Fourth General Assembly (GA4)

Completing the Process of Decolonization in the Caribbean Region

Research Report

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"Out of this world"

Forum: Fourth General Assembly

Issue: Completing the Process of Decolonization in the Caribbean Region

Position: Head Chair

Introduction:

The decolonization process in the Caribbean is an ongoing, multifaceted issue that continues to hold significant relevance on the international stage. While the mid-20th century saw a wave of independence movements sweep across the globe, including many Caribbean nations, several territories in the region remain under colonial administration. Despite years of efforts by international organisations, such as the United Nations, and regional bodies, full sovereignty has yet to be realized for all territories in the Caribbean. This report aims to provide a detailed overview of the historical and current context of decolonization in the Caribbean, examine the challenges and key players involved, and propose potential solutions to help complete this long-standing process.

Definition of Key Terms:

Decolonization:
The process by which colonies become independent and achieve self-determination, removing the control of a colonial power and transitioning to sovereign status.

Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs):
Territories recognized by the United Nations as not having attained full self-governance. These include Caribbean territories such as Puerto Rico, the British Virgin Islands, and the Cayman Islands, which remain under the control of colonial powers.

Self-determination:
The right of a people to decide their own political status and to pursue their own economic, social, and cultural development, free from external interference.

Colonial Powers:
Countries that continue to hold colonial control over territories. These powers influence the political and economic structures of the territories under their control.

Referendum:
A direct vote in which an entire electorate is asked to either accept or reject a particular proposal.

General Overview:

Historical Context
The Caribbean has a long and complex history of colonisation, beginning with European powers like Spain, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom seizing control of the region's islands and establishing colonies as early as the 16th century. These colonial powers exploited the region's resources, including sugar, coffee, and other cash crops, as well as human capital through the transatlantic slave trade. Colonisation significantly shaped the region’s political, economic, and cultural development, leaving a legacy of structural inequality, racial hierarchy, and economic dependency.

The wave of global decolonization in the mid-20th century was largely driven by the formation of the United Nations and its emphasis on the principles of self-determination and human rights. The UN played a crucial role in advocating for the dismantling of colonial empires and the establishment of sovereign states. In the Caribbean, this era witnessed the independence of several territories: Jamaica (1962), Barbados (1966), and Saint Kitts and Nevis (1983), among others. However, despite this progress, certain territories opted to remain under colonial administration, either seeking greater autonomy within an established framework or delaying the decision of full independence due to economic and political uncertainties.

Current Situation

Currently, the Caribbean region consists of a mixture of independent nations and Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs) that remain under colonial administration. These territories include:

- **Puerto Rico**: A territory of the United States with commonwealth status, Puerto Rico has held multiple referendums on its political future, with recent votes showing support for statehood. However, no binding decision has been made by the U.S. Congress to change its status.

- **British Overseas Territories**: These include the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Anguilla, Bermuda, and Turks and Caicos Islands, which enjoy varying degrees of self-governance but remain under British sovereignty. Although some territories have shown interest in greater autonomy, full independence remains uncertain due to economic and geopolitical concerns.
- **Territories under the Kingdom of the Netherlands**: Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten have constituent country status, which grants them significant autonomy but retains their link to the Netherlands. These territories have their own governments but remain politically tied to their former colonial power.

The political status of these territories varies, with some favouring the current arrangements, others advocating for greater autonomy, and still others pushing for full independence. The ongoing decolonization process is complicated by economic dependencies, strategic geopolitical interests of colonial powers, and the complex views of local populations regarding their future.

Challenges and Obstacles

Economic Dependencies: Many of the NSGTs remain economically dependent on their colonial powers for financial aid, trade, and tourism. These dependencies create significant obstacles to full independence, as the territories often lack the economic infrastructure necessary to sustain themselves independently. For example, the British Virgin Islands and Cayman Islands rely heavily on financial services and tourism, both sectors deeply intertwined with their colonial relationships.

Political Complexities: Each NSGT has a unique political status shaped by historical agreements, local governance, and the political interests of both the colonial powers and the local populations. For example, Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States is complex due to its commonwealth status, and its political future remains unresolved despite multiple referendums.

Diverse Aspirations: The local populations of NSGTs often have varying views on their political futures. While some factions push for full independence, others prefer enhanced autonomy or

maintaining the status quo, citing concerns about economic stability and the benefits of colonial protection.
Geopolitical Interests: The strategic interests of colonial powers further complicate decolonization efforts. For instance, Puerto Rico holds considerable geopolitical value for the United States due to its location in the Caribbean. Similarly, the British Overseas Territories serve key economic and strategic roles for the United Kingdom.

Major Parties Involved:

Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs):
NSGTs are directly involved in the decolonization process. Their local populations, governments, and political movements are critical in shaping the outcomes of negotiations with colonial powers.

Colonial Powers:
Countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Netherlands maintain control over various Caribbean territories. Their policies and willingness to negotiate play a significant role in determining the pace and nature of decolonization.

United Nations:
The UN's Special Committee on Decolonization (C-24) has been instrumental in monitoring the progress of decolonization efforts. The UN's framework for self-determination continues to guide international efforts to support the rights of NSGTs to choose their political future.

Regional Organisations:
Regional bodies such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS) have been strong advocates for the decolonization of the Caribbean. These organisations promote regional cooperation, economic development, and political dialogue to support territories in achieving greater autonomy or independence.

Local Populations:
The residents of the NSGTs are the primary stakeholders in the decolonisation process. Their aspirations for autonomy, independence, or continued association with colonial powers drive the political discourse in each territory.

Timeline of Events:

1945	The United Nations is established promoting decolonisation through its Charter.
1960	The UN adopts the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.
1962-1983	Several Caribbean nations, including Jamaica, Barbados, and Saint Kitts and Nevis, achieve independence.
1986	Aruba attains a separate status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

2013	The UN Special Committee on Decolonization reaffirms the need to complete decolonization in the Caribbean region.
2020	Puerto Rico holds a referendum on statehood, with the majority voting in favour, though no binding result has been implemented.

Possible Solutions:

 Increased Autonomy with a Pathway to Independence
Gradual autonomy allows NSGTs to build governance, legal, and economic systems. For example, Greenland has increased control over its internal affairs while Denmark retains foreign and defence responsibilities. This phased approach helps NSGTs develop the necessary infrastructure for full independence. Programs like international capacity-building (e.g., from the UNDP) can aid in governance, education, and economic management.

 Support for Full Independence
For NSGTs seeking independence, international support is crucial. Diplomatic recognition and financial aid from institutions like the World Bank or IMF can stabilise newly independent states. Countries like Timor-Leste, which received global diplomatic backing and economic assistance post-independence, serve as a model. Additionally, technical support in state-building and governance can ensure smooth transitions to sovereignty.

 Neutral Mediation and Dialogue
Neutral mediators, like those from the UN, can facilitate discussions between NSGTs and colonial powers. Mediation can resolve disputes and build trust. For instance, UN-mediated talks led to East Timor's peaceful independence from Indonesia. International organisations like the African Union or the EU can provide added support, ensuring fair negotiations and sustainable agreements.

 Targeted Economic Development Programs
Strengthening economies is key to independence. Programs focused on diversifying industries (e.g., tourism, agriculture, technology) and improving infrastructure can help NSGTs become self-sufficient. Investment in education and workforce development fosters economic resilience, making independence a more viable and stable option.

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