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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

New Caledonia

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
The Territory at a glance	3
I. Constitutional, political and legal issues	5
II. Budget	9
III. Economic conditions	10
A. General	10
B. Mineral resources	11
C. Construction and manufacturing	11
D. Agriculture and fisheries	12
E. Transport and communications	12
F. Tourism	13
IV. Social conditions	13
A. General	13
B. Employment	14
C. Education	15
D. Health	16

Note: The information contained in the present working paper has been derived from public sources, including those of the territorial Government, and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the administering Power on 2 December 2022 under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Further details are contained in previous working papers available from www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



V.	Environment	17
VI.	Relations with international organizations and partners.	17
VII.	Position of the administering Power	18
VIII.	Consideration of the question by the United Nations	18
A.	Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples	18
B.	Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)	19
C.	Action taken by the General Assembly	19
Annex		
	Map of New Caledonia	20

The Territory at a glance

Territory: New Caledonia is a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations, administered by France. New Caledonia has the status of a sui generis collectivity (*collectivité*) under the French Constitution and has enhanced autonomy.

Representative of the administering Power: Patrice Faure, High Commissioner of the Republic (since 19 May 2021)

Geography: New Caledonia is located in the Pacific Ocean, about 1,500 kilometres east of Australia and 1,800 kilometres north of New Zealand, and 17,000 kilometres from France. It comprises the main island (Grande Terre), the Isle of Pines, the Bélep Archipelago, Huon and Surprise, the Chesterfield Islands and the Bellone Reefs, the Loyalty Islands (Maré, Lifou, Tiga, Beautemps-Beaupré and Ouvéa), Walpole Island, the Astrolabe Islands, the Matthew Island and Fearn or Hunter Island, as well as islets close to the shore. It also has several uninhabited islets to the north of the Loyalty Islands.

Land area: 18,575 square kilometres (the Territory as a whole); 16,750 square kilometres (Grande Terre)

Exclusive economic zone: 1,422,543 square kilometres

Population: 271,407 (2019 census)

Life expectancy at birth: women: 79.1 years; men: 72.9 years (2021)

Ethnic composition: 41.2 per cent Melanesians (mainly Kanaks); 24.1 per cent persons of European origin, mainly French; 8.3 per cent Wallisians and Futunians; 2 per cent Tahitians; 1.4 per cent Indonesians; 0.8 per cent Vietnamese; 0.9 per cent Vanuatians; and 21.3 per cent populations classified by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies as “others” (2019).

Languages: The official language is French. About 27 Kanak vernacular languages are spoken in geographically distinct regions. Under the Agreement on New Caledonia signed in Nouméa on 5 May 1998 (Nouméa Accord), Kanak languages and French are the languages of instruction and culture.

Capital: Nouméa, located in the south of Grande Terre

Head of the territorial Government: Louis Mapou (since 8 July 2021)

Political groups (at the Territorial Congress): Avenir en confiance; Les Loyalistes; Calédonie ensemble; Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste et Nationalistes; and Union nationale pour l’indépendance.

Elections: The most recent national elections were held on 10 and 24 April 2022 (presidential), 12 and 19 June 2022 (legislative) and 24 September 2017 (Senate). The most recent local elections were held on 12 May 2019 (provincial) and 15 March and 28 June 2020 (first and second rounds of municipal elections).

Legislature: Congress of New Caledonia

Gross domestic product per capita: 30,509 euros (2021)

Unemployment rate: 13.3 per cent (2020)

Economy: Mining industry (mainly nickel), construction, trade and services

Monetary unit: Pacific franc or CFP franc (1,000 CFP francs = 8.38 euros, at a fixed exchange rate).

Brief history: In 1774, the British captain James Cook discovered Grande Terre and named it “New Caledonia”. France annexed New Caledonia on 24 September 1853. In 1942, the United States of America decided to set up one of its military bases for the Pacific in New Caledonia. Some 20,000 New Zealand soldiers were stationed in New Caledonia during the Second World War. In 1946, France made New Caledonia an overseas Territory with limited autonomy. In the 1970s, supporters of independence were highly active, leading to violence during the 1980s known as the “événements” (events). In 1988, the Matignon Agreements led to the establishment of three provinces with the aim of restoring the balance of power. Ten years later, in 1998, the Nouméa Accord provided for the gradual autonomy of the Territory and for referendums on the Territory’s accession to full sovereignty, which took place on 4 November 2018, 4 October 2020 and 12 December 2021.

I. Constitutional, political and legal issues

1. New Caledonia is a *sui generis* collectivity within the French Republic, governed under the provisions of part XIII of the Constitution (“Transitional provisions pertaining to New Caledonia”). The French Junior Minister for Overseas Territories is responsible for New Caledonia, overseen by and working in close coordination with the French Minister of the Interior, and, in that capacity, oversees the coordination and implementation of the actions of the Government of France in accordance with the Territory’s status and organization. The current Junior Minister is Jean-François Carenco, who assumed his functions on 4 July 2022. The administering Power is represented in the Territory by a High Commissioner, who exercises the authority of the French Republic in New Caledonia. That position is currently held by Louis Le Franc. Under Organic Act No. 99-209 of 19 March 1999 concerning New Caledonia, the administering Power retains prerogatives in a number of areas, including diplomacy, immigration and alien control, currency, the Treasury, defence, justice, and maintenance of law and order. In the area of defence, the High Commissioner and the Commander of the Armed Forces of New Caledonia perform the functions prescribed by the relevant legislation. New Caledonia has an air force base, a navy base and one infantry regiment, with a total of around 1,450 military personnel. The Armed Forces of New Caledonia conduct the sovereign missions of the administering Power and provide support to the territorial Government in the exercise of its civilian security responsibilities. The administering Power is responsible for the maintenance of law and order, discharged by some 550 national police officers and around 855 members of the gendarmerie (including five mobile gendarmerie squadrons).

2. The Territory is part of the metropolitan judicial system of the administering Power, with some special features, such as the obligation to use customary judges in civilian courts in cases involving disputes between persons with customary civil status. The Court of Appeal is located in the capital, Nouméa. Appeals on points of law can be filed with the French Court of Cassation.

3. New Caledonia has a 54-member Congress (28 women and 26 men) drawn from the elected membership of the three provincial assemblies (15 of the 22 members of the North Province assembly, 32 of the 40 members of the South Province assembly and 7 of the 14 members of the Loyalty Islands Province assembly).

4. As at 18 November 2022, the 54 members of Congress are distributed as follows: (a) Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste et Nationalistes (13 seats); (b) Les Loyalistes (12 seats); (c) Union nationale pour l’indépendance (11 seats); (d) Avenir en confiance (7 seats); (e) Calédonie ensemble (6 seats); and (f) five independent members.

5. Political parties in New Caledonia are essentially divided between those favouring New Caledonia remaining part of the French Republic and those favouring independence, with a number of shades within each stripe. There are also coalitions of actors and political parties within each stripe. According to the administering Power, the main political parties that support independence include the following: Dynamique autochtone; Dynamique unitaire Sud; Mouvement des océaniens indépendantistes; Mouvement nationaliste indépendantiste et socialiste; Rassemblement démocratique océanien (RDO); Parti de libération kanak (Palika); the Labour Party; Union progressiste en Mélanésie (UPM); and Union calédonienne (UC). The Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste (FLNKS) is a pro-independence political grouping of four parties: UC, Palika, RDO and UPM. The main political parties that are in favour of remaining part of the French Republic are Calédonie ensemble, Générations NC, Mouvement populaire calédonien, Le Rassemblement – Les

Républicains, Rassemblement national, Les Républicains calédoniens and Tous calédoniens. The political groups that are in favour of remaining in the French Republic are the Loyalists (a group that includes Les Républicains calédoniens, Mouvement populaire calédonien and Générations NC) and Avenir en confiance (a group that includes Le Rassemblement – Les Républicains and Rassemblement national). In addition, two political parties are unaffiliated: Éveil océanien and Construire autrement.

6. In accordance with the Nouméa Accord, a set of institutions has been established to confirm the full recognition of the Kanak identity and culture. There are eight customary councils representing eight customary regions. In addition, a Territory-wide customary Senate with a rotating presidency comprises 16 members, with each customary council selecting two members. Under article 143 of Organic Act No. 99-209, the Senate is consulted on all matters relating to the Kanak identity but has no normative power. In accordance with article 147 of the Organic Act, the Senate has a budget for its operations.

7. The Government is elected by the Congress on the basis of a proportional system and comprises 11 members. The seventeenth Government of New Caledonia was elected on 17 February 2021, following the resignation of the pro-independence members of the previous Government on 2 February 2021. It is made up of four members presented by Avenir en confiance, three from the joint group of Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste et Nationalistes and Éveil océanien, three from Union nationale pour l'indépendance, and one from Calédonie ensemble. The Government is composed of one woman and 10 men.

8. The Kanak independence movement was launched in the 1970s, in response to the process of decolonization in Africa and Oceania and as a reaction to the large movements of people from metropolitan France in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1984, the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste was founded as an umbrella organization for the pro-independence parties and, later that year, it established a provisional independent Government. Between 1984 and 1988, about 80 people died in violent confrontations between pro- and anti-independence elements. The violence was eventually halted with the conclusion of the Matignon Agreements on 26 June 1988 between the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, the anti-independence Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République and the Government of France. Information on the Matignon Agreements and the Nouméa Accord, concluded in 1998, is available in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat. The full text of the Nouméa Accord is contained in the annex to the working paper published in 1998 ([A/AC.109/2114](#)).

9. Under the Nouméa Accord, France agreed to transfer certain non-sovereign powers and a number of institutions to the Government of New Caledonia between 1998 and 2018. All institutions with the exception of the Rural Development and Land Management Agency have been transferred, along with all powers other than those in the following three areas envisaged in article 27 of Organic Act No. 99-209: (a) rules governing the administration of provinces, municipalities and their public institutions, legal oversight of the provinces, municipalities and their public institutions, and accounting and financial regulations for local authorities and their public institutions; (b) higher education; and (c) broadcasting. The Congress, which may request the transfer of the powers referred to in article 27 of Act No. 99-209, has yet to do so. The administering Power indicated that it had transferred to the Government and the provinces, through Organic Act No. 99-209, powers concerning access to and management of natural resources, including the regulation and exercise of the rights of exploration, exploitation, management and conservation of natural resources on land and in the exclusive economic zone; and regulations for hydrocarbons, nickel, chromium, cobalt and rare earth elements.

10. The Nouméa Accord provides for the holding of one to three referendums on accession to full sovereignty by New Caledonia.

11. The Government of France sets the referendum date (article 216 of Act No. 99-209). On 27 March 2018, at the meeting of the Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord – a regular meeting that brings together heads of institutions, political groups and members of the Congress, among others – the New Caledonian political partners, in agreement with the State, finalized the question to be asked for the referendum, which was formulated as follows: “Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?”.

12. Following a meeting of the Committee of Signatories on 2 November 2017, and in order to enable the populations concerned to participate in the referendum on accession by New Caledonia to full sovereignty, the French Parliament adopted Organic Act No. 2018-280 of 19 April 2018 concerning the referendum, and its implementing decrees were issued by the Government of France in April and May 2018. According to the administering Power, the exceptional package of measures adopted in 2018 had several purposes: (a) establishing a procedure for automatic inclusion on the general electoral roll; (b) establishing periods for additional revisions of the three electoral rolls in New Caledonia; (c) allowing automatic inclusion for a category of voters whose property and personal ties are presumed to be mainly in New Caledonia; (d) establishing offshore polling stations in Nouméa for voters from the municipalities of Bélep, the Isle of Pines, Lifou, Maré and Ouvéa; and (e) establishing a special mechanism, as an exception to the general law, for voting by proxy.

13. The referendum on the accession to full sovereignty of New Caledonia held on 4 November 2018 saw a turnout of 81.01 per cent of voters, or 141,099 voters out of 174,165 registered voters, in 284 polling stations. The results of the vote, announced on 7 November 2018 by the Commission Overseeing the Organization and Conduct of the Referendum, led to the rejection of full sovereignty and independence by 78,734 voters, or 56.67 per cent of the votes cast. The number of voters who voted for full sovereignty and independence was 60,199, or 43.33 per cent of the votes cast.

14. In June 2019, a new referendum was requested, by both the elected members of the group *Avenir en confiance* and those of *Union nationale pour l'indépendance* and *Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste*. The Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord met on 10 October 2019, with the Prime Minister of France as Chair, to determine the arrangements for the second referendum, the date of which was set for 6 September 2020. Owing to the health crisis related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the referendum was postponed to 4 October 2020. In preparation for the second referendum, two decrees were adopted: Decree No. 2020-776 of 24 June 2020 specifies that the system of specific proxies and the establishment of offshore polling stations in Nouméa for voters in the island province will be continued, with some procedural improvements as requested by the nineteenth Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord. These provisions were updated by Decree No. 2020-127 of 14 February 2020 in order to determine, on the one hand, the exceptional arrangements for voting by proxy and, on the other hand, the arrangements for voting in Nouméa for voters in island municipalities, in the context of the referendum on accession by New Caledonia to full sovereignty scheduled for 2020.

15. The second referendum on the accession to full sovereignty of New Caledonia was held on 4 October 2020, with a turnout of 85.69 per cent of voters, or 154,918 voters out of 180,799 registered voters, in 304 polling stations. The results were announced on 5 October 2020 by the Commission Overseeing the Organization and Conduct of the Referendum. The administering Power reported that the results of the

vote had led to the rejection of full sovereignty and independence by 81,503 voters, or 53.26 per cent of the votes cast. The number of voters who voted for full sovereignty and independence was 71,533, or 46.74 per cent of the votes cast.

16. In accordance with the provisions of the Nouméa Accord and the Organic Act, on 8 April 2021 the pro-independence political groups represented in the Congress of New Caledonia, representing more than one third of the elected representatives, requested that a third and final referendum be held.

17. The Government of France organized political discussions from 26 May to 1 June 2021 in Paris, in which political groups participated and at the end of which a third referendum on 12 December 2021 was announced. According to the administering Power, these discussions also addressed the consequences of the vote and led to the distribution of an information document to the population. This document was presented on 16 July 2021 to elected officials, the press, civil society and the customary authorities of the Territory.

18. The final declaration of the exchange and working session provided for the organization, by 30 June 2023 at the latest, of a referendum for the approval of the new Caledonian institutions.

19. At the request of the Congress of New Caledonia, the third and final referendum on the accession to full sovereignty of New Caledonia, provided for in the Nouméa Accord, was held on 12 December 2021. The turnout was 43.87 per cent of voters, or 80,881 voters out of 184,364 registered voters, in 317 polling stations. The results were announced on 13 December by the Commission Overseeing Voting Operations. The administering Power reported that the results of the vote had led to the rejection of full sovereignty and independence by 75,720 voters, or 96.50 per cent of the votes cast. The number of voters who voted for full sovereignty and independence was 2,747, or 3.50 per cent of the votes cast.

20. According to the administering Power, the Commission stated that the low turnout, which was related to a call for non-participation by pro-independence political groups and parties, did not affect the fairness and sincerity of the referendum, for which voting was not compulsory and there was no minimum turnout requirement. The results of the referendum were appealed before the Council of State by the Customary Senate, the Customary Council of the Drubea Kapumë area and a number of voters. The Council of State came to the conclusion that the arguments presented by the petitioners should be rejected (Council of State, Nos. 459711 and 459753, 3 June 2022). In accordance with the Nouméa Accord, the partners “shall meet to consider the situation thus created”.

21. There are several electorates in New Caledonia: the general electorate, the special electorate for elections to the Congress and the provincial assemblies, and a special electorate called upon to participate in the final status referendums under the Nouméa Accord. To be included on the special electoral roll for the referendum, all persons must meet at least one of the criteria established in Organic Act No. 99-209.

22. Every year, the special electoral rolls of voters eligible to participate in the election of members of the Congress and the assemblies are updated by special administrative commissions headed by members of the judiciary. These commissions also include a representative of the Administration appointed by the High Commissioner of the Republic, a representative of the mayor of the municipality and two representatives of voters in the municipality (one pro-independence voter and one anti-independence voter).

23. In order to ease possible tensions, a team of experts from the United Nations has been mobilized every year since 2016 to sit on the administrative commissions as independent qualified persons. The team of experts issues reports at the end of each

annual review. In addition, the United Nations Secretariat deployed experts to monitor the conduct of the three referendums.

II. Budget

24. The financial situation of the collectivity, which has been deteriorating since 2012, has been worsened by the health crisis, with a high level of debt.

25. New Caledonia is primarily a redistributive collectivity. It collects taxes on behalf of local authorities and public bodies and redistributes 83.23 per cent of the sums raised. Given the scale of non-discretionary spending, in particular payments to local authorities, but also structural spending, including on staff and public institutions, it has only limited fiscal space. Its debt ratios are very sensitive to variations in its savings and revenues. According to the administering Power, the issue of establishing a separate municipal tax system is still being considered.

26. On tax matters, the Congress passed two country laws in 2016, one establishing a comprehensive consumption tax to replace the existing seven taxes and contributions; the other on competition, competitiveness and prices, which will mainly allow the Government to regulate prices in the event of a breakdown in competition, supply constraints, slippage in the prices of basic commodities, or a major crisis. The collectivity has also established the Local Emergency Plan to Support Employment (Pulse), which includes measures to revive investment, and an export support plan designed to diversify the economy, which for years has been focused on nickel mining. New fiscal measures are being developed to enable a return to financial equilibrium.

27. Faced with the COVID-19 health crisis and the consequences of the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus, the Government of New Caledonia has drawn up a plan to safeguard the New Caledonian economy. The support measures include the deferral of social security and tax contributions and an increase in partial unemployment benefits. At the same time, New Caledonia has also had to meet exceptional costs in managing the crisis, such as the purchase of sanitary items (personal protective equipment, tests, oxygen, etc.) and the cost of repatriation and hotel quarantine for all travellers arriving in the Territory. In 2022, it received two State-guaranteed loans from the French Development Agency totalling 175 million euros. The loans enabled the Government of New Caledonia to finance its plan to safeguard the New Caledonian economy, to cope with losses in tax revenue and to reduce social security deficits. In accordance with the provisions of this State guarantee, specified in article 18 of the 2020 Budget Rectification Act (Act No. 2020-473 of 25 April 2020), an agreement, appended to the credit agreement signed on 13 May 2020 between the State, the French Development Agency and the Government of New Caledonia, specifies the reform programme that New Caledonia has undertaken to adopt in order to guarantee the sustainability of the loan repayment, as well as the principle and procedures for allocating part of New Caledonia's revenue, corresponding to the annual loan principal and interest, for the repayment of the loan guarantee.

28. The administering Power has put in place several national measures that are applicable in New Caledonia to assist businesses experiencing cash flow difficulties as a result of the health crisis: the solidarity fund; ad hoc cash-flow support for businesses; and the loan guarantee by the State. State-guaranteed loans totalling 76 million euros (9.1 billion CFP francs) were granted in 2021. There have been 1,700 beneficiaries of State-guaranteed loans since their introduction in 2020, amounting to 260 million euros (31 billion CFP francs). The solidarity fund has also continued to support businesses. Since its establishment, the fund has disbursed more than

58 million euros (7 billion CFP francs) to over 6,000 beneficiaries. In 2021, 9,900 beneficiaries were partially unemployed (compared with 12,600 in 2020), representing a cost of approximately 25 million euros (3 billion CFP francs).

III. Economic conditions

A. General

29. The administering Power reports that New Caledonia has one of the richest economies of all the Pacific islands, with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of 30,509 euros in 2021. This is partly due to the importance of nickel mining and processing to the economy of the collectivity. The outputs of the metallurgical and mining industries account for 93 per cent of exports by volume. However, there are still significant geographical disparities in income distribution: 90 per cent of total expenditures and resources are concentrated in the South Province, which represents 75 per cent of the population of the Territory, while the North Province accounts for 18 per cent of the population and the Loyalty Islands Province only 7 per cent. The economy is highly dependent on financial transfers from the Government of France. In 2021, such payments amounted to over 1.63 billion euros (195 billion CFP francs), representing approximately 20 per cent of the GDP of New Caledonia. By comparison, the contribution of the nickel sector to wealth creation was estimated at 9 per cent of GDP in 2021. A large part of the State's financial transfers to the New Caledonian authorities are made under development contracts.

30. The business environment of the New Caledonian economy improved by 8.4 points in the first quarter of 2021, to reach 109.2 points, well above the long-term average. Measured among business leaders by the Overseas Issuing Institute, the business climate indicator was at its lowest average level in 2020 (85 points, i.e. down 6.3 points over the year), well below its long-term average.

31. The main investment drivers used by the Government of France are based on the following tools:

(a) **Development contracts.** These account for 473.5 million euros (56.5 billion CFP francs) of State financing since 2017;

Since the introduction of such contracts under the Matignon Agreements, there have been six successive rounds of development contracts. Since 1990, the State has signed contracts worth over 2 billion euros (239 billion CFP francs). The current round of 10 development contracts, benefiting all the local authorities of the Territory (33 communes, three provinces and New Caledonia), runs from 2017 to 2022 and was recently extended to 2023. The 2017–2022 round of development contracts is a continuation of the five previous rounds of contracts. The focus of such contracts is set out in the Organic Act of 19 March 1999, which states that “the activities and operations provided for in the contracts should promote access to initial and continuing training, the integration of young people, economic development, improved living conditions for the population and cultural development”. The 2017–2022 contracts primarily relate to investments; the sectors receiving the most support are social housing (75 per cent funded by the State) and infrastructure (road and air transport and schools). The 2017–2022 contracts provide for programming totalling 891.6 million euros (106.4 billion CFP francs), of which the administering Power finances 53 per cent, equivalent to 473.5 million euros (56.5 billion CFP francs). Of that amount, 396 million euros (47.25 billion CFP francs) goes towards investments and 77.5 million euros (9.25 billion CFP francs) is for operating costs.

(b) **The Special Investment Fund and the Equipment Grant for Rural Areas.** Between 2017 and 2022, the French State contributed 65.49 million euros (7.81 billion CFP francs) to the Special Investment Fund and the Equipment Grant;

Since 2017, the French State has provided:

(i) 39.14 million euros (4.67 billion CFP francs) to all 33 communes through the Equipment Grant for Rural Areas, which is intended to subsidize the capital expenditure of communes, but can also be used to finance the development of projects (project design and studies);

(ii) 26.35 million (3.14 billion CFP francs) for all local authorities in New Caledonia (33 communes, three provinces and New Caledonia) from the Special Investment Fund for investment in community facilities;

(c) **Tax relief.** Overseas tax assistance targets private sector economic projects. It allows a taxpayer based in metropolitan France to benefit from a significant tax reduction in return for investing in a productive project overseas. This reduces the cost of financing the project by approximately 30 per cent. The tax relief mechanism was initially scheduled to expire in late 2017. The mechanism was extended until 2025, giving project owners greater visibility. Tax relief remains the main tool of State support for the private sector and all flagship projects in recent years have benefited from it. According to the administering Power, in 2021, the budgetary cost to the State for overseas tax assistance amounted to almost 88 million euros (10.5 billion CFP francs), compared with 105 million euros in 2020 (12.5 billion CFP francs) and 163.5 million euros in 2019 (19.5 billion CFP francs).

B. Mineral resources

32. According to the report of the Overseas Issuing Institute for 2021, New Caledonia, with 7 per cent of the world's nickel reserves, is the fifth-largest source of that metal in the world, after Australia (21 per cent), Indonesia (21 per cent), Brazil (16 per cent) and the Russian Federation (7 per cent). New Caledonia has jurisdiction over nickel, chromium and hydrocarbons with regard to the regulation and enforcement of rights, including export licences. Mining is carried out by about ten operators. According to the administering Power, the largest operators are SLN, the Nickel Mining Company, Prony Resources New Caledonia and Koniambo Nickel. The level of nickel ore exports has risen sharply in recent years, from 5.5 million tons in 2015 to 7.94 million tons in 2021. Metallurgical production, which had seen a steady increase between 2015 and 2018, from 93,977 tons to 114,637 tons, has since been steadily declining, reaching 73,413 tons in 2021 (a decrease of 19.1 per cent). The sector has a strong knock-on effect in terms of induced employment and consumption, which feed the other sectors of the economy. According to an April 2021 study by the New Caledonian Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the sector directly employs 9 per cent of private sector employees (approximately 6,000 people) and generates nearly a quarter of direct, indirect or induced wage employment.

C. Construction and manufacturing

33. According to the administering Power, in 2021 the construction and public works sector accounted for an average of 9 per cent of the wealth generated and employed some 9 per cent of wage earners in the Territory. As at 31 December 2021, the sector had 7,129 businesses, accounting for 11.3 per cent of all New Caledonian businesses (compared with 14.5 per cent in 2020).

D. Agriculture and fisheries

34. Although the primary sector (excluding mining) accounted for around 2 per cent of wealth generation in 2020 and 2.7 per cent of wage employment (with 1,772 wage earners in 2021), it is nonetheless the principal sector of activity of much of the rural population. New Caledonia is not self-sufficient in most agricultural and livestock sectors and thus remains heavily dependent on imports. The agricultural sector includes a food-crop farming component not included in accounting statistics, but whose production level is estimated to be equal to that of the business sector. According to the administering Power, longline production increased to 2,525 tons in 2021. Tuna accounted for 90 per cent of the volume fished. The main outlet for high-seas fishing is the local market, which absorbs more than 80 per cent of production.

E. Transport and communications

35. The Territory has a road network that extends over 5,600 kilometres (46 per cent in the North Province, 40 per cent in the South Province and 14 per cent in the Loyalty Islands) and consists of territorial, provincial and municipal roads.

36. Since 2000, New Caledonia has had authority over international traffic rights and air carrier operational programmes. Powers in policing and security in respect of air traffic were transferred, for domestic traffic only, in 2013. The New Caledonia Air Services Agency, a public enterprise of New Caledonia, is responsible for ensuring the continuity of air services. To that end, it owns 99.38 per cent of the shares in the international airline Aircalin. The five international airlines that operated regular flights from and to the Territory prior to the suspension of international commercial passenger transport owing to the COVID-19 health crisis have gradually resumed service in 2022. Before the global pandemic, frequent international flights connected the airport to neighbouring countries and territories (Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Vanuatu and French Polynesia), as well as to Japan. Since July 2022, Air Calédonie International has also been offering direct flights to Singapore. In 2020 and 2021, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, international traffic from and to New Caledonia dropped by 70.4 per cent and 75 per cent respectively, compared with 2019. In the first 10 months of 2022, 233,600 international passengers passed through La Tontouta airport, compared with 459,000 passengers over the same period in 2019.

37. Owing to the COVID-19 health crisis, the Government of New Caledonia suspended international commercial routes from 20 March 2020 to 30 November 2021. Only the routes ensuring territorial continuity between the French territories remained active, essentially serving returning residents and those with a compelling reason to travel. As of 1 August 2022, travellers no longer need to complete any COVID-19-related formalities to enter New Caledonia, regardless of their vaccination status.

38. Regarding domestic service, New Caledonia has 14 airfields open to public air traffic. Public domestic air transport is provided by two companies, the main one being Air Calédonie. The construction of the Lifou-Wanaham airport and the extension of the parking lot have just been completed, and the construction of a new cargo building is ongoing. These projects, costing over 14.2 million euros (1.7 billion CFP francs), are financed partly by the State, which is contributing 5.3 million euros (625 million CFP francs). By 2030, the new airport will make it possible to receive up to 300,000 passengers and 750 tons of cargo annually. Domestic transit was less affected than international traffic by the COVID-19 health crisis, although it continued to serve about 20 per cent fewer passengers in the first 10 months of 2022 compared with the first 10 months of 2019.

39. The telecommunications sector includes the territorial operator, the Post and Telecommunications Office of New Caledonia, and its partners. From 2008 to 2022, New Caledonia was connected to the Internet by an undersea optical cable that links Nouméa to Sydney. The number of subscribers is increasing and had reached 63,400 by 31 December 2021 (+4.3 per cent since 2020). A programme to secure the transmission networks is currently being carried out by the Post and Telecommunications Office, with the support of the Government of New Caledonia. The objective of this programme is to improve the resilience of the domestic network, both land and sea, and of international links. It depends, inter alia, on the deployment of a second international undersea cable to secure international connectivity for New Caledonia for the next 25 years. The cable was financed with a loan from the French Development Agency, assistance from the Special Investment Fund and national tax exemptions (Ministry of Overseas Territories).

F. Tourism

40. In the view of the administering Power, New Caledonia, with its geographical location and cultural richness, has real strengths and considerable tourism potential that has not yet been fully tapped. Tourism could, therefore, be a driver of the Territory's economic development. In March 2018, the Government of New Caledonia, as part of its economic diversification strategy and in order to support tourism, which is the second largest export sector after nickel, approved a strategy for the period up to 2025 aimed at developing services and leisure activities for tourists. New Caledonia aims to welcome more than 200,000 tourists and 1.2 million cruise passengers (goals set prior to the pandemic).

41. In 2019, the tourism sector accounted for just over 2.8 per cent of GDP and 5,387 jobs. In the same year, there were a record 130,458 visitors, compared with 85,785 in 2009 and 120,343 in 2018. From March 2020 to 1 December 2021, owing to the pandemic and the closure of borders, New Caledonia did not welcome international tourists (except for passengers from Wallis and Futuna, a territory with which a health "bubble" had been set up). This led to an exceptional 76.1 per cent drop in tourist numbers, a sudden halt in cruise ship tourism and a contraction in jobs in the sector (804 jobs lost, resulting in a 14.9 per cent drop in the workforce). Tourism has been slowly recovering since the borders reopened, and cruise ship arrivals resumed in October 2022.

IV. Social conditions

A. General

42. The population of New Caledonia was estimated to be 269,808 as at 1 January 2022. The population of the Territory has fallen slightly since the last census, in 2019 (271,290 inhabitants). The trend has reversed in the space of a decade. The rate of population change, which was +8.8 per cent for the period between the 2009 and 2014 censuses, and then +1.0 per cent between 2014 and 2019, has since been negative (-0.4 per cent in 2021). The outflow of migrants (an estimated 10,000 departures between 2014 and 2019, a trend that continued in 2020 and 2021) is no longer offset by positive natural population change because of the continuous decline in fertility.

43. According to the Overseas Issuing Institute report for 2021, the Territory's human development index rose by 15 per cent between 1990 and 2010, driven by its social component (education and health), which accounted for 80 per cent of that increase.

44. The adult literacy rate is over 96 per cent and school enrolment (all levels) stands at 89 per cent. New Caledonians' level of education is gradually improving. In 2021, baccalaureate pass rates were at an all-time high, having increased by 4.6 points to a historical high of 85.6 per cent.

45. The concept of economic rebalancing is rooted in the Nouméa Accord and in the aim of achieving a more harmonious distribution of job and wealth creation throughout New Caledonia in preparation for the Territory's potential accession to full sovereignty. This concept led to the development of a formula for budgetary allocations that proactively favours the North (31.3 per cent) and Loyalty Islands (16 per cent) Provinces on account of their demographic weight and the imbalances to be corrected (for more details, see [A/AC.109/2019/11](#), para. 40). It has also resulted in the development of the Voh-Koné-Pouembout area in the North Province, with two successive development contracts (2011–2016 and 2017–2022), and the establishment of a nickel plant in the Province (Koniambo Nickel, in partnership with Glencore).

46. In the South Province, the administering Power has supported the construction of the Goro metallurgical plant, operated by the Prony Resources New Caledonia consortium since April 2021. According to the administering Power, the consortium consists of Société de participation minière du Sud calédonien (30 per cent of the shares), the trader Trafigura (19 per cent of the shares), Compagnie financière de Prony (30 per cent of the shares) and a trust company that is expected to hold 21 per cent of the shares. Once incorporated, employee ownership would take 12 per cent of the shares and a local fund, the Environmental and Sociocultural Risk Prevention Fund, would take 9 per cent of the shares. The Goro plant uses a hydrometallurgical process, which makes it possible to exploit low-grade nickel ore.

B. Employment

47. The average number of wage and salary jobs for 2021 was 65,340, up from the 2020 average of 64,890, which was the lowest level since 2011. Over the 10-year period between 2011 and 2021, private wage and salary employment grew by an average of only 0.2 per cent per year. It was on the rise until 2015, and then declined slightly between 2016 and 2020. This figure masks disparities between sectors. For example, the construction sector lost many jobs (-3,300 jobs) over the period as a result of the completion of various major projects (such as metallurgical plants and a medical centre (médipôle)), and jobs were created in other sectors, such as manufacturing (+2,075 jobs). The 2019 census data show several characteristic changes in the labour market compared to previous censuses, including feminization (a seven-point narrower gap between men and women), ageing, tertiarization (three out of four jobs) and increasing qualifications (31 per cent of workers have a higher education degree).

48. The unemployment rate as defined by the International Labour Office was 13.3 per cent in 2020, compared with 10.7 per cent in 2019. This is higher than in metropolitan France or French Polynesia (8.0 and 10.5 per cent, respectively, in 2020). However, it remains much lower than the rate in the overseas territories. According to the New Caledonian Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the proportion of precarious jobs (including fixed-term contracts, temporary work and apprenticeships) has risen over four years, from 17 to 21 per cent of total occupied jobs (compared with 11.5 per cent in France). Part-time work also increased over the period (+4,500 employees). The Loyalty Islands Province continues to lag far behind in labour market terms.

C. Education

49. According to the Overseas Issuing Institute, in 2021, New Caledonia's school population was composed of 68,987 students, of whom 5,858 were in higher education, 33,749 were in primary education, spread over 254 public and private schools, and 29,380 were in the 104 middle and high schools. Post-baccalaureate education is expanding to meet the needs of the Territory. According to 2019 census data, the number of highly educated individuals has increased more than fourfold since 1996 and continues to grow rapidly, with a 39 per cent increase between 2014 and 2019. The number of graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher is also three times higher than in 1996. Over the same period, the number of individuals over 15 years of age with few or no degrees has decreased (by 8 per cent between 1996 and 2019), with 46,762 individuals without a degree in 2019.

50. The "Cadres Avenir" (Future managers) scheme is a management training programme implemented by the administering Power as part of the rebalancing provided for in the Nouméa Accord. According to the administering Power, since the launch of the programme, 2,010 training courses have been established, allowing the 1,893 beneficiaries to provide their expertise to various communities, administrations and companies in New Caledonia today. Some 67 per cent of those trainees are of Kanak origin. The overall success rate is 84 per cent, and 95 per cent of trainees successfully enter the workforce within three months of their return to New Caledonia. In 2021, the administering Power contributed 450 million CFP francs (3.8 million euros) to the programme, with New Caledonia contributing 50 million CFP francs (approximately 419,000 euros). Since 2014, new measures have been taken under this specialization scheme to enable New Caledonians to take competitive examinations for the State's senior civil service.

51. The adapted military service is a mechanism that fosters the social and vocational integration of young people in difficult circumstances. It is aimed at those people aged 18 to 25 in the overseas territories who are the most likely to be unemployed and who are often marginalized. In 2021, adapted military service volunteers represented 12 per cent of those aged 18 to 25 in New Caledonia. The average age of the trainees was 21. Women accounted for 44.8 per cent of trainees, and the rate of illiteracy was 45.66 per cent. The employment rate among volunteers was 77.96 per cent in 2021. Three professional integration measures have been put in place to meet training needs and promote access to employment. The first scheme, called "Young trainees for development", which is specific to New Caledonia and is aimed at unemployed young people aged 18 to 26 in difficult circumstances, is intended to facilitate their integration by offering them training, an introduction to the world of work and the opportunity to participate in social life. This scheme supports the professional integration of people aged 26 and under who are in difficult circumstances. The second programme, universal national service, is available to young people between the ages of 15 and 18 after the fourth year of high school. Its first phase, the cohesion stay, took place in 2020 (from 12 to 23 October), and 80 students, 40 girls and 40 boys in the fifth year of high school throughout the country (including 5 from the Wallis and Futuna Islands), were able to take part. That roll-out was subject to prior consultation with the local government and the three provinces in order to organize the terms of its implementation in the Territory. Lastly, civic service volunteering, a multifaceted civic engagement scheme, is supported by the administering Power, which has been focused on its development since 2011. This has included the development of voluntary public service for young people between the ages of 16 and 25, regardless of their qualifications, and for young people with disabilities up to 30 years of age. Civic service volunteers have served public authorities and associations in fields as diverse as culture, youth, the status of women

and combating violence against women. In 2021, there were 550 young volunteers, 61 per cent of whom were women. These programmes are being maintained in 2023.

52. The University of New Caledonia is a public scientific, cultural and professional institution under the supervision of the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The University derives special institutional legitimacy from the Nouméa Accord, in which it is called on to address the specific research and training needs of New Caledonia (point 4.1.1). The University opened a campus in the North Province in 2020 and has worked with the Loyalty Islands Province in a research partnership.

D. Health

53. The Territory has three public hospitals: Gaston-Bourret Territorial Hospital in the South Province; Albert-Bousquet Specialized Hospital in Nouméa, in the South Province; and North Hospital in the North Province.

54. In the area of health crisis management, competencies relating to health and civil security have been transferred by France, which nevertheless remains the guarantor of civil liberties. Since 2020, the COVID-19 health crisis has thus been managed in close cooperation between the administering Power and the political and customary authorities of New Caledonia. In the face of this crisis, which made it necessary to restrict public freedoms and put in place emergency health measures, it was agreed that the President of the Government of New Caledonia and the High Commissioner of the Republic would jointly decide how to proceed. State services, including the Armed Forces, also provided human, logistical and material support to New Caledonia from the start of the pandemic. Following the rapid implementation of strict sanitary protection and health and public freedom management measures, the Territory remained free of COVID-19 cases for a long time. The vaccination of the population started on 20 January 2021, with the provision of vaccines by the administering Power (in total, more than 400,000 doses were delivered to the Territory).

55. On 6 September 2021, three isolated cases of the Delta variant were identified in New Caledonia. In less than a week, hospitals had to deal with a massive influx of patients. A support mission from the Ministry of Health visited the Territory from 14 to 20 September to assess the quantity and quality of human and material reinforcements needed. More than 400 medical personnel were sent to augment the Territory's existing personnel. The Government of France also provided medical supplies, tests and personal protective equipment in large quantities. A military resuscitation unit (medical equipment and 39 military personnel) was also made available to the Territory. These reinforcements, the strict containment measures and the vaccination policy limited the impact of the spread of the Delta variant. After a peak around 20 September 2021, the number of cases began to decline, and the situation stabilized. As at December 2021, the Government of New Caledonia estimates that there are approximately 12,000 patients who have recovered and fewer than 300 deaths. An initial analysis showed that 45 per cent of all patients and 53 per cent of those who died were men. Of those with confirmed cases, 70 per cent were not vaccinated, and of those who died, more than 80 per cent were not vaccinated. While the epidemic has continued beyond 2021, its characteristics have changed profoundly: the number of people who have recovered is now over 74,000 and deaths have become rare, with 15 deaths reported in 2022. At the same time, the rate of vaccination has fallen.

V. Environment

56. The administering Power indicates that New Caledonia has a unique natural heritage. Its land is characterized by a particularly high rate of endemism (76 per cent for plant species) and the existence of various ecosystems (rainforest, maquis shrubland), some of which, such as dry forest, are particularly endangered. The Territory is also rich in marine biodiversity and possesses a vast maritime area. The various threats to this biodiversity (which include mining, invasive exotic species, fires and climate change) have attracted the special attention of those responsible for environmental management (the North, South and Loyalty Islands Provinces and the Government of New Caledonia) and research institutes, which receive technical and financial support from the State. Alongside these public actors, non-governmental organizations and nature protection associations are also very active and involved in the field.

VI. Relations with international organizations and partners

57. Organic Act No. 99-209 governs the legal framework for the establishment of external relations by New Caledonia. New Caledonia has been an associate member of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific since 1992. It became an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2006 and a full member in 2016. The participation of New Caledonia for the first time as a full member in the Forum summit in Apia in 2017 was an important step in the implementation of the Nouméa Accord towards a greater international presence.

58. New Caledonia is also a full member of the Pacific Community, which has its secretariat in Nouméa. Other regional arrangements to which New Caledonia is a full party include the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the Oceania Customs Organization and the Pacific Tourism Organisation. It participates under different statutes in the work of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (as an associate member), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (as a participating territory), the Pacific Islands Development Forum (participating in the work, without any special status), the World Health Organization (with a non-voting seat on the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific) and the Oceania Regional Anti-Doping Organization (as a participating member). Lastly, New Caledonia, with the support of the Government of France, was granted associate membership in the International Organization of la Francophonie in 2016 and in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2017.

59. New Caledonia has continued to strengthen its ties with the European Union, with which it holds the status of associated overseas territory, as conferred by the Treaty of Rome. The European Commission office for the Pacific overseas countries and territories is based in Nouméa. Under the eleventh European Development Fund, New Caledonia received 29.8 million euros (3.6 billion CFP francs) between 2017 and 2020. Over this period, New Caledonia, together with the other three overseas countries and territories in the Pacific, benefited from a regional envelope under the eleventh European Development Fund amounting to 36 million euros for the implementation of a regional cooperation project. Lastly, New Caledonia is also involved in the work of the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union, of which it assumed the vice-presidency in 2019 and the presidency in December 2020.

60. In January 2012, the French Minister for Cooperation, the French Minister for Overseas Territories and the President of the Government of New Caledonia signed an agreement on the hosting of representatives of New Caledonia in French

diplomatic and consular missions in the Pacific (Oceania). The first New Caledonia representative was appointed to work out of the French Embassy in Wellington in 2012. On 9 March 2017, the Congress of New Caledonia adopted, by a majority, a country law on New Caledonia representatives that allows the Territory to be represented in States or territories in the Pacific. Five delegates took up their posts in 2019 and 2020 in the French embassies in Australia, Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand.

61. Since 2016, the Government of New Caledonia has been heavily invested in developing relations with neighbouring States. In addition to the tripartite cooperation agreement initiated in 2012 between France, New Caledonia and Vanuatu, and regularly renewed since then, New Caledonia has strengthened its cooperation with Vanuatu by signing a joint cooperation plan in 2017. New Caledonia signed similar cooperation plans with New Zealand in 2016 and Papua New Guinea in 2018. It has also entered into an agreement on the development of economic and commercial exchanges with Vanuatu and is in discussions with other States in the region. The Government of New Caledonia intends to develop its economic diplomacy in the region. As such, economic diplomacy missions were sent to Papua New Guinea in July 2018, Fiji in July 2019 and Australia in March 2020.

VII. Position of the administering Power

62. Speaking on the question of New Caledonia during the general debate of the Fourth Committee on 13 October 2022, the representative of France returned to the political process initiated in 1998 under the Nouméa Accord, which had significantly advanced with the referendum of 12 December 2021. Since the referendum, the Territory had been in a period of transition, during which dialogue must continue.

63. The French representative recalled his country's cooperation with the United Nations in this political process. The United Nations provided an additional guarantee of transparency and legitimacy, complementing the fundamental principles of neutrality, dialogue and respect for democratic choices that were guaranteed by France. France wished to maintain that cooperation throughout the transition period.

VIII. Consideration of the question by the United Nations

A. Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

64. The Special Committee considered the question of New Caledonia at its 5th and 8th meetings, held respectively on 14 and 24 June 2022. At the 5th meeting, the representatives of France and Papua New Guinea each made a statement. At the same meeting, in accordance with requests for hearing granted by the Special Committee at its 5th meeting, the Counsellor of the President of the Government of New Caledonia, Charles Wea, made a statement (see [A/AC.109/2022/SR.5](#)). At the same meeting, the Special Committee, having granted the requests for hearing made at its 3rd meeting, held on 13 June, heard statements by Marie-Laure Ukeiwë, of the South Province of New Caledonia, James Bhagwan, of the Pacific Conference of Churches, and Frédérique Muliava, of the Congress of New Caledonia.

65. At its 8th meeting, the Special Committee adopted, without a vote, the draft resolution on the question of New Caledonia ([A/AC.109/2022/L.22](#)) submitted by the representatives of Fiji, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

**B. Special Political and Decolonization Committee
(Fourth Committee)**

66. At its 10th meeting, held on 17 October 2022, the Fourth Committee adopted, without a vote, draft resolution XII on the question of New Caledonia (see [A/C.4/77/SR.10](#)).

C. Action taken by the General Assembly

67. On 12 December 2022, the General Assembly adopted resolution [77/142](#) without a vote, on the basis of the report of the Special Committee transmitted to the Assembly ([A/77/23](#)) and its subsequent consideration by the Fourth Committee.

Annex

Map of New Caledonia

