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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

STATEMENT BY

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**Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism
Pacific Regional Seminar: Priorities for Action**

**Speaking Notes
David Payton, Administrator of Tokelau**

**Yunuca, Fiji
Tuesday 28 November 2006**

I'm grateful for the opportunity to be here to represent the perspective of New Zealand as administering power for Tokelau. This is the first occasion that I am attending a United Nations meeting since taking up my duties in September as Administrator of Tokelau and I wish to take this opportunity to place on record my respect for those who have proceeded me in this role, particularly my immediate predecessor, Neil Walter, who throughout his long and distinguished career in the New Zealand diplomatic service worked to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Tokelau were clearly and positively addressed.

This year, 2006, might rightly be called the year of Tokelau. It marks eighty years since these distant atolls came under the responsibility of New Zealand. It also marks thirty years since the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation sent its first mission to Tokelau. In that same year 1976 the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed an Official Secretary as head of the Tokelau Public Service. He was delegated the Administrator's full powers and instructed to involve Tokelau more closely in all decision making. He was also tasked with establishing a truly Tokelauan public service to work with Tokelau's political authorities and with engaging Tokelau in active consideration of its political future.

Since 1976 there have been four more missions to Tokelau by the Special Committee on Decolonisation. Those missions have seen steady change in Tokelau. New Zealand's reports to the Special Committee and to annual sessions of the General Assembly have sought to give a clear account of the effort being devoted to meeting New Zealand's responsibilities to Tokelau. Over the past decade the practice has been for the Administrator of Tokelau and Tokelau's Ulu or Head of Government to appear in person before the Special Committee. This practice is also in evidence here and I am most pleased to be here with Faipule Kolouei O'Brien, Ulu of Tokelau.

This year should also be remembered by all those committed to the cause of decolonization as the year that Tokelau underwent an act of self-determination. Much has been said about this event which took place in February. All those who worked tirelessly to ensure it took place under the best possible conditions are to be congratulated for a job very well done.

The outcome of that act of self-determination has been described and debated at length, particularly in June at the latest session of the Special Committee. It is not my intention to go over those details again. What I do want to do is state that New Zealand remains fully committed to Tokelau. The draft Constitution and the draft Treaty of Free Association remain on the table. The substantial financial support provided by New Zealand to Tokelau continues as does the commitment to ensure that the people of Tokelau have the essential services they require.

Tokelau's General Fono has decided that a further referendum on self-determination will be held in a year's time, in November 2007. New Zealand is committed to supporting this process in similar fashion to the referendum this year. It is vital that the months ahead be used well to ensure that those who vote next November in this act of self-determination do so with the clearest possible understanding of the implications of their actions. If that happens we will all have done our duty to the people of Tokelau. We will also have acted in fully compliance with the objectives of this Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

Earlier I mentioned that I have only recently taken up my post as Administrator of Tokelau. Late last month I had the opportunity to pay my first ever visit to Tokelau. In my head I have long known of the isolation of those atolls, hundreds of miles to the north of Samoa. I have been told of their beauty, their vulnerability and their fragility. As all here who have had the privilege of visiting Tokelau know only too well, there can be no substitute for seeing the uniqueness of Tokelau at first hand.

Tokelau is, of course, much more than the beauty of the atolls, the allure of their lagoons. It is the determination of the people of the atolls that is the true testament to Tokelau. On each atoll I had the opportunity to meet with the village council, the Taupulega, and hear first hand of the priorities it has for the development of their village and atoll. I was, for example, able to gain a first hand understanding of the crucial importance of the shipping service that binds Tokelau to the outside world and to New Zealand. More needs to be done on this and I was pleased to be able to signal major advances in the upgrading of this vital service.

Everyone who visits Tokelau for the first time will come away with at least one special memory, a special perspective about those fragile strips of land in the huge Pacific Ocean. I have a background in environment issues

and especially climate change. It will not surprise you, therefore, that my impressions were coloured by the challenges and threats posed to Tokelau and other small, remote island countries by climate change, the potential for sea level rise and the very present realities of increased extreme weather events.

While it is all too common to hear that international efforts to tackle climate change face strong and ongoing challenges by those states that believe more information is needed, or the time is not right to make the hard political and economic choices that will be essential if human induced climate change is to be seriously addressed, the reality is that the people of Tokelau live with the consequences of such inaction. The threats of significant climate change and of more frequent extreme weather events is a reality for all the people of Tokelau. In addition to the attention they receive on the fundamental issue of decolonization, I would suggest that they, and all other small island states, deserve equal attention and support from the wider international community to tackle this daily challenge.

I do not know how long the position of Administrator of Tokelau will continue to exist. What is significant is that it is a question that lies in the hands of the people of Tokelau. That surely is testament to the commitment of New Zealand to decolonisation.

I look forward to participating in the consideration by this Pacific Regional Seminar of the situation in Tokelau. I look forward to hearing the contributions of Mr Akuso who until recently played such a key role within the Tokelau public service and who now holds high responsibility at the Pacific regional level, as well as professor Tony Angelo, who has also made such a substantial contribution to the development of a number of Pacific island states.