Intensify Action-oriented Dialogue to Boost Momentum for Self-determination, Urges Secretary-General, as Special Committee on Decolonization Begins 2016 Session

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Special Committee on Decolonization,

1st Meeting (AM)

The Special Committee on Decolonization should intensify action-oriented dialogue with the aim of generating further momentum to fulfil the United Nations decolonization mandate, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement read out on his behalf at the opening of that body’s 2016 session today.

“The international community has the means to eradicate colonialism,” an urgent priority demanding prompt action, the Secretary-General told the Special Committee, known formally as the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples.

In the statement, read out by Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Secretary-General Ban urged the Special Committee, administering Powers, Non-Self-Governing Territories and other stakeholders to do their part to advance progress.  The international commitment to advance the decolonization agenda could be seen in the fact that the Special Committee had undertaken to dispatch one visiting mission to one Non-Self-Governing Territory every year, he said.  Thanking the Special Committee for its renewed vigour and creativity, he emphasized: “All of us must seize the opportunities at hand.”

Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño (Venezuela), who was elected Chair of the Special Committee by acclamation, said decolonization had been one of the most important tasks in the history of the United Nations and had become one of its main symbols.  However, the persistence of colonial situations around the world undoubtedly represented a blatant violation of fundamental rights, contradicting the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter, and a “stigma in the conscience of the world”.  Half a century after the adoption of the decolonization Declaration, 17 cases of colonialism had not been resolved, he noted.

Indeed, he continued, despite the noteworthy results of the Special Committee, those cases demonstrated that the decolonization process had not yet concluded.  It was therefore necessary to engage in permanent dialogue involving the administering Powers, the Special Committee and the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories in order to reach a negotiated solution, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions on decolonization.

He called upon the administering Powers to increase their efforts to take the necessary measures so that the Non-Self-Governing Territories could exercise fully their right to self-determination, in compliance with Chapter XI of the United Nations Charter.  It was also important that they provide the necessary cooperation, and, in accordance with section (e) of the Charter’s Article 73, provide appropriate information on each Territory under their respective administrations.

Noting that his country still faced the consequences of unpunished plunder of its territory by colonial Powers during the nineteenth century, he said it had always taken as its own the struggle of peoples under “detestable occupations and abhorrent colonial situations”.  Venezuela called upon the international community to pay all necessary attention to the Non-Self-Governing Territories, particularly island States, because they were more vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental degradation — including the risk of disappearance.  He also asked Member States to continue contributing to decolonization efforts in the name of peace, human rights and social and economic development.

In other elections today, the Special Committee re-elected, by acclamation, Rodolfo Reyes Rodríguez (Cuba), Vandi Chidi Minah (Sierra Leone) and Desra Percaya (Indonesia) as Vice-Chairs, and Bashar Ja’afari (Syria) as Rapporteur.  It then approved a timetable and organization of work (document A/AC.109/2016/L.2) for its 2016 session, with the understanding that it might be revised.

In other business, the Chair announced that the Special Committee had yet to find a host for its 2016 Pacific Regional Seminar, scheduled for June.  Inviting offers to host from Member States of the Asia-Pacific region, he added that should a host not be identified, offers by States in other regions would be entertained.

A number of speakers congratulated the new Chair and the other Bureau members on their re-election.  Several underlined the importance of the United Nations decolonization agenda and the Special Committee’s crucial role in that regard, with some warning against a “one-size-fits-all” approach in addressing the 17 cases remaining on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Ecuador’s representative said those situations remained, in large part, because of a lack of political will on the part of the administering Powers.  The Special Committee had an important mission to establish a road map to concluding the decolonization process before 2020, he added.

Indonesia’s representative agreed that the Special Committee should continue its work through a balanced and thorough assessment of each case, stressing that each was unique, and that the delisting process should be carried out on a “case-by-case” basis.

Nicaragua’s representative agreed that much remained to be done to resolve the situation of the 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, as well as that of Puerto Rico.  For Latin America and the Caribbean, the issue of decolonization was a very important one, he said, adding that the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) had declared the region a “zone of peace”, for which decolonization was a crucial requirement.

Also speaking were representatives of Chile, Iran, Cuba, Sierra Leone, Syria and Algeria.

The Special Committee will reconvene on Monday, 13 June, to begin its substantive work.