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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 the remainder of the Decade

Bandung, Indonesia  
14 to 16 May 2008

STATEMENT

BY

THE REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF  
INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES**

**ADMINISTRATOR OF TOKELAU  
DAVID PAYTON**

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**STATEMENT AT THE PACIFIC REGIONAL SEMINAR  
OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONIZATION**

*"Implementation of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of  
Colonialism: priorities for remainder of the Decade"*

Bandung, Indonesia: 14-16 May 2008

In my capacity as Administrator of Tokelau, I am grateful for the opportunity to make this statement to your Seminar. While I would have preferred to be with you in person, I hope that you will understand that other demands, in significant part relating to the ongoing programme of work with Tokelau, have prevented this from being possible. I wish all participants in this Seminar success as you address the challenges associated with colonialism and the central issue of self-determination.

Tokelau remains an active issue on the agenda of the Special Committee, and New Zealand, as administering power for Tokelau, remains pleased to cooperate closely with the Committee to ensure that its commitment to Tokelau and to the principle of self-determination is well understood. This past year has been a busy one for Tokelau. Twenty months after they first held an act of self-determination in February 2006, the people of Tokelau, through a decision of their General Fono, participated in a second self-determination act in October last year. The outcome of that event is well known to members of the Special Committee and the wider international community, thanks in no small part to the excellent

reporting of the UN Secretariat responsible for overseeing and supporting the work of the Special Committee.

It is not my intention to try to explain the reasons why the people of the atolls of Tokelau chose for a second time not to change their current status and become "self-governing in free association with New Zealand" as the Cook Islands had in 1965 and Niue in 1974. I do wish however to place on record my assessment that the preparation of the Tokelau electorate for this referendum by the Government of Tokelau was exemplary. No electorate was ever more carefully prepared to take an informed decision than the people of the three atolls of Tokelau. It is also very important to record here that this preparatory process was one entirely determined by Tokelau. New Zealand was pleased to support this process but throughout it remained a Tokelau-led process.

I also wish to take this opportunity to express New Zealand's appreciation for the commitment of the Special Committee to support of Tokelau's latest act of self-determination. The presence during the referendum of Ambassador Aisi of Papua New Guinea, together with representatives of the UN Secretariat, demonstrated the ongoing commitment of the wider international community to the principle of self-determination.

I have stressed that the decision to hold a second referendum and the conduct of it was a Tokelau-driven process. I also wish to make clear that in the aftermath of the referendum result it was Tokelau's leaders who set the tone and direction of their country's decision on the way forward. Immediately after the result of the referendum was announced in Atafu on 24 October, the Ulu of Tokelau spoke by telephone with the New Zealand Prime Minister. Prime Minister Helen Clark made clear to the Ulu that New Zealand would fully respect the Referendum result. She also invited Tokelau's leaders to visit Wellington after the January 2008 atoll elections so that New Zealand and Tokelau together could look at the path ahead for Tokelau.

In February that visit took place. It provided an opportunity for the special ties that bind New Zealand and Tokelau together to be reaffirmed. There was discussion about why a significant minority within the Tokelau electorate remains unconvinced that a change of status to one of self-government was appropriate at this time. It also provided a helpful opportunity for both parties to look at how the ongoing needs of the people of Tokelau's atolls can best be met. The outcome of these discussions was agreement that, while self-determination remains an important facet of Tokelau's aspirations, in the coming years increased attention should be devoted to meeting the core needs of this small, isolated and vulnerable community. It was agreed that particular attention would be given to upgrading and strengthening infrastructure and services in the key sectors of health, education and administration. There was also agreement that work to deliver to Tokelau an assured, quality long term shipping service should continue and be enhanced.

The months since that meeting in February have seen major progress in a number of key areas. A major multi-million dollar infrastructure programme, spanning several years and geared to ensuring maximum involvement by each atoll's population, is well underway. In its first year emphasis will be on renewing schools on Atafu and Fakaofu and upgrading the hospital on Nukunonu. And on the shipping service front, planning has advanced to a stage where formal decisions are expected next month on the specific vessel that will service Tokelau's needs in the coming 25 years. Much is being done to ensure that the people of Tokelau who choose to remain on their home atolls have a quality of life and a certainty of adequate services that is sufficient to ensure viable and sustainable communities on each of the three atolls.

I am providing this information because it is important that this Seminar and those committed to the cause of self-determination understand clearly that New Zealand's commitment to Tokelau relates not only to the right of the people of Tokelau to decide their future path and direction but also to ensuring that, whatever Tokelau's status, meeting the needs of the people on those distant atolls remains of paramount importance to New Zealand.

These are challenging times for many countries, not least the small, remote and vulnerable. We know that changes taking place within the world economy are impacting on the lives and wellbeing of an increasing number of people. Costs of basic needs such as food and energy are rising. Tokelau is no exception and, unlike some, it has few, if any, options to reduce the growing economic pressures it is facing. In such circumstances it is vital that the international community does not overlook the needs of countries such as Tokelau. International and regional organisations need to ensure that the support they provide is focused and relevant to the unique circumstances of this tiny group of people, living such an exposed, vulnerable existence in the midst of the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

New Zealand is committed to standing with Tokelau and its people. They may be very small in number, their atolls may be tiny and isolated but their expectations and needs are as relevant as any others. It is my hope that this Seminar will find it possible to look at Tokelau not only as a non self-governing territory whose people deserve the right to self-determination but also as a <sup>living,</sup> dynamic community that has far wider hopes and expectations.