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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 1486th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 22 May 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ PARRILLA
(Vice-Chairman)

(Cuba)

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In the absence of Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea), Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OBSERVANCE OF THE WEEK OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLES OF ALL COLONIAL TERRITORIES FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM, INDEPENDENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The CHAIRMAN said that since 1972, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2911 (XXVII), the United Nations had observed annually a Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of All Colonial Territories Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Human Rights. That observance was fully in accord with the purposes and principles of the Charter, which were eloquently reaffirmed in the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. It was an occasion for the United Nations and the international community to recommit themselves to the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations, through the full implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV); to reassert their faith in fundamental human rights, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small; and to demonstrate support to the peoples of all colonial Territories.

2. In expressing solidarity with the peoples of the colonial Territories, the United Nations was profoundly convinced that they should be able freely to determine their political status and their socioeconomic development; their wishes must be safeguarded in considering the self-determination options available to them. The Committee was particularly aware of the need for greater and more determined effort in the area of decolonization. It also recognized the need for flexibility, realism and imagination, and for new practical solutions to the problems facing the peoples in the Territories.

3. Many of the Non-Self-Governing Territories were small islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific affected by their small size and population, geographic remoteness, limited natural resources and vulnerability to natural disasters. The General Assembly had consistently reiterated its call to the United Nations, regional organizations and the international community at large to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories in enhancing their standards of living. It had also called upon the administering Powers to continue to cooperate with the Committee in the discharge of its mandate and to receive visiting missions to the Territories; the support and cooperation of those Powers were indispensable for the progress of the Territories towards self-determination.

4. With less than two years to go to the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the urgency of the goal of eradicating colonialism by the year 2000 would continue to motivate the work of the Committee and should remain one of the Organization's priorities. He echoed the General Assembly's call to all States, in particular the administering Powers, to international and regional organizations, to non-governmental organizations and to civil society at large to redouble their efforts to provide assistance to the peoples of the colonial Territories for the achievement of the objectives of

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the Declaration. He also urged the specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system to continue to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories in enhancing their standard of living and promoting self-sufficiency. Those efforts would help to realize the vision of the Charter of the United Nations and to ensure that the promise of freedom, lasting peace, friendly relations, sustained growth and development was fulfilled for all humanity on the basis of respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.

5. The SECRETARY-GENERAL paid tribute to the Committee's mission during the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of All Colonial Territories Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Human Rights. Ever since its founding, the United Nations had been a home and a haven for the peoples of the world still struggling for independence. In the 38 years since the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, some 60 former colonial Territories inhabited by more than 80 million people had attained independence and had joined the United Nations as sovereign members. And yet, the work remained unfinished. With the approach of the final year of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the United Nations must redouble its efforts and see the process to its conclusion. In the fiftieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he recalled the centrality of human rights to the struggle for independence.

6. Ultimately, the struggle for independence, for self-rule - for the right of a people to be master of its own destiny - was the struggle for human rights. It must be remembered that while human rights began with independence, they did not end there. It was the solemn duty of all the new nations - whether in Africa or Asia - to honour their independence by rewarding their peoples with genuine human rights for all, including the right to development and all civil and political rights. Only thus would it be possible to truly honour the long struggle against colonialism and pay tribute to the many men and women who had made the ultimate sacrifice in the hope of freedom and independence.

7. Mr. KA (Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People) recalled that the Committee had been established by General Assembly resolution 3376 (XXX) to consider and recommend a programme of implementation designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate and internationally recognized rights, including the right to self-determination and the right to establish their own State. The Week of Solidarity was therefore a week for Palestine and for all the Palestinians living under occupation, deprived of their freedom and dispossessed of their lands; for all the Palestinians in forced exile; and for all the Palestinians who had been deprived of their most basic rights, including freedom of movement and the right to work and live in peace, dignity and security.

8. The Week was being observed in the context of an acute crisis in the Israeli-Arab peace process. Despite the many initiatives of the sponsors of the peace process to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, and despite the international community's indignation about the settlement activities and systematic sealing-off of occupied Palestinian territories, the occupying Power was continuing to deny the Arab and Palestinian population their basic rights.

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9. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it was time to go back to the negotiating table as the only means of finding a peaceful political outcome to the crisis.

10. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People would continue to work under the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly to assist in the resumption of the political and diplomatic dialogue among the parties concerned so that a just solution would be found to the crisis in the Middle East, the Palestinian people would regain their rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of their own State, and a new era of peace and security for all and of partnership among the various nations and communities would begin. It was to be hoped that the end of the International Decade would coincide with the end of the occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the accession of the martyr people of Palestine to international sovereignty.

11. Mr. FORERO (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that one of the most significant achievements of the United Nations had been its contribution to the attainment of independence by many of its Members; however, the Organization could not relax its efforts, and decolonization must continue to be one of its urgent priorities. In order to be able to redirect its action to meet the challenges of a new international situation, the Organization must first complete the tasks remaining from the past. It must continue to assist the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, since without that help, it would be much harder for those Territories to achieve independence and self-determination. It was for the peoples to decide on their own self-determination, and as long as there were peoples claiming that right, the United Nations had an obligation to help them. All States had an obligation to ensure that the precepts of the Charter concerning the right of peoples to self-determination were fulfilled, and there was a double responsibility for those States which were colonial Powers. It was therefore important to provide the Committee with all necessary cooperation for the full implementation of its mandate. The cooperation of the administering Powers was essential in that regard. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries recognized the contribution made by the Committee to the cause of decolonization, and welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to maintain the decolonization unit within the Department of Political Affairs.

12. Less than two years before the end of the International Decade, there were still 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, and efforts must therefore be accelerated. The right of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to be guided by their democratically expressed wishes, free from any foreign pressure or military presence, must be reiterated. The Non-Self-Governing Territories must have the necessary elements for their economic and social development, within a framework of respect for their culture and environment.

13. At the Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, currently taking place in Cartagena, Colombia, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Heads of Delegation had reaffirmed the inalienable right of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to self-determination and reiterated their commitment to accelerate the complete elimination of colonialism. They had also reiterated their firm support for the

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Committee, expressed the wish that it be provided with the necessary human and financial resources, and called on the administering Powers to provide full support to the Committee's activities.

14. Mr. KWONG (Mauritius), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the end of the International Decade would coincide with the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the era of colonialism on the part of the European Powers. During that era, the African continent had suffered some of the worst ravages of colonialism. Africa had been carved into a crazed jigsaw puzzle, with little or no attention to local factors, giving rise to problems that would plague African nations long after they achieved independence. Those problems were compounded by the fact that decolonization and the liberation of the oppressed peoples of Africa had not always been a peaceful process.

15. Decolonization was one of the greatest successes of the United Nations. Yet, there was still some unfinished business, including the decolonization of one part of the African continent, where recent progress had been slow and uneven, but encouraging. To accomplish the remaining tasks, the Committee would require increased assistance and cooperation from all Member States. The African nations pledged their full support to the Committee and appealed to the administering Powers to cooperate fully with it.

16. The role of the specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system was vital in helping the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories to overcome the handicaps related to such factors as small size, remoteness and proneness to natural disasters. The Group of African States was gratified that substantive responsibilities for the decolonization programme were to remain in the Department of Political Affairs.

17. As the end of the International Decade approached, efforts to conclude the decolonization process must be redoubled.

18. Mr. EFFENDI (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of Asian States, said that, with the approach of a new millenium, the meeting offered a unique opportunity to reaffirm commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the implementation of the Declaration.

19. The efforts of the Organization to eradicate colonialism had led to some of its most successful achievements. The unanimous adoption of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) was enduring testimony to the collective conscience of the international community and its determination to ensure justice for the peoples of the world and had injected into the decolonization process a remarkable transformation of world geopolitics. As a result, the United Nations was on the threshold of achieving its goal of universality.

20. The views of the Asian States were rooted in their own national experiences and freedom struggles, which had instilled in them a strong solidarity with all peoples living under the colonial yoke. They were united in the conviction that international peace and security could never be attained unless all nations and peoples were free and equal. Those feelings of unity and solidarity had led them to play an active role in shaping the course of history, unleashing the desire for freedom and the exercise of the right to self-determination.

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21. Although many of the objectives of the International Decade had been achieved, a few Non-Self-Governing Territories remained; in that context, it must be emphasized that the modalities for self-determination laid down in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) were: emergence as a sovereign independent State, free association with an independent State or integration with an independent State. It was important that the majority of peoples of those Territories should be able to determine their political aspirations freely, and not be subjected to the whims of the minority. The complexity of the problems associated with the decolonization of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, in particular the difficulties relating to their small size, should not be a deterrent to fashioning specific solutions adapted to their unique circumstances. The Committee and the United Nations had recognized that no two cases of decolonization were alike, but were subject to prevailing realities and historical circumstances. The Group of Asian States hoped that the generally admirable record of the United Nations in the field of decolonization would continue to inspire collective efforts to relegate the colonial era to history.

22. Mr. FELICIO (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that the United Nations had achieved considerable success in decolonization and had made a significant contribution to the attainment of independence by a large number of countries which were now Members of the Organization. The Committee had played an essential role in that respect. Yet, less than two years before the end of the International Decade, there were still 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories and colonial practices still persisted. At a time when the Organization was engaged in a process of reform there must be a renewed commitment to decolonization on the part of the Members of the United Nations. To that end, action must be taken to create the necessary conditions to guarantee to all peoples the right to determine their future freely. The specific characteristics and particular situation of each of the Non-Self-Governing Territories were basic elements in that process. The participation and cooperation of the administering Powers remained indispensable. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States welcomed the participation of Portugal and New Zealand in the work of the Committee and recognized the progress made in the informal dialogue between the Committee and the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

23. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States hoped that a peaceful and lasting solution would be found to the long-standing dispute between Argentina and the United Kingdom concerning sovereignty over the Malvinas, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations and of the Organization of American States.

24. Speaking on behalf of the countries of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) and the associated States of Bolivia and Chile, he said that those countries reaffirmed their support for the legitimate rights of Argentina in the dispute concerning sovereignty over the Malvinas.

25. Speaking as representative of Brazil, he reiterated the importance of a just and internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Brazil continued to believe that the best course was direct talks between the parties and strongly supported the tripartite process, under

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the auspices of the Secretary-General. It likewise attached great importance to the human rights situation in East Timor. Those views were also shared by the countries of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries.

26. Mr. JILANI (Observer for Palestine) said that Palestine looked forward to the achievement of self-determination and independence by all peoples by the year 2000, so that in the twenty-first century the world would be free from colonialism, foreign occupation and oppression. The eradication of colonialism had been one of the major achievements of the United Nations. The right to self-determination was considered by the international community as a fundamental human right to which all peoples were entitled; the denial of that right therefore constituted a grave violation of human rights. In that regard, the international community must bear its responsibility, especially with regard to people under colonial or alien domination or foreign occupation who were still struggling for their right to self-determination.

27. On 15 May 1998 the Palestinian people had commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of al-Nakba, the dispossession and uprooting of over half the population from their land and homes. For five decades the Palestinian people had suffered a grave injustice, but they had managed to survive, against all odds, and had gained the respect and recognition of the international community. They had maintained and strengthened their national identity and sustained continuous resistance against ruthless Israeli occupation. They had established their own institutions and waged the intifada, a sustained daily resistance to Israeli military occupation, for six years. It was clear that stability and peace in the Middle East could not be attained unless the injustice perpetrated against the Palestinian people was reversed and their rights were achieved.

28. The problem now was that, while the Israeli side claimed to wish to achieve peace, its policies and actual practices were virtually precluding any possibility of attaining a peaceful solution to the problem. It appeared to be searching for a solution to its own internal problems rather than aiming for a solution to the conflict and truly striving for genuine coexistence on an equal footing between the two sides. The Palestinian people had made many sacrifices, but they were ready to make historic compromises in order to exercise their inalienable rights and finally live in peace.

29. The CHAIRMAN recalled that at its 1485th meeting the Special Committee had decided to invite a representative of Montserrat to participate in the special meeting as a manifestation of the Committee's support for its Government and people.

30. Mr. BRANDT (Montserrat) praised the Special Committee for allowing Non-Self-Governing Territories to participate in its meetings and for its efforts to enable them to deal directly with donors on the question of aid. It was well known that Montserrat was in dire need of aid because of the extraordinary devastation it had experienced since the Soufriere Hills volcano had begun to erupt in July 1995. He acknowledged the vast amount of support received from the United Kingdom which had helped to keep Montserrat alive. Montserrat had been a British colony for almost 350 years, but those new developments had caused it to reassess that relationship in positive ways and to collaborate in the search for solutions to the problems raised.

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31. The physical damage caused by the volcano was stupendous, but even more devastating had been the mental, psychological and social complications. Nevertheless, since scientific studies had concluded that the northern third of the island was relatively safe, many citizens had decided not to abandon their homeland, but to confront its problems and fight on. Montserrat's tragic losses included the capital, Plymouth, its only hospital, high school and technical school, most of the elementary schools, the offshore medical school, the airport and the three radio stations. Moreover, families had been torn apart in the aftermath of the devastation. Many had offered to help, but few understood that the kind of aid needed was fundamentally different from that required after a hurricane. The problems were enormously complex and their end was nowhere in sight.

32. Montserrat was, however, looking for ways to transform adversity into advantage. One of the few advantages of the tragedy was the opportunity it had provided to observe, record and study every aspect of an exploding volcano, resulting in a great increase in knowledge about volcanoes from which the whole world would benefit. He regretted that similar think-tanks had not been set up to observe and document the effects of the disaster on people and society. There was an important body of knowledge to be tapped, and he invited universities and other organizations to come to Montserrat to take advantage of the opportunity. The prospect of having to build a new Montserrat at the dawn of the twenty-first century also presented exciting possibilities for scientists, architects, engineers and technology pioneers.

33. Montserrat was not simply looking for handouts; it had the daunting task of rebuilding a country and an economy. It especially needed help with programmes that could lead to economic viability and sustainability, and looked forward to meetings with the United Nations specialized agencies and the international financial institutions to discuss those matters.

34. The people of Montserrat had been compelled to retreat and regroup, and they were grateful for the help extended to them from the Caribbean and around the world. They would survive, they would rebuild, and they would never forget.

35. Ms. GOMES (Portugal) said that decolonization had been one of the most successful endeavours undertaken by the United Nations. Since the restoration of democracy in 1974, Portugal had cooperated with the Special Committee as an administering Power and had taken an active role in promoting and implementing the right to self-determination for its former colonies. Portugal assumed its full responsibilities for the Non-Self-Governing Territory of East Timor, and had been seeking to improve the prevailing situation, particularly in the area of human rights. It had been engaged in direct talks with Indonesia under the auspices of the Secretary-General and his personal representative, aimed at achieving a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement to the question of East Timor.

36. The right to self-determination was pre-eminent among all human rights and was enshrined in all the major international human rights instruments. Honouring one's own national independence implied respecting the right to self-determination of other peoples. The East Timorese had been denied that right, first under Portuguese colonialism, and since 1975 by a new colonialism as

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practised by Indonesia. Her delegation sincerely hoped that the winds of change blowing in Indonesia would not only bring democracy and respect for human rights to the people of Indonesia but would also translate into a diplomatic solution to the question of East Timor, putting an end to the illegal occupation of the Territory and allowing its people to exercise the right to self-determination, which Indonesia itself had proudly exercised some fifty years earlier.

37. Ms. DURRANT (Jamaica) said that Jamaica, as one of the many countries which had entered the United Nations as a result of decolonization, attached great importance to that process and strongly supported the goals set forth in the plan of action for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. The right of peoples of dependent territories to self-determination, including independence if they so chose, must be guaranteed by the international community, and in particular by the United Nations.

38. It was pleasing to note a greater spirit of cooperation between the Special Committee and the administering Powers, which, along with the many initiatives being undertaken to assist the peoples of dependent Territories, would help to achieve the goal of eradicating colonialism by the year 2000. Jamaica, as a fellow member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), was grateful for the assistance provided to Montserrat and recognized the role played by the administering Power in responding to its plight.

39. The work of the United Nations decolonization machinery must be seen as a necessary intermediary between the interests and concerns of the peoples of dependent Territories and those of administering Powers. As long as there were territories that were neither independent nor an integral part of another State by choice, the inalienable rights of those peoples must be guaranteed by an independent broker. The United Nations had played that role well for many years, and must continue to do so until that chapter of history had been closed once and for all.

40. Mr. BAPTISTA (Indonesia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation was surprised by and deeply regretted the statements of the delegations of Brazil and Portugal regarding East Timor. Portugal had abandoned East Timor in 1975 and East Timor had never recognized Portugal as an administering Power.

41. Ms. SMITH (United Kingdom), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, with regard to the statement by the representative of Brazil on sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, her country's position was well known, having been restated before the General Assembly in 1997.

42. Mr. FELICIO (Brazil) said that he had mentioned East Timor in his statement simply to support the efforts of the Secretary-General to resolve that conflict equitably. Regarding the remarks of the United Kingdom representative he wished to clarify that he had been speaking in his capacity as representative of Brazil and on behalf of MERCOSUR when he had mentioned the Malvinas.

43. Ms. GOMES (Portugal) said that her Government had left East Timor because Indonesia had invaded that territory. She hoped that the change taking place in Indonesia would soon be reflected in the Permanent Mission in New York.

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44. Mr. BAPTISTA (Indonesia) said that Portugal had not only abandoned East Timor in 1975 but had voted against the resolution establishing the Special Committee in 1972.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.