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Ending of Trusteeships Through Plebiscites

1. British-Administered Togoland

The British administered this Trust Territory under joint administration with their territory known as the Gold Coast. In 1954, having decided to give the Gold Coast its independence, the United Kingdom asked the advice of the Trusteeship Council regarding the future of the Trust Territory. A Visiting Mission was sent, and it recommended the people of Togoland be offered a choice between continuing the union with the Gold Coast after it became the independent state of Ghana, or separation from the Gold Coast and continued trusteeship. The people voted 93,095 to 67,492 to stay with the Gold Coast and become independent. The Gold Coast became independent on March 6, 1957 and the Trusteeship Agreement for British Togoland ended the same day -- with the two territories becoming the new state of Ghana. The 11th General Assembly had adopted a resolution approving the decision of the people and approving in advance the termination of the trusteeship.

Thus this case was much like what will presumably take place in the case of the Trust Territory of New Guinea and its neighboring Australian Territory of Papua.

2. British-Administered Cameroons

This situation is more complicated. Both the British and French Cameroons were originally a German territory which was split into the two portions after World War I. The British portion was, in turn, divided into two sections, with a 45-mile separation, known as Northern and Southern Cameroons.

Until 1954, the two halves were administered as integral parts of the Northern and Eastern Regions respectively of the British territory of Nigeria. In 1954, as the result of a conference on the Nigerian constitution, while Northern Cameroons continued at its own request to be so administered as a part of the state of Northern Nigeria within the Federation of Nigeria, the Southern Cameroons was given, also at its request, quasi-federal status within the Federation, with institutions of its own. In 1957 as the result of a constitutional review in London, the term quasi-federal was dropped

and it became the state of Southern Cameroons within the Federation of Nigeria. The Northern Cameroons on the other hand decided to remain a part of the state of Northern Nigeria.

During this period, there were also repeated inquiries about the possibility of reuniting the French and British Cameroons. But the matter was always deferred.

In 1958 the British pointed out that Nigeria was due to become independent on October 1, 1960. They did not wish to force the Trust Territory of Cameroons to stay with Nigeria so they asked the UN's advice on how the views of the people might best be assessed. The problem was compounded by the setting of the independence date for the French Cameroons for January 1, 1960.

A Visiting Mission was sent and as a result the General Assembly in 1959 recommended separate plebiscites in both halves of the British Cameroons. The Northern half was to be given a choice of remaining as part of Northern Nigeria within the Nigerian Federation when it became independent, or deciding its future later. It was decided to put off the Southern vote until the end of 1959 and decide the questions then. The North, however, voted 70,546 to 42,788 to put off the decision on its future, thus effectively putting off the decision for both halves.

In 1960 the General Assembly therefore decided to hold new plebiscites in both halves, no later than March 1961, with both being given the choice between joining Nigeria (which would then be newly independent) or the former French Cameroons (which had just become independent). In the meantime, the British were to bring about the separation of both halves of their Trust Territory of the Cameroons from Nigeria before it became independent in October 1960. This was done and the votes were held on February 11, 1961, with the North voting to join Nigeria and the South voting to join the new state of Cameroons (the former French trust).

The 15th General Assembly, at its resumed session in April 1961, adopted a resolution approving these results and the termination of the trusteeship in accordance with the wishes of the people.

Thus while much more complicated than the case of Togoland, the situation in the Cameroons was also essentially a case of Trust Territories and national territories evolving together toward independence on the basis of earlier ties.

3. Western Samoa

Western Samoa followed a different course. Starting with the constitutional convention of 1954, New Zealand followed a policy of leading the Territory toward self-government, and independence or very loose association. The final plebiscite, which was really two referendums, was conducted on the recommendation of the General Assembly, based on the report of a Visiting Mission, and asked the people first to approve the Constitution drawn up at the 1960 Constitutional Convention and second to approve the accession to independence in 1962. The vote took place in 1961 and both issues were approved.

The 16th General Assembly passed a resolution approving these results and accordingly terminating the trusteeship.

Note: In all three cases it was the United Nations which decided what choices would be offered to the people -- not the Administering Authority.

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Termination of Trusteeships
Without a Plebiscite

Nauru

The Nauru Local Government Council discussed its future with the Australian Government in June 1967. The Australians proposed two alternatives: either association with Australia or full independence, with Australia handling defense and foreign affairs under a treaty arrangement. The Australians suggested a plebiscite. The Nauruan delegation said they wished to be independent; that they did not think a plebiscite was necessary; that there was not time to hold a plebiscite; and that, in any case, a general election was already scheduled. Australia agreed and Nauru became independent on January 31, 1968. The General Assembly approved these developments during its 22nd session.

Ruanda-Urundi

The following is a simplified version of this most complex case:

A 1960 UN Visiting Mission recommended that because of the political difficulties in Ruanda-Urundi a conference be held as soon as possible between Belgium -- the Administering Authority -- and the African leaders regarding the future of the territory. The mission also recommended UN-supervised elections for national assemblies of separate kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi. The General Assembly then decided to set up a three-man commission to supervise the elections and, additionally, to lend its advice and assistance in "advancing peace and harmony in the territory."

At a resumed session of the General Assembly in April 1961, the General Assembly called for the establishment of caretaker governments in both parts of the territory and the holding of elections of popular governments under UN supervision. Legislative elections, held under UN supervision in September 1961, seemed to show, in terms of the platforms of the winning parties, that the majority of the inhabitants wished to emerge from trusteeship as separate independent states.

After further investigation by a UN Special Commission, the General Assembly, at its resumed session in June 1962, approved,

with the concurrence of Belgium, the termination of the trusteeship through the creation of two independent states.

Tanganyika

Great Britain followed an orderly course of granting increased measures of self-government in the territory over a period of years. This process was culminated in 1960 with changes which brought about a large measure of internal self-government, including the appointment of a Chief Minister from among the members of the Legislative Council. This latter body was also reformed to insure an African majority, almost exclusively elected. Under this new system, elections were held in September 1960 for the Legislative Council and the Council of Ministers, the majority of the elected, was formed. These elected leaders represented the people at a Constitutional Convention in March 1961 with the United Kingdom, at which both sides agreed that Tanganyika should become independent in December 1961. The General Assembly, at its resumed 15th session and again at its 16th session, passed resolutions approving these developments and terminating the trusteeship.

Somaliland

The original Trusteeship Agreement, reflecting a 1949 decision of the General Assembly, set December 2, 1960, as the date of independence. This date was moved up approximately six months at the request of the administering authority and the local government. Otherwise the transition was carried out as prescribed by the Agreement.

French Cameroons

In 1957 under a new Statute of the Cameroons, France granted considerable self-government and gave the Legislative Assembly the authority to ask for further transfer of powers. In 1958 the Assembly asked France to recognize the option of independence and to grant it full internal power. This was done. Later in 1958 the Assembly asked the Government to inform France that the Cameroons wished to become independent in 1960. A Visiting Mission went to the Territory and concluded this request was supported by a great majority of the people. France agreed and the General Assembly approved.

French Togoland

In 1958 the General Assembly voted to accept the invitation of the French Government to supervise election of a legislative assembly which was to be asked to formulate, in consultation with the administering authority, proposals for attainment of early independence. UN-supervised elections were held in 1958. The UN observer declared that they were free and the resulting assembly could honestly speak for the Togolese people. France recognized during the negotiations with the Togolese representatives that they had opted for independence and arrangements were worked out to achieve it. The General Assembly then approved.

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