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FORTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: advancement of the Non-Self-Governing Territories through the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond

Castries, Saint Lucia

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STATEMENT BY

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Executive Summary

It is unimaginable that in the twenty-first century there are still colonized peoples in the world. What is even more unthinkable, is that in many instances the colonized peoples seem to have a measure of contentment in their state of institutional dependency.

The contentment alluded to above is bolstered by the false perception that those in our region who have ventured into the ambit of self-determination are experiencing failure of their economies as a result of relinquishing the 'apron strings' of their colonial masters.

This false perception, coupled with the apparent reluctance of the Administering Powers to prepare the Non-Self Governing Territories for self-actualization, has created a deterrent to the Territories embracing what should be a natural process in our evolutionary journey.

The time has come for the United Nations, through the Committee of 24, to take a more aggressive approach (and I underscore the word aggressive) in advancing the self-determination agenda for the remaining Non-Self Governing Territories.

I am herein advocating that the aggressive approach that the United Nations through the Committee of 24 can take, is the prolific and pervasive dissemination of materials, (pamphlets, flyers etc) in all of the remaining Non-Self- Governing Territories, promoting the UN self-determination agenda.

To this end, one of the recommendations that I am proposing herein is one that was advanced by Mr. Daniel Malcolm, United Nations Expert on Decolonization, in his presentation to the Pacifica Regional Seminar, in Managua, Nicaragua, May 19 – 21, 2015 – The establishment of a High Commissioner, who main remit would be the oversight of an educational campaign in the Territories to promote the decolonization agenda of the United Nations, through the Committee of 24.

Another recommendation that I am advancing, is the launching of a national debate on decolonization in all of the Territories.

Finally, I will be recommending a robust consultation exercise among the Non-Self Governing Territories considering the next steps and the way forward.

Acknowledgement

I wholeheartedly and without reservations acknowledge my gratitude to the Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands, Honorable Charles Washington Misick for selecting me to serve as a participant to the United Nations Regional Seminar on Decolonization, in St Lucia, May 10 – 13 2022.

Introduction

For many years now the United Nations through the Committee of 24 has been hosting these bi-annual seminars on decolonization. While the exercise of engaging the Non-Self-Governing Territories in these talks and discussions is an appropriate endeavor, it appears the no real progress is being made. A startling examples of this is turn of events presently taking place in our sister Territory of The British Virgin Islands, where there is the looming threat of the inevitable suspensions of parts of their constitution. This is a digression from the noble ideals of advancing to self determination for the people of that Territory.

There is an old adage that goes something like this '*He who feels it knows it*'. I am saying this because we in the Turks and Caicos Islands, who empathize with the people of the British Virgin Islands, had a similar experience, as a matter of fact parts of our constitution were suspended on two occasions, 1986 and again in 2009. My contention is that our efforts at realizing self-determination were subverted, twice, setting us back many years in our quest for political independence. Now the same scenario is being played out in another of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. This is a set up to impose direct rule from London, it is a setup that results in a set back in our progress towards self-determination. While we do not condone any acts of malfeasance, we stand in solidarity with the people of the British Virgin Islands. The question we need to ask ourselves is - Are we progressing or are we in fact regressing?

Presentation

In this presentation I will be addressing (3) areas that will enlighten us as the decolonization progress or lack thereof in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Firstly, I want to give a description of the situation in The Turks and Caicos Islands as it relates to the decolonization process.

The Situation

In 1980, the First Chief Minister of the Turks and Caicos Islands, The Honorable James Alexander George Smith McCartney, lead a delegation to London seeking Full Internal Self Government. Simultaneously, a delegation of the Official Opposition, the Progressive National Party was also dispatched to London, whose mission was to counter the proposal of the then Chief Minister, by making the case for the unpreparedness of the country for self determination. In what seems to have been an effort by London to thwart the Chief Minister's noble proposal, the British Government stipulated that any move to full internal self government would have to be followed by independence in 18 months to two years. The delegations from the Progressive National Party retorted that they disagreed with what was being offered and requested that the outcome of elections, that were imminent, be the deciding factor. As fate would have it, the Progressive National

became the government and the idea for internal self-government was relegated to distant future considerations.

In 1976, a constitutional commission was established, their work resulted in a constitutional document that gave the government of the day a fair measure of latitude in governance. However, the revocation of parts of the document in 1986 frustrated our political ambition, because the 2011 constitution that was drafted to replace it fell far short of what obtained in the 1976 document. Even though a country wide consultation was conducted, it was widely suspected that what was thrust upon us was a document whose contents were already decided upon. To date, this is the document that governs the affairs of the Turks and Caicos Islands. Despite the cries of successive governments of the unworkability of the document, no effort has been made on the part London to give any thing better. Incidentally, in 2017 a constitutional commission was convened to recommend cosmetic changes to the 2011 document, the finished proposal was sent to London, the Foreign Commonwealth Office did not even acknowledge receipt thereof, this was perceived by the people of our country as outright snobbery.

It is noteworthy to know that 'watchdog' institutions designed to achieve good government benchmarks have been implemented by the London. The office of a Complaints Commissioner, since its implementation has resulted in a more effective working of the Public Service.

Another 'watchdog' institution established in the Territory, is the Integrity Commission. The work of this body has made great strides in stamping out governmental corruption.

These are indicators of the level of political maturity that we in the Turks and Caicos Islands have achieved.

Another area that I will highlight herein as it relates to our situation, is the fact that the Turks and Caicos Islands are no longer on Grant-In-Aid, and have not been for many years, but the finances for the Territory is subjected to ultimate control from London.

I have given a synopsis of the situation now I will offer a brief analysis of –

The Problem

When it comes to the advancement of decolonization in the Turks and Caicos Islands, the overarching problem is fear, fear of the unknown. This fear of the unknown is unfounded, because many other countries in our region have undertaken and gone through the process. Nevertheless, there is, what can be described as a debilitating fear in the minds of many of our people, which renders us incapable of thinking progressively when it come to decolonization. This fear translates into an unnecessary hesitancy. We want to be rid of our colonial masters, but we do not know what awaits us if we take the leap. So we are hesitant.

What feeds this fear is, in my opinion, the false perception that those who have moved towards self-determination are now struggling with failing economies. From my humble observation what may be seen as struggling economies are directly related to external factors, factors such as structural adjustments and monetary devaluation by international monetary agencies. So in actual fact, this fear is really unfounded and needs to be dispelled in the minds of our people.

Another problem that I will draw your attention to as it relates to the decolonization process in the Turks and Caicos Islands is the ongoing criminal trial of several of our former leaders. This trial, which is mandated by the United Kingdom, started in 2010 and continues. Even though commissioned by London, the cost thereof has been thrust upon us and is now estimated to be near 200 million dollars. This is money that could have been utilized in preparing us for self-determination.

This is money that could have been used in training our people to take their rightful places in key positions in our country.

Many of our people are of the opinion that since this trial was commissioned by the United Kingdom, that London should pay out of the purse rather than saddling the Territory with such an astronomical financial burden.

The Deterrent

In my preparation for this presentation I consulted with, what is on my opinion, some of the brightest minds in the Turks and Caicos Islands. One such person was my own father, Daniel Malcolm who was designated by the United Nations as an Expert on Decolonization. In many instances the responses to my queries and the questions I posed, not surprisingly, were met with notions of un-readiness and unpreparedness.

One of the persons I consulted with, said that we should set an independence date for 2036. He gave a very valid reason why he thought so. He acknowledged that despite the fact that our economy is buoyant and the people are experiencing a measure of prosperity, that the reality is the wealth of the country is concentrated in the hands of a few expatriated resident investors and not in the hands of the indigenous people.

I agreed with him in some respects, because political independence with economic independence is only the transferring of power from a colonial master to a neocolonial master, capitalism. It is imperative that programs and institutions be put in place to empower the indigenous people to take their rightful place in the development of our country. One such initiative being introduced is legislation to implement the concept of Credit Union in the wider community and the introduction of legislation to implement a Fishermen Cooperative and eventually farming cooperatives and husbandry cooperatives. These would go a long way in putting wealth in the hands of our people.

These initiatives should be undergirded with the introduction micro credit facilities that would provide the financing for small business ventures to be undertaken by the indigenous people. While there is a micro, small and medium size business financing entity, the (MSME), operated through the Center For Entrepreneurial Development, the grants that are awarded are too small to undertake and substantial investment.

The failure of the Turks and Caicos Islands Bank, which was an indigenous Turks and Caicos Islands owned bank, is an incident that set us back tremendously in this area.

Another of my consultants said that we are not prepared for self-determination because we have not yet made enough progress in educating our people to assume key positions in our public service and in the private sector. As a small developing country, we have come a long way since the eighties and nineties in accomplishing this. Our public service is undergoing a radical transformation, in recent years we have realized the recruitment of scores of university trained young people, returning with bachelors degrees, masters degrees and some PHD's in areas such as Human Resource Management, Business Administration, Education, Science and Technology.

The uptake in the private sector in recruiting these highly qualified returning prospect is sluggish. It is treated as a protected domain for the family and friends of the expatriate investors. The result of this is that we are experiencing a 'brain drain' as many of these persons are now opting for settling in the UK. There is still much progress to be made in this area but we have come a long way

Having heard about our situation and having heard about the problem and having heard about the deterrent, the question that arises is this:

What Are the Next Steps?

Finally What Are The Recommendations

1. A comprehensive education program across the Non-Self Governing Territories. This is a recommendation that was made by Daniel Malcolm, during his presentation at the United Nations Caribbean Pacific Regional Seminar on Decolonization held in Managua, Nicaragua, May 19th. – 21st, 2015.

Here is what he said:

"... the UN would do well to look into upgrading and further empowering the Office of the Decolonization Unit from its current status to one of having appointed as its head – a High Commissioner to the Dependent Territories. The function of the Commissioner would be more or less on a footing of equal importance with that of the current High Commissioner for Refugees (U.N.H.C.R.)"

Such a Commissioner would be tasked with the responsibility of (but not limited to) promoting in the Dependent Territories -

(a) The dissemination of information regarding UN activities, particularly as they relate to health, education, welfare human rights and civil rights etc. Such programs should be geared to impact schools, government, and non-government bodies and organizations, civic and professional groups religious bodies and service organizations etc. The intention being that this activity would have a trickled effect to the 'man on the street'

(b) This could be achieved by -

- (i) Pamphlets***
- (ii) Flyers***
- (iii) Workshops***

And could be geared at creating a positive mindset of self-determination, its various forms, and its potential benefits."

I have cited this recommendation because it is of paramount importance that the people of the Non-Self Governing Territories be educated about the pros and cons of the self-determination process.

A second recommendation that I would like to advance is this -

2. The promotion of a national conversation of decolonization, this would entail -
 - (a) debating the subject on television and radio
 - (b) debating the subject at the tertiary school level
 - (c) debating the subject at the secondary school level
3. Robust Consultation on decolonization between the Non-Self- Governing Territories. This would engender a sense of camaraderie, and a sense of shared responsibility.

Conclusion

The people of the Non-Self Governing Territories, and in our case, the Turks and Caicos Islands, hold the notion that the Administrating Powers, in our case, the United Kingdom, have a responsibility to not only prepare us for self-determination, but to propel us towards it. However, it seems as if there is reluctance on the part of London to do this. Could it be that this is a last ditched effort to hold on to the last vestiges of the British Empire, If it is, then the fate, and the lives of many people are being held in abeyance.