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DISCUSSION PAPER

PRESENTATION

BY

MR. SERGEI CHERNIAVSKY

Sergei Cherniavsky
Ph.D. (History of International Relations)
Expert (Ukraine)

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE THIRD DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

(THE WEEK OF SOLIDARITY: A CASE STUDY)

HISTORY

General Assembly resolution 1654 (XVI), which established the Special Committee in 1961, in operative paragraph 5, specifically directed it “to carry out its task by employment of all means which it will have at its disposal within the framework of the procedures and modalities which it shall adopt for the proper discharge of its functions...” The Committee, at its first meeting on 20 February 1962, during the discussion of its proposed *modus operandi*, recognized outright the value of information on the non-self-governing territories and its uses to promote the cause of decolonization¹.

Throughout its 55 years of existence, the Committee has paid special attention to outreach activities to get its message across to the international community. These efforts became more focused upon the inauguration of the Week of Solidarity with the Colonial Peoples of Southern Africa and Guinea (Bissau) and Cape Verde Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Equal Rights, proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 2911 (XXVII), which was adopted in 1972. The resolution proposed that the Week should begin on 25 May, which is also known as the Africa Liberation Day, given that it marked the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which became known as the African Union in 2002. By its operative paragraph 2 the resolution recommended that on the occasion of the Week of Solidarity, “meetings should be held, appropriate materials should be published in the press and broadcast on radio and television and public campaigns should be conducted with a view to obtaining contributions to the Assistance Fund for the Struggle against Colonialism and Apartheid”.

Since 1972, all reports of the Special Committee to the General Assembly contained a section specifically devoted to the activities of the Week.

For example, such activities in 1975 included, the Chairman’s briefing to the news media accredited to the United Nations; a public exhibition of photographs, books and magazines depicting the struggle of colonial peoples for freedom and independence; a press conference of the Chairman, during which he emphasized the importance of public information and the role of the news media in rallying support for the liberation struggle of colonial peoples, and urged the

¹ United Nations, General Assembly, Official records, Seventeenth session, Annexes, Addendum to agenda item 25, The situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples: report of the Special Committee established under General Assembly resolution 1654 (XVI), Document A/5238.

international press to lend its fullest possible cooperation. The week of solidarity activities in 1975 also included an informal panel discussion to consider ways and means of improving the dissemination of information on decolonization, and in addition to the participation of members of C24 on the panel, other participants included members of a number of permanent missions of Member States to the UN, representatives of specialized agencies and other organizations within the UN system, members of the UN Council for Namibia, the Special Committee on Apartheid and the Commission on Human Rights, representatives of national liberation movements from colonial Territories in Africa, as well as a large number of representatives of the information media and NGOs. Furthermore, the Office of Public Information, as it was then known, held a public screening of two films depicting the liberation struggle of the peoples of the colonial Territories in southern Africa².

Week of solidarity activities in 1976 also included a press conference by the Chairman of C24; a special meeting of C24, where statements were made by the Chair, a representative of the Secretary-General; the Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations (on behalf of the President of the Security Council), the Permanent Representative of Mexico (in his capacity as Acting President of the UN Council for Namibia), the Permanent representative of Nigeria (in his capacity as Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid), the Executive Secretary of OAU to the United Nations, and the Chairs of the Regional Groups at the United Nations for the month of May 1976. Also in connection with the observance of the Week of solidarity that year, messages were received from the Director-General of UNESCO, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines. Other activities in commemoration of the week in 1976 included an exhibit of photographs and publications relating, *inter alia*, to the liberation struggle of the colonial peoples of southern Africa at the UN Headquarters and UN Office at Geneva, and the screening by the Office of Public Information of eight films relating to the same liberation struggle.³ Similar events were held in 1978 to mark the week of solidarity that year, and also in 1980,⁴ with the cooperation of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, assisted by United Nations information centers throughout the world.

The 209th report of the Sub-Committee of the Special Committee, which it adopted at its 116Gth meeting on 16 May 1980 (A/AC.109/L.1351) contained, *inter alia*, the following recommendations for the observance of the Week in 1980:

- a) The Chairman of the Special Committee might issue a statement of support for the colonial peoples of southern Africa fighting for freedom, independence and equal rights;
- b) The Department of Public Information could be requested to organize, in consultation with the United Nations Council for Namibia and the Special Committee against Apartheid, at Headquarters and in the United Nations information centres:
 - (i) An exhibition of photographs and publications depicting the struggle of the colonial peoples of southern Africa for freedom and independence;
 - (ii) The public screening of films on the struggle for independence in southern Africa;

² A/9023/Rev.1[VOL.I], pp.34-35.

³ A/31/23/rev.1[VOL.I], pp.39-40

⁴ In 1982, the Week was renamed "Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Namibia and All Other Colonial Territories, as well as those in South Africa, Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Equal Rights" (A/37/51, p. 292)). In 1998, the Week received its current name – the Week of solidarity with the peoples of the non-self-governing territories.

- (iii) The distribution to national radio and television stations, through United Nations information centres, of audiovisual materials relating to the liberation struggle in southern Africa;
- (iv) The briefing of non-governmental organizations concerned with colonial questions, and particularly with the liberation struggle in southern Africa;
- (v) A wide distribution of any declaration or message issued by the Chairman of the Special Committee on the occasion of the Week of Solidarity.

During the observation of the Week in 1980, the Committee Chair addressed a letter⁵ to the Secretary-General with a recommendation to adopt a draft resolution by the General Assembly that year containing a Plan of action, which, *inter alia*, proposed elements of an outreach campaign in furtherance of the objectives of decolonization to the international community, including *waging a vigorous and sustained campaign against the activities and practices of foreign economic, financial and other interests operating in colonial Territories which are detrimental to the interests of the population of those Territories and undertaking measures aimed at enhancing public awareness of the need for active assistance to bring about the complete eradication of colonialism in all its forms and manifestations.*

On 11 December 1980, the General Assembly adopted resolution 35/118 endorsing the Special Committee recommendations in the "Plan of Action for the Full Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" annexed to the resolution.

Some Member States sought to dilute the message of the Special Committee to the international community of the need to keep the decolonization cause alive. In connection with the observance of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Declaration, the permanent Representative of the United Kingdom in his letter dated 5 September 1984 addressed to the Chairman of the Special Committee stated, *inter alia*, that "...[I]t is important to recognize that the decolonization process is now almost at an end. Few Non-Self-Governing Territories remain and all have expressed a wish to maintain their links with the administering Power." In the same vein, the Acting Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations also indicated in his letter dated 10 September 1984 addressed to the Chairman the position of his government, stating that "...the process of decolonization is nearing its end. With the obvious exception of Namibia, the United Nations has largely achieved its decolonization objectives. It further stated that "...In looking for the future, it seems desirable to consider how the United Nations might arrive at viable permanent solutions for the remaining small Territories rather than seeking to develop ambitious plans for the continuation of the Special Committee's work along existing paths."⁶

Please note that this was mid-1980s when there were even more NSGTs on the list than today. Needless to say, some remaining administering Powers continue to maintain this position today, more than three decades later.⁷

The last time the Special Committee had a meaningful observation of the Week of Solidarity was

⁵ A/35/413, Annex.

⁶ A/39/23[VOL.I], pp.65-66.

⁷ The United Kingdom and the United States left the Committee in early 1970s. Subsequently, they ended their formal cooperation with the Special Committee (see letters from both administering Powers in A/8276 and A/8277). For the explanation of the United Kingdom's position non-participation, see documents A/41/23 (chap. I, paras. 76 and 77) and A/47/86. Australia left the Committee upon graduation of the territories under its administration from the list of NSGTs.

in 1998, when it held its 1486th meeting specifically devoted to the Week, with statements made by the Acting Chairman, the Secretary-General, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and by the representatives of regional groups and the Chief Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development of Montserrat⁸.

Since 1998, the activities of the Week gradually shrank into some perfunctory references in the reports of the Special Committee with references to the reports of the regional seminars.

In 2002, the Special Committee emphasized the importance of the Week of solidarity. In this regard, the Committee's report to the 57th session of the General Assembly stated, *inter alia*, that "The Special Committee has consistently reiterated the importance of disseminating information on decolonization as an instrument for furthering the aims of the Declaration. Accordingly, the Special Committee will continue to use opportunities such as the regional seminars and the observance of the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories to disseminate information on its activities and on the Territories in an effort to mobilize world public opinion to support and assist the people of the Territories in bringing about the speedy and unconditional end of colonialism in all its forms and manifestations."⁹

Unfortunately, this important element of the Special Committee's outreach activities had unintended consequences. As most regional seminars, with a few exceptions, were held during the Week of Solidarity, reflections and statements on the significance of the Week were made *almost exclusively* at the regional seminars, away from the United Nations Headquarters. As a result, no activities envisaged by the original General Assembly resolution 2911 (XXVII) took place at New York or other major United Nations centers in Geneva, Vienna, Bangkok and Nairobi. This restricted the focus of this important event, contrary to the original legislative intent of the General Assembly. The General Assembly resolution which regularly renews mandate of the Special Committee, the most recent of which is 70/231 adopted on 23 December 2015, requests the Special Committee in its operative paragraph 8(h) to observe annually the Week of solidarity. However, this requests rings hollow in view of the fact that the Week is no longer supported with activities mandated by the original resolution 2911 (XXVII).

In 1883, the Russian philosopher, journalist and literary critic Nikolai Chernyshevsky published a novel with a title "What to Be Done?" The author promoted the idea that the intellectuals' duty was to educate and lead the working people along the path to social justice. The characters of the novel in search of their purpose in life were preoccupied with two questions: "Who is to blame?" and "What to be done?" which became the essence of any revolutionary movement agenda.

Leaving the references to the revolutions aside, the Special Committee today is facing the same question relating to "What to be done". Perhaps, we should not be concerned too much with apportioning blame, but should instead focus on the intellectual exercise of finding the way

⁸ A/AC.109/SR.1486.

⁹ A/57/23, p. 23. This paragraph was reduced to a brief statement in the most recent report in 2015: "As is customary, the Special Committee will continue to observe annually the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories, in accordance with resolution 60/119." (A/70/23, p.20).

towards what exactly can be done in practical terms to restore the original intent and scope of the Week of solidarity as an important carrier of decolonization message to the international community.

Certainly, we must be realistic. It seems, given the current international climate and expressed priorities of the Organization, that it would be impossible to return the Week to its original scope and glory. To reverse the negative trend of the past two decades, the Special Committee, perhaps, should initiate small gradual steps intended to comply with the provisions of resolution 2911 (XXVII), especially its operative paragraph 2, in the sense of closely tying the activities of the Week of solidarity to the overall strategy of the outreach activities of the Special Committee at all levels envisaged by the Plan of action. The most recent General Assembly resolution on the dissemination of information on decolonization provides an important guidance in this regard.

Against that background, I would like to propose below some recommendations for the consideration of the Special Committee, and it should be understood that these activities may have a much wider impact at all levels envisaged for the outreach activities of the Special Committee in the plan of action for the Third Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) In order to maintain a global focus of the decolonization agenda, the Special Committee should plan and implement concrete activities in observance of the Week of solidarity, either immediately before of immediately after the annual regional seminar, including the following:
 - a. Holding a special meeting of the Committee specifically devoted to the Week with invitations extended to the Secretary-General, President of the Security Council, President of the General Assembly, President of ECOSOC and the President of the Trusteeship Council;
 - b. Organizing an exhibit of documents at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library on the history of the Declaration;
 - c. Organizing at the UN Headquarters a photo exhibit devoted to the history of the Special Committee, which should feature photos and other audio-visual material from the DPI archives. Also, a special outreach to Committee experts should be conducted to gather exhibit materials, and I am sure all of us here will be happy to help in that regard. I personally will be honored to contribute to this effort.
 - d. Organizing at UN Headquarters a screening of documentaries on the liberation movements in Africa from the UN archives; Interviewing the Chair of the Special Committee on the United Nations radio, which may be subsequently broadcast in syndicated form to those local radio stations which collaborate with DPI in disseminating UN material;
 - e. Exploring the possibility of issuing a commemorative United Nations stamp devoted to the Week of Solidarity, which will mark its 45th anniversary in 2017;
- (2) The Special Committee, through its partnership with DPI and DPA, which both have very talented staff, some of whom are present in the room today, could compile a press kit containing essential information on the Declaration and the importance of the Week of

Solidarity, as well as other relevant information to ensure that the media adequately covers the issue of decolonization. Such kit, in both print and electronic form, may be distributed to the local media in the country hosting the annual decolonization seminar. All publications that can be used to compile such a kit, are already available. I should make a full disclosure that, even though many delegations remember me as the former Secretary of the Committee, I was, in my prior UN life a former staff member of DPA. I also started my career in the UN Secretariat as an Associate Information Officer. So I take this opportunity to salute both Departments, DPI and DPA.

- (3) The Special Committee should forge a close working relationship with NGOs concerned with decolonization, and a first step in this direction, the Special Committee can request the Secretariat to compile a list of NGOs with an expertise in this area. For such an exercise, perhaps the current list of NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC¹⁰ could be a useful tool for selecting relevant NGOs engaged with decolonization issues.
- (4) The Special Committee should request, through the Committee on Conferences, a special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to celebrate its 55th anniversary in November 2016 during the main part of the regular session of the General Assembly. If this is not possible, the Special Committee, through the same channel, should request the permission to hold its own commemorative meeting during that period with invitations extended to the the Secretary-General, President of the Security Council, President of the General Assembly, President of ECOSOC and the President of the Trusteeship Council, and to all Member States, regional groups and UN-system specialized agencies.
- (5) It is understood that all these proposed activities would be adequately covered in the United Nations media and would receive global exposure through the network of the United Nations information centres. It should also be kept in mind that all commemorative outreach activities intended for the observance of the Week of Solidarity must of necessity be considered on a case-by-case basis, given that each decolonization case has its own particular circumstances and much care must be taken in appreciating those circumstances.
- (6) The Special Committee could also promote the decolonization agenda in general and Week of Solidarity activities in particular through active advocacy and outreach to major regional groups - AU, ASEAN, OAS, Pacific Island Forum etc., by attending their meetings, seminar and conferences to address them, in order to build support for the Committee's work and vision. In its early years, the Committee Chair or other representatives participated in some of these regional meetings, and the time has come for it to revive them. In this regard, I recall that as recently as in 2014 in a procedural document of the Committee there was a section entitled "**Representation at seminars, meetings and conferences of intergovernmental and other organizations**", in which it recommended to the General Assembly that the Committee continue to be represented at seminars, meetings and conferences organized by United Nations bodies and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations active in the field of

¹⁰ <http://csonet.org/content/documents/E-2014-INF-5%20Issued.pdf>

decolonization¹¹. Upon the General Assembly's adoption of such a paragraph by way of reference in the Committee report, it becomes an official mandate of the Committee to participate in such meetings. The Committee Chair and/or Bureau members should start doing so.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Proposed Week of Solidarity activities will cost money and it is also important to keep this in mind. As we know, money issues in the UN are complex, not the least because of the 2-year budgeting cycle. So the Special Committee must be fully aware of its budgetary entitlements in order to plan effectively and successfully. It should also pay attention to strategic outreach activities included under the DPI budget line, which can be useful for Week of Solidarity purposes.

For example, the DPI budget in its Subprogramme 1 – Strategic communication services envisages, *inter alia*, in addition to servicing of the Special Committee, the following outputs:

- exhibits, guided tours, lectures, briefings, seminars and video screenings on United Nations issues and themes for government officials, representatives of the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions and other audiences, including exhibits at the national level;
- development and dissemination of information materials designed for media outreach and for a general audience for distribution in the official languages of the United Nations and, through the network of United Nations information centres, in local languages;
- responses to public and media requests for information on United Nations priority thematic issues;
- development of media outreach programmes, including soliciting media interviews, writing and placing opinion articles on thematic issues and developing and disseminating information materials;
- Organization and promotion of press conferences, briefings, round tables and panel discussions at the international, regional and national levels as part of a communications strategy to publicize United Nations activities, events, publications and reports, to explain the outcomes of negotiations or other United Nations activities on thematic issues and to assist organizations of the United Nations system with their public information outreach programmes;
- Special events - Development of strategic outreach activities, events and conferences to promote a specific priority issue or special observance of the United Nations and to strengthen partnerships between the United Nations and the media, civil society and other advocates at the international and national levels¹²;

Of course, we are far from regarding that all of these activities budgeted by DPI are about decolonization. However, the Special Committee may approach DPI officers during its regular meeting on the agenda item on dissemination of information on decolonization and through its resolution on dissemination of information on decolonization may propose specific activities

¹¹ A/AC.109/2014/L.14

¹² A/70/6(Sect. 28), pp.12-13.

listed above. It seems that most of these activities may not have financial implications as they may be already absorbed by the regular budget. Anyway, this issue begs further consultations with the Department of Public Information.

As a footnote, I would like to note that the press releases prepared by our colleague from DPI at this particular seminar serve as an invaluable source of the proceedings of the seminar. The report of the seminar may not report, due to space constraints, all that is happening in the room and reports of the UN press officer fill this void more than adequately.

Above everything else, the Special Committee should take every step to prevent any reduction of its budget, which would definitely curtail its potential to undertake the outreach activities recommended in this paper and which may further be considered in other Committee fora. Even though the Assembly regularly approves its budget at the level of the preceding biennium, cuts can sneak up on the Committee at any time, as we saw in the past. Especially taking into account the current trend of budget reductions affecting the Organization, the Committee must be vigilant in this regard.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the recommendations outlined above, may not be implemented immediately, given the variety of short-term obligations of the UN Secretariat. However, the perseverance of the Special Committee and its vigilance would be instrumental in restoring the activities, which were reduced or forgotten due to various reasons, without going overboard in terms of budgetary resources. The outreach programme of the Committee, including its essential element – the Week of solidarity - remains as important as ever in the effort of the Special Committee to ensure the implementation of the objectives of the Third Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.