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SUB-COMMITTEE II BEGINS CONSIDERATION OF QUESTION OF NEW HEBRIDES

Sub-Committee II\* of the Special Committee of 24 on decolonization, which is concerned with matters relating to small Territories, the question of visiting missions to Trust Territories, and with Territories in the Pacific, this afternoon began consideration of the situation in New Hebrides.

The Territory forms a condominium administered jointly by France and the United Kingdom and is governed according to the terms of the Anglo-French Protocol of 6 August 1914. It has been considered by the Special Committee of 24 and by the General Assembly since 1964.

A working paper (document A/AC.109/L.777) has been prepared by the Secretariat giving information on the political and constitutional developments and on the economic, social and educational conditions in New Hebrides, as well as the action previously taken by the United Nations as regards the Territory.

Statements were made this afternoon by the representatives of Iraq and India.

The Chairman, Barakat Ahmad (India), announced that the Secretariat has prepared a working paper on the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Pitcairn and the Solomon Islands which will be issued tomorrow as document A/AC.109/L.794.

The Sub-Committee will meet again at a date to be announced.

Views in Debate

RIYADH AL-QAYSI (Iraq) expressed his delegation's profound regret over the absence of the representatives of the Administering Powers at the Sub-Committee's meeting. Such non-participation, to say the least, obstructed fulfilment of the Sub-Committee's duties to the United Nations under the Charter, he observed.

The working paper, he stated, contained numerous shortcomings. Regarding the political and constitutional developments in the Territory, he recalled that his delegation had expressed serious misgivings last year about the negative aspects of the changes in the composition of the Advisory Council, particularly those relating to the reduction of the number of the indigenous members of the Council.

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\* Members of the Sub-Committee are Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, Indonesia and Iraq.

There did not appear to be anything new in the present document before the Sub-Committee that detracted from the views of his delegation. It was proper to conclude that the political scene had not witnessed any substantive change.

The representative of Iraq then raised several questions in connexion with the vagueness and terseness of the information given in the working paper.

In so far as the economic conditions of the Territory were concerned, his delegation regretted the fact that copra exports, which was one of the basic foundations of the economy of New Hebrides, lost substantial markets in 1971. Yet, while his delegation could understand the effects of the international monetary problem in this connexion, it was not readily apparent why the long-shoremen's strike on the West Coast of the United States was cited as one of the reasons for this loss, since the United States was not listed as one of the principal markets for New Hebrides copra.

It was very difficult to understand, he went on, why the administering Powers would still have to determine the desirability of passing legislation to control and improve copra quality; unless, of course, they did not want to see it controlled and improved.

Mr. AL-QAYSI felt that the system of land tenure was very important and the information imparted to the Sub-Committee in this respect revealed some disquieting features worthy of the utmost attention.

To begin with, it would seem that foreign interests controlled an area of registered land the size of which was more than seven times that controlled by the indigenous population. Moreover, paragraph 49 of the working paper stated that the 177,252 hectares of native land in the process of being registered corresponded almost entirely to the reserves set aside for the indigenous population.

Yet, it was not indicated whether these reserves had been set aside according to sound economic criteria. The expression "native land" was interesting, he added, in as much as it indicated a feeling that the lands of New Hebrides did not originally belong to the indigenous population of the Territory.

The representative of Iraq remarked that it would seem that the exodus of labour still continued.

He asked why it was that the wages had gone down in the span of one year, although the figure for 1969 did not include overtime and that for 1970 did so.

Lastly, with regards to the right of the people of New Hebrides to self-determination, he said that there was nothing in the working paper to suggest that the exercise of that right was the ultimate objective of the administering Powers; it would be interesting to know their intentions in this respect.

(more)

BARAKAT AHMAD (India) said his delegation found it discouraging that both the administering Powers of New Hebrides had decided not to be present at the meeting, as their presence would have been in their own interests.

The discussions in the Sub-Committee, he observed, had always been constructive, and no administering Powers had any reason to believe that there was any element of unfairness in the deliberations.

He went on to say that the so-called land development in New Hebrides was nothing more than sheer exploitation of the local inhabitants. This, he added, was not brought out adequately in the working paper on the subject (document A/AC.109/L.777).

The working paper, he noted, showed that the administering Powers had not managed the economy of the islands very successfully; in 1970, the trade balance showed a debit \$A 1,534,000 (Australian).

The most depressing part of the working paper, he went on, was the part on education conditions in the Territory. Neither of the administering Powers appeared keen on training the inhabitants to take over reins of power; there was a considerable deficiency in the teacher-training programmes in the Territory.

He wondered if the Sea-Bed Committee was keeping the interests of the islands in mind in its deliberations.

Mr. AL-QAYSI (Iraq) added that a specific study was necessary on the problems of the colonial Territories as regards the sea-bed. He hoped that the problem would receive adequate attention in the deliberations of the Sea-Bed Committee.

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