

# SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF DECOLONIZATION ENDS UNNOTICED

By Joyce van Genderen-Naar

---

The Second International Decade of Decolonization is ending soon in 2010. The main conclusion is that two decades were not enough to resolve all decolonization issues, in contrary the process of self-determination leading to decolonization has become increasingly complex. Third and even more International Decades will be needed before all Non-Self-Governing Territories have attained self-determination. The international mandate for decolonisation is a function of the UN Charter and UN resolutions on decolonisation are supported by all of the nations of the world, with regard to the international obligation to develop self-government and to take due account of the political aspirations of the people of their territories (article 73 of the United Nations Charter). But the implementation is politically sensitive and information has been scarce. Decolonization issues stay unnoticed.

The stocktaking took place during the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Decolonization, organized on 12, 13 and 14 May in St. Kitts and Nevis (Caribbean) by the UN Special Committee of 24 on Decolonization (Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples). Recommendations were made to establish a mechanism for dialogue between local authorities in the Territories, administering Powers and the international community to facilitate the decolonization process. There has to be more interaction and cooperation between the Special Committee and the administering Powers, by creating frameworks for dialogue between the Territories, the administering Powers and the Special Committee. The international community needs to work together and to remain engaged, guided by the political options available to the Non-Self-Governing Territories: free association with other independent States, full integration with political rights, or independence. It is important to focus more on the specific needs of each Territory in terms of their political and economic needs and assistance by the United Nations system. Education and public outreach are crucial for decolonization, to enable the people concerned to make informed decisions regarding their future political

status, to promote maturity and movement towards “appropriation of the own destiny”: “You cannot insist on your rights, unless you understand them.” Decisions on self-determination must be based on full information and education.

In a message to the Seminar UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had urged the administering Powers, Non-Self-Governing Territories and the United Nations to continue working together to accelerate the process of eradicating colonialism. He said that progress in this area will require close cooperation between all three actors. He noted that the right to self-determination must be taken into proper account in exploring how to accelerate the decolonization process for the remaining 16 UN listed non self-governing territories, namely the 10 Overseas Countries and Territories of the UK (Anquilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands in the Caribbean Sea; Falklands Islands (Malvinas) and St. Helena in the Atlantic Ocean; Pitcairn Islands in the Pacific; Gibraltar in Europe); New Caledonia, Overseas Country and Territory of France in the Pacific; 3 territories of the USA: Virgin Island in the Caribbean, American Samoa and Guam in the Pacific; Tokelau, a self-governing dependency of New Zealand in the Pacific; Western Sahara, occupied by Morocco, in Africa.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was counting on the administering Powers in particular to discharge their obligations in a manner that promotes the well-being of the inhabitants of the territories within their responsibility. The interests of the peoples of the Territories have to be at the heart of all efforts. The UN system will continue to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories, in areas such as economic and social development, environmental sustainability, healthcare and good governance.

Emerging challenges for the Non-Self-Governing Territories on their path towards decolonisation are the impact of climate change, the global economic and financial crisis, the role of regional cooperation, education and public awareness, the role of women, the empowerment of vulnerable people and the capacity for full self-government towards self-determination. Key elements in responding to the challenges of today are political maturity, economic sustainability, enhanced administrative capacity and strengthened regional cooperation.

Regional cooperation and regional arrangements offered important opportunities for many Non-Self-Governing Territories and contributed to the development of a strong regional identity and strengthened concrete functional cooperation in various areas of mutual interest. Important were the role of the United Nations regional commissions, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and bodies like the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), as well as various United Nations specialized agencies. In response to climate change, which had exposed the vulnerability of many Non-Self-Governing Territories, regional cooperation could play a crucial role in the field of disaster preparedness. The global economic crisis had further highlighted the importance of economic sustainability and diversification of the economic base in the Non-Self-Governing Territories through community-based development, the development of small and medium enterprises, promotion of micro-financing and employment-generating activities, and the empowerment of vulnerable groups.

In his closing statement on behalf of the host country, Delano Frank Bart, Permanent Representative of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the United Nations, characterized the seminar as “the penultimate event” in the course of the Decade.

He said that with regard to the energy, food and financial crises, the Territories had been hit as hard as most countries, if not more, but that their concerns were often marginalized. “Our role is to ensure that all needs are met, especially the needs of those of us who are not governing themselves.” Highlighting the impact of climate change, he said that, of the 16 Territories under the Special Committee’s mandate, the majority were islands. Therefore, the concerns of small island developing States within the United Nations system were also the concerns of those Territories. They were among the most vulnerable and needed to be aware of the commitment of the international community to stand by them and “weather the storm together”. Recalling that his country had recently celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary of independence, he said Saint Kitts and Nevis remembered the concerns of the pre-independence period. One needed the goodwill of all parties to resolve such issues, and the participants should, therefore, take away with them a determination to ensure that the day would come in the not-too-distant future, when the Special Committee’s work would bear fruit, and that the solutions found would be in the best interests of all concerned.

The recommendations of the St. Kitts Seminar have become the most recent chapter of the ever growing legislative authority on the self-determination of the territories. Some of the recommendations were included in the decolonisation resolutions adopted by the UN Fourth Committee in November 2009, and are expected to be approved by the General Assembly in December 2009. Implementation is an entirely separate matter, according to International Advisor on Democratic Governance *Dr. Carlyle Corbin*

#### GUAM's self-determination bill

How important information and education are to the people of the Non-self Governing Territories and how essential to the expression of their political aspirations and self-determination, was shown on November 5, 2009, when the delegate of Guam Hon. Madeleine Z. Bordallo, in the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife Legislative hearing on H.R. 3940, introduced a self-determination bill to support a public education program for the people of Guam regarding various political status options to express their desired political status. Guam is a territory of the USA in the Pacific, that has been under the United States Flag as an unincorporated territory for over 111 years. Guam, like her sister territory Puerto Rico, was ceded to the United States from Spain upon the signing of the Treaty of Paris settling the Spanish-American War in 1898. Guam is listed by the United Nations as a non-self-governing territory. Despite all efforts towards defining a new political relationship between Guam and the United States, the political aspirations of the people of Guam for such status were never realized. A referendum affording the people of Guam an opportunity to express their views on status was authorized by local law but remains unscheduled.

In November the US Congressional Committee approved the self-determination bill and assistance to the territories. Dr. Corbin explained that there are two separate pieces of legislation - one bill for American Samoa, Guam and the US Virgin Islands, and a second different bill for Puerto Rico, which is essentially a referendum bill which had been adopted by the same Committee earlier this year. The Puerto Rico measure does not address public education since they already have a very sophisticated process in place via their political parties. Both bills have been adopted by the substantive committee in one House of the US Congress so far. It still has to be adopted by the full House of Representatives, then by the US Senate and signed by the President. He anticipated that this would happen without too much difficulty since there is no new financial resources associated with either measure.

Dr. Corbin also made clear that the issue is not only between independence or not, but rather to choose one of the three political status options which provides for a full measure of self-government, namely independence, free association and integration. These are so recognised by the UN. Some member states which administer territories, such as the UK, have told its territories that offers neither integration nor free association to them, and the choice is either independence or remaining in a dependency status. This is unlike the Dutch Antilles which had achieved sufficient autonomy to be regarded as fully self-governing. This might change as the dismantling of the five islands will now yield a new less autonomous model for the two islands which have chosen in referendum to become separate countries within the Dutch Kingdom.