10.30 a.m.

NEW YORK

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Agenda item 79:</i>	
<i>The problem of Mauritania (continued)</i>	
<i>General debate (continued)</i>	169

Chairman: Sir Claude COREA (Ceylon).

AGENDA ITEM 79

The problem of Mauritania (A/4445 and Add.1) (continued)

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. EL HAKIM (United Arab Republic) observed that the problem of Mauritania was one of the consequences of the partitioning of Africa by colonial Powers which had begun at the end of the nineteenth century. Mauritania, which, as the Moroccan representative had shown at the 1109th meeting, had never been a national entity separate from Morocco, had been conquered by France and proclaimed a French colony in 1920. Similar methods had been used in the Middle East; at the end of the First World War the territories which had been detached from the Turkish Empire had been partitioned in the same way.

2. The representative of Morocco had clearly demonstrated the ties that had existed between Morocco and Mauritania before the French occupation, ties of the same nature as those generally in existence at the beginning of the century between central authorities and local administrations in that part of the world, and reflecting political and administrative conditions in the area. It was significant that the French delegation had not denied those facts, but had merely tried to minimize the ties which had existed between Mauritania and Morocco. It would, indeed, have been in no position to deny the historical fact, vouched for by no less an authority than Marshall Lyautey, that the Sultan of Morocco had always exercised undisputed authority over that part of the continent.

3. From the moment of its occupation of Morocco, France, despite its pledges under the General Act of the International Conference of Algeciras, signed on 7 April 1906, and the Convention between France and Germany signed at Berlin on 4 November 1911, had consistently pursued a policy designed to weaken the country and to facilitate partition, and had gone on to detach the Mauritanian portion of Morocco's territory. The French representative had been unable to give any valid reason for his Government's attitude in respect of the agreements referred to and of the other evidence which had been cited. There was no doubt that the Moroccan position, which was based on international agreements and on the fact of its former sovereignty over the territory, was well founded. Since Morocco's accession to independence in 1956,

it had frequently made clear its views on the Mauritanian question. It had persisted in demanding respect for its rights over the territory, and had made its reservations known to the French Government, the United Nations and the specialized agencies.

4. In the course of the negotiations preceding Morocco's independence, Morocco had agreed with the French Government on the appointment of a mixed commission to study the still unresolved frontiers problem. That commission, however, had never met, because France had rejected the Moroccan claims in advance and had stated on 20 January 1960 that territories under the sovereignty of France and the States members of the French Community must be excluded from the discussions.

5. In the circumstances, the Moroccan Government had had no other course than to bring the matter to the United Nations, in accordance with the Charter, which called for the settlement of disputes between Member States by peaceful means, i.e. by means of negotiations.

6. One of the most important questions that had been raised in the discussion, in particular by the French delegation, was that of the will of the Mauritanian people. According to the French representative, the peoples of the former French overseas territories had been able to choose between the *status quo* and immediate independence with the right of becoming autonomous members of the French Community. If the Mauritanian people, he had said, had really wished to join Morocco they could easily have voted against membership in the Community and then decided for integration with Morocco; however, they had opted for membership of the Community. But the truth of the matter was that the Mauritanian people had not been asked whether or not they wished to become part of Morocco. If the French authorities had really wished to consult them on that subject, the question should surely have been one of those included in the referendum. If any Mauritanian had actually asked for integration with Morocco, his vote would have undoubtedly been considered void, since the question had not been asked. If France's real desire at the time had been to bow to the freely expressed will of the people, it should have negotiated with Morocco through the mixed commission; a plebiscite could then have been held under United Nations supervision to ensure free elections. Such a solution would have been quite feasible; but unfortunately France had chosen to ignore the Moroccan Government, and after taking unilateral decisions had organized a referendum which was now disputed and had only made a solution of the problem more difficult.

7. For all those reasons, the United Arab Republic was obliged to support Morocco's case. It confidently hoped that Morocco and Mauritania would eventually be reunited, in the interests of both peoples.

8. In conclusion, he expressed surprise at some of the remarks made in his statement at the 1114th meeting by the representative of Upper Volta. The position of the United Arab Republic on colonial questions and national freedom was well known; he could only hope that those remarks made by a fellow African had stemmed from misinformation.

9. Mr. DADET (Congo (Brazzaville)) said that his people had had great admiration for King Mohammed V of Morocco ever since 1953, when France had sent him into exile in order to prevent the Moroccan people from exercising its right of self-determination. It was astonishing that Morocco, in seeking to annex Mauritania, had now joined the ranks of the expansionists and imperialists. He cited three letters he had received from young Congolese to show that the Congolese people, while it did not favour the balkanization of Africa, strongly disapproved of Morocco's claim to Mauritania. His delegation found the arguments advanced by Morocco unconvincing, and felt that it was possible to create large territorial groupings without employing the methods proposed by Morocco. Countries which considered their present boundaries too narrow could not be permitted to seize territory belonging to their neighbours. He recalled that at one time much of the territory of the two present-day Republics of the Congo had comprised a single huge kingdom, whose capital had been in what was now the Republic which he represented; surely, however, that did not entitle his Government to claim the entire territory of the ancient kingdom of Anzika. He appealed to Morocco to join on 28 November 1960 in celebrating the independence of Mauritania. By doing so, it would promote the cause of world peace.

10. Mr. IGNACIO-PINTO (Dahomey) said that while his delegation could not agree with those delegations which had seen expansionist designs in the Moroccan claim that Mauritania had been an integral part of the Sherifian Empire and should be restored to Morocco, it felt that the Moroccan Government had perhaps allowed itself to be carried away by the arguments of those who, for reasons which might perhaps be valid from the domestic point of view but were certainly inappropriate at the international level, were pressing that claim.

11. France, for its part, maintained that Mauritania had never been an integral part of Moroccan territory and had in any case not been under Moroccan sovereignty when France had colonized it at the beginning of the century, and that, since seven of France's eight former West African colonies had already achieved independence, it was only fair that Mauritania, the eighth of those colonies, should also be granted independence.

12. The issue was really quite simple: whether the United Nations should or should not promote the accession of a formerly colonized country to independence. To anyone not blinded by partisan feeling the answer must obviously be in the affirmative. For his delegation, therefore, there was no problem. Despite his country's deep friendship for Morocco, it could not close its eyes to the truth and defend an indefensible cause. It must, in all sincerity, declare its conviction that the independence France was to grant to Mauritania was in conformity with the spirit and the letter of the United Nations Charter. In the light of the desire for freedom and independence that was spreading like wildfire throughout the whole of

Africa, Morocco's claim seemed not only out of date but extraordinary. It was paradoxical, too, that it should be put forward at the very moment when the General Assembly, under item 87 of its agenda, was about to consider a draft declaration on the immediate and unconditional granting of independence to all dependent territories. The Committee would no doubt remember the enthusiasm with which that idea had been greeted when it had first been put forward by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Mr. Khrushchev, in the General Assembly (869th plenary meeting). In granting independence to Mauritania, therefore, France could not be accused of trickery, as Morocco claimed; on the contrary, it was to be commended for thus wishing to complete its work of liberating its former West African colonies.

13. One point that puzzled him in the matter was the claim that the dispute was not one between Moroccans and Mauritians but one between Morocco and France, due to France's refusal to consider any adjustment of Morocco's southern frontiers to extend Moroccan territory as far as the Senegal River. It did not seem reasonable to imagine that all the Mauritians, with the exception of the very small minority which had seen fit to seek asylum in Morocco, were puppets of the French colonialists. His delegation refused to entertain any such insulting opinion of its West African compatriots.

14. Indeed, it did not find any of the arguments advanced by Morocco convincing. The Moroccan claim that France was signing military agreements with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania did not impress it, for such agreements were not unusual, as witness those recently signed between the United Kingdom and Nigeria for the use by the United Kingdom of all of Nigeria's airports. It would be inadmissible interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign State to criticize Nigeria for coming to such an agreement with the former colonial Power.

15. It was hard to believe that the Mauritanian statesmen at present in power would agree to any collaboration with Morocco, after the disparaging attitude Morocco had adopted towards them.

16. For all those reasons, his delegation could not support Morocco in denouncing France for granting Mauritania independence. It was too attached to the ideal of freedom to wish to delay by one moment Mauritania's accession to national sovereignty, especially as Mauritania had followed the same path as Dahomey, suffered the same evils of colonization and engaged in the same struggle for liberty. It was strange that voices should now be raised to prevent the liberation of a colony until such time as negotiations between France and Morocco had enabled Morocco to "recover" its Mauritanian province. It would be interesting to hear what principles of the United Nations Charter could be invoked in support of Morocco's case; he would like to offer the Moroccan delegation a piece of friendly advice and suggest that it should simply withdraw its claim. It was worth pointing out that had the federal executive Dahomey had wished for been established in French West Africa when the "loi cadre" had been adopted in 1956, Mauritania would now have been in the French West African federation, to which it had belonged for almost sixty years.

17. At the present day, when the knell of colonialism had been sounded, Morocco should join the other former colonial territories in rejoicing over that event, rather than try to deprive Mauritania of its place among the free nations.

18. His delegation felt that the United Nations could not entertain Morocco's claim without undermining the very principles of the Charter. On the other hand, it would gain in prestige if it used the occasion to demonstrate that it remained faithful to its ideal of enabling all colonized peoples freely to determine their own future and their form of government.

19. In conclusion, he wished to warn the Moroccan delegation that the claim it was advancing was fraught with serious consequences, not the least of which was the danger of dismembering the present Mauritania, where three races lived together in peace and harmony. He was confident that the United Nations would see to it that Mauritania attained independence and national sovereignty; that country could then, as an independent State, decide in its own time whether or not it wished to be integrated or federated with Morocco.

20. Mr. JOVANOVIĆ (Yugoslavia) said that his delegation was doing its utmost to further the movement of national liberation which was developing throughout the entire world, and felt that one of the main tasks of the United Nations was to hasten the liquidation of the last vestiges of colonialism and to strengthen the independence of the newly emancipated States. That task was not always simple, owing to the policy pursued by the colonialist Powers of safeguarding their economic, political, military and other interests, and to that end limiting the exercise by peoples of the right to self-determination.

21. The origin of the Mauritanian problem was clearly to be found in colonialism; it was the result of intervention in the destinies of the African peoples by colonial Powers which had disregarded the traditional ties and interests of the peoples and had created artificial frontiers that divided groups formerly united by historical bonds.

22. The discussion of the problem of Mauritania and the arguments advanced by the Moroccan and other delegations had shown that the question of Mauritania's future must be viewed in a different context from that of the other former French colonies of the part of Africa concerned.

23. In studying the material presented to the Committee, his delegation had been particularly struck by the following aspects of the problem: firstly, the deep ties between Morocco and the people of Mauritania, which had lasted for many centuries and had been interrupted only by the French occupation of Mauritania; secondly, the existence of an agreement concluded between France and Morocco, after Morocco's attainment of independence, to set up a mixed commission to examine the question of Morocco's southern frontiers; thirdly, the fact that, France having subsequently withheld its agreement, that commission had never been set up and the question had not been settled; and fourthly, the fact that Morocco had never accepted that attitude on the part of France and had repeatedly raised the question of its southern frontiers in its bilateral dealings with France.

24. In drawing attention to those aspects of the problem, the Yugoslav delegation took as its point of departure the right of the people of Mauritania to self-determination, with all the variants that might be inherent in the democratic exercise of that right in normal, free conditions. It must be recognized that a difference of opinion existed; but a peaceful solution must be sought to the problem.

25. His delegation accordingly considered that the General Assembly could and should appeal to the parties concerned to enter into negotiations with a view to arriving at a peaceful and just solution of the problem, in accordance with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations. It was a matter for regret that the necessary efforts had not been made in that direction in the last few years, in compliance with the provisions of the agreement between France and Morocco to which he had referred.

26. Mr. JHA (India), after reviewing the arguments on both sides, said that much historical research would be needed to establish their validity, but that it was doubtful whether the Committee itself could undertake such a task. India's own opinion was that the problem of Mauritania illustrated the entire pattern of colonial expansion during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a general rule, the colonial Powers had selected areas in which the indigenous empires or principalities were in the process of decay and their military power and authority on the decline. They had first established trading posts, giving assurances of obedience and goodwill to the local authorities. After gradually expanding the areas of their influence, they had later, with the help of their military might, succeeded in subjugating those local authorities, whom they had often cajoled into signing agreements. With each successive instrument the local chiefs had surrendered increasing authority to the colonial Power; and in many cases they had set themselves up against the suzerain Power and connived with the colonial Powers to subvert its authority. At a convenient moment, the puppet rulers had themselves been cast aside and the territories annexed to the colonial empire, for the suzerain indigenous Powers had become so helpless that they had fallen an easy prey to the colonial Power. That had happened in India and in other parts of Asia and Africa.

27. On the west coast of Africa the declining empire of the Kingdom of Morocco had been subjected by the rising power of Spain and France to pressures and techniques of that kind. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, France had begun the conquest of Mauritania from the south. It had gradually extended its sway northwards, setting up so-called independent principalities with which it had entered into treaties and agreements, so that eventually their links with the Moroccan Kingdom had been severed. At the same time, the French had advanced into Morocco from the north, and in 1912 had established a protectorate there. It should be mentioned that any criticism attaching to that process applied not specifically to the French people, which had a long tradition of liberalism and humanism, but to colonialism as a system.

28. In determining the validity of territorial claims, no reliance could be placed on treaties concluded between expanding colonial Powers such as France and Spain and declining indigenous kingdoms like

Morocco. For, although clothed in legal form, such treaties had usually been unequal arrangements embodying territorial claims which the indigenous Powers had been too weak to resist. Nor could the French assertion that the 1958 referendum in Mauritania was a rejection of union with Morocco be sustained. The referendum had been conclusive only with respect to the questions asked, and there was no justification for drawing any other conclusions from it. Since the question whether Mauritania wanted union with Morocco had not been asked, it could not be said to have been decided by the referendum.

29. The situation seemed to be fairly summed up in a survey published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs of London, a body with a reputation for impartial study.^{1/} It was stated in that book that

^{1/} See Royal Institute of International Affairs, *A Survey of North West Africa (The Maghrib)*, edited by Nevill Barbour (London, Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 63.

the existing southern frontier of Morocco was in fact the limit of more or less effective Moroccan administration at the time of Morocco's greatest weakness, and that it was primarily a line agreed by the French and Spanish protectors for the purpose of settling their own disagreements over the division of Moroccan territory; it had never been acknowledged by an independent Moroccan Government.

30. Although, historically speaking, the divisions imposed by colonial Powers gave Morocco cause for grievance, it would be unrealistic to ignore the trend of developments over recent years. For, whatever their origins, situations tended to become crystallized with the passing of time. In the circumstances, it was hard to suggest a solution or any useful course of United Nations action. In the view of the Indian delegation, the matter was one which should be solved amicably and peacefully by the peoples concerned without any outside influences or pressures.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.