



# General Assembly

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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

### Tokelau

### 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 under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Information was transmitted by the administering Power on 1 December 2020. Further details are contained in previous working papers, available from <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers>.



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### **The Territory at a glance**

*Territory:* Tokelau is a Non-Self-Governing Territory, as defined under the Charter of the United Nations, administered by New Zealand.

*Representative of administering Power:* Administrator Ross Ardern

*Geography:* Tokelau comprises three small atolls: Atafu, Fakaofu and Nukunonu. Each atoll comprises strips of land up to 200 m wide and not more than 5 m above sea level. Samoa, located 480 km to the south, is the nearest sizeable neighbour and the principal point of contact for Tokelau with the outside world. Access is possible only by ship, with an average of 30 hours sailing from Samoa. There is no air service.

*Land area:* 12.2 km<sup>2</sup>

*Exclusive economic zone:* 318,990 km<sup>2</sup>

*Population:* 1,647 (2019), distributed as follows: Atafu: 535; Fakaofu: 546; Nukunonu: 504; and Samoa: 62 (Tokelau Public Service employees and their immediate families). There are 7,176 Tokelauans living in New Zealand (2013 census). As New Zealand citizens, Tokelauans may also reside in Australia.

*Life expectancy at birth:* 69.1 years (women: 70.4 years; men: 67.8 years (2010–2015 estimates))

*Ethnic composition:* Tokelauans are Polynesians with linguistic, familial and cultural links with Samoa.

*Languages:* Tokelauan. English and Samoan are also widely used.

*Capital:* None. Each atoll has its own administrative centre.

*Head of territorial Government:* Ulu-o-Tokelau. The position of titular head of Tokelau rotates annually among the *faipule* of the atolls.

*Main political parties:* None

*Elections:* Held in January every third year. The most recent election was held on 23 January 2020.

*Legislature:* The unicameral General Fono

*Economy:* The principal sources of revenue are fees from fisheries licences and assistance provided by New Zealand through budget support and project funding.

*Monetary unit:* New Zealand dollar (\$NZ)

*Gross domestic product per capita:* \$US 6,275 (2015/16 financial year, Tokelau National Statistics Office)

*Brief history:* Originally inhabited by Polynesians from surrounding islands, Tokelau became a British protectorate in 1889, and administration was transferred to New Zealand in 1926. By the Tokelau Act 1948, sovereignty over Tokelau was transferred to New Zealand.

## I. Constitutional and political developments

### A. Local self-governance

1. As previously reported, the current process of constitutional development stems from the 1998 decision of the General Fono (the national representative body) to endorse a comprehensive report entitled “Modern house of Tokelau”, which addressed the core issue that faced Tokelau in creating a constitutional framework that suited an atoll- or village-based self-governing community that respected traditional decision-making customs. The traditional Council of Elders on each atoll serves as the foundation for the governance structure of Tokelau. The Councils delegate authority to the General Fono for activities that must be handled at the national level (see [A/AC.109/2005/3](#)).

2. General Fono delegates are now elected on the basis of proportional village representation, with a system of universal village suffrage, rather than one of equal village representation with delegates appointed by the respective *taupulega* (village councils), as was previously the case. In the elections held on 23 January 2020, 22 General Fono delegates, including four women, were elected for the next parliamentary term of 2020–2022.

3. The six-person Council for the Ongoing Government is the executive Government when the General Fono is not in session. The Council consists of three *faipule* (representatives of each village) and one General Fono delegate from each village, designated by the *taupulega*. The position of Ulu-o-Tokelau, or Head of Government, rotates annually among the three *faipule*. In March 2020, the *faipule* of Fakaofu took over as Ulu-o-Tokelau. In March 2021, the *faipule* of Atafu is expected to rotate into the position.

4. The New Zealand official with the principal responsibility for maintaining the relationship with Tokelau is the Administrator of Tokelau, who is appointed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand. The current Administrator is Ross Ardern, who was formerly the High Commissioner to Niue and assumed the role of Administrator in May 2018. The Office of the Administrator draws on advice and support from the Ministry, including the Pacific and Development Group.

### B. Referendum process

5. In 2003, the General Fono took a formal decision, with the support of all three village councils, to endorse self-government in free association with New Zealand as the choice to be actively explored with the Government of New Zealand. In August 2005, the General Fono approved a draft constitution, as the basis for the proposed act of self-determination, and the text of a draft treaty of free association. In November 2005, the Cabinet of New Zealand gave its formal approval. The referendum package, consisting of the draft treaty and the draft constitution, was to form the basis of the referendum on self-determination. In line with a decision by the General Fono, an overall majority of two thirds of the valid votes cast was required for a change to the status of Tokelau.

6. The first referendum on self-determination was held sequentially in Apia and on the three atolls from 11 to 15 February 2006 (see [A/AC.109/2006/20](#)). The outcome fell short of the required two-thirds majority, with 60 per cent of valid Tokelauan votes cast in favour of self-government in free association with New Zealand. The United Nations, which formally monitored the referendum, deemed the process credible and reflective of the will of the people of Tokelau. A representative 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, accompanied by a Political Affairs Officer of the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, also observed the referendum process.

7. In August 2006, the General Fono voted to hold a second referendum on Tokelauan self-determination in late 2007. The proposed constitution and the draft treaty, commonly referred to as the self-determination package, were to be the same, and the legal threshold for acceptance of the proposal would remain at a two-thirds majority.

8. The second referendum was held from 20 to 24 October 2007. The result, with 64.4 per cent in favour, was again below the two-thirds threshold, thereby leaving the status of the Territory unchanged (see [A/AC.109/2007/19](#)). As with the first referendum, the United Nations formally monitored the voting, with representatives of the Special Committee and the Department of Political Affairs present as observers.

9. Following the results of the second referendum, the General Fono requested the Government of New Zealand to keep the entire self-determination package on the table. The Council for the Ongoing Government noted that Tokelau could in the future change the two-thirds majority threshold for the referendum but should put in place measures to ensure that a threshold would be supported by a clear majority in each village, to guarantee unity. The Council also noted the Territory's strong commitment to self-determination and its wish to have a constitution, albeit one that did not encompass the provisions for free association and self-government.

10. The outcomes of the referendums, neither of which reached the threshold of support set by the General Fono for a change of status, have been acknowledged and accepted by New Zealand. As a follow-up to the result of the referendum held in 2007, the then Prime Minister of New Zealand met the leaders of Tokelau in February 2008 to discuss the next steps in the development of the New Zealand-Tokelau relationship. It was agreed that a "pause" should be taken in the self-determination efforts of Tokelau. New Zealand is supporting Tokelau in efforts to develop its infrastructure, public services and capacity for self-governance.

## **II. Economic conditions**

### **A. General economic overview**

11. Tokelau faces major constraints to its economic growth, including such natural disadvantages as small size, isolation, distances between the atolls, lack of natural resources and natural disasters. The economic stability of the Territory has been made possible by the high levels of assistance provided by the administering Power supplemented over the past decade by significant revenue from fisheries licences. With the continued assistance of New Zealand, the Council for the Ongoing Government has maintained a focus on improving the delivery of core public services, such as education and health; completing key infrastructure projects, such as renewable energy, telecommunications and transport; adapting to climate change; and strengthening the Council and the Tokelau Public Service.

12. As part of a fisheries policy aimed at maximizing the economic benefits from the sustainable use of its exclusive economic zone, Tokelau joined the Vessel Day Scheme in 2012. The Scheme is used to sustainably manage catches of target tuna species and increase the rate of return from fishing activities through access fees paid by distant water fishing nations. In October 2015, the General Fono approved fisheries reforms intended to further improve the administration and management of the Territory's offshore and inshore fisheries. The implementation of the reform

programme continues and is guided by a fisheries reform steering group comprising representatives of Tokelau, the Office of the Administrator, the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries and technical advisors to the Administrator and the Tokelau Fisheries Management Agency.

13. Traditional and communal values and practices play a key role in contributing to a state of general well-being in the Territory, as evidenced by the *inati* system and the importance attached to upholding the concepts of family and/or extended family. The tradition of *inati* requires the deposit at a central location of food and produce, which are then apportioned on the basis of “share groups” to address the needs of every member of the community, including older persons, widows, single parents and children.

14. The first economic summit for Tokelau, organized by the Department of Economic Development, Natural Resources and Environment of the Government of Tokelau, was held in April 2018 under the theme “Small is sustainable”.

## **B. Assistance to Tokelau by the administering Power**

15. Customized assistance is provided through budget support, projects and regional programmes. In 2019/20, New Zealand spent \$NZ 43 million on development assistance to Tokelau, including \$NZ 12.5 million in general budget support, significant one-off investments in infrastructure such as Tokelau’s link to a trans-Pacific submarine Internet cable, four wharves and a wide range of other activities. Forecast expenditure for 2020/21 is \$NZ 23 million. New Zealand has committed to comprehensive support for strengthening the police and judiciary of Tokelau and updating its legislation (rules) on related matters, as Tokelau is expected to take initial steps on a journey of reforming its law and justice sector.

16. The Tokelau International Trust Fund, established in November 2004, was designed to provide intergenerational security and an independent source of income to Tokelau. Its balance as at 1 July 2020 was \$NZ 98.24 million.

## **C. Transport and communications**

17. Transportation needs in Tokelau are met by regular passenger and cargo shipping services from Apia. In 2016, the Government of New Zealand gave Tokelau the *Mataliki*, a vessel that carries up to 60 passengers and essential cargo on international voyages. Transportation links were further improved in March 2018 with the launch of the *Kalopaga*. This cargo vessel, which can carry eight passengers, was funded and procured by Tokelau. In late 2018, New Zealand gave Tokelau a search and rescue vessel, *Fetu o te Moana*, which also provides general transportation between the atolls. With the completion of all four wharves and reef passages in 2019, the shipping services of Tokelau have been substantially upgraded.

18. During her visit to Tokelau in July 2019, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, indicated that New Zealand was committed to working in partnership with Tokelau on the development of air services to the territory. This was on the conditions that Tokelau decide on which one of the three atolls the runway should be constructed; that it would be a joint project with co-financing from Tokelau; that a suitable site could be found; and that engineering and financial assessments proved the viability of air services. In October 2019, the General Fono decided that Nukunonu would host the first runway with the specific location subject to engineering assessments.

19. Telecommunications services in Tokelau are provided by the Tokelau Telecommunications Corporation (Teletok). The investment in connecting Tokelau to an undersea Internet cable was confirmed in 2019. New Zealand is contributing \$NZ 22.2 million and the Government of Tokelau is contributing \$NZ 7 million towards the total estimated cost of \$NZ 29.2 million. The undersea Internet cable will provide high-speed Internet service, enabling better communication, administration, governance and improved health and education services. The cable landing station on Nukunonu is being completed, with the laying of the cable scheduled for 2021.

#### **D. Power supply**

20. In 2012, Tokelau became the first area in the world to draw electrical power primarily from solar sources, following the completion of the Tokelau Renewable Energy Project. The initiative involved the installation of solar photovoltaic systems on the three atolls.

21. The demand for electricity has grown significantly since 2012. As a result, in 2016 the Government of Tokelau funded a small expansion of photovoltaic systems and upgrades of the village distribution networks. However, demand has continued to outstrip supply. In 2019, New Zealand committed \$NZ 6 million to an expansion and renewal of Tokelau renewable energy facilities which generate electricity for the villages. The Government of Tokelau and the villages will contribute \$NZ 3 million. The installation of proven new technology that would ensure that Tokelau generates 90 per cent of its electricity from renewable energy for at least 10 years is expected to be completed in 2021, as coronavirus disease (COVID-19) border controls have delayed installation.

### **III. Social conditions**

#### **A. General**

22. In October 2016, Statistics New Zealand and the Tokelau National Statistics Office conducted a census, which is carried out every five years. The official de jure usually resident population of Tokelau was 1,499, which represented an increase of 6.2 per cent from the previous census, conducted in 2011. In December 2019, Statistics New Zealand and the Tokelau National Statistics Office carried out a population count which reported a further increase in the usually resident population to 1,647.

23. The first household income and expenditure survey of Tokelau was completed in 2016 with assistance from the Pacific Community. This survey estimated total annual household income at \$NZ 7 million, with employment accounting for 77.2 per cent, imputed rents for 10 per cent, income from transfers (including remittances, social benefits, pensions and scholarships) for 7 per cent and gifts (in kind and remittances) for 5.1 per cent. The survey estimated an average household size of 4.6 people and annual per capita income of \$NZ 6,100. Some 40 per cent of the population of Tokelau is less than 20 years of age, with a median age of 25 years.

24. According to the administering Power, COVID-19 has had a considerable social impact on the people of Tokelau. A number of students have had to forgo their international studies, and health patients have had increased difficulty travelling to New Zealand and have been stranded in Samoa and New Zealand after receiving treatment. The disruption to family life has been considerable.

## **B. Education**

25. In Tokelau, early childhood, primary and secondary education is free up to year 13 and provided by three schools, one on each atoll. As an owner of the University of the South Pacific, Tokelau has access to the University's distance-learning foundation course through a University satellite receiver and centre on each atoll. The cost of the University's local infrastructure and staff is covered by the Government of Tokelau.

26. With a significant financial commitment from New Zealand, Tokelau carried out a five-year plan to transform compulsory education, focused on primary and early childhood education, with the assistance of the Centre for Educational Development of Massey University. The Education Review Office of New Zealand visited the three villages of Tokelau in March 2018 to assess progress and consult the village councils and education committees about priorities for the coming years. The 2018 review found that the quality of early childhood and primary education had improved since the 2013 review. However, much remains to be done and particular attention needed to be given to improving the breadth and quality of secondary education.

27. In 2019, New Zealand supported the Tokelau Department of Education in holding a successful Tokelau education summit by granting funding and coordinating attendance by representatives of New Zealand education agencies. The summit endorsed a historic shift in the education strategy of Tokelau towards closer integration with the New Zealand education system in order to raise the quality of secondary education and to broaden career and learning pathways for young Tokelauans. In October 2019, the General Fono approved the new secondary and digital education strategies of Tokelau. In May 2020, New Zealand committed \$NZ 4 million to support Tokelau in implementing its secondary and digital education strategies in particular and to continue raising the standard of all education services.

## **C. Health care**

28. An independent review of clinical health services in Tokelau and the patient referral scheme of the Government of Tokelau was completed in 2019 and provided many recommendations for improving health services. The review found that, while Tokelau has a financially well-resourced health system, there are substantive areas of dysfunction. It noted that strained relationships can obstruct effective delivery of health services and national coordination. The review found that substandard health-care provision and a lack of trust in local clinical services contribute to an increased uptake of the patient referral scheme. This, the increasing incidence of non-communicable diseases and policy and process issues contribute to the scheme's unsustainable financial burden. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand has contracted a Tokelauan health adviser to assist the Government of Tokelau in prioritizing the review recommendations and developing a strategic plan and operational plans for improving health services.

29. Tokelau has reported low infant and maternal mortality, thanks to the early referral of mothers for maternity care in Samoa or New Zealand. Antenatal care coverage and coverage for child immunization is 100 per cent. Tokelau also has very high rates of immunization. It was vigilant in protecting its population from the measles outbreak in Samoa.

30. At the time of writing of the present working paper, Tokelau had reported zero cases of COVID-19. On 21 March 2020, Tokelau declared its borders closed to all countries and territories with COVID-19 cases. New Zealand provided the Government of Tokelau with \$NZ 3 million in supplementary budget support in March 2020 to prepare for COVID-19 and to respond to its economic and social



impacts. A further \$NZ 1.26 million was committed to improve diagnostic capacity in Tokelau and assist the health sector in equipping staff quarantine and hospital isolation facilities for each village appropriately. That financial support is complemented by advice from the New Zealand Ministry of Health and ongoing assistance from regional and international organizations, which the Government of New Zealand supports.

## **IV. Environment**

31. Tokelau's low-lying atolls are susceptible to climate change impacts such as sea level rise, extreme weather events and related hazards. In July 2016, the General Fono included climate change among its national priorities under the Tokelau development framework for 2016–2020. In April 2017, Tokelau officially launched its climate change strategy, entitled "Living with change: an integrated national strategy for enhancing the resilience of Tokelau to climate change and related hazards, 2017–2030".

32. New Zealand recognizes its unique obligation to Tokelau to assist with climate change adaptation and disaster resilience efforts because, as a territory of New Zealand, Tokelau cannot access global climate change funds and it receives limited assistance from other donors. A multi-year programme of technical assistance and grant funding to strengthen disaster preparedness in Tokelau has been extended. In 2019, New Zealand-contracted environmental engineers completed a coastal hazards study and an implementation plan for improving coastal resilience. They developed concept designs for multi-purpose evacuation centres after a workshop with Tokelau village representatives prioritized "no regrets" investment to protect lives. New Zealand and Tokelau officials presented the implementation plan to the village councils in February 2020 and ensured village feedback was incorporated into the revision of the plan. In June 2020, New Zealand committed \$NZ 5 million to detailed design and initial assistance to implement the resilience projects prioritized by Tokelau and New Zealand. The COVID-19 border controls of Tokelau have been taken into account in the planning and procurement of specialist services.

33. New Zealand also adapted its approach to strengthening the water security of Tokelau to take account of COVID-19 control measures. The New Zealand navy deployed a large vessel to Tokelau in November 2020, which transferred water tanks and renewable energy materials to the atolls by helicopter while maintaining social distancing.

## **V. External relations**

34. Tokelau, as a Non-Self-Governing Territory, does not have an international legal personality separate from that of New Zealand that would allow it to enter into formal international legal obligations as a State in its own right. In consultation with Tokelau, New Zealand is responsible for entering into any such obligations on behalf of Tokelau. Tokelau participates in regional and international organizations in its own right to the extent that such organizations allow.

35. Tokelau is seeking to increase its engagement with regional and international organizations. It is a member of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Community Coastal Fisheries Programme, the Council of the University of the South Pacific, the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. Tokelau is an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum, a member of the Polynesian Leaders Group and an associate member of the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In addition to New Zealand, Samoa is an important bilateral contact for Tokelau.

36. Representatives of Tokelau attended the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as part of the New Zealand delegation. A highlight at the Conference was the special screening of *Vaka*, a film dealing with the vulnerability of Tokelau to climate change.

37. At the twenty-third session, as requested by the Government of Tokelau, New Zealand announced that it had submitted a formal declaration to the United Nations to extend the territorial application of both the Convention and the Paris Agreement to Tokelau. The national reports of New Zealand under the Convention now include action taken by Tokelau.

## **VI. Future status of the Territory**

### **A. Position of the territorial Government**

38. At the 4th meeting of the Special Committee, on 17 June 2019, the Ulu-o-Tokelau said that self-governance was distinct from self-determination. Tokelau continued to practise self-governance and refine a governance model that was based on its own culture but that also incorporated elements of Western models.

39. Tokelau and New Zealand were working together to build greater local capacity. New Zealand had been strengthening infrastructure in Tokelau by maintaining and increasing energy capacity; constructing schools, hospitals and homes; and improving connectivity through a new inter-atoll vessel and a new telecommunications cable. Tokelau, for its part, had begun relocating senior officials in the national public service from Samoa to Tokelau, which would lead to a greater integration of traditional and modern knowledge that was characteristic of its emerging governance model.

40. Tokelau was also living the reality of climate change. Rising sea levels and sea acidification presented serious problems for Tokelau. Tokelau appreciated the opportunities provided by New Zealand, the United Nations and other countries and donors, which had given the people of Tokelau more confidence to consider self-determination in the future. However, failure to mitigate the risks would result in a loss of confidence.

### **B. Position of the administering Power**

41. The Administrator of Tokelau, Ross Ardern, delivered a statement at the 4th meeting of the Special Committee, on 17 June 2019. He said that the partnership between Tokelau and New Zealand was strong. He had visited Tokelau five times over the past 12 months and further trips were planned in the coming months. Leaders from Tokelau had visited New Zealand in September 2018 and March 2019. The nature of the relationship and questions of governance and self-determination were guided and determined by the people of Tokelau. His role was to provide support and guidance so that Tokelau could realize its vision and aspirations and provide its people with a better quality of life.

42. New Zealand had consistently sought to devolve its administrative powers to Tokelau and support the development of its own governance institutions. The current arrangements reflected the unique characteristics of the Territory and would continue to evolve. It was the role of New Zealand to support Tokelau in developing a governance model that recognized those characteristics while also drawing on other

models it considered would serve it well. The growing sense of unity between the three atolls was an important aspect of the governance journey and must be nurtured. The women's organization in each village already played a vital role in their communities and every effort should be made to amplify women's voices, since their contributions would strengthen leadership and governance at the village and national levels.

43. Development assistance from New Zealand had recently been expanded and around \$NZ 86 million would be used over the next three years for the advancement of the Territory, including to strengthen the governance and management of its public services, finances and infrastructure. In response to a review carried out in 2013, New Zealand had contracted professional support for Tokelau schools and was helping the Tokelau Department of Education to build leadership capacity and improve education services. A follow-up review in 2018 noted that early childhood and primary education had improved, but secondary education required further attention.

44. Primary health care was available in every village in Tokelau while secondary and tertiary care was generally provided in Samoa and New Zealand. A new hospital was close to completion on one of the atolls. At the request of Tokelau, New Zealand had commissioned an independent review of health services and patient referrals.

45. Connectivity was a lifeline for isolated communities. The new inter-atoll vessel would enable people to receive more specialized health services. Increased Internet connectivity was on track to be delivered in the fourth quarter of 2021. New Zealand and Tokelau were contributing \$NZ 22.2 million and \$NZ 7 million, respectively, to the project, which would bring benefits for public services.

46. Climate change was a real challenge. Small places such as Tokelau, which had contributed the least to climate change, would suffer the full force of a warming planet. New Zealand was committed to supporting the Territory on the international stage, including by facilitating the attendance of its representatives at regional and international forums alongside New Zealand representatives. New Zealand was supporting the efforts of Tokelau to adapt to the changes that the atolls were already experiencing. The national climate change strategy focused on integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in village decision-making. New Zealand had increased technical assistance to incorporate climate change adaptation and disaster resilience into village planning. An international firm was developing a coastal hazard reduction plan and would help village representatives to identify and assess options for mitigating such hazards.

47. Subsequent to the Administrator's remarks, a highlight in the New Zealand-Tokelau partnership was the visit in July 2019 of the Prime Minister of New Zealand to Tokelau. This was the first visit by a New Zealand Prime Minister in 15 years. Prime Minister Ardern pledged to support air services for Tokelau, provided certain conditions were met (see para. 18), and to work with Tokelau on improving its health services.

## **VII. Consideration by the United Nations**

### **A. Consideration of the question of Tokelau by the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples**

48. The 2020 substantive session of the Special Committee, scheduled to take place between 15 and 26 June, was not held owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the

Committee conducted the work of its substantive session through correspondence and considered proposals through a silence procedure pursuant to General Assembly decision 74/544 and its follow up decisions 74/555, 74/558 and 74/561. On 30 July 2020, pursuant to Assembly decision 74/561, the Chair of the Special Committee transmitted to the members for their consideration, under the silence procedure, the report of the Committee for 2020 ([A/75/23](#)), including draft resolution XV, entitled “Question of Tokelau”, submitted by Papua New Guinea, which was adopted by consensus on 5 August 2020.

## **B. Consideration of the question of Tokelau by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)**

49. At the 7th meeting of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), held on 23 October 2020, the Permanent Representative of New Zealand stated that Tokelau and New Zealand enjoyed a warm and respectful partnership underpinned by shared values and aspirations. New Zealand was pleased that Tokelau continued to have no reported cases of COVID-19 and was committed to ensuring that that remained the case in the future.

50. He stated that his Government and the Government of Tokelau were working together to lay the building blocks for self-government in a manner that reflected the best of the Territory’s faith, culture and identity. The 2019 visit by the Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Territory had showcased the close cultural and community ties between Tokelau and his country and their joint efforts to enhance core public service governance, transport and internet connectivity, and climate change resilience and mitigation. Although the closure of the border of Tokelau since March 2020 as a result of COVID-19 had had a significant impact on some operational aspects of the relationship between New Zealand and the Territory, the two Governments continued to adapt their engagement in order to ensure that their shared goals and commitments remained on track.

51. New Zealand continued to fund development activities in Tokelau. It had provided assistance to local health services, including in the form of diagnostic equipment to strengthen the Territory’s pandemic preparedness and of the recruitment of a health adviser to oversee improvements in clinical health services. During the previous financial year, New Zealand had also provided \$NZ 4.6 million in supplementary budget support and grant funding to assist Tokelau in preparing for and coping with the economic impact of the pandemic. As fisheries were the Territory’s only significant source of independent revenue and played a critical role in the fulfilment of its goal to become more self-reliant, the Government of New Zealand continued to work with the Government of Tokelau to ensure that fisheries in the Tokelau exclusive economic zone were sustainably managed.

52. During the previous year, the parliament of Tokelau had endorsed closer integration between the Territory’s secondary and tertiary education systems and those of New Zealand, and the Government of Tokelau had developed new education strategies and plans. Over a four-year period, the Government of New Zealand had allocated \$NZ 4 million to the implementation of the secondary and digital education strategies of the Government of Tokelau. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety of transport to and between the Territory’s atolls had been improved owing to the upgrading of wharves and reef passages. Despite the operational constraints imposed by the pandemic, the construction of a new submarine cable and inter-atoll connection was on track to be completed by early 2021. New Zealand was also committed to supporting Tokelau in modernizing its laws to ensure that they reflected international norms and was engaging in dialogue with

the leaders of Tokelau on ways to improve the Territory's legal, judicial and police services.

53. He added that the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic had strengthened the determination of New Zealand to support Tokelau in its efforts to develop its capacity for self-government and decision-making. His delegation was committed to providing the Committee with timely and accurate information on matters related to Tokelau.

### C. Action taken by the General Assembly

54. On 10 December 2020, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution [75/118](#) on the question of Tokelau. In that resolution, the Assembly:

(a) Acknowledged the decision of the General Fono in 2008 that consideration of any future act of self-determination by Tokelau would be deferred and that New Zealand and Tokelau would devote renewed effort and attention to ensuring that essential services and infrastructure on the atolls of Tokelau were enhanced and strengthened, thereby ensuring an enhanced quality of life and opportunities for the people of Tokelau;

(b) Welcomed the progress made towards the devolution of power to the three *taupulega* (village councils) since 2004, and noted that further discussion was planned on the recommendations in the report on the devolution review, compiled in 2012;

(c) Noted with satisfaction the democratic elections in Tokelau held on 23 January 2020 for the tenth General Fono and the subsequent swearing-in of the Ulu-o-Tokelau on 9 March 2020;

(d) Noted with appreciation that Tokelau and New Zealand remained firmly committed to the ongoing development of Tokelau for the long-term benefit of the people of Tokelau, with particular emphasis on the further development of facilities on each atoll that meet their current requirements, including investment to connect Tokelau to an undersea fibre-optic cable for faster and more reliable Internet services, improved maritime transport infrastructure and services, quality health care and education and support for the fisheries sector;

(e) Recalled the consideration by Tokelau of its National Strategic Plan for 2016–2020, which prioritized good governance, human development, infrastructure development, sustainability and climate change adaptation, and noted the completion by Tokelau of the Plan, which determined development and other priorities for the 2016–2020 period, and the Plan's focus on infrastructure development to support service delivery, including through transport and telecommunications solutions;

(f) Acknowledged the ongoing and consistent commitment of New Zealand to meeting the social and economic requirements of the people of Tokelau, including through new shipping service assets and shipping infrastructure development, and budget support for the delivery of education services ranging from early childhood education to foundation courses for tertiary study, as well as the support and cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization;

(g) Commended the completion by Tokelau in 2013 of the Tokelau Renewable Energy Project with the support of the administering Power and receipt by the Government of the Renewable Energy Award granted by the New Zealand Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority;

(h) Also commended Tokelau for the recent measures taken to safeguard the health of its peoples through its "Tobacco-Free Tokelau by 2020" policy, and

encouraged the necessary support for its implementation from the administering Power, the United Nations system and relevant stakeholders;

(i) Acknowledged the need of Tokelau for continued support from the international community and its desire to become part of the discussions on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the impacts of climate change and the protection of the environment and oceans, and in that regard encouraged, as appropriate, assistance towards the implementation of the climate change strategy of Tokelau, entitled “Living with change: an integrated national strategy for enhancing the resilience of Tokelau to climate change and related hazards, 2017–2030”, and the associated plan, also acknowledged the efforts of the administering Power to include in its national reporting to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change the climate mitigation action taken by Tokelau, and noted with appreciation the launch of the Tokelau national greenhouse gas inventory report on 11 April 2019 as a milestone achievement;

(j) Recalled with satisfaction the establishment and operation of the Tokelau International Trust Fund to support the ongoing needs of Tokelau, and called upon Member States and international and regional agencies to contribute to the Fund and thereby lend practical support to Tokelau in overcoming the problems of smallness, isolation and lack of resources;

(k) Welcomed the cooperative attitude of the other States and territories in the region towards Tokelau and their support for its economic and political aspirations and its increasing participation in regional and international affairs, and in that regard noted the successful chairmanship by Tokelau of the tenth annual ministerial meeting of the Forum Fisheries Committee of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, held in Tokelau on 1 and 2 July 2014, the representation of the Agency by the Ulu-o-Tokelau at the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held in Apia from 1 to 4 September 2014, and the signing by Tokelau of the Pacific Islands Development Forum Charter on 27 April 2016 so as to become the twelfth member of the Forum, and the recent participation of Tokelau, represented by the Ulu-o-Tokelau, as an associate member in the forty-ninth Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, held in Nauru in September 2018;

(l) Called upon the administering Power and United Nations agencies to continue to provide assistance to Tokelau as it further developed;

(m) Recognized the positive actions taken by the administering Power to transmit to the Secretary-General under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations information regarding the political, economic and social situation of Tokelau;

(n) Commended the renewed strong commitment of both Tokelau and New Zealand to continuing to work together in the interests of Tokelau and its people;

(o) Requested the Special Committee to continue to examine the question of the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Tokelau and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session.

## Annex

## Map of Tokelau

