



# General Assembly

Sixty-fifth session

**65**<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting

Tuesday, 14 December 2010, 10 a.m.  
New York

*President:* Mr. Deiss ..... (Switzerland)

*In the absence of the President, Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.*

## Agenda item 59 (continued)

### Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

#### Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): On 29 June 2010, the General Assembly adopted decision 64/560, by which it decided to hold a commemorative meeting on 14 December 2010 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The Assembly will now observe this important anniversary.

“All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

So states article 2 of the Declaration, whose fiftieth anniversary we commemorate today. On this anniversary, just four days after the observance of Human Rights Day and at the dawn of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, it seems to me important to highlight and

reaffirm this fundamental principle. The subjection of peoples to foreign domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of human rights.

A large number of Territories have gained their independence, sometimes by means of painful processes. Since 1945, more than 80 former colonies have become independent and joined the United Nations as sovereign and independent States. I should like to extend a special greeting to those of you who represent those States in the General Assembly.

The Assembly has played a vital role in this historic development. The adoption of the Declaration and the subsequent establishment of the Special Committee on Decolonization were decisive steps. Since its inception, the Special Committee has considered, with perseverance and determination, the situation of over 50 Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Today, we have yet to turn the page on colonialism once and for all. Sixteen Territories remain on the list. I hope that the General Assembly's adoption of the draft resolution proclaiming the third International Decade on Decolonization will mobilize the attention and energy of the international community so that this chapter can be closed.

To that end, the Special Committee plays an essential role as the principal United Nations body in the area of decolonization. It should continue to promote cooperation with the administering Powers. In consultation with the peoples of the Territories, the Committee should develop innovative, tailored

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approaches aimed at ensuring the exercise of the right to self-determination.

I would like to pay tribute to the courage of all those who have worked and struggled for their country's right to independence. I call upon everyone here today to support the efforts of the Organization and, in particular, those of the Special Committee, to eradicate the last vestiges of colonialism and thereby achieve the world of justice and equal rights promised by the Charter of the United Nations.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

**The Secretary-General:** I thank everyone for being here today. The General Assembly Hall looks very different than it did 50 years ago. I am not talking about the big television monitors or the electronic voting boards. I am not even talking about the seats, which are more comfortable now. I am talking about the number of independent Member States represented in this most universal international body and about the role of new and old States in shaping our world.

In 1960, we had just 99 members; today, we have 192 States in the Organization. At that time, we had more room — 10 seats for each delegation. Now, even after adding dozens of rows, each delegation still has only six seats. Then, only four African countries were represented at the United Nations. Today, there are more than 50 African Member States.

Many events helped shape these changes, but few were more important than the adoption of the General Assembly's Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

Then, more than 100 million human beings lived in conditions of colonial oppression and exploitation, denied their fundamental human rights. The Declaration was a light of hope, but making good on its promise to end colonialism seemed like a far-off goal for too many locked in the struggle for independence. Now, 50 years later, the vast majority of States have achieved that goal.

Still, the process of decolonization is not complete. There are 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories on the list of the Special Committee on Decolonization. Finishing the job will require a continuing dialogue among the administering Powers, the Special Committee and the peoples of those Territories.

The United Nations is committed to fulfilling the Declaration's great promise. The Organization was the proud midwife at the birth of a number of formerly colonized countries. We remain engaged with all of them as we seek to consolidate peace, development and human rights.

This is a long road beset by new challenges. Fortunately, decolonization efforts to date have taught us many lessons that we can use to reach our goals. First and foremost, we must remember that decolonization required commitment and persistence. These are qualities we must bring to the consolidation of independence. The building of new politics is just as big a struggle, and must continue in order to forge strong, self-reliant States.

Secondly, decolonization was achieved not through the lonely sacrifices of isolated individuals but through a spirit of solidarity that travelled across the globe, sometimes in writings smuggled into prison cells, sometimes in rallying cries shouted across borders and always with an understanding that we are all connected and share a common dignity.

Thirdly, the greatest champions of decolonization — those who have left their mark on history — understood that independence is part and parcel of global interdependence. Today, new coalitions and groupings of countries are taking hold. Rather than fragmenting into smaller groups with narrower concerns, we should forge broad alliances. That is how we can best reach our shared goals. In the process, we should pioneer new forms of cooperation among countries that were colonized, and with those that were not. We must preserve the lessons of the decolonization process, but we also have to adopt new ways of thinking to meet emerging challenges.

We must never forget the shared origins of many of the world's developing countries and the sacrifices they made on the path to independence. At the same time, global interdependence demands a new kind of solidarity to overcome the challenges of our times, be it eliminating poverty, pressing forward towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, protecting the environment or dealing with the violence in and between our societies.

Decolonization remade the world — in our minds and on the ground. It showed the tremendous power we have to shape the world for the better. Let us continue to build on that remarkable achievement and realize in

full the spirit of the Declaration whose anniversary we mark today.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Pursuant to General Assembly decision 64/560, today's meeting should be held in accordance with the established format for commemorative meetings of the General Assembly. Members will recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 17 September 2010, the Assembly adopted the recommendation of the General Committee that the format for commemorative meetings would include statements by the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the Chairs of the five regional groups and the representative of the host country.

Nevertheless, previous meetings to commemorate the anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples have included statements by the Chairman of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Therefore, if I hear no objection, this commemorative meeting will also include a statement by the Chair of the Special Committee.

*It was so decided.*

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Núñez Mosquera, Permanent Representative of Cuba, who will speak on behalf of the Chair of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

**Mr. Núñez Mosquera** (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is my honour to address this commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples on behalf of the Chair of the Special Committee on Decolonization.

The Declaration, adopted by the United Nations in resolution 1514 (XV), solemnly proclaimed the right of all peoples to self-determination and stressed that the subjecting of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and foreign exploitation were an impediment to the promotion of world peace and cooperation. It sent a strong message of emancipation

and hope to those still suffering under the colonial system. By this act of the United Nations, we unreservedly reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of the human person, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and lit a clear path forward for the oppressed. It further expedited the process of decolonization, which had begun with the birth of the Organization and became its first great success.

The Special Committee on Decolonization has been continuously examining the situation in the territories of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, Guam, the Malvinas Islands, Montserrat, New Caledonia, Pitcairn, Saint Helena, Tokelau, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the United States Virgin Islands and Western Sahara, as well as the question of Puerto Rico.

Many resolutions and decisions have been adopted that are aimed at the genuine exercise of the inalienable rights of the inhabitants of those territories to self-determination in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. Of the approximately 750 million people who lived under colonial rule in the past, fewer than 2 million people inhabit the 16 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories today.

As the Assembly is aware, last Friday the General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (resolution 65/119). The Special Committee believes that the decolonization process can only be addressed by taking into account current realities in the Territories and by bearing in mind the goal of a sustainable future for them. To that end, the international community will have to find creative ways to resolve the difficulties associated with this process, paying careful attention to economic and social needs and to the interest of the peoples in the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Each Non-Self-Governing Territory presents a unique set of circumstances that often involve quite complex political issues, the solution of which will require significant international cooperation, including close reliance on neighbouring and long-established relationships. In this context, the role of regional and subregional organizations should be further explored and possibly enhanced. Slow progress should not be

attributed to the absence of resolutions on this issue. It is, instead, a reflection of the lack of political will. A constructive relationship with the administering Powers is indispensable for the full implementation of the Declaration.

Accordingly, the Special Committee intends to enhance cooperation with the administering Powers, in consultation with the peoples of the Territories, with a view to developing case-by-case approaches. The relevant information that the administering Powers provide every year to the Secretary-General in accordance with Article 73 e of the United Nations Charter is an important tool in shaping these programmes.

As the main policymaking body of the United Nations in the area of decolonization, the Special Committee is called upon to monitor the implementation of the Declaration and to submit concrete proposals to the Assembly. In that regard, I would like to highlight the importance of regional seminars held alternatively in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. These seminars provide an excellent opportunity for enhancing education and public awareness of the decolonization process, thereby ensuring that the peoples of the Territories are in a position to make informed decisions regarding their future political status, in keeping with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Fact-finding and the evaluation of the situation in each Territory are important aspects of the Special Committee's mandate. That is why the Committee will continue to seek the cooperation of the administering Powers in facilitating United Nations special missions to the Territories under their administration. The Special Committee will explore the possibility of combining visiting missions to certain Territories with regional seminars.

We can all promote the cause of decolonization through joint resolute efforts and with close consultation and interaction. The Special Committee will continue to take the lead in facilitating cooperation among all interested parties in that area.

I am confident that, together, we will find the way to address future challenges in the most effective and pragmatic way, thereby accelerating the decolonization process in the coming years.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Milorad Šćepanović, Permanent Representative of Montenegro, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

**Mr. Šćepanović** (Montenegro): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States. Today, we are observing the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which, together with the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has laid the foundation for the role and responsibility of the United Nations in upholding the principle of the right to self-determination.

The Declaration not only was an expression of support by the overwhelming majority of United Nations States Members for the liberation struggle of colonial Territories, but also became a dynamic and vigorous tool that could spur the implementation of the Charter's provisions on Non-Self-Governing Territories.

The Declaration proclaimed the necessity of bringing a prompt and unconditional end to colonialism in all its forms and manifestations, which were incompatible with the United Nations Charter, the Decolonization Declaration and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The General Assembly declared that all peoples had the right to self-determination under international law and that, by virtue of that right, they may freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

The Assembly has reaffirmed the principles enshrined in the Charter and has reiterated that the administering Powers have a special responsibility to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security, the well-being of the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories under their responsibility. A review of the efforts of the United Nations over the past five decades since the adoption of the Declaration offers grounds for believing that decolonization is one of the most significant achievements of the Organization.

The membership of the United Nations has more than doubled since the adoption of the Declaration. A total of 192 Member States, many of them former Non-Self-Governing Territories, are now called on to

observe the anniversary of that historic document and to acknowledge the urgency of achieving the eradication of colonialism.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration offers us the opportunity not only to look back at the success that the United Nations has achieved in the field of decolonization but also, more important, to look ahead and reiterate our unwavering commitment to fulfil its objectives and redouble our efforts to that end.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Valero Briceño, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

**Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) on the occasion of commemorating a special and historic event for the United Nations, namely, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, adopted by the Assembly under resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960.

A landmark development took place at the United Nations with the adoption of resolution 1514 (XV), known as the Magna Carta of decolonization devised by the international community, the substance of which, in the light of the twenty-first century, formally ratified an almost unanimous conviction to consider colonialism unjust and unlawful. It is rightly described as one of the most authentic multilateral instruments on the self-determination of peoples. Subsequent to its adoption, the United Nations adopted numerous resolutions affirming and complementing such a universal expression of will, which was quickly incorporated into international law as a documented expression of unquestionable value.

Unlike the Charter, which describes self-determination only as a principle, the resolution enshrined self-determination as a right. It also established the principle of territorial integrity as the other guiding principle of decolonization. A milestone was thereby established in affirming that all peoples have the right to self-determination.

That implies that a people subjected to foreign subjugation, domination and exploitation has the right to be consulted, to freely express their views on how they wish to shape their political and economic circumstances and, if they so wish, the right to become a sovereign and independent State.

For GRULAC, this celebration is important and symbolic given that the 33 Member States that make up our Group strongly believe in the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of peoples. Resolution 1514 (XV) has particular significance for Latin America and the Caribbean, given its important role in the independence movements that helped 14 Caribbean States that were once Non-Self-Governing Territories to achieve independence in the 1960s and 1970s.

An integration process took place in our region that has been experienced by few other regions of the world. The nations of Latin America that gained their independence in the nineteenth century declared their solidarity with the Caribbean nations that years later achieved their independence and joined the United Nations as sovereign States.

Our region had a fundamental role in the great process of decolonization driven by the United Nations even before the well-known Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was adopted. Indeed, during the negotiations on the Charter of San Francisco, the Latin American republics were established as the voice of those who still had no voice; since 1945, they have fought for the exercise of self-determination and for the decolonization of the brotherly peoples of the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Unfortunately, there are still 16 Territories on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, eight of which are located in the Latin American and Caribbean region. That is why we encourage the Special Committee on Decolonization to continue to work until those Territories are decolonized, on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations on decolonization. The record of success since the adoption of this landmark resolution must be accompanied by renewed commitment to eradicating colonialism, achieving socio-economic development in the Territories in question and thereby fully realizing the goals of resolution 1514 (XV).

As characterized by the General Assembly, the question of the Malvinas Islands, which are located in our continent, is a special and particular case of sovereignty dispute. Our Heads of State and Government, gathered recently at the Riviera Maya Summit on Latin American and Caribbean Unity, on 23 February 2010, underscored the interest of the region that the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland resume negotiations to seek, as soon as possible, a just, peaceful and lasting solution to the sovereignty dispute over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and declarations of the United Nations and other international bodies.

We also wish to recall that the question of Puerto Rico has been considered in the Special Committee on Decolonization for more than 35 years. During that time, some 29 resolutions and decisions have been adopted. For the past 13 years, their adoption has been by consensus. Those resolutions on the question of Puerto Rico, among other things, reaffirm the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence, in accordance with resolution 1514 (XV). They also reiterate that the Puerto Rican people constitute a Latin American and Caribbean nation with its own unmistakable national identity, and request the General Assembly to undertake comprehensive consideration of all the aspects of the question of Puerto Rico.

Our Group strongly supports the work and activities of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization and hopes that in the coming years the Special Committee can move forward substantively in the review of the status of Non-Self-Governing Territories, taking into consideration the aspirations of the peoples of those Territories, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions on decolonization.

Achieving these objectives will require the full support of the administering Powers. The Group therefore calls upon the administering Powers that have not done so, to cooperate fully with the Committee's activities, thereby fulfilling the mandate set by the international community as a whole.

Finally, GRULAC expresses its support for declaring 2011-2020 as the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gérard Araud, Permanent Representative of France, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

**Mr. Araud** (France) (*spoke in French*): The Group of Western European and other States is pleased to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The end of colonialism and access to independence were among the most significant developments that shaped our world today. Our world view has been enriched by the chorus of voices that has emerged.

This has also changed the way we work at the United Nations. Fifty-one countries founded the Organization in 1945. There were 99 Members on 14 December 1960, when resolution 1514 (XV) was adopted. Today, I have the honour to speak before representatives of some 192 nations. Their diversity gives the United Nations the unique composition of a mosaic of peoples, the characteristic that makes the Organization, and the General Assembly in particular, a peerless entity in which all members are represented on an equal footing.

Although it is fair to say that, historically, there were several waves of emancipation throughout the world, some of which came before the Declaration of 1960, the text that we are commemorating today remains a symbolic landmark of those achievements.

In 1999, we witnessed Timor-Leste's achievement of independence. Today, 16 Territories remain on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. It is essential for the peoples concerned to take charge of the various options regarding the future status of their Territories and to be able to exercise their right to freely determine their future.

In this regard, we must not forget that the world has changed radically over the past 50 years. It has become more complex. The various Territories of the world are ever more interdependent. The fight against climate change, sustainable development, poverty eradication, gender equality and access to education and knowledge are just some of the challenges facing us today. The question of political emancipation cannot be addressed independently from those issues, which have a direct impact on people's lives. In this context,

we must show creativity in responding to those individual and collective aspirations.

We remain committed to achieving the goals contained in the Declaration. A new decade is about to begin. We intend to work hand-in-hand with all stakeholders involved in the decolonization process to find innovative ways to move forward.

I am sure that the Group of Western European and other States, a regional group comprising countries with developed economies, will play its full part in meeting these challenges.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Manjeev Singh Puri, Deputy Permanent Representative of India, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

**Mr. Manjeev Singh Puri** (India): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Asian Group. I would like to express the appreciation of all members of the Group to the President of the General Assembly for having taken the initiative to organize this meeting on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. I also wish to put on record my appreciation to the delegation of Pakistan for having chaired our open-ended working group that coordinates statements such as this.

In the late 1940s, when many countries in Asia were emerging from the dark shadow of colonial rule, the cardinal importance of independence from colonial rule was highlighted as never before. Indeed, the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement also echoed this sentiment.

The Charter provisions on Non-Self Governing Territories were given a new thrust when this body adopted the landmark 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Many Asian countries were sponsors of the Declaration.

The Declaration solemnly proclaimed the need to bring colonialism in all its forms and manifestations to a speedy and unconditional end. The right of peoples under alien subjugation, domination and exploitation to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development was recognized as a result of these initiatives, of which Asian countries were at the forefront.

The following year, the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was established to study, investigate and recommend action to bring an end to colonialism. India was elected the first Chair of the Decolonization Committee. As members of the Committee of 24, as it came to be called, Asian countries have toiled ceaselessly for an end to colonialism.

Today, the majority of United Nations Members are former colonies. This is clearly a measure of the success of the historic struggle against colonial rule. The fact that today fewer than 2 million people live under colonial rule in the remaining 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories, compared to 750 million in 1945, is a testament to the efforts of this body and of the crucial role of the Declaration.

Asian countries have supported numerous resolutions in the United Nations forums on decolonization. For coming generations, colonialism may be a part of history. Tomorrow's new challenges will have to be faced. However, it was the struggle against colonialism, successfully waged in solidarity by countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, that brought us to a stage where we can set goals of economic and social development for our societies.

It should be our common endeavour to work with the people of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories to realize what they perceive to be in their best interests. They should be given an opportunity to determine this freely from a well-informed standpoint. The way ahead must be characterized by a judicious mixture of urgency and activism, on the one hand, and sensitivity and circumscription, on the other, taking into account, first and foremost, the needs of the peoples of the Territories and their special circumstances.

Today, as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration, let us rededicate ourselves to the cherished ideals of freedom, democracy, human rights, dignity and peaceful coexistence, while also reaffirming our commitment to achieving the goal of decolonization, to which, as Members of the United Nations family, we have subscribed.

I wish to say a few words in my national capacity, coming as I do from the land of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru — two leaders who stand tall even among the giants who fought against colonialism and for the right to justice for all. Given that we are a country that experienced colonialism and earned independence through a non-violent struggle, India has always supported the legitimate right of peoples to self-determination and its application to peoples under colonial or alien domination as adopted under the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): The plenary meeting to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples is now concluded.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 59?

*It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.*