As Special Committee on Decolonization Opens Session, Assistant Secretary-General Says Agenda’s Success Hinges on Political Will of All Stakeholders

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Special Committee on Decolonization,

1st Meeting (AM)

Citing growing cooperation among all stakeholders concerned to eradicate colonialism across the globe, a senior United Nations political official this morning called for innovative, practical ways to address the issue of self-government, as the Special Committee on Decolonization opened its 2015 session.

“Let us seize this momentum and move the decolonization agenda forward,” said Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen, Assistant Secretary-General ad interim for Political Affairs, speaking on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.  “The success of our efforts continues to depend on the political will of all involved.”

Last year, the Special Committee took important steps towards that end, Mr. Anders said, dispatching a visiting mission in March to New Caledonia, one of the 17 Non-Self Governing Territories still under the watch of the 29-member body, known as the Committee of 24.  The visit was the first such mission to that Territory since 2007.

The rounds of dialogue begun in 2013 between the Special Committee’s Bureau and each of the four administering Powers of the Territories, as well as various other stakeholders, were successfully repeated in 2014, he said.

This year marked the fifty-fifth anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Peoples, and the midpoint of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, he stated.  Yet the Organization’s historic decolonization mandate was still not complete, Mr. Anders said, pledging the Secretariat’s continued support for the Special Committee’s work.

Xavier Lasso Mendoza (Ecuador), who at the outset of the meeting was elected Chair for the Special Committee’s 2015 session, noted that body’s work over the past year, including another round table of informal consultations with three of the administering Powers and other decolonization actors aimed at “building bridges that allow dialogue to advance”.

He said that the Special Committee held its first meeting with Jim McLay, New Zealand’s Permanent Representative, on 26 November during which they discussed the socioeconomic development of the South Pacific island Territory under that country’s administration, Tokelau, and the postponement of any decision on self-determination in order to focus on improving the quality of life of the local population.

The Special Committee, he said, met on 9 December with Alexis Lamek, Deputy Permanent Representative of France, who stated that the French Government had put in place various mechanisms to address electoral voting problems.  But the Special Committee was informed that those mechanisms had yet to produce concrete advances and that the Territory administered by France — New Caledonia — had not had a functioning Government since 16 December 2014 even though its congress had elected a new one on 31 December 2014.

“We are following with concern the institutional crisis in the Territory and how it could affect the process of decolonization in New Caledonia,” Mr. Lasso said, stressing the importance of permanent dialogue between the interested parties, as called for in General Assembly resolution 62/102 on the matter, adopted in December 2014.

He said that the resolution, drawing on the conclusions and recommendations of the visiting mission to New Caledonia in March 2014, stated, among other things, that the Special Committee must continue monitoring the situation in New Caledonia during the last phase of implementing the Noumea Agreement; a fair, impartial and transparent electoral register was essential for any decision on self-determination; and a programme educating New Caledonians about self-determination was the best way to prepare them to make a decision on the matter.

The Special Committee on 16 December, he said, met with Mark Lyall Grant, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, who reaffirmed his Government’s position over the Special Committee’s role and his country’s relationship with the Territories under its administration.

Lastly, Mr. Lasso noted the Special Committee had not been able to meet with the Permanent Mission of the United States in February as planned, due to time constraints, but it hoped to do so in the near future and would keep the Special Committee abreast of developments.  The Bureau was also working to arrange its annual meeting with the Secretary-General.

At the outset of the meeting, the Special Committee adopted its agenda and organization of work (documents A/AC.109/2015/L.1 and A/AC.109/2015/L.2) for its 2015 session, and elected Rodolfo Reyes Rodríguez (Cuba), Desra Percaya (Indonesia) and Vandi Chidi Minah (Sierra Leone) as Vice-Chairs, and Bashar Ja’afari (Syria) as Rapporteur.

Further, the Special Committee decided to hold its annual regional seminar in Managua from 19 to 21 May and authorized its Chair to finalize the list of invitees.  It also decided the official languages of the seminar would be English, Spanish and French, and its official delegation would comprise the Special Committee Chair, his adviser and eight other Special Committee members, including members from the Group of African States, Group of Asia-Pacific States, Group of Eastern European States, and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.  The United Nations would pay for the cost of travel of officials of the Non-Self-Governing Territories only.

María Rubiales de Chamorro, representative of Nicaragua, said this marked the first time the Special Committee’s seminar would take place in a Central American country with both a Caribbean and Pacific coastline.  The seminar would focus on the Third International Decade, she said, expressing hope that colonialism would finally come to end during the course of the decade.

In other matters, the Chair informed the Special Committee that its Bureau had held intersessional meetings with the administering Powers and other stakeholders in December 2014 and was expecting one of the administering Powers to make itself available for the final meeting.

Robert Guba Aisi, representative of Papua New Guinea, stressed the importance of the administering Powers’ participation in the Special Committee’s work in order to resolve the status of Non-Self-Governing Territories, notably New Caledonia.

The Special Committee will meet again at a date and time to be announced in the *Journal*.