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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 2nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 6 April 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

2. **The Chair** reminded the Committee that the delegations of Algeria, Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Gabon, Germany, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and the African Union had indicated their wish to participate in the work of the Committee as observers. In addition, the delegations of Guatemala, Guinea, Mexico and Namibia had requested to participate as observers.

3. **Mr. Sevilla Borja** (Ecuador) said that, in recent years, very little progress had been made towards decolonization but there appeared to have been a revival of interest in the subject within the United Nations in 2017. First, more than one country had expressed interest in chairing the Committee and an election had been held. The Chair had been re-elected with a large majority, which reflected the important role played by Venezuela in the Committee, given that the country had been a member since its establishment. Second, an additional 17 Member States had asked to participate in the work of the Committee as members, and several others as observers. Third, the Secretary-General had attended the opening meeting and had spoken passionately about his personal experience of decolonization. His statement was of considerable importance and should be circulated as an official document.

4. The year ahead presented considerable challenges. Emblematic cases such as Puerto Rico and the Malvinas Islands, which were part of the Latin American region, and Gibraltar and Western Sahara were priorities, and his delegation hoped that significant progress would be made in 2017 so that the peoples concerned could exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. With regard to the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, he wished to remind the Committee of the importance of visiting missions, which had yielded positive results in the past even when carried out against the wishes of the administering Power.

5. However, decolonization was not only a matter for the Territories on the list; many other peoples in his region and elsewhere were unable to exercise their right to self-determination. The provisions of General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV) should be fulfilled and the Committee should instruct an expert or group of experts to prepare a preliminary

report on non-self-governing territories that were not on the list.

6. **The Chair** said that the renewed interest in decolonization within the United Nations would be positive for the work of the Committee, in particular with a view to achieving the objectives of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism by 2020.

7. **Mr. Djani** (Indonesia) said that eradicating colonialism required constructive engagement, sustained effort and political will. The Committee should continue to analyse thoroughly the situation in each Non-Self-Governing Territory in order to decide on the best way to proceed, since there was no one-size-fits-all solution.

8. Another key aspect of the decolonization process was ongoing dialogue between the administering Powers and the Non-Self-Governing Territories and with other relevant parties. His delegation encouraged the parties to make use of all United Nations forums and bilateral measures to find common ground and move forward. Along the same lines, his delegation supported the plan to send visiting missions to Non-Self-Governing Territories; however, decisions regarding such missions should be taken following dialogue with all relevant parties.

9. His delegation welcomed the increased interest from other Member States in the Committee's work and stood ready to welcome all 17 States that had expressed interest in joining the Committee as new members. Their interest, together with the presence of so many ambassadors at the present meeting, was an indication of the relevance of the Committee's work in the current global climate and also of the success of the previous year's chairmanship. Lastly, his delegation was grateful to the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for offering to host the regional seminar in 2017.

10. **Ms. Rodríguez Camejo** (Cuba) said that, in one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations, more than 80 countries had left behind their colonial past and become Member States. Nevertheless, decolonization remained a pending issue; a total of 17 Territories, which were rather euphemistically referred to as Non-Self-Governing, were effectively still colonies, as well as others that were not on the list. Considerable work lay ahead and the delegation of Cuba pledged its support for the Committee's work.

11. **The Chair** said that Cuban nationals had fought for the self-determination and independence of African countries and other countries around the world.

12. **Mr. Arancibia Fernández** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that the fact that 17 States wished to become members of the Committee was indisputable proof of growing confidence in the Committee's important and transparent work in line with the principles of the Charter. With regard to procedural matters, the Committee's practices when accepting new members should be closely examined in order to ensure harmony. His delegation commended the Committee on its recent accomplishments, including its work on Puerto Rico and in securing the release of the political prisoner Oscar López Rivera.

13. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that Venezuela had played a historic role in the fight for the independence and self-governance of many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Chair's re-election in 2017 was evidence of his excellent work in fulfilling the mandate entrusted by the General Assembly, and it was hoped that the Committee would see a fruitful outcome to its work in 2017. To that end, the Committee should step up its efforts and contact with colonial powers with a view to eradicating colonialism. As peace was a priority for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Committee must work to resolve the situation in the 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, most of which were in the Latin American and Caribbean region, as well as in others that were not on the list.

14. **Mr. Rai** (Papua New Guinea) said that the Committee must work to achieve self-governance for as many of the 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories as possible in the years to come. Many of those countries faced grave difficulties, especially three of the Territories in the Pacific region. His delegation would continue to work with the administering Powers of those three Territories to achieve decolonization as soon as possible.

15. As General Assembly resolution 1654 (XVI) did not prescribe any conditions for membership of the Committee, it was the sovereign right of countries to apply for membership. As a member of the Committee for over 40 years, Papua New Guinea welcomed the increasing number of States members, which was a result of the decolonization process. His delegation also looked forward to the biennial Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

16. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation attached great importance to the work of the Committee and would continue to support its efforts at decolonization.

17. **Mr. Callis Giragossian** (Chile) said that the Committee had sent a positive signal to the rest of the United Nations by electing its Chair democratically. Many countries in the North tended to forget that the process of decolonization was, for countries in the Southern hemisphere, one of the most important events of the twentieth century, putting an end to one of the harshest forms of oppression that had ever existed and contributing to the eradication of slavery. The Committee's work had been fundamental throughout the previous century and his delegation reaffirmed its commitment to the process of decolonization for the twenty-first century. The fact that 17 countries wished to become members of the Committee was proof of the international community's commitment to decolonization efforts.

18. **Ms. Pires** (Timor-Leste) said that her delegation welcomed the renewed interest in the Committee's work and hoped that joint efforts would result in progress on the 17 listed Territories in 2017. Her delegation also looked forward to participating in the Caribbean regional seminar.

19. **Mr. Khamis** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation would continue to support the Committee in all its endeavours.

Organization of the 2017 Caribbean regional seminar (A/AC.109/2017/19)

20. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with the Committee's programme of work and timetable as approved during its meeting of 22 February 2017, he invited the Committee to consider preparations for the Caribbean regional seminar, starting with the dates and venue.

21. The Governments of Antigua and Barbuda and of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had originally offered to host the seminar but had subsequently withdrawn their offers. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had then expressed interest in hosting the seminar and communications had been circulated to all Committee members to that end. Bureau members had unanimously expressed their firm support for that offer and had recommended that the Committee should accept it.

22. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had already hosted the regional seminar twice, in 2005 and 2011, thus demonstrating the importance that it attached to the work of the Committee. As a product of the decolonization process, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was an excellent choice to host the seminar. The theme of the seminar would be the future of decolonization in the Non-Self-Governing

Territories and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Non-Self-Governing Territories, including its economic implications and the role that the United Nations should play. He took it that the Committee agreed to accept the offer to hold the seminar in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in 2017.

23. *It was so decided.*

24. The Bureau had first considered its usual practice of holding the regional seminar around the third week of May, thus coinciding with the annual Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories that started on 25 May. However, as Ramadan would also be observed that week, the Bureau recommended that the Committee should consider holding the seminar from 16 to 18 May 2017. He took it that the Committee agreed to hold the regional seminar on the proposed dates.

25. *It was so decided.*

26. **Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the regional seminar would be an opportunity for in-depth discussions on the state of play in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, in particular small island Territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific regions.

27. Small islands represented the largest group being reviewed by the Committee, and there was no other mechanism within the United Nations system to address their decolonization challenges. As her country had been the beneficiary of the concerted attention of the United Nations during its process of self-determination leading to political independence several decades prior, it was particularly committed to achieving the self-governance and decolonization of its neighbouring Non-Self-Governing Territories, which were moreover associate members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States. CARICOM in particular had recognized decolonization as a priority. Her delegation looked forward to welcoming all members of the Committee for the regional seminar.

28. **The Chair** thanked the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for its offer to host the seminar, which was sure to have significant results.

29. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that the offer of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to host the regional seminar for the third time demonstrated both its own commitment and that of the Latin American and Caribbean region to eradicating colonialism. The seminar would present an opportunity for the Committee to see the new infrastructure that had been built thanks to regional

solidarity. The construction of such infrastructure was very important to small island States.

30. **Ms. Joseph** (Saint Lucia), pledging her country's full support in the run-up to the regional seminar, said that the event would make an important contribution to regional integration, in which the Caribbean Non-Self-Governing Territories were playing a key role. The seminar's agenda should devote proper attention to progress towards implementing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in the remaining small island Territories. In addition, the General Assembly had highlighted the key role of regional institutions and United Nations agencies in the decolonization process, and their active participation in the seminar should be encouraged.

31. The aim of the annual regional seminar was to highlight the political, economic and social challenges faced by small island Territories and that had become especially important following the abolition of the Subcommittee on Small Territories and the consolidation of decolonization resolutions. Her delegation was pleased that the Committee had resumed its practice of adopting Territory-specific resolutions and looked forward to refocusing attention on the situation on the ground in the island Territories. It would welcome a pre-seminar expert briefing on the substantive issues affecting decolonization in the small island Territories of the Caribbean and the Pacific.

32. **The Chair** said that the suggestion of a briefing was a very valuable one and could be considered within the framework of the seminar.

33. **Mr. Duberry** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that his delegation was grateful to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for its offer to host the seminar in representation of small island States and his country stood ready to provide any assistance required.

34. **Mr. Méndez Graterol** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, in offering to host the seminar, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had reaffirmed its commitment to implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The efforts of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in organizing and holding the seminar would be an important contribution to the Committee's work towards decolonization in the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Guidelines, rules of procedure, theme and agenda of the seminar

35. **The Chair** drew attention to the guidelines, rules of procedure, proposed theme and provisional agenda

for the seminar, as contained in document [A/AC.109/2017/19](#). Apart from the new theme and agenda, the text was essentially the same as in previous years. The working languages would be English, French and Spanish, since he intended to preside over deliberations in Spanish.

36. Reviewing the proposed agenda, set out under point IV of that document, he said that the Bureau was concerned at the lack of recent progress in the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories and wished to examine how the process could be revived, how the Committee could work more effectively and how concrete results could be achieved. The United Nations agencies had been absent from the previous seminar, and should participate more actively. The potential reduction in funding for United Nations agencies would have an impact on the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

37. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the proposed theme was a good one but he was disappointed that the title and topics did not seem to have been circulated to Member States in advance. In addition, the two documents under consideration ([A/AC.109/2017/19](#) and [A/AC.109/2017/L.2](#)) had not appeared in the Journal until the morning of the meeting.

38. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba) said that it was very appropriate that implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be at the heart of the proposed agenda. No one, including peoples living under colonial occupation, should be left behind, and the Committee should help them achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Committee should also continue to insist on the participation of the agencies, funds and programmes in the seminars; they played a key role in the Territories and it was frustrating when the United Nations system was not represented.

39. **The Chair** said that the agenda for the seminar had been discussed by the Bureau and submitted to the Committee. If Member States wished to raise any concerns or propose an alternative title for the seminar, they should do so during the current meeting. Regarding the agencies, funds and programmes, their absence left much to be desired at such a critical moment and the Committee should continue to insist on bilateral talks.

40. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation was aware that alternative titles and topics for the seminar could be put forward at the present meeting, but perhaps Member States could be asked in advance to make proposals for the Bureau's

consideration, so that documents did not have to be revised subsequently.

41. **Mr. Sevilla Borja** (Ecuador) said that his delegation would like to discuss at the seminar and at the Committee's meetings in June 2017 the "Question of the list of Territories to which the Declaration is applicable", which was last on the list of pending matters for consideration by the Committee during 2017 contained in the annex to document [A/AC.109/2017/L.2](#).

42. **Mr. Habib** (Indonesia) said that the aim was to give the Committee an opportunity to discuss the relevance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals to its work. He welcomed the suggestion made by the representative of Iran and said that the Bureau should receive input from all Committee members. The "Question of the list of Territories to which the Declaration is applicable" had not been discussed at the Bureau's meeting and a more specific proposal would be needed in order to include it on the agenda for the regional seminar. His delegation understood that expanding the number of Territories on the list was very different to reducing it.

43. **The Chair** said that the Bureau would discuss the matter of the "Question of the list of Territories to which the Declaration is applicable" and, in consultation with Ecuador, it would formulate a proposal on how and when to address it. To that end, he invited Ecuador to participate in a special meeting of the Bureau.

44. He took it that the Committee wished to approve the guidelines, rules of procedure, theme and agenda of the seminar.

45. *It was so decided.*

Composition of the official delegation

46. **The Chair** recalled that the Committee's official delegation to the seminar would comprise the Chair, his adviser, members of the Bureau and the representatives of the four regional groups in the Committee, for a total of 10 Committee members. The four regional groups were the Group of African States, the Group of Asia-Pacific States, the Group of Eastern European States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. The nomination of the regional Group representatives would be coordinated by the Bureau members from the respective Groups. The United Nations would bear the travel costs and daily subsistence allowances of the delegation.

Extension of invitations to experts and organizations

47. **The Chair** said that the Bureau had decided to maintain the Committee's practice of extending seminar invitations to selected experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations. He took it that the Committee wished to authorize the Chair and the Bureau to finalize the list of experts and organizations invited to the seminar.

48. *It was so decided.*

49. **The Chair** recalled that, in accordance with rule 6 of the rules of procedure for the seminar, participation would be restricted to the persons to whom formal invitations had been addressed, or to their proven representatives if any of those persons were unable to attend.

Extension of invitations to representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories

50. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with the established practice of the Committee, invitations to the seminar would be extended to all elected and appointed officials of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The United Nations would bear the travel costs of the officials of all Non-Self-Governing Territories. Invitations would also be extended to the administering Powers and other Member States, specialized agencies within the United Nations system and some regional organizations. However, their travel and accommodation costs would not be borne by the United Nations.

51. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) asked for clarification regarding the criteria and procedure for the election of the experts.

52. **The Chair** said that the issue had already been discussed in the past. Experts must be individuals with broad experience in the specific region and the necessary credentials. The composition of the experts had also been examined with a view to representing all the regions of the 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories on the list. The preliminary list of 10 experts would be adopted by the Bureau and the experts would then be contacted to determine the feasibility of their attendance. The same criteria were being used as had been used the previous year. While the establishment of the criteria was the purview of the Bureau, that information would be shared with all Committee members.

Question of sending visiting missions to Territories

53. **The Chair** recalled that the Special Committee had been mandated to continue to dispatch visiting and

special missions to the Non-Self-Governing Territories in accordance with the relevant resolutions on decolonization, including resolutions on specific Territories. As several Committee members had stated, visiting missions were useful tools in the process of self-determination for the Territories.

54. After extensive discussions, the Bureau had reached general consensus on the issue of sending two visiting missions in 2017. The first visiting mission would be sent to New Caledonia, given the Territory's upcoming referendum in 2018 on the assumption of full sovereignty. The Committee had been informed that the Chair had initiated contact with the Permanent Representative of France, whose efforts at continued dialogue were appreciated. The Chair thanked the Permanent Representative of France for transmitting the report of the United Nations experts on the compilation of the special electoral roll for the referendum, which was in the process of being translated into English. The report would subsequently be distributed for consideration by the Committee.

55. **Mr. Lamek** (France) said that, despite the general lack of participation in the work of the Committee by administering Powers, his delegation valued the relationship of mutual respect and confidence that it had established over the years with the Committee on the issue of New Caledonia.

56. Following prior informal contact, his delegation had received the letter proposing a visiting mission in 2017 and had immediately transmitted it to the relevant national authorities for consideration. As a result, his delegation could not yet provide a definitive answer.

57. While France was not opposed to the idea of a new visiting mission, he stressed that New Caledonia could not be the only Territory visited by the Committee, as the last visiting mission just two years prior had also been sent to New Caledonia. Moreover, the timeline of the mission must align with the current process of self-determination already underway and the upcoming referendum. Sending a mission in the very near future would not be useful, on account of the French presidential election that would take place in April and May 2017.

58. France remained committed to full cooperation with the Committee on the question of New Caledonia. His delegation had thus transmitted the report of the group of experts sent to monitor the revision of electoral lists in the Territory, as well as a list of measures that France had taken to implement the recommendations of the report. Another similar mission had been invited to produce an updated report

for 2017, which would similarly be transmitted when ready.

59. **The Chair**, expressing appreciation for the open dialogue with France, said that it was very important for the referendum to take place, as it was an extraordinary mechanism for self-determination.

60. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, as the report of the experts had only been provided to his delegation in French, an English translation would be appreciated.

61. **The Chair** said that a translation had been requested and was already underway. The original had been sent for consideration in the meantime.

62. He took it that the Committee wished to proceed with the proposed visiting mission to New Caledonia.

63. *It was so decided.*

64. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with standard procedure, a letter would be sent to the representative of France, informing it of the Committee's decision and requesting its continuing cooperation. The previous visiting mission sent to New Caledonia in 2014 had comprised four members of the Committee, including its Chair, accompanied by an independent expert and three members of the Secretariat.

65. Although it was preferable for the Committee to send at least one visiting mission per year, it had been unable to achieve that goal in 2016 for a variety of reasons. For 2017, he thus proposed sending a second visiting mission to the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Western Sahara to better understand the situation on the ground, keeping in mind the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Contact with the relevant parties should be made in order to begin the process.

66. **Ms. McGuire** (Grenada) said that her delegation was unable to endorse the proposal of sending a visiting mission to Western Sahara. The proposal ran afoul of Article 12.1 of the Charter of the United Nations, which stipulated that "while the Security Council is exercising in respect of any dispute or situation the functions assigned to it in the present Charter, the General Assembly shall not make any recommendation with regard to that dispute or situation unless the Security Council so requests." The United Nations currently had a peacekeeping mission in the area that provided the necessary information to the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General. As such, any visiting mission sent by the Committee would be redundant and

unnecessary; it might moreover compromise the ongoing political process and create further tensions.

67. **Mr. Bouah-Kamon** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the question of Western Sahara was the only issue addressed by the Committee that was also on the agenda of the Security Council; the latter was the appropriate body to address the issue. The proposed visiting mission would run counter to the provisions of Article 12 of the Charter. In accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council, a political process had already been implemented with a view to finding a mutually acceptable solution. His delegation therefore expressed reservations regarding the proposed visiting mission.

68. **Mr. Duberry** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the proposed visiting mission to Western Sahara appeared to be a very political topic. His delegation took note of the visiting mission that would be sent to New Caledonia. It also proposed that, since most of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories were in the Caribbean region, a visiting mission should be sent to a small island Territory in the Caribbean instead.

69. **The Chair** said that there was clearly no consensus, which was unsurprising given that the Committee was divided on the issue of Western Sahara. In his view, the arguments put forward were an interpretation of the Charter which, if accepted, would mean that no other body could take action on the subject of Palestine since it was a Security Council matter. Regarding the relevance of a visiting mission, the issue had remained unresolved for over 25 years, and, with its clear mandate, the Committee could not keep silent when it came to the last colony in Africa. It was important to address it and visit the area.

70. The meetings of the Fourth Committee on the question of Western Sahara had been very well attended in 2016, which was an illustration of the level of support for the issue. Concerns had been raised regarding the situation in the refugee camps and a visit would seem to be highly relevant. He hoped that the various actors involved would cooperate during the visit to enable meetings to be held as necessary. France had set a good example of the way to deal with such issues, by taking a balanced approach that allowed progress to be made.

71. **Mr. Hilale** (Observer for Morocco) said that Morocco had so far refrained from giving its opinion since it wished to respect the will of the Committee. The delegations that had spoken had not attempted to interpret the Charter; they had merely recalled its words. The Chair, however, had provided his own interpretation of Article 12 of the Charter and had

taken a unilateral decision to go ahead with the visit. The Charter was very clear on the matter and Western Sahara was the only Non-Self-Governing Territory within the mandate of the Committee that was still subject to a political process under the auspices of the Security Council. The situation of Palestine was not comparable.

72. A new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara would shortly be appointed and the political process would resume in early May. The Committee had just expressed its opposition to the Chair's insistence on visiting Western Sahara. The decision should be taken by consensus and, if a consensus could not be reached, the Committee should be guided by the Charter. He appealed to the Chair to respect the will of the Committee, as determined by consensus, as well as the rules and procedures, and to apply the Charter. The former Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, a great defender of human rights and United Nations values and principles, had always referred to the Charter as "the bible" guiding the Organization.

73. Morocco remained committed to United Nations processes, including the appointment of the Personal Envoy, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara. In addition, a resolution would be adopted at the end of April to renew the mandate of MINURSO. All being well, the process would receive fresh impetus. However, Morocco could not cooperate with the Committee on a visiting mission; it was completely opposed to the Chair's personal project and his hijacking of the Committee.

74. Morocco remained optimistic that the political process would produce results and that the Committee would regain its wisdom, its equanimity, its ability to reach a consensus and its freedom from political considerations. The Chair of the Committee had a heavy responsibility. If he had so much respect for the rules and procedures and the Charter, Morocco trusted that he would also understand that a country could not be compelled to cooperate, and Morocco was not prepared to cooperate on the grounds of the Charter's provisions. His country supported the work of the Committee, but also that of the Security Council, its mandate, processes and the resolution of disputes with the participation of all parties concerned.

75. **The Chair** said that he would act in accordance with the Committee's will: if the other members refused to go ahead with a visiting mission, he would respect that. The Committee would leave it up to the

Security Council to resolve the matter, which in his view it would not do. However, he had no personal interest in the subject; his only duty was to discharge his responsibilities as Chair. Only three of the many members present had expressed their opposition to the mission. A more advanced decision-making mechanism would be called upon if necessary.

76. **Mr. Bessedik** (Observer for Algeria) said that it was in everyone's interests to complete the decolonization process. His delegation was surprised at the reaction to the visiting mission expressed by three delegations. A country had, of course, a right to express reservations. However, the proposal had not come from the Chair; rather, it was a recommendation contained in a General Assembly resolution made to the Committee, which was a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. Furthermore, the legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara had officially requested a visit and a visiting mission had already been conducted, in 1975. His delegation had been surprised by the suggestion that the Committee charged with examining the question of Western Sahara was not permitted to visit the area because it was a matter for the Security Council. The question of Palestine was subject to two processes: one that was external to the United Nations, and one that was internal. The United Nations bodies must all work to gather more information on the situation in the 17 Territories under occupation. The Chair should continue to work on the proposal, which was both legal and legitimate, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions and the Committee's mandate. Furthermore, the possibility of implementing the proposal in the following few months should be considered.

77. His delegation welcomed the flexibility shown by France and hoped that other occupying or administering Powers would follow its example. Dialogue on proposals, rather than outright rejection, was needed to resolve problems and the United Nations should work to facilitate matters rather than complicate them.

78. **Mr. Duberry** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that a visiting mission should be organized to one of the Non-Self-Governing Territories in the Caribbean, since most of the Territories were located in that region.

79. **The Chair** agreed that a visiting mission to one, if not all, of the Non-Self-Governing Territories in the Caribbean should be arranged and said that he looked forward to receiving a concrete proposal.

80. **Mr. Ndong Ella** (Observer for Gabon) said that the African Group was also often divided on the issue

of Western Sahara. The proposal for the Committee to conduct a visit to that Territory was causing difficulties within the Committee and it was vital for the Chair to consider all factors before insisting upon it. The highly pertinent legal arguments made earlier could have been used to get around the problem. A political process was under way and it must be encouraged; moreover, perhaps peace should be prioritized over justice. It would be better to cancel the visit if it was likely to disrupt the rather precarious balances within the Committee on the subject.

81. **Mr. Méndez Graterol** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that visits were carried out to the Non-Self-Governing Territories in accordance with General Assembly recommendations. The Charter of the United Nations could not be interpreted in such a way as to limit the Committee's capacity to contribute to dialogue on decolonization. A visiting mission to Western Sahara would be a very useful way to obtain information from the field and formulate recommendations. Expectations had been high following the establishment of MINURSO in 1991, but the process had suffered from paralysis and setbacks and the prospect of a peaceful solution had in fact diminished. While respecting the opinions of the delegations that had expressed reservations, his delegation believed that a visit would be consistent with the Charter and consensus should continue to be sought on the proposal.

82. **Mr. Sevilla Borja** (Ecuador) said that visiting missions had often marked turning points in the path to self-determination. The proposal to conduct two missions in 2017 was not a personal project of the Chair; it had been decided upon following consultation with various delegations. The discussions in the present meeting represented a good starting point; a number of Member States had expressed reservations and it was important to clarify the legal issues. A decision should not be taken at the present meeting but the subject should remain on the agenda.

83. **Ms. Rodríguez Camejo** (Cuba) said that the Committee had a specific mandate, of which visiting missions were an important part. A mission to Western Sahara could be useful even when the issue was already under the purview of another United Nations body, as it could assist in advancing towards a definitive solution. The proposal was not a personal project of the Chair; it had been discussed by the Bureau and agreed upon collectively. Clearly, more discussion was needed and a decision should not be taken immediately. Further consultations should be held with a view to reaching a consensus.

84. **Mr. Habib** (Indonesia) said that the Committee should uphold the principle of consensus. Given the divisive nature of the potential visit to Western Sahara, the proposal should not be pursued at that time. His delegation remained open to discussing any of the other Non-Self-Governing Territories on the list.

85. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that there were other questions that were addressed by both the General Assembly and the Security Council. The main function of the Committee was to implement General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). Moreover, all peoples had the right to achieve self-determination in conformity with the procedures of the United Nations.

86. The proposal of sending a visiting mission to Western Sahara should not be definitively ruled out. The question of Western Sahara was ongoing. Some Member States believed that the visit of the Committee might help to alleviate tensions with a view to achieving peace. A decision did not need to be taken at the current moment, but the issue should be discussed further, including in consultation with representatives from the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

87. **Mr. Bessedik** (Observer for Algeria) said that a certain observer State's rejection of the proposal to visit a particular Territory attested to its selectivity, a practice deemed unacceptable within and outside the United Nations. Moreover, certain delegations had accused the Chair of hijacking the proposal, when, in fact, he had merely been performing his duty as Chair, in accordance with the Committee's mandate. For its part, Algeria welcomed his continued efforts to conduct consultations with all Committee members. Some missions had been dispatched despite the opposition of the occupying Power or the Administering Power of the Territory in question. In that context, the Chair should continue consultations with all Committee members. In order to pre-empt the selectivity of certain delegations, which called for missions to be sent to some Territories while opposing their visit to the Territory proposed by the Chair, and to dispel those delegations' charges that the Chair was biased, the Chair could instead establish a timetable for visits to all 17 Territories. Lastly, his delegation was grateful to the Chair for insisting upon a vote that aligned with the views of Committee members.

88. **Mr. Barro** (Observer for Senegal) said that his delegation had faith in the Chair's interpretation of Article 12 of the Charter and his understanding of the Committee's consensual working methods. As the proposal of sending a visiting mission to Western Sahara had not been met with consensus, however, and several delegations had clearly expressed their

reservations, the proposal should be definitively abandoned in order to preserve the unity of the Committee, which should focus instead on more consensual issues like the rules of procedure.

89. **The Chair** said that, although consensus was desirable, it was not a rule. Members of the Committee could not reject visiting one place but agree to visit another. It was hoped that the Committee would have the necessary time and resources to visit all 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Committee did not have double standards; when consensus could not be reached, a vote was taken, as in the case of his election.

90. **Mr. Matjila** (Observer for South Africa) said that, when General Assembly resolution 1514 had been adopted in 1960, South Africa had witnessed the end of a four-year-long treason trial that had seen national leaders arrested simply because they had wanted to be free. Those leaders had been released exactly two days before the adoption of the resolution. While it was easy to understand why United Nations leaders had adopted the resolution at the time, given the circumstances, it was perhaps more difficult to faithfully follow its spirit almost 50 years later.

91. The Committee was the heart and soul of the United Nations, as it addressed the issue of those who could not enjoy their fundamental freedoms and human rights. South Africa used to be a visitor to the Committee and used to listen to other countries speak on its behalf. Now his country placed itself in the shoes of those who were still denied fundamental freedoms. If the Committee did not speak for those people then it had no reason to exist. Ensuring that all people had the right to exercise their fundamental freedoms was not ideological or political. The Committee was forgetting from where it derived its mandate; it should fulfil the letter and the spirit of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). If doing so entailed further dialogue about a specific visit, such discussion should be guided by the original spirit of that resolution. The Committee must work on behalf of those who were voiceless, silenced, exiled, detained, tortured or otherwise unable to enjoy their fundamental freedoms.

92. **Ms. Pires** (Timor-Leste) said that her delegation supported the proposal to continue further discussions with a view to achieving consensus and fulfilling the mandate of the Committee. The Chair should provide a timetable for visits to all 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, including Western Sahara, which was the last Territory in Africa that must be decolonized.

93. **Mr. Prasad** (India) said that the number of applications for new memberships reflected the

importance of the Committee. As consensus was an important principle, further discussions should be held on the question of sending a visiting mission to Western Sahara.

94. **The Chair** said that a special meeting would be convened for further discussions and to present a timetable for visits to all the Non-Self-Governing Territories, starting with those in the Caribbean region.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.