

1. What is decolonization?

A half-century ago, much of the world was made up of colonies and dependent Territories ruled by a small number of colonial Powers. In 1945, the Charter of the United Nations proclaimed “the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples” as one of its basic purposes. Self-determination means that the people of a colony or a dependent Territory decide about the future status of their homeland. In the following decades, more than 80 colonial Territories became independent as a result of self-determination. Other Territories chose free association, or integration with an independent State. The process by which these Territories exercised their right to self-determination is known as decolonization. In 1960, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was adopted, which spelled out some of the decolonization principles.

2. What is a Non-Self-Governing Territory?

In the Charter, a Non-Self-Governing Territory is defined as a Territory “whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government”. In 1946, several UN Member States identified a number of Territories under their administration that were not self-governing and placed them on a UN list. Countries administering Non-Self-Governing Territories are called administering Powers. As a result of the decolonization process over the years, most of the Territories were removed from the list.

3. What is the current role of the United Nations in decolonization?

The UN still follows developments in the 16 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories that

remain on the list. The UN body that oversees this work is the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (or the Committee of 24, also known as the Special Committee on decolonization) created by the General Assembly in 1961 through resolution 1654 (XVI).

4. What does the Special Committee on decolonization do?

The Special Committee:

- Follows political, economic and other developments in the remaining Territories;
- Holds annual seminars in the Caribbean or the Pacific where most of the Territories are located, during which decolonization and issues of concern to the peoples of the Territories are discussed;
- Hears petitioners from the Territories or other persons with expertise and relevant information on a Territory at its annual sessions;
- With the cooperation of the administering Power, it may send visiting missions to a particular Territory, to better understand what can be done to move the decolonization process forward;
- Provides information regarding assistance from UN agencies to Territories;
- Makes recommendations to the General Assembly, which then approves resolutions reflecting developments in the Territories;
- Where and when appropriate, recommends to the General Assembly that the conditions have been met for the removal of a Territory from the list of Territories under its supervision.

5. What can the Special Committee do for your homeland?

By following developments in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the Committee of 24 seeks to protect the interests of the peoples in the Territories through dialogue with the administering Powers and the local governments.

It helps Territories find out how to get assistance from UN agencies.

By being an honest broker, the Committee of 24 can help your government and the administering Power work out a programme of work for the decolonization of your homeland based on the special characteristics of your Territory.

6. What options does your homeland have when deciding on its future constitutional status?

The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples says that all peoples have the right to self-determination. According to General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) of 1961, there are three ways in which a Non-Self-Governing Territory can exercise self-determination and reach a full measure of self-government:

- (a) By free association with the administering Power or another independent State as a result of a free and voluntary choice by the people of the Territory expressed through an informed and democratic process;
- (b) By integrating with the administering Power or another independent State on the basis of complete equality between the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territory and those of the independent State;
- (c) By becoming independent.