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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

New Caledonia

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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Note: The information contained in the present working paper has been derived from public sources, including those of the territorial Government, and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the administering Power on 7 December 2020 under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Further details are contained in previous working papers, available from www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



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The Territory at a glance

Territory: New Caledonia is a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations, administered by France. New Caledonia has the status of a sui generis overseas territory under the French Constitution and has enhanced autonomy.

Representative of the administering Power: Laurent Prévost, High Commissioner of the Republic (since 5 August 2019)

Geography: New Caledonia is located in the Pacific Ocean, about 1,500 kilometres east of Australia and 1,800 kilometres north of New Zealand. It comprises the Main Island (Grande Terre), the Pine Islands, the Bélép Archipelago, Huon and Surprise, the Chesterfield Islands and the Bellone Reefs, the Loyalty Islands (Maré, Lifou, Tiga, Beautemps-Beaupré and Ouvéa), Walpole Island, the Astrolabe Islands, the Matthew Islands and Fearn or Hunter, as well as islets close to the shore. It also has several uninhabited islets to the north of the Loyalty Islands.

Land area: 18,575 square kilometres (the Territory as a whole); 16,750 square kilometres (Grande Terre)

Exclusive economic zone: 1,422,543 square kilometres

Population: 271,407 (2019 census).

Life expectancy at birth: women: 80.1 years; men: 75.1 years (2017).

Ethnic composition: 41.2 per cent Melanesians, mainly Kanaks; 24.1 per cent persons of European origin, mainly French; 8.3 per cent Wallisians and Futunians; 2 per cent Tahitians; 1.4 per cent Indonesians; 0.8 per cent Vietnamese; 0.9 per cent Vanuatuans; and 21.3 per cent populations classified by the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies as “others” (2019).

Languages: The official language is French. About 27 Kanak vernacular languages are spoken in geographically distinct regions. Under the Agreement on New Caledonia signed in Nouméa on 5 May 1998 (Nouméa Accord), Kanak languages and French are the languages of instruction and culture.

Capital: Nouméa, located in the south of Grande Terre

Head of the territorial Government: Thierry Santa (since 28 June 2019)

Main political parties: Calédonie ensemble, le Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, L’avenir en confiance, l’Éveil océanien, l’Union calédonienne, l’Union nationale pour l’indépendance, Nationalistes, le Parti de libération kanak (Palika) and le Parti travailliste.

Elections: The most recent national elections were held on 23 April and 7 May 2017 (presidential), 11 and 18 June 2017 (legislative) and 24 September 2017 (Senate). The most recent local elections were held on 12 May 2019 (provincial) and 15 March and 28 June 2020 (first and second rounds of municipal elections respectively).

Legislature: Congress of New Caledonia

Gross domestic product per capita: 3.8 million Pacific francs (2019), or 31,875 euros.

Unemployment rate: 10.9 per cent (2019)

Economy: Mining industry (notably nickel), construction and tourism

Monetary unit: Pacific franc or CFP franc (1,000 CFP francs = 8.38 euros (fixed exchange rate))

Brief history: In 1774, the British captain James Cook discovered Grande Terre and named it “New Caledonia”. France annexed New Caledonia on 24 September 1853. In 1942, the United States of America decided to set up one of their military bases for the Pacific in New Caledonia. Some 20,000 New Zealand soldiers were stationed in New Caledonia during the Second World War. In 1946, France made New Caledonia an overseas Territory with limited autonomy. In the 1970s, supporters of independence were highly active, leading to violence during the 1980s known as the “*événements*” (events). In 1988, the Matignon Agreements led to the establishment of three provinces with the aim of restoring the balance of power. Ten years later, in 1998, the Nouméa Accord provided for the gradual autonomy of the Territory and for a referendum on the Territory’s accession to full sovereignty.

I. Constitutional, political and legal issues

1. New Caledonia is a sui generis territory within the French Republic, governed under the provisions of part XIII of the Constitution (“Transitional provisions pertaining to New Caledonia”). The French Minister for Overseas Territories has responsibility for New Caledonia and, in that capacity, oversees the coordination and implementation of the actions of the Government of France in accordance with the Territory’s status and organization. The current Minister is Sébastien Lecornu. He assumed his functions on 6 July 2020. The administering Power is represented in the Territory by a High Commissioner, who exercises the authority of the French Republic in New Caledonia. That position is currently held by Laurent Prévost. Under Organic Act No. 99-209 of 19 March 1999 concerning New Caledonia, the administering Power retains prerogatives in a number of areas, including diplomacy, immigration and alien control, currency, the Treasury, defence, justice, and maintenance of law and order. In the area of defence, the High Commissioner and the Commander of the Armed Forces of New Caledonia perform the functions prescribed by the relevant legislation. New Caledonia has an air force base, a navy base and one infantry regiment, with a total of around 1,700 military personnel. The Armed Forces of New Caledonia conduct the sovereign missions of the administering Power and provide support to the territorial Government in the exercise of its civilian security responsibilities. The administering Power is responsible for the maintenance of law and order, discharged by almost 560 national police officers and around 850 members of the gendarmerie (including mobile gendarmerie squadrons).

2. The Territory is part of the metropolitan judicial system of the administering Power, with some special features, such as the obligation to use customary judges in civilian courts in cases involving disputes between persons with customary civil status. The Court of Appeal is located in the capital, Nouméa. Appeals on points of law can be filed with the French Court of Cassation.

3. New Caledonia has a 54-member Congress (28 women and 26 men) drawn from the elected membership of the three provincial assemblies (15 of the 22 members of the North Province assembly, 32 of the 40 members of the South Province assembly and 7 of the 14 members of the Loyalty Islands Province assembly).

4. As at 2 March 2021, the 54 members of Congress are distributed as follows: (a) L’avenir en confiance (18 seats); (b) the joint group of Union calédonienne–Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, Nationalistes and Éveil océanien (16 seats); (c) Union nationale pour l’indépendance (12 seats); (d) Calédonie ensemble (6 seats); (e) a member of the Labour Party; and (f) a non-registered member.

5. Political parties in New Caledonia are essentially divided between those favouring New Caledonia remaining part of the French Republic and those favouring independence, with a number of shades within each stripe. The pro-independence groups are Union calédonienne–Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, Nationalistes, l’Union nationale pour l’indépendance and the Labour Party. The two anti-independence groups are L’avenir en confiance and Calédonie ensemble.

6. In accordance with the Nouméa Accord, a set of institutions has been established to confirm the full recognition of the Kanak identity and culture. There are eight customary councils representing eight customary regions. In addition, a Territory-wide customary Senate with a rotating presidency comprises 16 members, with each customary council selecting two members. Under article 143 of Organic Act No. 99-209, the Senate is consulted on all matters relating to the Kanak identity but has no normative power. In accordance with article 147 of the Organic Act, the Senate has a budget for its operations.

7. The Government of New Caledonia is elected by the Congress on the basis of a proportional system and comprises 11 members. The seventeenth Government of New Caledonia was elected on 17 February 2021, following the resignation of the pro-independence members of the previous Government on 2 February 2021. It is made up of four members presented by L'avenir en confiance, three from the joint group of Union calédonienne–Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, Nationalistes and Eveil Océanien, three from l'Union nationale pour l'indépendance and one from Calédonie ensemble. The Government is composed of one woman and ten men.

8. The Kanak independence movement was launched in the 1970s, in response to the process of decolonization in Africa and Oceania and as a reaction to the large movements of people from metropolitan France in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1984, the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste was founded as an umbrella organization for the pro-independence parties and, later that year, it established a provisional independent Government. Between 1984 and 1988, about 80 people died in violent confrontations between pro- and anti-independence elements. The violence was eventually halted with the conclusion of the Matignon Agreements on 26 June 1988 between the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, the anti-independence Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République and the Government of France. Information on the Matignon Agreements and the Nouméa Accord, concluded in 1998, is available in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat. The full text of the Nouméa Accord is contained in the annex to the working paper published in 1998 ([A/AC.109/2114](#)).

9. Under the Nouméa Accord, France agreed to transfer certain non-sovereign powers and a number of institutions to the Government of New Caledonia between 1998 and 2018. All institutions with the exception of the Rural Development and Land Management Agency have been transferred, along with all powers other than those in the following three areas envisaged in article 27 of Organic Act No. 99-209: (a) rules governing the administration of provinces, municipalities and their public institutions, legal oversight of the provinces, municipalities and their public institutions, and accounting and financial regulations for local authorities and their public institutions; (b) higher education; and (c) broadcasting. The Congress, which may request the transfer of the powers referred to in article 27 of Act No.99-209, has yet to do so. The administering Power indicated that it had transferred to the Government and the provinces, through Organic Act No. 99-209, powers concerning access to and management of natural resources, including the regulation and exercise of the rights of exploration, exploitation, management and conservation of natural resources on land and in the exclusive economic zone; and regulations for hydrocarbons, nickel, chromium, cobalt and rare earth elements.

10. The Nouméa Accord provides for the holding of one to three referendums on accession to full sovereignty by New Caledonia. The referendum date is set by a decision of the Congress adopted by a three-fifths majority of its members (33 of 54 members). Pursuant to the Accord, should independence be rejected, a second referendum may be held within two years of the first poll at the request of one third of the members of the Congress. In accordance with the provisions of Act No. 99-209, this request is addressed to the High Commissioner and is filed from the sixth month following the poll. The new referendum shall take place within 18 months of the referral to the High Commissioner on a date set in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Organic Act. If independence is again rejected, a third referendum may be held within two years of the second poll under the same conditions. If the response is still negative, the parties to the Accord will then have to meet to consider the situation thus created. Pursuant to the Accord, the referendum is on the transfer of

sovereign powers, achievement of an international status of full responsibility and transformation of citizenship to nationality.

11. On 19 March 2018, the Congress decided that the first referendum on accession to full sovereignty by New Caledonia would be held on 4 November 2018. On 27 March 2018, at the meeting of the Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord – a regular meeting that brings together heads of institutions, political groups and members of the Congress, among others – the New Caledonian political partners, in agreement with the administering Power, finalized the question to be asked for the referendum, which was formulated as follows: “Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?”.

12. Following the 2 November 2017 meeting of the Committee of Signatories, and in order to enable the populations concerned to participate in the referendum on accession by New Caledonia to full sovereignty, the French Parliament adopted Organic Act No. 2018-280 of 19 April 2018 concerning the referendum, and its implementing decrees were issued by the Government of France in April and May 2018. According to the administering Power, the exceptional package of measures adopted in 2018 had several purposes: (a) establishing a procedure for automatic inclusion on the general electoral roll; (b) establishing periods for additional revisions of the three electoral rolls in New Caledonia; (c) allowing automatic inclusion for a category of voters whose property and personal ties are presumed to be mainly in New Caledonia; (d) establishing offshore polling stations in Nouméa for voters from the municipalities of Bélep, Pine Islands, Lifou, Maré and Ouvéa; and (e) establishing a special mechanism, as an exception to the general law, for voting by proxy.

13. On 7 November 2018, the Commission Overseeing the Organization and Conduct of the Referendum on Accession to Full Sovereignty by New Caledonia announced the results of the referendum, which had been held on 4 November 2018, with a turnout of 81.01 per cent of voters, or 141,099 out of 174,165 voters registered in 284 polling stations. The referendum resulted in the option of full sovereignty and independence being rejected, with 60,199 or 43.33 per cent of votes cast in favour and 78,734 or 56.67 per cent of votes against.

14. In June 2019, a new referendum was requested, by both the elected members of the group L’avenir en confiance and those of Union nationale pour l’indépendance and Union calédonienne–Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste. The Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord met on 10 October 2019, with the Prime Minister of France as Chair, to determine the arrangements for the second referendum, the date of which was set for 6 September 2020. Owing to the health crisis related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the referendum was postponed to 4 October 2020. In preparation for the second referendum, two decrees were adopted: Decree No. 2020-776 of 24 June 2020 specifies that the system of specific proxies and the establishment of offshore polling stations in Nouméa for voters in the island province will be continued, with some procedural improvements as requested by the nineteenth Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord. These provisions were updated by Decree No. 2020-127 of 14 February 2020 in order to determine, on the one hand, the exceptional arrangements for voting by proxy and, on the other hand, the arrangements for voting in Nouméa for voters in island municipalities, in the context of the referendum on accession by New Caledonia to full sovereignty scheduled for 2020.

15. On 5 October 2020, the Commission Overseeing the Organization and Conduct of the Referendum on Accession to Full Sovereignty by New Caledonia announced the results of the second referendum, which had been held on 4 October, with a turnout of 85.69 per cent of voters, or 154,918 out of 180,799 voters registered in 304 polling stations. The administering Power indicated that the referendum had resulted in the

option of full sovereignty and independence being rejected, with 71,533 or 46.74 of votes cast in favour and 81,503 or 53.26 per cent per cent against.

16. Following the second referendum, the Minister for Overseas Territories visited New Caledonia from 8 October to 2 November 2020. During his visit, he notably introduced the “Leprédour” meeting format composed of five pro-independence and five non-independence elected officials and established the 12-member Comité des Sages, set up in 2017 by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe.

17. There are several electorates in New Caledonia: the general electorate, the special electorate for elections to the Congress and the provincial assemblies, and a special electorate called upon to participate in the final status referendums under the Nouméa Accord. The administering Power reports that this latter electorate was established for the first time in 2016 and consisted of 180,799 voters on the day of the referendum, 4 October 2020. To be included on the special electoral roll for the referendum, all persons must meet at least one of the criteria established in Organic Act No. 99-209.

18. Every year, the special electoral rolls of voters eligible to participate in the election of members of the Congress and the assemblies are updated by special administrative commissions headed by members of the judiciary. Each commission also includes a representative of the Administration appointed by the High Commissioner of the Republic, a representative of the mayor of the municipality and two representatives of voters in the municipality (one pro-independence voter and one anti-independence voter).

19. According to the administering Power, in order to ease potential tensions, a team of United Nations experts has been mobilized each year since 2016, taking into consideration the successive periods of annual revision of the special electoral rolls. The experts served on the administrative commissions as independent qualified persons to assist with the revision of the special roll for the election of members of the Congress and the provincial assemblies and to prepare the special electoral roll for the referendum. The experts issued two separate reports in 2016 and a single report in 2017, making recommendations on how to improve the functioning of the special administrative commissions. Three reports were issued in 2018. In 2019 and 2020, two reports were issued: one on the annual revision of the special provincial electoral roll and the other on the revision of the special electoral roll for the referendum. In addition, at the request of the administering Power, the United Nations Secretariat deployed a group of experts to monitor the first and second referendums.

20. At the conclusion of the period for the annual revision of the special electoral roll for the referendum on 4 July 2020, 180,640 voters, 89,122 of whom were men and 91,518 of whom were women, were registered. Of those voters, 173,332 were automatically included between 2016 and 2020, and 7,308 were added upon voluntary request. In addition, the administering Power reports that the list contained 158,642 natives and 21,998 non-natives, and that the proportion of voters with customary civil status remained stable at 46 per cent. According to the administering Power, in the weeks leading up to the second vote on 4 October 2020, the monitoring commission included an additional 383 individuals in the special electoral roll for the referendum, mostly individuals who came of age between 6 September and 4 October 2020. On polling day itself, the monitoring commission issued 138 decisions for inclusion in the roll.

II. Budget

21. The administering Power reports that the Territory's financial situation has deteriorated since 2012. The business environment reached its lowest level in the first quarter of 2016 and remains low. The 2020 budget of New Caledonia pursues two imperatives: to control the growth in operating expenditures while preserving the capacity to invest in and develop the Territory.

22. The business environment of the New Caledonian economy gradually improved throughout 2019 (+11.7 points), until it had returned to its 2015 level. However, the index continues to reflect positive but slowing growth, associated with a weakened economy (the index is in fact more than 10 points below its long-term average of around 3 per cent economic growth).

23. The administering Power further reports that New Caledonia has been engaged in a reform of the management of its public finances for the past five years, with a view to replenishing the treasury and restoring fiscal space. This has mainly involved cutting overall budgetary appropriations, which have been constrained by ever-declining revenues. New Caledonia enjoys fiscal autonomy, and tax revenues constitute the main source of budget income. To balance the budget, it must therefore optimize the effectiveness of its tax system by reforming the various exemptions.

24. New Caledonia is primarily a redistributive Territory: it collects taxes on behalf of local authorities and public bodies and redistributes 74.25 per cent of the sums raised. Taking into account the scale of non-discretionary spending, particularly the payments to local authorities, but also structural spending, including on staff and public institutions, it has only limited fiscal space. Its debt ratios are very sensitive to variations in its savings and revenues. According to the administering Power, the issue of establishing a separate municipal tax system is still being considered.

25. On tax matters, the Congress passed two country laws on 1 September 2016, one establishing a comprehensive consumption tax to replace the existing seven taxes and contributions; the other on competition, competitiveness and prices, which will mainly allow the Government to regulate prices in the event of a breakdown in competition, supply constraints, slippage in the prices of basic commodities, or major crisis. The Territory has also established the Local Emergency Plan to Support Employment (Pulse), which includes measures to revive investment, and an export support plan designed to diversify the economy, which for years has been focused on nickel mining. The provisional budget for 2020, adopted in December 2019, is, for the first time, a rigorous budget aimed at restoring the depleted finances of New Caledonia. The COVID-19 health crisis had a big impact on this budget.

26. Faced with the COVID-19 health crisis and the consequences of the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus, the Government of New Caledonia has drawn up a plan to safeguard the New Caledonian economy. The support mechanisms involve deferral of social security contributions and taxes and an increase in partial unemployment benefits. At the same time, New Caledonia has also had to meet exceptional costs in managing the crisis, such as the purchase of masks and the cost of repatriation and hotel accommodation for all travellers arriving in the Territory.

27. Given the deterioration in its financial situation, New Caledonia requested financial support from the State, which was provided by a loan guarantee (25-year term with a two-year grace period), granted by the French Development Agency, in the amount of 240 million euros. This loan is intended to enable the Government of New Caledonia to finance its plan to safeguard the New Caledonian economy, to cope with losses in tax revenue and to maintain its capacity to provide funding to local authorities. In accordance with the provisions of this guarantee, specified in article 18

of the 2020 Budget Rectification Act (Act No. 2020-473 of 25 April 2020), an agreement, appended to the credit agreement signed on 13 May 2020 between the State, the French Development Agency and the Government of New Caledonia, specifies the reform programme that New Caledonia proposes to adopt in order to guarantee the sustainability of the loan repayment, as well as the principle and procedures for allocating part of New Caledonia's revenue, corresponding to the annual loan principal and interest, for the repayment of the loan guarantee.

28. In addition, according to the administering Power, the French State has put in place several national measures that are applicable in New Caledonia to assist businesses experiencing cash flow difficulties as a result of the health crisis: the solidarity fund; ad hoc cash-flow support for businesses; and the loan guarantee by the State. As at 1 October 2020, 16,780 companies had received aid from the solidarity fund, representing 2.7 billion CFP francs. As at 1 November 2020, 1,212 companies had benefited from State-guaranteed loans amounting to 18.4 billion CFP francs. Other aid measures are intended to be applied in New Caledonia as part of the recovery plan put in place by the administering Power.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

29. The administering Power reports that New Caledonia has one of the richest economies of all the Pacific islands, with per capita gross domestic product (GDP) estimated in 2019 at 3.8 million CFP francs (31,875 euros). This is partly owing to the preponderance of nickel mining and processing in the Territory's economy. Nickel production accounts for more than 95 per cent of export earnings. However, there are still significant geographical disparities in income distribution: 90 per cent of total expenditures and resources are concentrated in the South Province, which represents 74.4 per cent of the population of the Territory, while the North Province accounts for 18.8 per cent of the population and the Loyalty Islands Province only 6.8 per cent. The economy is also highly dependent on transfer payments from the Government of France. Such payments amounted to over 176.6 billion CFP francs in 2018, representing approximately 17.2 per cent of New Caledonian GDP. In comparison, the contribution of the nickel sector to wealth creation is 7 per cent of GDP. A large part of the State's financial transfers to the New Caledonian authorities are made under development contracts. At the close of the meeting of the Committee of Signatories held on 10 October 2019, an agreement was reached to extend the development contracts for an additional year and a State allocation of an additional 9 billion CFP francs was granted until 2022. The Territory runs a significant structural trade deficit, which is widening every year (126.9 billion CFP francs in 2019), and is suffering from a decline in the coverage rate – 58.8 per cent in 2019 against 68.6 per cent in 2018 – owing to a fall in exports.

30. New Caledonia enjoyed steady growth over the period from 2001 to 2011 thanks to the construction of two nickel plants and their positive knock-on effects. Between 2012 and 2018, the growth regime slowed, with an average annual growth rate of 1.2 per cent in real terms (compared with 3.6 per cent for the period 2001–2011). According to the administering Power, the standard of living in the Territory is now comparable to that of the vast majority of regions in France and close to that of New Zealand, which itself is the second highest in the Pacific region, after Australia.

31. The main investment drivers used by the Government of France are based on:

(a) *Development contracts*. The new generation of contracts that will cover the period 2017–2022 includes an allocation, following the signature of amendments

in 2020, of 99.563 billion CFP francs, including 53 per cent in funding by the administering Power (53.221 billion CFP francs).

(b) *Tax relief.* Overseas tax assistance targets private sector economic projects. It allows a taxpayer based in metropolitan France to benefit from a significant tax reduction in return for investing in a productive project overseas. The number of applications for funding has been declining for several years. According to the administering Power, this is linked to the economic downturn. As a result, 27 applications were filed in 2019, compared with 24 in 2018. The tax relief mechanism was initially scheduled to expire in late 2017. The mechanism was extended until 2025, offering project managers greater visibility. According to the administering Power, tax relief remains the main tool of State support for the private sector and all flagship projects in recent years have benefited from it. Between 2005 and 2015, 7,500 social housing units were financed by this mechanism.

B. Mineral resources

32. According to the report of the Overseas Issuing Institute for 2019, New Caledonia, with 7 per cent of the world's nickel reserves, is the fifth-largest source of that metal in the world, after Indonesia (22 per cent), Australia (21 per cent), Brazil (12 per cent) and the Russian Federation (7 per cent). Cobalt is also mined commercially, and deposits of iron, copper and gold have been discovered and mined on a small scale in the past. New Caledonia has jurisdiction over nickel, chromium and hydrocarbons with regard to the regulation and enforcement of rights, including export licences. Mining is carried out by about a dozen operators, the largest of which are SLN, the Nickel Mining Company, Vale New Caledonia and Koniambo Nickel. The other operators are small-scale miners, who may or may not be owners of mining claims and supply the SLN plant with or export crude ore.

33. According to the administering Power, the level of nickel ore exports has risen sharply in recent years, from 5.5 million tons in 2015 to 7.2 million tons in 2019. Metallurgical production has remained relatively stable, increasing from 93,977 tons in 2015 to 94,404 tons in 2019. New Caledonia also produces cobalt carbonate. Export volumes have decreased over the past five years, from 1,515 tons in 2015 to 1,129 tons in 2019. The number of people employed in the metallurgical and mining sectors has increased to approximately 6,000.

C. Construction and manufacturing

34. The construction and public works sector accounted for an average of 11 per cent of the wealth generated and employed some 8.3 per cent of wage earners in the Territory in 2018. As at 31 December 2019, there were 7,523 companies in the sector, 12.3 per cent of the total. According to the administering Power, after several years of sustained growth, this sector is now suffering following the completion of major projects and the slowdown in new housing construction.

35. In 2019, New Caledonia had 2,667 industrial companies, compared with 2,290 in 2011. The development of the industrial sector is nevertheless faced with high investment and production costs owing to the small size of the local market and the island status of the Territory, which raises the cost of inputs. To address those handicaps, the local authorities have launched a proactive policy to protect local production and offer tax incentives.

D. Agriculture and fisheries

36. Although the primary sector (excluding mining) represented around 2 per cent of wealth generation in 2018 and wage employment (with 1,740 wage earners in 2019), it is nonetheless the principal sector of activity of much of the rural population. The census of agriculture conducted in 2012 showed that around 13,000 people were engaged in family farming. According to the administering Power, New Caledonia is not self-sufficient in most agricultural and livestock sectors and thus remains heavily dependent on imports. The agricultural sector includes a food-crop farming component not included in accounting statistics but whose production level is estimated to be equal to that of the business sector.

E. Transport and communications

37. The Territory has a good road system in and around Nouméa. Road infrastructure in the rest of the Territory is gradually improving.

38. Since the year 2000, New Caledonia has had authority over international traffic rights and air carrier operational programmes. Powers in policing and security in respect of air traffic were transferred, for domestic traffic only, in 2013. The New Caledonia Air Services Agency, a public enterprise of New Caledonia, is responsible for ensuring the continuity of air services. To that end, it owns 99.38 per cent of the shares in the airline Air Calédonie International. Five international companies operate regular flights to the Territory. In 2019, a total of 566,405 passengers (arrivals and departures) were registered at Nouméa-La Tontouta International Airport. Frequent international flights connect the airport to neighbouring countries and territories (Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Vanuatu and French Polynesia) as well as Japan. There are regular services from the Nouméa-Magenta domestic airfield to the other islands and major towns in Grande Terre. Air Calédonie International owns four Airbus aircraft for its operations.

39. Owing to the COVID-19 health crisis, the Government of New Caledonia suspended international commercial routes on 20 March 2020. This suspension has been extended until July 2021. In addition, the borders have been closed to non-resident foreign nationals by order of the High Commissioner for an as yet undetermined period. However, there is still an air route between Paris and Nouméa, to ensure territorial continuity with the French mainland. As a result, the number of passengers averaged around 3,800 per month between April and October 2020, these passengers being mainly repatriated residents and persons needing to travel for compelling reasons.

40. Regarding domestic service, New Caledonia has 14 airfields open to public air traffic. Public domestic air transport is provided by two companies, the main one being Air Calédonie. Domestic traffic in 2019 was 464,102 passengers (arrivals and departures), a slight increase of approximately 10,000 passengers compared with 2018. Work is under way to expand and redesign the Nouméa-Magenta airfield to cope with increasing domestic traffic, financed under the development contract between the French State and New Caledonia for the period 2017–2021. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis, domestic transport has maintained an average of around 30,000 passengers per month since May 2020 (compared with around 40,000 in 2019), with domestic routes having been completely suspended in April 2020.

41. The telecommunications sector includes the territorial operator, the Post and Telecommunications Office of New Caledonia, and its partners. In recent years, Internet facilities and usage have grown rapidly. The stated goal is to further reduce

the digital divide and facilitate Internet traffic. The Post and Telecommunications Office is currently studying the possibility of connecting with another international submarine cable to secure international connectivity for New Caledonia for the next 25 years.

F. Tourism

42. In the view of the administering Power, New Caledonia, with its geographical location and cultural richness, has real strengths and considerable tourism potential that has not yet been fully tapped. Tourism thus could be a driver of the Territory's economic development. The tourism sector accounts for a little more than 2.8 per cent of GDP and 5,387 jobs. In 2019, the sector reached a record number, with 130,458 visitors, compared with 85,785 in 2009 and 120,343 in 2018. However, the number of cruise passengers fell sharply (343,962 in 2019 compared with 456,030 in 2018), a situation partly linked to the renewal of the fleet of a shipping company. Since March 2020, owing to the COVID-19 global health crisis and the closure of the borders, New Caledonia no longer welcomes international tourists. Since the end of the lockdown, some hotels in Nouméa have been required to accommodate the people in quarantine. However, the lack of international customers has had a strong impact on tourist transport companies and certain leisure service providers.

IV. Social conditions

A. General

43. According to the Overseas Issuing Institute report for 2019, the Territory's human development index rose by 15 per cent between 1990 and 2010, driven by its social component (education and health), which accounted for 80 per cent of that increase, and its economic component, 20 per cent.

44. The adult literacy rate is over 96 per cent and school enrolment (all levels) stands at 89 per cent. Nevertheless, the territory suffers from certain imbalances and inequalities at several levels, including in the social and economic spheres.

45. The concept of economic rebalancing is rooted in the Nouméa Accord and in the aim of achieving a more harmonious distribution of job and wealth creation throughout New Caledonia in preparation for the Territory's potential accession to full sovereignty. This concept led to the development of a formula for budgetary allocations that proactively favours the North (31.3 per cent) and Loyalty Islands (16 per cent) Provinces on account of their demographic weight and the imbalances to be corrected (for more details, see [A/AC.109/2019/11](#), para. 40). It has also resulted in the development of the Voh-Koné-Pouembout area in the North Province, an area covered by two successive development contracts (2011–2016 and 2017–2021), and the establishment of a nickel plant in the North Province (Koniambo Nickel, in partnership with Glencore).

46. The administering Power also indicates that it has concluded development contracts with the Territory's three provinces (North, South and Loyalty Islands) and 33 municipalities. These subsidies have helped to support not only the development of municipalities in the interior and on the islands, but also the four municipalities of the Greater Nouméa area, thereby addressing shortfalls in primary amenities (drinking water, roads, sanitation, miscellaneous public facilities) and other infrastructure.

47. In the South Province, the construction of a metallurgical plant has also received support from the administering Power and local authorities. This plant, located in

Goro, is operated by the Vale New Caledonia company. A 95-per-cent share of the plant is owned by Vale Canada and a 5-per-cent share is owned by Société de Participation Minière du Sud Calédonien, a holding company belonging to the three provinces. The Goro plant uses a hydrometallurgical process, which makes it possible to exploit low-grade nickel ore.

B. Employment

48. In the second quarter of 2020, the private sector employed 64,680 employees, down slightly from 65,842 in the second quarter of 2019. Over the same period, the trade sector employed 10,090 wage earners, a decrease of 0.4 per cent compared with the previous quarter, while the agriculture sector employed 1,770 wage earners, an increase of 0.8 per cent compared to the previous quarter. The non-commercial services sector accounted for 32,450 jobs in the second quarter of 2020, down 2.5 per cent, quarter-on-quarter.

49. The unemployment rate as defined by the International Labour Office was 10.9 per cent in 2019, compared with 11.9 per cent in 2018, higher than in metropolitan France, where it was 8.6 per cent in 2019, but much lower than in overseas France. According to the New Caledonian Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, 46.3 per cent of job seekers are men and 53.7 per cent are women. More than half of the unemployed are between 25 and 49 years of age. Unemployment is more common among Kanaks than in the population as a whole. The South Province continues to post the best general employment indicators. That said, when only the male population is taken into consideration, access to jobs appears to be easier in the North Province. The Loyalty Islands Province continues to lag far behind in labour market terms.

C. Education

50. According to the administering Power, enrolment in New Caledonia schools in 2020 stood at 3,483 university students and 65,495 students seeking advanced vocational training certificates, with 33,786 in public or private primary schools and 29,622 students in public secondary schools and private secondary schools under contract (17,195 in 58 colleges and 12,517 in 21 lycées of different types). According to the latest census conducted by the Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies in 2019, 11.3 per cent of women and 18.6 per cent of men aged 20 to 39 had no degree, compared with 25.9 per cent of women and 26.2 per cent of men aged 40 to 59. These figures are stable compared to the previous census conducted in 2014.

51. The Cadres Avenir scheme is a management training programme implemented by the administering Power as part of the rebalancing provided for in the Nouméa Accord. The 1,555 New Caledonians who have followed the 1,792 training paths are providing their expertise to various communities, governments and enterprises in New Caledonia. Some 71 per cent of those trainees are of Kanak origin. The success rate is high: 95 per cent of trainees successfully enter the workforce within three months of their return to New Caledonia. Since 2006, the administering Power has maintained its financial commitment in this regard at 644 million CFP francs (approximately \$5.63 million), while New Caledonia provides 55 million CFP francs (\$512,000). New initiatives have been undertaken to identify and train individuals in the fields of excellence (for further details see [A/AC.109/2018/11](#)).

52. The adapted military service is a mechanism that fosters the social and vocational integration of young people in difficult circumstances. It is aimed at people aged 18 to 25 in the overseas territories who suffer the most from unemployment and

are often marginalized. According to the administering Power, universal national service, which is available to young people between the ages of 15 and 18 after the fourth year of high school, has been implemented in its first phase, namely, the 15-day cohesion stay for 88 students in the fifth year of high school throughout the country. That roll-out was subject to prior consultation by the administering Power with the local government and the three provinces, in order to organize the modalities for the establishment of such a system in the Territory. Civic service volunteering, a multifaceted civic engagement scheme, is supported by the administering Power, including the development of voluntary service in the public interest, for young people between the ages of 16 and 25, regardless of qualification, and for young people with disabilities up to 30 years of age. Nearly 400 young people, mostly girls, have benefited from this scheme. They have served public authorities and associations in fields as diverse as culture, youth, the status of women, and combating violence against women. This system is being maintained for the year 2021.

53. The University of New Caledonia is a public scientific, cultural and vocational institution that comes under the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. It serves as an instrument for development, construction and rebalancing in New Caledonia. It derives special institutional legitimacy from the Nouméa Accord, point 4.1.1 of which calls upon the institution to address the specific research and training needs of New Caledonia. The University, which has about 3,483 students, opened a Northern Province campus in 2019 and entered into a partnership with the Loyalty Islands Province on language research.

D. Health

54. The Territory has three public hospitals: (a) Gaston-Bourret Territorial Hospital in the South Province; (b) Albert-Bousquet Specialized Hospital in Nouméa, South Province; and (c) North Hospital in the North Province.

55. According to the administering Power, in the area of health crisis management, competencies relating to health and civil security have been transferred from the State, which nevertheless remains the guarantor of civil liberties. In 2020, the management of the COVID-19 health crisis thus required close cooperation between the administering Power and the political and customary authorities of New Caledonia. In the face of this crisis, which imposed restrictions on public freedoms and required the implementation of emergency health measures, it was agreed to proceed by joint decision between the President of the Government of New Caledonia and the High Commissioner of the Republic. State services, including the Armed Forces, also provided human, logistical and material support to New Caledonia from the start of the pandemic. Following the rapid implementation of strict sanitary protection and health and public freedom management measures, the Territory has recorded very few cases (52 cases as at 15 February 2021) and no indigenous spread of the virus.

56. In the context of the COVID-19 health crisis, the Government of New Caledonia first implemented health checks upon arrival in the Territory from 28 January 2020. The first two cases – travellers who arrived from Europe – were recorded on 18 March 2020. According to the administering Power, this was followed on 19 March by the introduction of a mandatory 14-day period of strict lockdown in requisitioned hotels upon arrival in the Territory, as decided jointly by the President of the Government of New Caledonia and the High Commissioner. Following the detection of new cases and in order to prevent any indigenous spread of the disease, a new joint decision established a lockdown for the entire population from 22 March to 21 April 2020, with school closures during this period. Hospital operations were adapted from the start of the pandemic and a department dedicated to the management of COVID-19

cases was set up where all patients stayed. According to the administering Power, all these measures have effectively protected New Caledonia from the pandemic. In terms of material support, in May 2020, France donated a stockpile of equipment to the New Caledonian health authorities, which was distributed as follows: 15,000 FFP2 masks; 200,000 surgical masks; and 400 pairs of protective goggles.

V. Environment

57. The administering Power indicates that New Caledonia has a unique natural heritage characterized by a high rate of endemism, in particular in terms of flora (76 per cent); striking land ecosystems (rainforest, maquis shrubland), some of which are particularly endangered (dry forest); and the second-largest coral reef in the world after the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. According to the administering Power, the various threats to this biodiversity have attracted the special attention of non-governmental organizations. Biodiversity conservation is also at the heart of government concerns. Various initiatives are being undertaken by the three provinces, which are responsible for environmental matters, and by the Government of New Caledonia in the exclusive economic zone.

VI. Relations with international organizations and partners

58. Organic Act No. 99-209 governs the legal framework for the establishment of external relations by New Caledonia. New Caledonia has been an associate member of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific since 1992. It became an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2006 and a full member in 2016. According to the administering Power, New Caledonia's participation for the first time as a full member in the Forum summit in Apia in 2017 was an important step in the implementation of the Nouméa Accord towards a greater international presence.

59. New Caledonia is also a full member of the Pacific Community, which has its secretariat in Nouméa. Other regional arrangements to which New Caledonia is a full party include the Oceania Regional Environment Programme, the Oceania Customs Organization and the South Pacific Tourism Organization. It participates under different statutes in the work of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (as an associate member), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (as a participating territory), the Pacific Islands Development Forum (participating in the work, without any special status), the World Health Organization (with a non-voting seat on the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific) and the Oceania Regional Anti-Doping Organization (as a participating member). Finally, New Caledonia, with the support of the Government of France, was granted associate membership in the International Organization of la Francophonie in 2016 and in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2017.

60. New Caledonia has continued to strengthen its ties with the European Union, with which it holds the status of associated overseas territory, as conferred by the Treaty of Rome. The European Commission office for the Pacific overseas countries and territories is based in Nouméa. Under the eleventh European Development Fund, New Caledonia received 29.8 million euros (3.6 billion CFP francs) between 2017 and 2020. Over this period, New Caledonia, together with the other three overseas countries and territories in the Pacific, has benefited from a regional envelope under the eleventh European Development Fund amounting to 36 million euros for the implementation of a regional cooperation project. Lastly, New Caledonia is also involved in the work of the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories of

the European Union, of which it assumed the vice-presidency in 2019 and took over the presidency in December 2020.

61. In January 2012, the French Minister for Cooperation, the French Minister for Overseas Territories and the President of the Government of New Caledonia signed an agreement on the hosting of representatives of New Caledonia in French diplomatic and consular missions in the Pacific (Oceania). The first New Caledonia representative was appointed to work out of the French Embassy in Wellington in 2012. According to the administering Power, on 9 March 2017, the Congress of New Caledonia adopted, by a majority, a country law on New Caledonia representatives that allows the Territory to be represented in States or territories in the Pacific. The conditions for their selection and training were defined in decision No. 84/CP of 16 May 2017. Four delegates took up their posts in 2019 in the French embassies in Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. The fifth delegate took up his duties at the French Embassy in Vanuatu in 2020.

62. Since 2016, the Government of New Caledonia has been heavily invested in developing relations with neighbouring States. In addition to the tripartite cooperation agreement initiated in 2012 between France, New Caledonia and Vanuatu, and regularly renewed since then, New Caledonia strengthened its cooperation with Vanuatu by signing a joint cooperation plan in 2017. New Caledonia signed similar cooperation plans with New Zealand in 2016 and Papua New Guinea in 2018. It has also initiated a free trade agreement with Vanuatu and is in discussions with other States in the region. The Government of New Caledonia intends to develop its economic diplomacy in that area. As such, economic diplomacy missions visited Papua New Guinea in July 2018, Fiji in July 2019, and Australia in March 2020.

VII. Position of the administering Power

63. Speaking on the question of New Caledonia during the general debate of the Fourth Committee, held on 23 October 2020, the representative of France said that his country had been cooperating fully with the United Nations on the New Caledonian issue for more than 30 years. He added that such cooperation took place within the framework of the Nouméa Accord, an agreement negotiated by the people of New Caledonia with the support of the State, which had mapped out a path that would make it possible to define the institutional future of New Caledonia in a peaceful environment. The fundamental principles of impartiality, dialogue and respect for democratic choices were guaranteed by the French State. The United Nations, and in particular its Special Committee on decolonization, provided additional guarantees of transparency that enhanced the legitimacy of the process. He said that an important step in the implementation of the Nouméa Accord had taken place on 4 October 2020, with the holding of a second referendum during which New Caledonia voters had been invited to respond to the question: “Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?” With an exceptionally high turnout of over 85 per cent of registered voters, 53.36 per cent of voters had said “no”. In accordance with the Nouméa Accord road map, a third referendum may be held by 2022. The political partners would then meet to discuss the outcome, in a spirit of dialogue for which the State would act as guarantor. The Minister for Overseas Territories had paid a visit following the vote, for a period of three weeks, in order to initiate this dialogue, listen to the various points of view and discuss the practical consequences of the choice of independence or remaining in France, with a view to the possible third referendum under the best conditions possible with respect to information.

64. The representative of France recalled that France had hosted a mission of the Special Committee on decolonization in New Caledonia in 2014 and 2018 and that the Committee had been able to observe on the ground the measures taken in the political, socioeconomic, cultural and educational fields to ensure full implementation of the Nouméa Accord, as well as the progress made with regard to the transfer of competencies in the area of natural resources to New Caledonian institutions. France had moreover followed the recommendations contained in the report of the Special Committee with regard to the importance of the public information campaign on the implications of the referendum. The representative of France concluded by stating that France had made the choice to face up to its history in New Caledonia, which was a colonial history, in order to overcome it. He expressed appreciation for the valuable support provided by the United Nations for that process (see [A/C.4/75/SR.7](#)).

VIII. Consideration of the question by the United Nations

A. Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

65. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples conducted the work of the session through correspondence and considered proposals under a silence procedure, in accordance with the relevant decisions of the General Assembly.

66. On 30 July 2020, the Chairperson of the Special Committee transmitted to the members of the Committee for consideration under the silence procedure, in accordance with General Assembly decision 74/561, the report containing the draft resolution entitled “Question of New Caledonia”, submitted by the delegations of Papua New Guinea and Fiji. On 5 August 2020, the Committee adopted the draft resolution by consensus.

B. Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

67. At its 10th meeting, held on 6 November 2020, the Committee adopted, without a vote, a draft resolution on the question of New Caledonia (see [A/C.4/75/SR.10](#)).

C. Action taken by the General Assembly

68. On 10 December 2020, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution [75/115](#) on the basis of the report of the Special Committee transmitted to the Assembly ([A/75/23](#)) and its subsequent consideration by the Fourth Committee.

Annex

Map of New Caledonia



Map No. 3428 Rev. 1 UNITED NATIONS
June 2016

Department of Field Support
Geospatial Information Section (formerly Cartographic Section)