



## General Assembly

Thirteenth Session

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### Fourth Committee – Special Political and Decolonization Committee

This group works on special topics. It used to help colonies get independence. By 1990 most colonies were independent. For this reason, it added “Special Political” to its name and began to look at other issues not covered by other committees.

There are 17 non-self-governing territories. These are areas of the world under the control of a state but not strictly part of that state. Some examples are Bermuda, Western Sahara, and Guam. Every year this group discusses what should happen with these areas.

The “Special Political” part of this group looks at other questions that do not fit in the other committees. They look at issues affecting Palestinian refugees, atomic radiation and how to use space for peace. Also, they discuss the topics of peacekeeping, land mines, and public information. The University for Peace is also on their agenda.

### Agenda Item 62 – Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

#### Guiding Questions

Colonialism is when one state directly controls another state. It rarely has a positive effect on a region. This is mainly because the people living there do not have a say in their government. With your fellow delegates you need to find a way to work towards making the following goals a reality.

- How can states help support colonial countries and peoples so they can become independent?
- What should be the course of action if a non-self-governing territory does not want to become its own country?
- How can states come to an agreement on what places should be considered a colony or not?

#### Background

Colonialism is when a more powerful country (imperial power) invades or takes over a weaker country. Usually, they do not allow the local people to have a say in what happens. The imperial power exploits the places it has taken over for its own benefit. For example, King Leopold of Belgium took \$1.1 billion in today's dollars out of the Congo over 23 years. 10 million people died in the process. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 60% of the silver in the world came from one mine in Bolivia. The mine was controlled by Spain and most of the silver was transported to Spain. 30 000 slaves were brought to dig for silver. Most of them died.

Before World War II, a third of the world was born in a colony. World War II was mostly fought by countries that had empires. Japan invaded many parts of East Asia. Germany

## Background

invaded countries next to them because they needed Lebensraum (living space). England and France and other countries fought Germany and Japan – but they had colonies all over Asia, Africa and the Americas too! After the war, it was decided it was better if all regions become independent. It was not fair to live in a world where a country could control people against their will just because they were more powerful. Also, it did not align with the ideas behind human rights. Colonialism was negative and needed to end.

In 1960, the General Assembly passed a resolution to say that colonialism is wrong and that all non-self-governing countries have the right to determine their own country and government. Since then, a lot of work has gone into helping places become independent.

## Recent Developments

In 1946, there were 8 countries that held 72 territories that were non-self-governing. Those countries were the UK, the US, France, Belgium, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. From 1960 to 2002, 54 territories became independent. Most of these places did so peacefully.

In 1990, the UN proclaimed the years 1990-2000 as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. 2001-2010 was proclaimed the Second International Decade and the third was proclaimed from 2011-2020. Beginning in 2005, the UN has asked countries to observe the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. The week is usually held from May 25 to 31.

Every year the UN publishes a list of the countries that are non-self-governing. Unfortunately, it can become a little political about who goes on the list. Some of the territories do not want to govern themselves. They are happy with how things are. This is true for Pitcairn Island which has less than 50 people. It would not make sense to become a country. Other places are claimed by other countries. For example, UK controls Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands but other countries claim they belong to them. Also, members of the Committee block adding territories to the list. For example, Indonesia will not allow West Papua to be added.

An interesting case is the one of Norfolk Island. It is an island between Australia and New Zealand. For many years it had its own government and took care of its own affairs. However, in 2015, the Australia decided that the government of Australia would make the decisions. The Norfolk government was abolished. 68% of the people on Norfolk Island did not want this to happen. Since then, a group called *Norfolk Island People for Democracy* has been asking the UN to put Norfolk Island on the non-self-governing territory list. They believe they should have the right to decide for themselves.

## Treaties &amp; Agreements

### **The United Nations Charter**

This is the document outlining how the UN works. Article 1 says their goal is “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.”

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

This was adopted by the UN in 1948. It outlines all the rights most states agree people should have. Article 15 states that everyone has the right to a nationality and that no one should be arbitrarily deprived of a nationality or denied the right to change nationality. This could refer to self-determination. This is the right to choose one’s government.

## The 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories

*Look at the following chart. What could prevent some of these places from starting their own country?*

*What territories could be added? What could come off?*

<b>Territory</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>How long has it been on the list?</b>	<b>Population</b>
Western Sahara	Claimed by Morocco	Since 1963	584,000
Anguilla	United Kingdom	Since 1946	15,700
Bermuda	United Kingdom	Since 1946	61,695
British Virgin Islands	United Kingdom	Since 1946	28,200
Cayman Islands	United Kingdom	Since 1946	60,413
Falkland Islands	United Kingdom	Since 1946	2,500
Montserrat	United Kingdom	Since 1946	5,000
St. Helena	United Kingdom	Since 1946	5,691
Turks and Caicos Islands	United Kingdom	Since 1946	37,910
United States Virgin Islands	United States	Since 1946	103,700
Gibraltar	United Kingdom	Since 1946	33,140
American Samoa	United States	Since 1946	60,200
French Polynesia	France	1946-1947 and since 2013	271,800
Guam	United States	Since 1946	159,358
New Caledonia	France	1946-1947 and since 1986	268,767
Pitcairn	United Kingdom	Since 1946	39
Tokelau	New Zealand	Since 1946	1,499

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## Research Questions

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1. What is your country's history with colonialism? Was it a colonial power? Was it colonized? How does that history affect your country today?
2. Why might some countries want to keep territories around the world under their control?
3. How is colonialism against human rights?
4. How can states agree on what territories should be considered non-self-governing?
5. The Western World has a history of colonialism. Most of the administrators on the non-self-governing list are Western countries. Why do you think that is? Do you think other countries in Asia can be considered colonizers as well?
6. Some people do not think colonialism ever ended. They think it just changed form. They think this because they think some countries take advantage of poorer ones. Do you think that this is true?
7. Why would some territories want to become independent? Why would some territories not want to change anything?
8. Does the problem exist in your community?
9. Who is working on it? NGOs, not for profits, other groups or individuals?
10. Knowing about this problem, how does it impact your world view?
11. How could you make an impact on this issue through your life choices?

## Resources

Source / Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
<b><i>The UN and Decolonization</i></b>	<a href="http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/index.shtml">http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/index.shtml</a>	UN site about the history of decolonization.
<b><i>The Guardian</i></b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/aug/20/past.hearafrica05">https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/aug/20/past.hearafrica05</a>	News article about how colonialism make Western countries rich.
<b><i>BBC</i></b>	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24396390">https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24396390</a>	News story on why the Congo is one of the world's poorest countries but should be the richest.
<b><i>NY Times</i></b>	<a href="https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/08/30/daily/leopold-book-review.html?mcubz=1">https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/08/30/daily/leopold-book-review.html?mcubz=1</a>	Book review of King Leopold's ghost.
<b><i>BBC</i></b>	<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8061841.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8061841.stm</a>	Article about how colonialism still affects Bolivia today.
<b><i>Vox</i></b>	<a href="https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/1/11/15782544/puerto-rico-pushes-for-statehood-explained">https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/1/11/15782544/puerto-rico-pushes-for-statehood-explained</a>	Article about Puerto Rico pushing to be recognized as a state.
<b><i>The Washington Post</i></b>	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/19/colonialism-left-behind-a-long-legacy-most-of-it-bad/?noredirect=on&amp;utm_term=.8b38d4faa04e">https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/19/colonialism-left-behind-a-long-legacy-most-of-it-bad/?noredirect=on&amp;utm_term=.8b38d4faa04e</a>	A response to an article written that said colonialism could be positive. Most people agree that it is not.
<b><i>The End of Poverty</i></b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xpKKHcC8eU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xpKKHcC8eU</a>	A documentary on poverty in the modern world.
<b><i>Norfolk Island People for Democracy</i></b>	<a href="http://www.norfolkschoice.com/">http://www.norfolkschoice.com/</a>	Website for people from Norfolk Island who want their territory put on the list of non-self-governing territories.