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SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Pacific Regional Seminar on the implementation of the Second
International Decade for the Eradication of
Colonialism: priorities for action

Yanuca, Fiji
28 to 30 November 2006

OPENING STATEMENT

BY THE CHAIRMAN

OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF 24

**Statement of the Chairman of the Special Committee on Decolonisation
Opening Session
Pacific Regional Seminar
Fiji**

His Excellency, the Honourable Mr. Pio Tabaiwalu, State Minister for Small and Micro Enterprises and Information Technology of the Republic of the Fiji Islands,

Distinguished Ministers, elected and other representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories,

Distinguished ambassadors and other representatives of United Nations member states,

Experts,

Members of United Nations organisations,

Members of civil society organisations,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the member States of the *United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation*, I wish to thank the Government of Fiji for its timely offer to host this 2006 Pacific Regional seminar on the implementation of the plan of action of the *Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism*.

It is especially noteworthy that Fiji, as a small island developing state, has once again stepped forward to host these important deliberations -- this time following the unavoidable delay in the convening of the seminar last May. In fact, this is the third time that Fiji has hosted the *Pacific Regional Seminar*, first in 1998, and again in 2002. The Special Committee salutes the government and people of Fiji for this sustained commitment to the contemporary self-determination process of the remaining territories yet to achieve that full measure of self-government that has been achieved by many small island states (SIDS) of the United Nations, including those of this beloved Pacific region.

Thus, the insights and experiences brought by small island states to the regional seminars are especially relevant to the small island developing *territories*, and the interaction between representatives of these territories from the Caribbean and Pacific creates its own dynamism. This continues to reinforce the importance of the regional nature of the seminars.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have passed the mid-way point in the *Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism*. Last year at the Caribbean Seminar held in Canouan, the mid-term review of the Second Decade was conducted. This coincided with the five-year review of the *Millennium Declaration* which re-committed the international community to the realisation of self-determination.

Throughout this period, due recognition has been given to the treaty obligations of states to promote the self-determination process, as contained in the various human rights conventions such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*; and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*; among other legal instruments;

In this connection, the linkage between the self-determination process of the remaining small island non self-governing territories, and the realisation of human rights, has been consistently reinforced by the General Assembly. Most recently, by resolution last December, the Assembly emphasized that:

“...in the process of decolonisation, there is no alternative to the principle of self-determination, which is also a fundamental human right as recognised under the relevant human rights conventions.”

Perhaps the most important of these legal instruments is the United Nations Charter itself, which in Article 73 (b) underscores the responsibility of those UN member states which administer territories “*to develop self-government*” in those territories.

The General Assembly has sought to give substance to this mandate through the adoption of concrete recommendations to be carried out by both the administering powers, the United Nations system, and the territories themselves:

- Initiatives such as the development of political education programmes in the territories to foster an awareness among the people of their legitimate political alternatives, and the need for the transfer of powers to the territories, have been consistent themes over the decades.
- The recognition of the right to self-determination in conformity with the legitimate status options of political equality-- namely independence, free association and integration – has been continually reaffirmed by all member states including the administering powers.
- The promotion of socio-economic development, the preservation of the cultural identity and repatriation of artefacts and other historical materials, the protection of the environment, and the ownership of the natural resources of the territory by the people have all been emphasized.
- The initiation of a work programme for each territory taking into account the respective levels of political and socio-economic development has been urged.

- The necessity of the completion of expert analytical studies on the prevailing political and constitutional conditions in the territories to identify issues impeding the progress towards full self-government, and to enhance the awareness of UN member states, have been repeatedly emphasized.
- Assistance in the development process of the territories by the wider United Nations system, such as *UN Development Programme*, the *UN Electoral Affairs Division*, the regional commissions, and others; as well by as regional organisations such as the *Pacific Islands Forum* and the *Pacific Community*; has also been made clear.

These and other concrete recommendations over the decades have served as the lengthy legislative authority to carry out activities leading towards the decolonisation of the non self-governing territories. Yet, insufficient implementation of these recommendations remains the most critical impediment to the decolonisation process, especially in the small island territories.

In this connection, the *Plan of Implementation of the Decolonisation Mandate*, prepared for the Special Committee, was recognised by the General Assembly's Fourth Committee last October as an important legislative authority for the attainment of self-government for the territories by the end of 2010. This *Plan of Implementation* organizes the actions called for in UN resolutions in eight areas of focus, and identifies actions to be carried out, either by the UN system or by independent means.

It is clear that the "*business as usual*" approach has not resulted in substantial progress. New and innovative methods are required to accelerate the implementation of the decolonisation mandate of the United Nations. It is a fact that over the last 15 years only one of the non self-governing territories on our list -- Timor Leste -- has achieved a full measure of self-government. The words of the former Chairman of the Special Committee, *Ambassador Julian Hunte*, at the 2005 Caribbean Regional Seminar in Canouan have great resonance here in Fiji in 2006, when he said that the second half of this decade must be focused on implementation. Otherwise, he said,

"...we will continue in a never-ending spiral of in-action, to return, year after year, to begin again."

As the present Chairman of the Special Committee, I concur with this observation. It cannot be the intention of the Special Committee to be party to a process of *in-action*, with the adoption of resolutions as our only achievement, without regard for whether they are implemented.

Indeed, the lack of commitment to implementation has not gone un-noticed. One administering power has instructed the territories under its administration that it no longer offers the political status option of free association, all the while joining in the

consensus on annual resolutions reaffirming the applicability of this option to all remaining territories.

Another administering power has announced that its relationship with one of its territories is an internal matter, rather than one which is a function of the United Nations Charter which governs the disposition of non self-governing territories.

Clearly, then, the insufficient attention paid to implementation of the decolonisation mandate tends to weaken the strength of that mandate, making our task even more difficult.

It should therefore be our clear intention to accelerate efforts at implementation. As former Chairman *Ambassador Peter Donigi of Papua New Guinea* has so eloquently stated in years past, we must begin to think "*outside the basket*" if we are to achieve success. Our success means that the people of the territories will progress.

I am therefore pleased to welcome all of our participants who will provide important information and analysis of these important issues against the backdrop of the seriousness and urgency of the day:

- We will hear of new developments in the aftermath of the *Tokelau* referendum and the prospects for a future exercise of self-determination.
- We will hear the concerns of representatives from *Guam* on developments affecting the self-determination process in that territory.
- We will be updated on the state-of-play of the *Noumea Accord* in place in *New Caledonia*.
- From the Caribbean, we will be updated on the elements of the new constitution in the *Turks and Caicos Islands*, the status of constitutional talks between the *British Virgin Islands* and the *United Kingdom*, and developments in other Caribbean territories. We will also be provided with an analysis of constitutional legislation in the US Virgin Islands, and gain some insight on the implications of the recent hearings on the self-determination of Puerto Rico as it relates to the territories under United States administration, including those in the Pacific region.
- We will hear the views of the representative of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), and the Frente POLISARIO.
- We also will be provided with expert analysis on the role of the United Nations system in providing assistance to the non self-governing territories.
- Finally, we look forward to the views of the members of the Special

Committee, and representatives of other UN member states in attendance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my intention that we make substantial time for structured inter-active dialogue during these few short days.

I look forward to a fruitful and constructive dialogue with the result being concrete recommendations that we can take forward to the wider United Nations family for implementation.

Our task is formidable – especially in view of the urgency of the day. I am sure that in pressing ahead, we will succeed in making an important contribution – not just to the decolonisation debate -- but a contribution to the solutions required in addressing the dynamics of contemporary colonialism, in all of its forms and manifestations.

Thank you very much.