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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

Tokelau

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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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 under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Information was transmitted by the administering Power on 27 November 2023. Further details are contained in previous working papers, available at www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



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The Territory at a glance

Territory: Tokelau is a Non-Self-Governing Territory, as defined under the Charter of the United Nations, administered by New Zealand.

Representative of administering Power: Administrator Don Higgins

Geography: Tokelau comprises three small atolls: Atafu, Fakaofu and Nukunonu. Each atoll comprises strips of land up to 200 m wide and not more than 5 m above sea level. Samoa, located 480 km to the south, is the nearest sizeable neighbour and the principal point of contact for Tokelau with the outside world. Access is possible only by ship, with an average of 30 hours sailing from Samoa. There is no air service.

Land area: 12.2 km²

Exclusive economic zone: 318,990 km²

Population: 1,647 (2019), distributed as follows: Atafu: 535; Fakaofu: 546; Nukunonu: 504; and Samoa: 62 (Tokelau Public Service employees and their immediate families). There are 8,676 Tokelauans living in New Zealand (2018 census). As New Zealand citizens, Tokelauans may also reside in Australia.

Life expectancy at birth: 69.1 years (women: 70.4 years; men: 67.8 years (2010–2015 estimates))

Ethnic composition: Tokelauans are Polynesians with linguistic, familial and cultural links with Samoa.

Languages: Tokelauan. English and Samoan are also widely used.

Capital: None. Each atoll has its own administrative centre.

Head of territorial Government: Ulu-o-Tokelau. The position of titular head of Tokelau rotates annually among the *faipule* of the atolls.

Main political parties: None

Elections: Held in January every third year. The most recent election was held on 26 January 2023.

Legislature: The unicameral General Fono

Economy: The principal sources of revenue are fees from fisheries licences and assistance provided by New Zealand through budget support and project funding.

Monetary unit: New Zealand dollar (\$NZ)

Gross domestic product per capita: US\$ 6,275 (2015/16 financial year, Tokelau National Statistics Office)

Brief history: Originally inhabited by Polynesians from surrounding islands, Tokelau became a British protectorate in 1889, and administration was transferred to New Zealand in 1926. By the Tokelau Act 1948, sovereignty over Tokelau was transferred to New Zealand.

I. Constitutional and political developments

A. Local self-governance

1. As previously reported, the current process of constitutional development stems from the 1998 decision of the General Fono (the national representative body) to endorse a comprehensive report entitled “Modern house of Tokelau”, which addressed the core issue that faced Tokelau in creating a constitutional framework that suited an atoll- or village-based self-governing community that respected traditional decision-making customs. The traditional Council of Elders on each atoll serves as the foundation for the governance structure of Tokelau. The Councils delegate authority to the General Fono for activities that must be handled at the national level (see [A/AC.109/2005/3](#)).

2. General Fono delegates are now elected on the basis of proportional village representation, with a system of universal village suffrage, rather than one of equal village representation with delegates appointed by the respective taupulega (village councils), as was previously the case. In the elections held on 26 January 2023, 20 General Fono delegates, including 3 women, were elected for the next parliamentary term of 2023–2025.

3. The six-person Council for the Ongoing Government is the executive Government when the General Fono is not in session. The Council consists of three faipule (representatives of each village) and one General Fono delegate from each village, designated by the taupulega. The position of Ulu-o-Tokelau, or Head of Government, rotates annually among the three faipule. In March 2023, the faipule of Atafu took over as Ulu-o-Tokelau. The faipule of Nukunonu is expected to rotate into the position in March 2024.

4. The New Zealand official with the principal responsibility for maintaining the relationship with Tokelau is the Administrator of Tokelau, who is appointed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand. The current Administrator is Don Higgins, who was formerly the High Commissioner to Solomon Islands and Kiribati and assumed the role of Administrator in May 2022. The Office of the Administrator draws on advice and support from the Ministry, including the Pacific and Development Group.

B. Referendum process

5. In 2003, the General Fono took a formal decision, with the support of all three village councils, to endorse self-government in free association with New Zealand as the choice to be actively explored with the Government of New Zealand. In August 2005, the General Fono approved a draft constitution, as the basis for the proposed act of self-determination, and the text of a draft treaty of free association. In November 2005, the Cabinet of New Zealand gave its formal approval. The referendum package, consisting of the draft treaty and the draft constitution, was to form the basis of the referendum on self-determination. In line with a decision by the General Fono, an overall majority of two thirds of the valid votes cast was required for a change to the status of Tokelau.

6. The first referendum on self-determination was held sequentially in Apia and on the three atolls from 11 to 15 February 2006 (see [A/AC.109/2006/20](#)). The outcome fell short of the required two-thirds majority, with 60 per cent of valid Tokelauan votes cast in favour of self-government in free association with New Zealand. The United Nations, which formally monitored the referendum, deemed the process credible and reflective of the will of the people of Tokelau. A representative of the

Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, accompanied by a Political Affairs Officer of the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, also observed the referendum process.

7. In August 2006, the General Fono voted to hold a second referendum on Tokelauan self-determination in late 2007. The proposed constitution and the draft treaty, commonly referred to as the self-determination package, were to be the same, and the legal threshold for acceptance of the proposal would remain at a two-thirds majority.

8. The second referendum was held from 20 to 24 October 2007. The result, with 64.4 per cent in favour, was again below the two-thirds threshold, thereby leaving the status of the Territory unchanged (see [A/AC.109/2007/19](#)). As with the first referendum, the United Nations formally monitored the voting, with representatives of the Special Committee and the Department of Political Affairs present as observers.

9. Following the results of the second referendum, the General Fono requested the Government of New Zealand to keep the entire self-determination package on the table. The Council for the Ongoing Government noted that Tokelau could in the future change the two-thirds majority threshold for the referendum but should put in place measures to ensure that a threshold would be supported by a clear majority in each village, to guarantee unity. The Council also noted the Territory's strong commitment to self-determination and its wish to have a constitution, albeit one that did not encompass the provisions for free association and self-government.

10. The outcomes of the referendums, neither of which reached the threshold of support set by the General Fono for a change of status, have been acknowledged and accepted by New Zealand. As a follow-up to the result of the referendum held in 2007, the then Prime Minister of New Zealand met the leaders of Tokelau in February 2008 to discuss the next steps in the development of the New Zealand-Tokelau relationship. It was agreed that a "pause" should be taken in the self-determination efforts of Tokelau. New Zealand is supporting Tokelau in efforts to develop its infrastructure, public services and capacity for self-governance.

11. In May 2022, the General Fono resolved to revive conversations on self-determination for Tokelau in the lead-up to the 100-year anniversary of New Zealand administration of Tokelau, in February 2026 (see sect. VI below).

II. Economic conditions

A. General economic overview

12. Tokelau faces major constraints to its economic growth, including such natural disadvantages as small size, isolation, distances between the atolls, lack of natural resources and natural disasters. The economic stability of the Territory has been made possible by the high levels of assistance provided by the administering Power supplemented by significant revenue from fisheries licences. With the continued assistance of New Zealand, the Council for the Ongoing Government has maintained a focus on improving the delivery of core public services, such as education and health; undertaking key infrastructure projects, such as renewable energy, telecommunications and transport; adapting to climate change; and strengthening the Council and the Tokelau Public Service.

13. As part of a fisheries policy aimed at maximizing the economic benefits from the sustainable use of its exclusive economic zone, Tokelau joined the Vessel Day Scheme in 2012. The Scheme is used to sustainably manage catches of target tuna

species and increase the rate of return from fishing activities through access fees paid by distant water fishing nations. In October 2015, the General Fono approved fisheries reforms intended to build the capacity and capability of Tokelau towards greater self-management of the offshore fisheries. As part of the reforms, Tokelau established a stand-alone government agency for fisheries and signed a fisheries arrangement with New Zealand focused on the management of the offshore fisheries. Implementation of the fisheries reform programme has been guided over the years by a steering group comprising representatives of Tokelau, the Office of the Administrator, the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries and technical advisers to the Administrator and the Tokelau Fisheries Management Agency. In 2022, a Tokelau fisheries partnership programme steering committee was established to oversee a capacity-development programme for Tokelau fisheries, involving senior managers from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Tokelau Fisheries Management Agency and the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries. Meanwhile, the management of the inshore fisheries has been delegated to the village councils and is focused on ensuring food security. Commercial fishing in the Tokelau territorial sea is prohibited by regulation.

14. Traditional and communal values and practices play a key role in contributing to a state of general well-being in the Territory, as evidenced by the inati system and the importance attached to upholding the concepts of family and/or extended family. The tradition of inati requires the deposit at a central location of food and produce, which are then apportioned on the basis of “share groups” to address the needs of every member of the community, including older persons, widows, single parents and children.

15. According to the administering Power, as a result of the levels of international assistance, fisheries licence fees, remittances and trust fund earnings, there is a significant degree of self-reliance in many Pacific island countries and territories. However, in comparison with other Pacific island countries and territories, the economy of Tokelau embodies an even greater degree of self-reliance owing in part to a lack of access to other international development funds. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had a negative impact on imports and curtailed some food supplies. However, it did not greatly influenced non-farm business, farming and fishing, employment or the receipt of remittances.

B. Assistance to Tokelau by the administering Power

16. Customized assistance is provided through budget support, projects and regional programmes. In 2022/23, New Zealand spent \$NZ 20.09 million on development assistance to Tokelau, including \$NZ 12.50 million in general budget support. Forecast expenditure for 2023/24 is \$NZ 27.95 million. New Zealand has committed to replacing critical infrastructure (the bridge in Nukunonu) and supporting Tokelau through COVID-19 outbreaks, including through vaccinations, workforce training, testing, protective equipment, quarantine facilities and a container laboratory. New Zealand is also supporting Tokelau in strengthening its resilience and adaptation to the impacts of climate change, including through the design of emergency shelters and coastal protections.

17. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade developed a four-year plan, published in October 2021, to guide the planning and management of the country’s overall engagement with Tokelau and to serve as a platform for dialogue. The plan is being used to bring clarity as to what work should be prioritized and to help to monitor progress in order to achieve shared outcomes and strategic goals. The plan is a living document that will be refreshed annually to ensure that it responds to changes in country context.

18. The plan sets out four strategic goals: supporting improved climate change resilience; supporting more effective, inclusive and resilient self-governance; strengthening the health and cultural vibrancy of the people of Tokelau in order to support human development and improve well-being; and supporting improved connectivity. These strategic goals are broken down into 6 medium-term and 10 short-term outcomes. The key assumptions of the plan, which will be tested and monitored during its implementation, are that: (a) the impacts of climate change will worsen; (b) the Government of Tokelau will continue to develop its policy and priorities while applying a climate change lens and maintaining a strong focus on building resilience in an environmentally sustainable way; (c) Tokelau remains free of COVID-19 and the vaccine roll-out will be successful; (d) the borders of Tokelau will reopen to essential workers in the short term so infrastructure projects can go ahead; and (e) Tokelau will seek to revisit the question of its constitutional status in the lead-up to 100 years of New Zealand administration (in early 2026).

19. The potential risks identified in the plan are as follows: (a) COVID-19 enters Tokelau and spreads among the population; (b) Tokelau is affected by extreme weather events or other natural disasters, resulting in significant damage, loss of life or disruption to New Zealand development investments; (c) improved Internet connectivity has unintended consequences; and (d) economic shocks significantly affect the country's fisheries revenue. The plan also notes that the key thematic focus areas for the engagement of New Zealand with Tokelau are the climate and governance and institutions. The focus of New Zealand on the climate drives its engagement to strengthen the climate change resilience of Tokelau, because this is essential to the preservation and development of Tokelau. The focus on governance and institutions is to support Tokelau in achieving more effective, inclusive and resilient self-governance because transparent, accountable, inclusive and democratic government systems are important enablers of positive development. Secondary focus areas include education, health, fisheries, and infrastructure and energy.

20. The Tokelau International Trust Fund, established in November 2004, was designed to provide intergenerational security and an independent source of income to Tokelau. As at 30 June 2023, the Fund's net assets stood at \$NZ 106.5 million.

C. Transport and communications

21. Transportation needs in Tokelau are met by regular passenger and cargo shipping services from Apia. In 2016, the Government of New Zealand gave Tokelau the Mataliki, a vessel that carries up to 60 passengers and essential cargo on international voyages. Transportation links were further improved in March 2018 with the launch of the Kalopaga. This cargo vessel, which can carry eight passengers, was funded and procured by Tokelau. In late 2018, New Zealand gave Tokelau a search and rescue vessel, Fetu o te Moana, which also provides general transportation between the atolls. With the completion of all four wharves and reef passages in 2019, the shipping services of Tokelau have been substantially upgraded.

22. During her visit to Tokelau in July 2019, the then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, indicated that New Zealand was committed to working in partnership with Tokelau on the development of air services to the Territory on the following conditions: Tokelau would decide on which one of the three atolls the runway should be constructed; it would be a joint project with co-financing from Tokelau; a suitable site could be found; and engineering and financial assessments proved the viability of air services. In October 2019, the General Fono decided that Nukunonu would host the first runway with the specific location subject to engineering assessments. The feasibility stage is complete, and a consultant has been

engaged to advance design options, while a construction supplier has been contracted to advise on methodology, programming and pricing.

23. Telecommunications services in Tokelau are provided by the Tokelau Telecommunications Corporation (Teletok). The investment in connecting Tokelau to an undersea Internet cable was confirmed in 2019. The project is being funded jointly by the Government of Tokelau and the Government of New Zealand. The undersea Internet cable will provide high-speed Internet service, enabling better communication, administration and governance and improved health and education services. The cable landed in Tokelau in September 2021, and the connection went live in October 2023, with acceptance testing ongoing until December 2023. The full benefits of the submarine cable will be realized once an upgrade to the domestic network is completed, in late 2024.

D. Power supply

24. In 2012, Tokelau became the first area in the world to draw electrical power primarily from solar sources, following the completion of the Tokelau Renewable Energy Project. The initiative involved the installation of solar photovoltaic systems on the three atolls.

25. The demand for electricity has grown significantly since 2012. As a result, in 2016 the Government of Tokelau funded a small expansion of photovoltaic systems and upgrades of the village distribution networks. However, demand has continued to outstrip supply. In 2019, New Zealand committed \$NZ 6 million to an expansion and renewal of Tokelau renewable energy facilities, which generate electricity for the villages. The Government of Tokelau and the villages will contribute \$NZ 3 million. The installation of proven new technology that would ensure that Tokelau generates 90 per cent of its electricity from renewable energy for at least 10 years is expected to be completed in 2024, as COVID-19 border controls have delayed installation.

III. Social conditions

A. General

26. In October 2016, Statistics New Zealand and the Tokelau National Statistics Office conducted a census, which is carried out every five years. The official *de jure* usually resident population of Tokelau was 1,499, which represented an increase of 6.2 per cent from the previous census, conducted in 2011. In December 2019, Statistics New Zealand and the Tokelau National Statistics Office carried out a population count which reported a further increase in the usually resident population to 1,647.

27. The first household income and expenditure survey of Tokelau was completed in 2016 with assistance from the Pacific Community. This survey estimated total annual household income at \$NZ 7 million, with employment accounting for 77.2 per cent, imputed rents for 10 per cent, income from transfers (including remittances, social benefits, pensions and scholarships) for 7 per cent and gifts (in kind and remittances) for 5.1 per cent. The survey estimated an average household size of 4.6 people and annual per capita income of \$NZ 6,100. Some 40 per cent of the population of Tokelau is less than 20 years of age, with a median age of 25 years.

28. According to the administering Power, COVID-19 had a considerable social impact on the people of Tokelau. A number of students had to forgo their international studies, and health patients had increased difficulty travelling to New Zealand and

were stranded in Samoa and New Zealand after receiving treatment. The disruption to family life was considerable. The border and quarantine conditions are now easing, with Tokelau removing mandatory quarantine requirements for arriving passengers in November 2023.

B. Education

29. In Tokelau, early childhood, primary and secondary education is free up to year 13 and provided by three schools, one on each atoll. As an owner of the University of the South Pacific, Tokelau has access to the University's distance-learning foundation course through a University satellite receiver and centre on each atoll. The cost of the University's local infrastructure and staff is covered by the Government of Tokelau.

30. With a significant financial commitment from New Zealand, Tokelau carried out a five-year plan to transform compulsory education, focused on primary and early childhood education, with the assistance of the Centre for Educational Development of Massey University. The Education Review Office of New Zealand visited the three villages of Tokelau in March 2018 to assess progress and consult the village councils and education committees about priorities for the coming years. The 2018 review found that the quality of early childhood and primary education had improved since the 2013 review. However, much remains to be done and particular attention needed to be given to improving the breadth and quality of secondary education.

31. In 2019, New Zealand supported the Tokelau Department of Education in holding a successful Tokelau education summit by granting funding and coordinating attendance by representatives of New Zealand education agencies. The summit endorsed a historic shift in the education strategy of Tokelau towards closer integration with the New Zealand education system in order to raise the quality of secondary education and to broaden career and learning pathways for young Tokelauans. In October 2019, the General Fono approved the new secondary and digital education strategies of Tokelau. In May 2020, New Zealand committed \$NZ 4.3 million to support Tokelau in implementing its secondary and digital education strategies in particular and to continue raising the standard of all education services.

C. Health care

32. An independent review of clinical health services in Tokelau and the patient referral scheme of the Government of Tokelau was completed in 2019 and provided many recommendations for improving health services. The review found that, while Tokelau has a financially well-resourced health system, there are substantive areas of dysfunction. It noted that strained relationships can obstruct effective delivery of health services and national coordination. The review found that substandard health-care provision and a lack of trust in local clinical services contribute to an increased uptake of the patient referral scheme. This, the increasing incidence of non-communicable diseases and policy and process issues contribute to the scheme's unsustainable financial burden. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand has provided grant funding to the Government of Tokelau to operationalize the strategic and operational plans for improving health services. Implementation of the plan for strengthening the health system began in mid-2023, and funding will run until mid-2026.

33. Tokelau has reported low infant and maternal mortality, thanks to the early referral of mothers for maternity care in Samoa or New Zealand. Antenatal care coverage and coverage for child immunization is 100 per cent. Tokelau also has very

high rates of immunization. It was vigilant in protecting its population from the measles outbreak in Samoa.

34. The New Zealand Ministry of Health has supported delivery of COVID-19 vaccines, including booster doses and vaccines for paediatrics, testing equipment and antivirals. Around 99 per cent of people in Tokelau 16 years of age and over are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19, with further booster doses planned for early 2024.

35. In 2023, Tokelau had several small outbreaks of COVID-19. Policies have now been eased, and Tokelau is “living with” COVID-19. To date, owing in large part to high vaccination rates, Tokelau has recorded no hospitalizations or deaths linked to COVID-19.

IV. Environment

36. The low-lying atolls in Tokelau are susceptible to climate change impacts such as sea level rise, extreme weather events and related hazards. In April 2017, Tokelau launched its climate change strategy, entitled “Living with change: an integrated national strategy for enhancing the resilience of Tokelau to climate change and related hazards, 2017–2030”. Strengthening climate change resilience is a national priority under the National Strategic Plan 2021–2026 of Tokelau. In September 2023, a three-day inception workshop was held in Apia to collect initial information and data for the development of a five-year blue economy road map for Tokelau, starting in 2025, to enhance the governance, management and protection of the marine ecosystem and ocean resources of Tokelau. Those efforts are part of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund for the United Nations joint programme on accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Tokelau through integrated policy solutions, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

37. New Zealand recognizes its unique obligation to Tokelau to assist with climate change adaptation and disaster resilience efforts because, as a territory of New Zealand, Tokelau cannot access global climate change funds and receives limited assistance from other donors. A multi-year programme of technical assistance and grant funding to strengthen disaster preparedness in Tokelau has been extended. In 2019, New Zealand-contracted environmental engineers completed a coastal hazards study and an implementation plan for improving coastal resilience. The plan provided a framework for reducing disaster risk and adapting to climate change. In the plan, the safeguarding of lives during storms and cyclones was prioritized and shelters were recommended. In 2020, New Zealand engaged a supplier to advance designs for three projects, including a climate-resilient upgrade of the Nukunonu bridge, the construction of emergency shelters to protect residents during extreme weather events and options for improved coastal protections. New Zealand is also supporting the climate change resilience and adaptation of Tokelau through projects to improve water security and better understand climate mobility issues so that communities are resilient to acute and slow-onset disasters and can remain in situ, as well as through the improved use of climate and meteorological data in decision-making.

38. New Zealand also adapted its approach to strengthening the water security of Tokelau to take account of COVID-19 control measures. The New Zealand navy deployed a large vessel to Tokelau in November 2020, which transferred water tanks and renewable energy materials to the atolls by helicopter while maintaining social distancing.

V. External relations

39. Tokelau, as a Non-Self-Governing Territory, does not have an international legal personality separate from that of New Zealand that would allow it to enter into formal international legal obligations as a State in its own right. In consultation with Tokelau, New Zealand is responsible for entering into any such obligations on behalf of Tokelau. Tokelau participates in regional and international organizations in its own right to the extent that such organizations allow.

40. Tokelau is seeking to increase its engagement with regional and international organizations. It is a member of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Community Coastal Fisheries Programme, the Council of the University of the South Pacific, the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. Tokelau is an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum, a member of the Polynesian Leaders Group and an associate member of the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In addition to New Zealand, Samoa is an important bilateral contact for Tokelau.

41. A representative of Tokelau attended the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as part of the New Zealand delegation.

42. At the twenty-third session, as requested by the Government of Tokelau, New Zealand announced that it had submitted a formal declaration to the United Nations to extend the territorial application of both the Convention and the Paris Agreement to Tokelau. The national reports of New Zealand under the Convention now include action taken by Tokelau.

VI. Future status of the Territory

A. Position of the territorial Government

43. At the 3rd meeting of the Special Committee, on 12 June 2023, the Ulu-o-Tokelau made a statement. He noted that, although the referendums of 2006 and 2007 had not resulted in an act of self-determination, Tokelau was committed to self-determination, and the Government was working to develop the atolls' infrastructure and governance systems, particularly with respect to decision-making and the effective management of public services. The General Fono had recognized that much remained to be done in terms of local capacity-building, infrastructure development and economic development. Through the National Strategic Plan 2021–2026 of Tokelau, the Government was supporting the three villages in achieving the shared vision of thriving communities with opportunities for all. The Plan would also serve as a strategic road map towards self-government, with the ongoing support of New Zealand and the United Nations. Tokelau had established aspirational yet realistic development targets in the Plan. Progress would depend largely on the resources available, and Tokelau therefore requested assistance from interested development partners. In 2025, New Zealand would have been the administering Power for Tokelau for 100 years, and it was important for Tokelau to adopt a clear path towards self-determination in connection with the commemoration of that anniversary. In May 2022, the General Fono had agreed to revive the conversation on the political status of Tokelau, and the plan was to initiate those discussions in the second half of 2023.

44. He added that the 2003 Joint Statement of the Principles of Partnership between New Zealand and Tokelau demonstrated the significance of the relationship between

Tokelau and its administering Power. The development needs of Tokelau had grown tremendously over the years, and it would therefore continue to look to New Zealand, and development partners, for assistance. The effects of climate change, including sea level rise and catastrophic weather patterns, were already threatening the livelihoods of its people, eroding its beaches and affecting the quality and quantity of seafood available in and around the atolls. Although Tokelau was included in the allocation to New Zealand from climate change funds and programmes and New Zealand had generously supported its leaders' capacity to engage in relevant global discussions, Tokelau was unable to access such funds and programmes in its own right.

B. Position of the administering Power

45. The observer for New Zealand delivered a statement at the 3rd meeting of the Special Committee, on 12 June 2023. He said that, in December 2022, Tokelau had recorded its first case of COVID-19, and in May 2023 it had recorded its first case of community transmission. New Zealand and Tokelau had been working in close partnership to prepare as well as possible for an eventual outbreak, and Tokelau continued to have a very high vaccination rate, a good stock of basic medical supplies and well-trained staff. Although New Zealand health officials remained in close contact with the Department of Health of Tokelau, Tokelau had very much led its own response to COVID-19, with New Zealand playing a supporting role. That situation underscored the degree to which the Territory had moved forward on its journey to self-determination.

46. The representative said that New Zealand welcomed the decision taken by the General Fono in May 2022 to begin a new conversation on the question of self-determination in the lead-up to the 100-year anniversary of its administration of the atolls. A full exploration of the options available to Tokelau was the best means of ensuring that the people of the Territory had sufficient information to form an initial consensus before potentially moving on to a more formal decision-making process; such an approach would improve the likelihood of a clear and conclusive outcome.

47. The representative went on to say that, aware of the importance of working with Tokelau to improve the delivery of public services and enable other critical services on the atolls, New Zealand continued to devote significant effort and resources to the well-being of the Territory's inhabitants and to building resilience against climate change. Such efforts included the design of emergency shelters on each atoll, connection of the new submarine cable to households in each village, an upgrade and expansion of the renewable energy system across Tokelau, and village-level consultations on the proposal for the first airport in Tokelau, on Nukunonu atoll. Fisheries remained the only source of independent revenue for Tokelau and thus had a critical role in supporting the aspirations of its people for greater self-determination. New Zealand and Tokelau were in the process of co-designing a new Tokelau fisheries partnership programme to ensure that fisheries within the Territory's exclusive economic zone continued to be managed sustainably, and to ensure that the powers of New Zealand over that zone could eventually be devolved to Tokelau.

48. The representative stated that the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic had served to strengthen both the self-determination aspirations of Tokelauans and the close working relationship between Tokelau and New Zealand. The experience could stand both parties in good stead for the discussions that lay ahead, which New Zealand hoped would be based on openness, transparency and mutual trust and respect.

VII. Consideration by the United Nations

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

49. The Special Committee considered the question of Tokelau at its 3rd and 10th meetings, on 12 and 23 June 2023. At the 3rd meeting, and with the consent of the Special Committee, the Ulu-o-Tokelau made a statement. The Administrator of Tokelau also made a statement on behalf of the administering Power. At the 10th meeting, the representative of Papua New Guinea (also on behalf of Fiji) introduced draft resolution [A/AC.109/2023/L.23](#). Subsequently, the delegation of Indonesia joined the sponsors of the draft resolution. At the same meeting, the Special Committee adopted draft resolution [A/AC.109/2023/L.23](#) without a vote.

B. Consideration of the question of Tokelau by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

50. At the 9th meeting of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), held on 11 October 2023, the Committee adopted draft resolution XV, entitled “Question of Tokelau”, contained in chapter XIII of the report of the Special Committee ([A/78/23](#)), without a vote.

C. Action taken by the General Assembly

51. On 7 December 2023, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution [78/97](#) on the question of Tokelau. In that resolution, the Assembly:

(a) Took note with appreciation of the decision of the General Fono on 23 May 2022 to revisit the views of the people of Tokelau and revive the dialogue on the question of self-determination for Tokelau in the lead-up to the centenary of New Zealand administration of Tokelau in February 2026;

(b) Welcomed the progress made towards the devolution of power to the three taupulega (village councils) since 2004, and noted that further discussion was planned on the recommendations in the report on the devolution review, compiled in 2012, and the additional recent efforts in Tokelau in addressing a future governance model that accounts for, inter alia, the Territory’s religious faith, culture and identity;

(c) Recalled with satisfaction the democratic elections in Tokelau held on 23 January 2020 for the tenth General Fono and the subsequent swearing-in of the Ulu-o-Tokelau on 8 March 2021, and noted the subsequent change of the Ulu-o-Tokelau on 19 May 2022 at the General Fono, and the most recent election of the General Fono on 26 January 2023 and the subsequent instalment of the Ulu-o-Tokelau in March 2023;

(d) Recognized the ongoing socioeconomic development challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to Tokelau, including the first recorded cases of community transmission in May 2023, and the close cooperation with the administering Power, New Zealand, neighbouring countries and the World Health Organization in successfully addressing the pandemic in Tokelau;

(e) Noted with appreciation that Tokelau and New Zealand remained firmly committed to the ongoing development of Tokelau for the long-term benefit of the

people of Tokelau, with particular emphasis on the further development of facilities on each atoll that meet their current requirements, including investment that had enabled Tokelau to be directly connected by an undersea fibre-optic cable on 20 September 2021 for faster and more reliable Internet services, improved maritime transport infrastructure and services, quality health care and education and support for the fisheries sector;

(f) Took note of the National Strategic Plan 2021–2026 of Tokelau, which further prioritized good governance, human and infrastructure development, telecommunication, transportation, sustainability and climate change adaptation, as an important framework for the Territory’s sustainable future, with a shared vision of “Thriving communities with opportunities for all”;

(g) Acknowledged the ongoing and consistent commitment of New Zealand to meeting the social and economic requirements of the people of Tokelau, including through new shipping service assets and shipping infrastructure development, and budget support for the delivery of education services ranging from early childhood education to foundation courses for tertiary study, as well as the support and cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization;

(h) Recalled the completion by Tokelau in 2013 of the Tokelau Renewable Energy Project with the support of the administering Power and the receipt by the Government of the Renewable Energy Award granted by the New Zealand Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority;

(i) Also recalled measures taken by Tokelau to safeguard the health of its peoples through its “Tobacco-Free Tokelau by 2020” policy, launched in 2017, and encouraged the necessary support for its implementation from the administering Power, the United Nations system and relevant stakeholders;

(j) Acknowledged the need of Tokelau for continued support from the international community and its desire to become part of the discussions on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the impacts of climate change and the protection of the environment and oceans, and in this regard encouraged, as appropriate, assistance towards the implementation of the climate change strategy of Tokelau, entitled “Living with change: an integrated national strategy for enhancing the resilience of Tokelau to climate change and related hazards, 2017–2030”;

(k) Appreciated the efforts of the administering Power to include in its national reporting to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change the climate mitigation action taken by Tokelau, and also recalled the milestone achievement of Tokelau in the launch of its national greenhouse gas inventory report on 11 April 2019;

(l) Recalled with satisfaction the establishment and operation of the Tokelau International Trust Fund to support the ongoing needs of Tokelau, and called upon Member States and international and regional agencies to contribute to the Fund and thereby lend practical support to Tokelau in overcoming the problems of smallness, isolation and lack of resources;

(m) Welcomed the ongoing cooperative attitude of the other States and territories in the Pacific region towards Tokelau and their support for its economic and political aspirations and its increasing participation in regional and international affairs, including at the fiftieth Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, held in Tuvalu in August 2019, as an associate member, represented by the Ulu-o-Tokelau;

(n) Called upon the administering Power and United Nations agencies to continue to provide assistance to Tokelau as it further developed;

(o) Recognized the positive actions taken by the administering Power to transmit to the Secretary-General under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations information regarding the political, economic and social situation of Tokelau;

(p) Commended the renewed strong commitment of both Tokelau and New Zealand to continuing to work together in the interests of Tokelau and its people;

(q) Requested the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples to continue to examine the question of the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Tokelau and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session.

Map of Tokelau

