



Remarks

by

H.E. John W. Ashe
President of the 68th Session of the United Nations
General Assembly

to the

Twentieth Meeting of the
Fourth Committee

New York
4 November 2013

Please check against delivery

Ambassador González, Chairperson of the Fourth Committee,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

Let me at the outset express my sincere appreciation to Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Carlos Enrique García González, for his able leadership and to the members of the Bureau of the Committee and the Secretariat for their tireless efforts in ensuring the success to date of this Committee.

You have been proceeding in an efficient and in a timely manner, and I am pleased to learn that eleven (11) out of your fifteen (15) agenda items have already been considered and completed.

In reference to today's agenda item, comprehensive review of special political missions, I'm pleased to see Assistant Secretary General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco here to discuss this issue.

Excellencies,

Within the United Nations system, the Fourth Committee is charged with debating a number of complex issues and I would like to touch upon three that I believe merit further consideration, namely decolonization, peacekeeping and some of the aspects of the situation in the Middle East.

We are now a few years into the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (2011-2020) and as President of this year's General Assembly, I sincerely hope that it will also be the final one. We, as an international community, have essentially reached agreement that colonialism has no place in the modern world. In 1945 when the United Nations was established, almost a third of the world's population lived in Territories that were under colonial administration. Thankfully, we are approaching the end of the protracted process of liberating and emancipating countries that have been under colonial rule. Today, only seventeen (17)

Territories with around 2 million people living in them are officially classified as non-self-governing, with one of these, French Polynesia, reinstated to the list earlier this year. Efforts of the Fourth Committee, as well as initiatives taken by the Special Committee on Decolonization, to bring the issue to closure have been truly praiseworthy. Simply stated, eradicating colonialism has been one of the most important tasks in the history of the Organization, and we have come a long way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to turn to another historical and monumental achievement of this august institution. United Nations peacekeeping has evolved into one of the world's main instruments to manage conflict situations and the complex crises they engender. Peacekeeping remains one of the Organization's most viable, cost-effective and critical activities. I salute all the women and men in Blue Helmets who serve and honor the value of peace in the most dangerous parts of the world. However, we all know that in order to fulfill their roles, these women and men need more than acknowledgement. They need a more efficient system that provides them with the necessary mandate, guidance, resources and training. These issues deserve our utmost attention, and as you deliberate them in this Committee and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, I hope you will remain focused on how we can contribute to a better future for UN peacekeeping.

I would also like to mention another important and related development. UN peacekeeping operations have long operated with the protection and promotion of human rights incorporated into their mandates. However, I am extremely pleased to note that now, due consideration is given to the environmental impacts of peacekeeping operations. The DPKO/DFS environmental policy for UN Field Missions was adopted in 2009 and more recently, the Security Council acknowledged this important issue in its resolution 2100 on the operations in Mali.

Excellencies,

The last issue I would like to take up this afternoon is the situation in the Middle East. During the general debate, numerous delegations raised the issue of Palestine and welcomed the resumption

of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. There was resounding support for the two-State solution, taking into account the legitimate concerns of Israel and Palestine. Some Member States called for the United Nations to play a more decisive role.

As we continue with negotiations here in New York, Palestine's refugees are ever more vulnerable amidst new and old conflicts and must not be forgotten by the international community. With no prospect for a ready solution to this plight, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played a vital role in providing basic services to these displaced men and women. UNRWA is a point of reference for the five (5) million registered refugees who are scattered throughout the Middle East. However, the Agency has faced two major challenges in its ability to provide basic humanitarian services: the prevalence of conflict and the scarcity of funds. Therefore, I appeal to donors to make additional efforts to fully fund the Agency's core budget and urge new donors to commit financially to the Agency's work.

Distinguished delegates,

Although you are dealing with sensitive and complex issues in this Committee, we also continue to see your progress in many areas. I thank you for your hard work and for your contributions to the overall success of the General Assembly, and I wish you continued success in your deliberations.

Thank you.