

Forum: Special, Political, and Decolonisation (GA4)

Issue: The Political Status of Non-Self-Governing Territories

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Introduction

Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs) are territories “whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government”,¹ meaning they do not have the freedom to govern themselves and are controlled by another country, often called an administering power. There are currently 17 NSGTs, including French Polynesia, Gibraltar, American Samoa and Western Sahara,² the concept of which was first introduced in the UN Charter. Originally, there were 72 NSGTs, but most of them underwent a process known as decolonisation, through which they managed to gain independence from their administering power.



Figure 1: Map of the current UN recognised NSGTs.³

¹United Nations. “CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS.” *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 1945, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>.

²United Nations. “Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization.” *the United Nations*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt>.

³United Nations. “Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization.” *the United Nations*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt>.



Politics have prolongedly affected the progress of NSGTs, with the political systems governing them lacking full autonomy or even self-government, as administering powers control critical sectors such as defence, foreign affairs, and financial matters. Additionally, competing sovereignty and territorial disputes cause unresolved political status due to conflicting interests. Agreements and resolutions presented have not been successful because of their non-binding nature and short-term effects. It is of utmost importance to determine the political status of NSGTs so that the local population can exercise their right to self-determination, meaning they can decide their political standing, whether they will be independent, integrated into another country, or autonomous. Nowadays, the undetermined political status of NSGTs causes huge challenges in political, social and legal levels. Simultaneously, the UN's goal of reaching decolonisation and sustainable development will be impossible to achieve. Therefore, a multi-faceted approach is required, tackling the issue from different perspectives, including cooperation, education, conflict resolution and referenda. These solutions should also take into consideration the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presented by the UN, more specifically the 10th regarding reduced inequalities and the 16th regarding peace, justice and strong institutions.

The topic “The Political Status of Non-Self-Governing Territories” is of utmost importance within MUN, as it is an ongoing event within the international community and sparks a series of unique discussions among experts. It is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of the issue and tackle it through one-of-a-kind approaches, potentially different from already existing ones.

Definition of key terms

Administering Power

“A country which administers one or more NSGTs to ensure the economic, political, social and educational progress of the citizens. In assisting them in developing self-government and political institutions, administering powers shall frequently report to the UN Secretary-General the economic, social and educational conditions in the administered territories.”⁴

Decolonisation

“Decolonisation refers to the process of undoing colonisation, where a colonised nation gains political, social, and cultural independence from the coloniser. It involves dismantling the imposed systems, structures, and ideologies of colonial powers, and

⁴United Nations. “International Week of Non-Self-Governing Territories | United Nations.” *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/non-self-governing-week>.



restoring the autonomy, identity, and heritage of indigenous or previously oppressed groups.”⁵

Non-Division Principle

The non-division principle applies to all territories categorised as NSGTs under the UN Charter and prohibits them from dividing. The main aim of the principle is to preserve the territorial integrity of NSGTs to achieve self-governance, while ensuring that no part of the territory is administered differently without the unanimous agreement of its people.⁶

Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs)

According to the United Nations Charter, Non-Self-Governing Territories are “territories, whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government”.⁷

Referendum

“A referendum is a process in which an election is used to refer a significant final decision to the public, which then directly votes to decide the outcome. Depending on the law in the jurisdiction, referendums may be used in both general elections and special elections. Referendums are generally used to repeal or approve state statutes or amendments to a state constitution.”⁸

Self-Determination

“The right of a people living within a non-self-governing territory to choose for themselves the political and legal status of that territory. They may choose independence and the formation of a separate state, integration into another state, or association with an independent state, with autonomy in internal affairs. The systems of mandates and trusteeship marked a step towards recognising a legal right of self-determination, but it is not yet completely recognised as a legal norm. It is probably illegal for another state to intervene against a liberation movement, and it may be legal to assist such a movement.”⁹

⁵“Decolonisation - Definition and Explanation.” *The Oxford Review*, <https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/decolonisation-definition-and-explanation/>.

⁶Summers, James. “Decolonisation revisited and the obligation not to divide a Non-Self-Governing Territory.” *Questions of International Law*, 31 January 2019, <https://www.qil-qdi.org/decolonisation-revisited-and-the-obligation-not-to-divide-a-non-self-governing-territory/>.

⁷United Nations. “CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS.” *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 1945, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>.

⁸Cornell law school. “referendum | Wex | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute.” *Legal Information Institute*, September 2024, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/referendum>.

⁹Oxford Reference. “Self-determination.” *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100453230>.



Self-Governance

“Self-governance is the exercise of power or control over oneself without external interference. The concept of self-government can apply on various scales - from the individual to the organisational to the national. Methods and institutions of self-government also vary and are all founded on the right or power to autonomous decision-making.”¹⁰

Sovereignty

“Supreme authority in a state. In any state, sovereignty is vested in the institution, person, or body having the ultimate authority to impose law on everyone else in the state and the power to alter any pre-existing law. How and by whom the authority is exercised varies according to the political nature of the state. In many countries, the executive, legislative, and judicial powers of sovereignty are exercised by different bodies.”¹¹

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

“The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Countries have committed to prioritising progress for those who're furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls.”¹²

Territorial Integrity

“Territorial integrity refers to the territorial ‘oneness’ or ‘wholeness’ of the State. As a norm of international law, it protects the territorial framework of the independent State and is an essential foundation of the sovereignty of States.”¹³

Trust Territory

A trust territory is “a non-self-governing territory placed under an administrative authority by the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations”¹⁴

¹⁰“Self-Governance – Participedia.” *Participedia*, <https://participedia.net/method/self-governance>.

¹¹Oxford Reference. “Sovereignty.” *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100520397>.

¹²United Nations Development Programme. “Sustainable Development Goals.” *United Nations Development Programme*, <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

¹³Blay, Samuel KN. “Territorial Integrity and Political Independence.” *Oxford Public International Law*, March 2010, <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e1116>.

¹⁴TRUST TERRITORY Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust%20territory>.



Trusteeship System

The International Trusteeship System was established under the UN Charter, Chapter XII, to administer and supervise all trust territories placed thereunder by individual agreements. Its purpose is to ensure international peace and security, promote political, economic, social and educational development, uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as guarantee equal treatment within the UN. However, due to the inactivity of the Trusteeship System, the 17 remaining NSGTs are placed under the Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24).

Timeline of events

Date	Description of event
June 26th, 1945	The UN Charter was signed in San Francisco after the UN Conference on International Organisation.
December 14th, 1946	The Trusteeship Council was officially established after the passing of the GA resolution 64.
December 15th, 1960	The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1541 (XV), namely the UN's Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, was adopted.
May 28th, 1961	Amnesty International was founded in order to encourage people to take action for a better world.
November 27th, 1961	The Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24) was established.
October 24th, 1970	The Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States was signed.
February 26th, 1976	Spain's permanent representative informed the Secretary General that Spain withdraws its presence in Western Sahara.



September 6th, 1991	A ceasefire between the Polisario Front and Morocco came into effect.
October 1st, 1994	Palau, the last remaining trust territory under the Trusteeship System, gained independence.
November 1st, 1994	The Trusteeship Council suspended its operations.

Background information

Historical Evolution and Context

The origins of NSGTs in the UN lie within the creation of the UN Charter in 1945¹⁵, post-World War II, which defines them as territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government. This declaration aimed at establishing the administration and decolonisation of territories, which were previously under colonial rule. Therefore, obligations for the administering powers were implemented to ensure the proper development and self-government of NSGTs. Originally, an official document was made by the UN, listing all the initial 72 NSGTs. Over the years, most trust territories either became independent countries or their status was changed.

The Trusteeship Council, created by the UN Charter, Chapter XII, is one of the six principal organs of the UN and was established with the GA resolution 64.¹⁶ Its main task was to supervise and ensure the proper administration of NSGTs, which were placed under the international trusteeship system. The Council's members were the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), France, and the Russian Federation). Its purpose is to examine and assess the reports of the administering powers on the development of the local population of the NSGTs, as well as to organise, along with the administering powers, missions to the trust territories. The Trusteeship Council suspended all its operations on 1 November 1994, because of the independence of Palau, the last trust territory, placed under the international trusteeship

¹⁵United Nations. "International Week of Non-Self-Governing Territories | United Nations." *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/non-self-governing-week>.

¹⁶United Nations. "Trusteeship Council | United Nations." *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/trusteeship-council>.

United Nations. "Resolutions adopted on the reports of the fourth committee." *Docs un*, 14 December 1946, [https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/64\(I\)](https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/64(I)).



system.¹⁷ As a result, the Council amended its rules of procedure to meet only when required instead of annually. Therefore, the 17 current NSGTs heavily rely on C-24 and the GA4 for their issues to be addressed, something that might not be a priority for the committees.¹⁸

Impact and Effects of Decolonisation on NSGTs

The impact of decolonisation on NSGTs, especially during the 1980s, was multifaceted, as their political status, economy and international relations were affected. Firstly, decolonisation aimed at granting self-determination and eventually self-governance, thus impacting their political status by limiting the administering power's colonial rule. Despite that, many NSGTs remain in transitional states, hence facing disputes. Additionally, many UN decolonisation efforts, such as the current decolonisation efforts through referenda in New Caledonia and the Nouméa Accord of 1998, have proved to be effective in eliminating ethnic and political divisions. Moreover, decolonisation efforts also emphasise the need to foster political autonomy and resilience in NSGTs by directly enhancing sustainable development, thus directly affecting humanitarian aid strategies aiming at long-term stability. Lastly, humanitarian assistance in NSGTs has simultaneously adapted, in order to abide by the principles of self-determination and self-governance, hence empowering the local population, by diversifying governance in local aid organisations.

Administrative and Governance Challenges

NSGTs face a series of administrative and governance challenges that impact their goal of achieving self-governance and independence, thus not having the right of self-determination. The phenomenon of NSGTs having limited political authority is expanding, mainly since the administering power controls most internal government institutions, vital for the proper function of a self-government. In addition, NSGTs usually do not have the right to formulate and adopt their own policies without supervision and intervention of the administering country, thus being overlooked from decision-making processes. International relations and the signing of treaties are almost impossible for such territories, as their international status is restricted, and they often have to rely on their administering power.

Trust territories are not only politically dependent on administering powers, but also economically, socially and educationally. While the UN Charter emphasises that administering powers have the "sacred trust" to promote the welfare of NSGT citizens, that is not always the case. Administering countries are responsible for the defence and security of each NSGT, hence the territory has to rely on external military support in case of emergency, something that might not be guaranteed or possible under all circumstances.

¹⁷United Nations. "Trusteeship Council | United Nations." *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/trusteeship-council>.

¹⁸United Nations. "Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization." *the United Nations*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt>.



Additionally, they control all economic policies, while in some cases, they even have the same currency as the administering power, hence not being able to make their own financial decisions. The control of natural resources, such as fisheries and agricultural products, might also lead to exploitation without consultation and actual benefit to the local community.

Some NSGTs experience different sovereignty claims, such as the Falkland Islands, administered by the UK and claimed by Argentina, as well as Gibraltar, administered by the UK and claimed by Spain. The uneven political control across all NSGTs, including different levels of autonomy, self-governance and self-determination, also influences the political participation and representation at an international level. NSGTs also have unclear political status under international law, resulting in varied international recognition.

Last but not least, multiple previous NSGTs, which have achieved self-determination, such as Guam and Bermuda, have not yet attained full independence. Therefore, due to political, social, economic and beneficiary reasons, they still maintain close ties with their respective administering power, thus limiting their potential to gain full independence.

Case Study of NSGT (Western Sahara)

Western Sahara has been on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories since 1963¹⁹, following the transmission of information on Spanish Sahara by Spain under Article 73e of the Charter of the United Nations. However, on 26th February 1976, the permanent representative of Spain in the UN informed the Secretary-General that Spain wishes to “terminate its presence in the Western Sahara”²⁰ and is therefore exempt from any obligation regarding the administration of the territory. According to the representative, full decolonisation will only be achieved “when the views of the Saharan population have been validly expressed.”²¹

Spain decided to sign an agreement with Morocco and Mauritania, in which 2/3 of the total area of Western Sahara was ceded to the former and 1/3 to the latter. However, the Polisario Front (SADR), a politico-military organisation, emerged intending to end Moroccan control over the territory and achieve independence. In 1979, SADR managed to sign a peace agreement with Mauritania, but Morocco simultaneously annexed Mauritania's

¹⁹United Nations. “Western Sahara | The United Nations and Decolonization.” *the United Nations*, 9 September 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt/western-sahara>.

²⁰ United Nations. “Letter dated 26 February 1976 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.” *digital library un*, 26 February 1976, https://digitallibrary.un.org/naanna/record/551155/files/A_31_56--S_11997-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0®isterDownload=1&version=1.

²¹ United Nations. “Letter dated 26 February 1976 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.” *digital library un*, 26 February 1976, https://digitallibrary.un.org/naanna/record/551155/files/A_31_56--S_11997-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0®isterDownload=1&version=1.

portion.²² On 6 September 1991, Morocco and the Polisario Front accepted a ceasefire proposed by the UN,²³ including a referendum, which, due to disagreements on the voting system, never took place.



Figure 2: Map of Western Sahara.²⁴

In 2007 and 2008, talks between the two parties, facilitated by the UN, occurred without any significant progress.²⁵ This also applies to the talks in 2018, which were suggested after the UN established a permanent UN peacekeeping mission in the region. In 2020, tensions escalated once again and after Morocco launched a military operation, the Polisario Front brokered the 1991 peace plan.²⁶

²²Chograni, Houda. "The Polisario Front, Morocco, and the Western Sahara Conflict." *Arab Center Washington DC*, 22 June 2021, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-polisario-front-morocco-and-the-western-sahara-conflict/>.

²³Chograni, Houda. "The Polisario Front, Morocco, and the Western Sahara Conflict." *Arab Center Washington DC*, 22 June 2021, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-polisario-front-morocco-and-the-western-sahara-conflict/>.

²⁴"Large detailed political and administrative map of Western Sahara with roads, railroads and major cities - 1989." *Mapsland*, <https://www.mapsland.com/africa/western-sahara/large-detailed-political-and-administrative-map-of-western-sahara-with-roads-railroads-and-major-cities-1989>.

²⁵"Western Sahara | Facts, History, Dispute, Conflict, Map, & Population." *Britannica*, 5 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Western-Sahara>.

²⁶"Western Sahara | Facts, History, Dispute, Conflict, Map, & Population." *Britannica*, 5 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Western-Sahara>.



The political status of Western Sahara remains yet to be determined, and due to the ongoing armed conflict, autonomy of any grade, independence or the right to self-determination will be difficult to achieve.

Stakeholders ..

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Even though DRC is currently one of the 193 Members of the UN²⁷, before the 1960s, it was considered to be an NSGT under the administration of Belgium.²⁸ DRC's independence was part of a wider wave of decolonisation at the time, in which multiple NSGTs managed to achieve self-governance or independence. However, the country currently faces definitive internal conflicts and governance challenges, mostly created by the long-standing presence of administering powers in the past. These issues can also be reflected in recent NSGTs regarding autonomy, representation and governance.

France

France is currently administering two of the 17 territories listed as NSGTs, namely New Caledonia and French Polynesia.²⁹ Hence, France is obligated to promote political, economic, social and educational advancements and assist them in becoming self-governed. France cooperates closely with C-24 through annual sessions regarding issues its trust territories face.³⁰ Additionally, during difficult periods, more specifically the referenda on self-determination in New Caledonia, France, along with the UN, launched a mission to visit the territory in order to facilitate the political progress. This mission was extremely successful, as France's support for holding the referendum was more evident than ever.

Morocco

Morocco controls most of Western Sahara and claims sovereignty over it, despite it not being internationally recognised. Therefore, an ongoing dispute regarding the status of Western Sahara and a lack of consensus over holding a referendum on self-determination have been created. Morocco fails to settle into an agreement with the Polisario Front, thus making the suggestions made by the country unrealistic and impossible.

²⁷United Nations. "Democratic Republic of the Congo | United Nations." *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/member-states/democratic-republic-of-the-congo>.

²⁸United Nations. "List of former Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization." *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/history/former-trust-and-nsgts>.

²⁹United Nations. "Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization." *the United Nations*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt>.

³⁰"New Caledonia: France will continue its cooperation with the United Nations and the C24." *France ONU*, 10 June 2024, <https://onu.delegfrance.org/new-caledonia-france-will-continue-its-cooperation-with-the-united-nations-and>.



United Kingdom (UK)

The UK administers most of the current NSGTs, including Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands and more.³¹ The country claims to have followed all of its obligations under the UN Charter so as to promote development and self-governance and to have cooperated with the UN, especially C-24, in order to send UN missions to the territories to assess progress. However, some of the UK's territories, such as the Falkland Islands, are under dispute because of mixed sovereignty claims. Most of the UK's actions regarding assisting their NSGTs in achieving self-determination were crucial, but the dispute on the Falkland Islands has not been properly addressed or overlooked by the official administering power.

United States

The United States administers three NSGTs, namely American Samoa, Guam and the US Virgin Islands.³² These territories have different levels of self-governance, but the US handles the defence, foreign affairs and administration. The country also claims to support sustainable development and democratic governance efforts, while in discussions, it has also been mentioned that the trust territories are, to a large extent, autonomous. The US has assisted the NSGTs enormously in achieving their goals of self-determination and later on independence.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) which promotes human rights. In regard to NSGTs, Amnesty International has played a pivotal role in monitoring and reporting the human rights conditions and violations in NSGTs, thus holding administering powers accountable for potential abuses. In addition, according to the organisation, human rights are the basis for political discussions and especially efforts towards self-governance and independence. The actions taken by Amnesty International could be considered effective in combating human rights abuses and advocating for the protection of individuals in NSGTs, but it has been impartial on sovereignty disputes and political claims.

Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24)

The Special Committee on Decolonisation was established in 1961 under the UN General Assembly as a subsidiary organ specifically devoted to the issue of decolonisation.³³ According to the GA resolution 1654 (XVI), its purpose is to “examine the application of the Declaration and to make suggestions and recommendations on the progress and extent of

³¹United Nations. “Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization.” *the United Nations*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt>.

³²United Nations. “Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations and Decolonization.” *the United Nations*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt>.

³³United Nations. “Special Committee on Decolonization | The United Nations and Decolonization.” *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/c24/about>.



the implementation of the Declaration.”³⁴ Additionally, the committee holds an annual meeting in order to discuss the developments in NSGTs, while statements are heard from representatives. C-24 helped many NSGTs in their journey towards self-governance and independence, while it has also overseen the removal of territories from the official list of NSGTs through successful decolonisation.

Relevant UN resolutions, treaties, and events (Previous attempts)

The United Nations Charter (Chapters XI, XII, XIII)

The UN Charter, Chapter XI titled “Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories”, establishes a clear definition as to which territories shall fall under the category of NSGTs, while in the same article, 73, the interests of the inhabitants of NSGTs are considered to be paramount.³⁵ Additionally, a series of obligations and responsibilities for Member States having administering powers are also introduced, including the development of self-government, cooperation and promotion of research, and respect for the culture of the citizens. In the following Chapter, the International Trusteeship System is founded as an administrative and supervisory body for such territories, while in Chapter XIII, the Trusteeship Council is established under the authority of the General Assembly in order to keep an annual report of the NSGTs’ progress.

The three Chapters were of great significance in forming the legal and institutional framework for decolonisation. Because of the obligations set and the active role of the Trusteeship System and Council, many former NSGTs achieved self-governance or independence. However, the Council suspended its operations after all trust territories attained independence, resulting in a limited ongoing operational impact. Therefore, the United Nations Charter, Chapters XI, XII and XIII were effective in setting a definition for NSGT and through which means they can change their status. Additionally, the responsibilities which the administering powers have are clearly stated, thus avoiding mistakes in interpretation. Lastly, the establishment and functions of the Trusteeship Council were rightly determined, but its long-term objectives and activities after the independence of the trust territories were omitted.

UN General Assembly Resolution 1541 (XV)

The UN General Assembly Resolution 1541, adopted in December 1960 and titled “Principles which should guide Members in determining whether or not an obligation exists to transmit the information called for under Article 73 e of the Charter”, sets out twelve

³⁴UN General Assembly. “The situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples.” *digital library un*, 27 November 1961, <https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/167/07/pdf/nr016707.pdf>.

³⁵United Nations. “CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS.” *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 1945, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>.



principles to navigate the process of decolonisation.³⁶ More specifically, three options as to how an NSGT can achieve self-governance are outlined, while the principle of self-determination as the cornerstone for decolonisation is affirmed.

The clarifications and details provided by this resolution regarding the declarations made in the UN Charter assisted in unifying the international approach towards decolonisation. By presenting a legal and political framework for administering powers and the UN itself, the process of achieving self-governance, self-determination and independence for NSGTs became straightforward.

The Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States (General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) of 1970)

The Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States, signed on 24th October 1970, explicitly mentions the right of people to self-determination.³⁷ This is a fundamental principle for all NSGTs since their citizens have not attained complete self-governance. Moreover, respect for the territorial integrity of a state or territory is emphasised, as well as the prohibition of the use of force to interfere with the political status of NSGTs.

The principles stated in the resolution have been cited in international law to foster cooperation and to guide peaceful relations among states. However, because of the non-binding nature of the declaration, its enforcement depends on each country's voluntary compliance. Therefore, despite the importance of all the principles in the resolution, Member States are not obliged to adopt them.

Possible solutions

Communication and Collaboration

Communication and cooperation are key to achieving friendly relations between an NSGT and its respective administering power. Bilateral committees or joint working groups could be established, in which representatives from both the NSGT and the administering power will hold monthly dialogues to discuss political, economic, social and cultural matters. Information sharing between the two parties should be encouraged, since an issue can only

³⁶UN General Assembly. "(XV) Principles which should guide Members in determining whether or not an obligation exists to transmit the information called for under Article 73 e of the Charter." *digital library un*, 15 December 1960, https://digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/206178/files/A_RES_1541%28XV%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0®isterDownload=1&version=1.

³⁷UN General Assembly. "RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED ON THE REPORTS OF THE SIXTH COMMITTEE." *digital library un*, 24 October 1970, https://digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/202170/files/A_RES_2625%28XXV%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0®isterDownload=1&version=1.



be addressed urgently with the proper reports and updates shared, thus increasing communication efforts.

During decision-making, in order to ensure collaboration and avoid public reactions, equal representation and the presence of a neutral third party, such as the UN GA4, could be some preconditions. In order to increase strong cooperation between the NSGT and the administering power, the fourth committee could make some suggestions through a resolution, focusing on establishing annual meetings regarding important decisions and visits to and from the NSGT, in order for the local population not to feel neglected.

Moreover, there are many cases in which NSGTs are not in full agreement with their respective administering power, thus creating unwanted tensions. In that case, a specialised agency, such as the Special Committee on Decolonisation, could intervene in order to find a common ground and revitalise the process of achieving self-governance.

Enhanced Participation and Representation of NSTGs

NSGTs are underrepresented in most UN organs, including specialised agencies, while multiple administering powers remain reluctant to share authority or political representation. Therefore, indigenous representatives of NSGTs ought to participate in the sessions of relevant UN organs and specialised agencies in order to increase and enhance their involvement in decision-making processes affecting the NSGTs' welfare and political standing. Additionally, each representative of an NSGT gives insights into the challenges of the local population, thus creating "tailored" approaches to address their needs individually.

Conflict Resolution for Disputed NSTGs

Some of the current NSTGs are facing huge administrative problems, as either the administrative power withdrew from its responsibilities or more than one state exercised administrative control over one NSTG. As a result, the NSTG is not being supported enough to achieve self-governance according to the UN Charter or is being neglected because the administrative powers have poor cooperation. Therefore, peaceful negotiations between the powers could take place, and dialogue could be facilitated to determine which country will be responsible for assisting the NSTG in becoming self-governed or even independent.

Self-Determination Processes

Self-determination processes in NSGTs must emphasise the right to determine their political status by following democratic means. Transparent referenda could be conducted when all relevant parties and the UN deem necessary, in order for individuals to be able to choose between options agreed upon by both the administering power and the spokespeople of their trust territories. So as for the referenda to be considered fair, the whole population must be involved, including minority groups and indigenous people.



Education and Public Awareness Campaigns

Informing individuals about the political status of NSGTs as well as their rights under the UN Charter is of utmost importance, as people will be aware of their obligations and opportunities within their territory. In addition, explaining to citizens the significance of self-determination and decolonisation processes will assist them in setting clear objectives as a nation and remind them of their goal to achieve self-governance and eventual independence. These explanations and information processes could be in the form of a campaign organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) along with the Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24), in order to provide technical and factual support. Therefore, the awareness of the local population of an NSGT regarding their rights and the importance of self-determination will be increased.

Further reading

[What the UN Can Do To Assist Non-Self Governing Territories](#)

[Ten Frequently Asked Questions on the United Nations and Decolonization](#)

[The Political Status of Non-Self Governing Territories](#)

[Non Self-Governing Territories](#)

[VIDEO - 'United Nations and Decolonization: Past to Present'](#)

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