

Ban marks 50th anniversary of UN declaration that helped propel decolonization



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) marks 50th anniversary of UN declaration that helped propel decolonization

14 December 2010 – Presiding over an organization that has surged from 99 members in 1960 to 192, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today commemorated the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration that helped to make this virtual doubling possible.

“This General Assembly Hall looks very different than it did 50 years ago,” he [told](#) the assembled ambassadors at a meeting to celebrate the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. “I am not talking about the big television monitors or the electronic voting boards.

“I am not even talking about the seats, which are more comfortable now. I am talking about the number of independent Member States represented in this most universal international body, and the role of new and old States in shaping our world.”

He noted that back in 1960 only four African countries were represented at the UN, compared to more than 50 today. “Many events helped shape these changes, but few were more important than the adoption of the General Assembly's Declaration,” he said, noting that in 1960 over 100 million people lived in conditions of colonial oppression and exploitation, denied their fundamental human rights.

“The Declaration was a light of hope, but making good on its promise to end colonialism seemed like a far-off goal for too many locked in the struggle for independence. Now, 50 years later, the vast majority of States have achieved this goal.”

The Declaration affirmed the right of all people to self-determination and proclaimed that colonialism should be brought to a speedy and unconditional end. It states that the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, contravenes the UN Charter and impedes the promotion of world peace and cooperation.

Two years after the adoption of the Declaration, a Special Committee on decolonization was established to monitor its implementation.

But, Mr. Ban noted, the process of decolonization is not complete since 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories remain on the list of the Special Committee. “Finishing the job will require a continuing dialogue among the administering Powers, the Special Committee, and the peoples of those territories,” he said. “The United Nations is committed to fulfilling the Declaration’s great promise.

“This Organization was the proud midwife at the birth of a number of formerly colonized countries. We remain engaged with all of them as we seek to consolidate peace, development and human rights.”

He cited many lessons learned from the process, including the need for commitment and persistence, the spirit of solidarity that travelled across the globe, and the realization that independence is part and parcel of global interdependence, which now requires a new kind of solidarity to eliminate poverty and hunger, protect the environment and deal with violence in and between societies.

“Decolonization re-made the world – in our minds and on the ground,” he concluded. “It showed the tremendous power we have to shape the world for the better. Let us continue to build on that remarkable achievement, and realize in full the spirit of the Declaration.”

Speaking on behalf of General Assembly President Joseph Deiss, Ambassador Sylvie Lucas of Luxembourg noted that since 1945, more than 80 former colonies had become independent, joining the UN as sovereign States, and she extended a special greeting to those nations today.

“The Assembly has played a vital role in this historic development,” she said, calling the Declaration’s adoption and the establishment of the Special Committee “decisive steps.”

However, “we have yet to turn the page on colonialism once and for all,” she added, pointing to the remaining 16 Territories. The Special Committee, she stated, should continue to promote cooperation with the administering Powers and, in consultation with the peoples of those Territories, develop innovative, tailored approaches to ensure the right to self-determination.

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