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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Agenda item 57:	
The Tunisia question	569

Chairman: Mr. Francisco URRUTIA (Colombia).

AGENDA ITEM 57

The Tunisia question (A/2683, A/C.1/L.128)

1. Mr. SHUKAIRI (Syria) said that, since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 611 (VII), many regrettable events had taken place. Consequently, on 28 July 1954, fourteen Asian and African States had requested the inclusion of the Tunisian question in the agenda of the ninth session and had forwarded an explanatory memorandum (A/2683) corroborating their complaint.

2. Normally it was necessary, when beginning the deliberations on any matter, to state the case and to submit arguments. However, since the filing of the complaint, the Tunisian question had entered a significant new stage which made it desirable to look to the future and to forget the past, at least for the present.

3. The question was under negotiation between France and Tunisia. On 31 July 1954, the French Prime Minister, Mr. Mendès-France, had declared in Tunis the internal autonomy of the Tunisian State. That declaration might prove to be the beginning of a new era in Franco-Tunisian relations and in the attitude of the Arab world towards French policy. Mr. Mendès-France had stated that the internal autonomy of the Tunisian State was unreservedly recognized and proclaimed by the French Government, which intended to affirm that autonomy as a principle and provide means for its implementation. He had added that the stage of development of the Tunisian people and the undoubted worth of its leaders justified the handing over of the management of Tunisian affairs, and that France was therefore ready to transfer to the Tunisians the exercise of internal sovereignty.

4. It was only natural for Tunisia to exercise internal sovereignty in the same degree as any other State. Any other course would have made seventy years of French protection meaningless, for Tunisia should not now have a status inferior to that which it had enjoyed in 1870. The Tunisian people had welcomed the programme of Mr. Mendès-France as a step towards the achievement of their aspirations, and the sovereign of Tunisia, His Highness the Bey, had accepted the French proposals for direct negotiations. A new cabinet had been formed, and negotiations had begun on 4 September 1954 in Tunis, and had continued in Paris. Declaring the negotiations open, His Highness the

Bey had stated that their purpose was to establish the internal autonomy of Tunisia and to safeguard French interests in Tunisia, and had expressed the hope that they would lead in the shortest possible time to agreements guaranteeing the happiness of the people and peace and prosperity for all. That moderate and constructive statement had laid the stress on the appropriate points.

5. The Prime Minister of Tunisia had made a similar statement, in which he had stated that honesty would be the guiding principle in the negotiations. The emphasis on honesty was most significant, for in any political problem negotiations would fail in the absence of honesty in definition, in interpretation, in expression and in application. With an honest mutual understanding, autonomy could only mean a government by the people and for the people.

6. The Tunisian people, for its part, had created an atmosphere favourable to the success of the negotiations. The country had been in a state of tension, and national feeling had been at its height. However, when the time had come to negotiate, the appeal of the Tunisian Government had met with a response. On 21 November 1954, the Prime Minister called upon the *fellaghas* to surrender their arms and invited all who held arms illegally to hand them over. There could be no more sincere action than to call upon a liberation movement to surrender its arms. That action had reflected the attitude of the ruler, the Government and the people of Tunisia.

7. On the French side, although not on the part of the Government, there had been disturbing statements. It had been reported that at the meeting of the National Assembly on 10 December 1954, Mr. René Mayer, the deputy from Algeria and a former Prime Minister, had reaffirmed the French intention to remain in North Africa in control of the only three Moslem countries not yet independent and had declared that the problem was one which France should face frankly. Such a mediaeval outlook was not in accord with the spirit and principles of France. The issue was not one of religion, and General Assembly resolution 611 (VII) had not been supported because of religious convictions. The fourteen States which had brought the item to the Assembly were not all Moslem. The issue was one of liberty and freedom, and Mr. Mayer's statement was an offence against France.

8. In Tunisia the voice of moderation had been heard from the national leaders no less than from the Government. Mr. Habib Bourguiba had declared that now that France had decided to base its policy on friendship and trust, he appealed to all who would preserve the friendship of the French and Tunisian peoples to forget past struggles and to refrain from any acts which might endanger that friendship.

9. The task of the Committee had thus been made easier at the current session. It was possible to forget

the past and deal with the problem as it now stood. The Governments and peoples of France and Tunisia were determined to reach a peaceful solution in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Charter. It was therefore necessary to have a resolution which raised no controversy.

10. Accordingly, the fourteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.128) took note of the existence of negotiations, appealed to both parties to seek mutual understanding and expressed the hope that the negotiations would be successful. There was only one operative paragraph, providing for the postponement of the consideration of the item for the time being. That course had been chosen because the sponsors did not wish to interfere with the negotiations or take any action which might create an unfavourable atmosphere.

11. It was to be hoped that at the next session France would be able to present a favourable report on fruitful negotiations for the internal sovereignty of Tunis. It was to be hoped that there could be a document signed by the Governments of France and Tunisia stating that sovereignty was a reality and the Tunisian Government was fully independent. Finally, it was to be hoped that France would then propose that Tunisia be admitted to the United Nations.

12. Mr. ABDOH (Iran) said that the clear and moderate statement of the representative of Syria reflected the feelings of the Iranian delegation also. Having in mind the stage of the Committee's proceedings and the favourable atmosphere which had recently been created, it might be better not to have a long debate which might not contribute to the settlement of the question. The fourteen-Power draft resolution should cause no difficulties and should receive the support of all members of the Committee. It was to be hoped that the negotiations would lead to a satisfactory solution in conformity with the principles of the Charter. It was fitting, too, that an appeal should be made to the parties—as was done in the joint draft resolution—to deal with the problem in a spirit of mutual understanding.

13. Mr. BOROOAH (India) said that a peaceful solution in conformity with the Charter could only be achieved through negotiations between the real representatives of the parties. India had therefore, over the course of three years, always urged the creation of favourable conditions and the beginning of real negotiations. That had been the theme of two draft resolutions (A/C.1/736 and A/C.1/L.64) which, at the seventh and eighth sessions respectively, India had co-sponsored, but which had not been adopted.

14. India had noted with satisfaction the statement concerning Tunisia made by Mr. Mendès-France. As a statement of objectives, it had fallen short of the hopes of the Tunisian people, for it had dealt only with internal autonomy. Nevertheless, it had been regarded in Tunisia as opening a new era, and had been received with satisfaction. The Néo-Destour Party had accepted a minority position in the Government, and negotiations had begun on 4 September 1954. India wished to draw attention to the spirit of co-operation shown by the Tunisian leaders in accepting the proposals of the French Government as the basis for discussion, by the Néo-Destour Party in accepting a minority position in the Government, and by the people in responding to the plea to lay down their arms. In the presence of such an attitude, it could be hoped

that the existing difficulties would not prove to be obstacles.

15. Although aware of unfavourable statements made in the French National Assembly, India recalled that Mr. Mendès-France had told the United Nations General Assembly (498th meeting) that a solution for Tunisia was not impossible, and recognized the business-like approach he had shown in the settlements for Indo-China and the French possessions in India. The Tunisian question represented the kind of problem which had already been solved in more difficult circumstances.

16. India had therefore co-sponsored the draft resolution (A/C.1/L.128) which was before the Committee. All delegations could be pleased that negotiations had begun. That was the first aim. There remained the problem of satisfying Tunisian aspirations. Success would mean the beginning of a new era on the African continent and would prove that France remained a great source of inspiration.

17. Mr. LOUTFI (Egypt), reviewing the evolution of the problem since the previous session, said that before Mr. Mendès-France had come to power the Tunisian question had been marked by a lack of understanding on the part of the French Government, aggravated by pressure from certain colonists in Tunisia to prevent a settlement. The failure of the reforms by the Resident-General had been complete, as they ran counter to the national aspirations and their implementation had been followed by grave disturbances. The disturbed state of affairs at the beginning of the Mendès-France ministry had been adequately described by Mr. Fouchet in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly.

18. At his investiture, Mr. Mendès-France had stressed the need to resume discussions with the Tunisian nationalist leaders as the only way to reach a solution and he had undertaken himself to proceed to Tunisia. There, he had made the very important statement concerning the internal autonomy of the Tunisian State which had been quoted by the representative of Syria. That statement had been welcomed by the Tunisian people, which had regarded it as the beginning of an era when Tunisia's relations with France would be based upon freedom and mutual respect. On 4 August 1954, the new French Resident-General, General Boyer de la Tour du Moulin, had said that France was prepared to transfer the internal exercise of sovereignty. Thus France had shown itself ready to begin a new era.

19. The Prime Minister of Tunisia had said that he counted in particular on the friendship of the French population in Tunisia, as well as on the desire for an understanding on the part of all the other elements in the country, to achieve a democratic régime guaranteeing justice. The national council of the Néo-Destour Party had noted with satisfaction the promise to transfer internal sovereignty and the resolve of the French Government to revise Franco-Tunisian relations.

20. It was thus possible to expect an improvement in the political atmosphere in Tunisia, and the people of Tunisia was entitled to hope for changes.

21. It had to be admitted that Mr. Mendès-France's programme was a modest one. When the negotiations had begun in September 1954, the colonists in Tunisia had exerted pressure to prevent a liberal policy.

That attempt had adversely affected Franco-Tunisian relations, and had been followed by the repression of the *fellaghas*. Force alone, however, could not resolve a problem. The voice of reason had prevailed, and agreement had been reached on the *fellaghas*.

22. Statements made in the National Assembly on 10 and 11 December 1954 by Mr. Mendès-France and Mr. Fouchet indicated that France had retreated from the position it had taken in July. Those statements suggested that any agreement would be subject to acceptance by His Highness the Bey only and not by the Tunisian people as well, although the latter procedure had been accepted by the Bey in 1951. The Egyptian delegation remained certain, however, that the French pledges would be observed.

23. It was evident that French policy had turned towards a just course and it was to be hoped that the negotiations would fulfil Tunisian aspirations in conformity with the principles of the Charter. It was also to be hoped that the Government of Mr. Mendès-France would be able to surmount all obstacles, including the pressures of the colonists. Egypt was certain that agreement could be reached and would welcome it as a contribution to peace and stability in the whole region of North Africa.

24. With regard to the fourteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.128), Mr. Loutfi pointed out that it was moderate in tone, and expressed the hope that it would be supported by all delegations.

25. Mr. WADSWORTH (United States of America) said that the present prospect of progress towards self-government for Tunisia made discussion neither desirable nor necessary. The negotiations that were taking place were those provided for in General Assembly resolution 611 (VII), and it was satisfying to note that the General Assembly's recommendations were being carried out. The policy outlined in the statement which Mr. Mendès-France had made on 31 July 1954 had been confirmed in his statement before the General Assembly on 22 November (498th meeting). Moreover, as Mr. Lodge had said in the Committee on 13 December (747th meeting), the joint Franco-Tunisian initiative in appealing for the surrender of arms was evidence of the ability of the two parties to act together.

26. The United States delegation appreciated the moderate attitude of the sponsors of the fourteen-Power draft resolution. However, as it believed that it would be better not to pass any resolution, it urged the sponsors not to press their proposal to a vote. The statements that had been made and the text of the draft resolution could stand in the record and be noted by the Rapporteur in his report.

27. Mr. SUDJARWO (Indonesia) said that the investiture of Mr. Mendès-France had brightened the prospects of a settlement of the Tunisian problem, which he had not been afraid to tackle with a new dynamism. His visit to Tunisia and the statement he had made concerning internal autonomy had aroused hopes of a new era. The words of Mr. Mendès-France had not been radical but had shown a progressive realization of the situation. They had been in accordance with French traditions, the aspirations of the Tunisian people and the provisions of General Assembly resolution 611 (VII).

28. Two factors were indispensable to success. The first requirement was the beginning of negotiations.

That had been met by the establishment of the new Tunisian Government, including five independent Nationalists and four members of the Néo-Destour Party, and by the opening of negotiations. The second requirement was that both parties should enter discussions in a spirit of mutual understanding and with the will to restore mutual confidence. That had been more difficult, and negotiations had broken down over the question of the *fellaghas*. In November, however, it had been possible to agree on a solution to that problem whereby the future status of the *fellaghas* had been assured. That agreement showed what could be done with the proper spirit. All Tunisian patriots had responded and shown their desire to contribute to the establishment of peace and confidence. The agreement had resulted in almost all the *fellaghas* laying down their arms, and it was to be hoped that the negotiations on other points would be equally successful.

29. Having in mind the policy of the Mendès-France Government, and desiring to do nothing which might impede a settlement, the Indonesian delegation had co-sponsored the fourteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.128), which expressed the hope that a satisfactory solution would be reached in conformity with the principles of the Charter.

30. Mr. BERNARDES (Brazil) believed that the moderation displayed by the Arab delegations during the debate showed that they were confident that the question was on the way to a satisfactory solution. The present debate was sufficient to show the continuous interest of the United Nations in the Tunisian question. Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 611 (VII), of 17 December 1952, was still in force, and it would be unwise to add to what had been said at that time.

31. Mr. Bernardes therefore supported the suggestion made by the representative of the United States that no resolution, moderate as it might be, should be adopted.

32. Mr. DE LA COLINA (Mexico) stated that his delegation had made known its views when discussing the question of Morocco (748th meeting) and would not repeat them. It noted with satisfaction the improvement in the Tunisian situation resulting from the action taken by the Government of Mr. Mendès-France.

33. Under the circumstances, he believed it would be wise for the Committee to adopt a procedural draft resolution similar to that introduced by the Asian-Arab delegations (A/C.1/L.128). However, in order to achieve unanimity, if possible, he suggested that the words "with satisfaction" be inserted after the word "noting" in the second preambular paragraph and that the third and fourth preambular paragraphs be deleted.

34. Mr. URQUIA (El Salvador) said that his Government was confident that the French Government would bring about a satisfactory solution to the Tunisian question. Therefore it was not necessary for the Committee to enter into a detailed discussion of the question.

35. The fourteen-Power draft resolution was basically procedural, because the operative part simply provided for the postponement of the further consideration of the item.

36. In order to encourage the continuation of negotiations between the French Government and the Tunisian leaders, no idea should be included in the draft reso-

lution which might be considered as interfering with the resolve of the parties to settle the problem. Furthermore, nothing should be included which was not indispensable to the aims sought by the draft resolution.

37. The delegation of El Salvador therefore supported the amendment suggested by Mexico to the second preambular paragraph.

38. To include the third preambular paragraph would be tantamount to assuming that the negotiating parties were not dealing with the problem in a spirit of mutual understanding. Mr. Urquía was convinced that the French Government, the Tunisian people and the Members of the United Nations supporting the Tunisian people had always acted, in a spirit of mutual understanding. He hoped, therefore, that the co-sponsors of the draft resolution would delete that paragraph.

39. The mentioning of the principles of the Charter in the fourth preambular paragraph might give rise to different interpretations and also to the idea that negotiations had been initiated without considering such principles. Such was not the case. Mr. Urquía therefore believed that the paragraph was unnecessary in its present form, and suggested that it be amended to read:

“Expressing the hope that the said negotiations will bring about a satisfactory solution”.

Reading thus, the paragraph would endorse the previous efforts made by the United Nations to solve the problem, and would once again express the hope of all peoples everywhere that peace and a sense of security would reign in all regions of the world.

40. Mr. QUIROGA GALDO (Bolivia) wished to express, once again, the firm adherence of the people and Government of Bolivia to the principles of the Charter and, in particular, to the principle of self-determination. His delegation had sought consistently to help to bring about understanding between the great Powers and those States which had recently become independent.

41. While agreeing with the spirit of the fourteen-Power draft resolution, the Bolivian delegation would accept any amendments designed to facilitate the discussions between the negotiating parties. It agreed with the views expressed by the representatives of El Salvador and Mexico.

42. Mr. TOV (Israel) recalled that the Tunisian question had been inscribed as the last item on the agenda because of the optimism which had been aroused by the negotiations announced in September by the French Government. That optimism had been justified because, during the three months which had elapsed since then, the assurances given by the French Government had been realized, and the attitude of the people and leaders of Tunisia also gave grounds for believing that the problem would be solved satisfactorily. Therefore any resolution adopted by the Committee should be of a procedural character, designed to assist the negotiations.

43. The Israel delegation believed that if the scope of the fourteen-Power draft resolution were limited in accordance with the suggested Mexican amendments, the resulting text would constitute an expression of confidence in the French Government, which would thus see its moral responsibility enlarged, and would feel encouraged to carry it out. Only in that

form would the text received the unreserved support of the Israel delegation.

44. Mr. TRUJILLO (Ecuador) observed that his delegation had on previous occasions expressed its views on both the Moroccan and Tunisian questions, which positions had in no way changed.

45. The joint draft resolution before the Committee (A/C.1/L.128) would take into account the essential aspects of the problem if it was amended in accordance with the suggestions made by the representatives of Mexico, El Salvador, Bolivia and Israel.

46. The Ecuadorian delegation believed, on the other hand, that the views expressed by the representatives of the United States and Brazil would have been acceptable only in the absence of that conciliatory spirit which had been manifested during the discussion of the Moroccan and Tunisian questions.

47. Mr. Trujillo believed that the Committee should confine itself to taking note, with satisfaction, of the negotiations which were in progress, and to postponing the debate on the question.

48. Therefore, the Ecuadorian delegation would ask that the joint draft resolution be voted on in parts. It would vote in favour of the first and second paragraphs of the preamble, with the addition, in the latter, of the words “with satisfaction”, and in favour of the operative paragraph; it would vote against the third and fourth paragraphs of the preamble.

49. Mr. FRANCO Y FRANCO (Dominican Republic) did not consider it necessary to repeat his delegation's views on the question, which had been stated at previous sessions of the General Assembly.

50. The delegation of the Dominican Republic supported the suggestion made by the representative of the United States because it did not feel that it would be necessary or useful to add any new provisions to resolution 611 (VII) of the General Assembly, of 17 December 1952, which was still in force. Furthermore, at the previous session the Committee had recommended (A/C.1/L.65) the postponement of the consideration of the Tunisian question until the ninth session. Therefore his delegation favoured a verbal declaration to the effect that the consideration of the question should remain suspended *sine die*, pending the result of the negotiations.

51. If that suggestion, which Mr. Franco y Franco considered to be logical, were rejected, his delegation would support the joint draft resolution, with the amendments suggested by Mexico, namely, the addition of the words “with satisfaction” in the second paragraph of the preamble, and the deletion of the third and fourth paragraphs of the preamble.

52. Mr. ZARUBIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) recalled that seventy years before, Tunisia had been a sovereign State. It had not ceased to exist as such, although France had instituted a protectorate over it. The USSR delegation was gratified that the French Government had followed the recommendations of the General Assembly in committing itself to a settlement of the question through direct negotiations with the representatives of the Tunisian people.

53. The USSR delegation supported the fourteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.128).

54. Mr. SHUKAIRI (Syria) stated that the Tunisian question was an international question. It was a

dispute between France, on the one hand, and Tunisia, on the other, although the sovereignty of the latter party had been suppressed. He would not discuss that point, because he wished to continue to be moderate in his remarks. The appeal of the representative of the United States that the Committee should not adopt a resolution on the question at the present session might have released him from his promise to be moderate, but he would resist any such temptation.

55. In 1952, the General Assembly had adopted, by an overwhelming majority, a resolution (611 (VII)) calling upon both parties to enter into negotiations "on an urgent basis". There was no reason why the Assembly should not adopt at the present session the moderate procedural draft submitted by the fourteen-Powers.

56. Sometimes, when a draft resolution was produced, it would be criticized by the United States as being too strong and unlikely to be adopted. But when a moderate procedural draft resolution was presented, the representative of the United States took the position that there was no need for the draft resolution, or even for any discussion, or indeed for bringing the matter before the United Nations. The United States should be reminded that other delegations could take the same position. The Syrian delegation, however, would always welcome the inclusion of any item in the agenda, and would be willing to consider the substance of any question.

57. It was not satisfactory to say that a resolution should not be adopted on an item included in the agenda and referred to the Committee. If the draft resolution was moderate, as almost every representative who had spoken had agreed, it should be adopted and not merely praised. Merely to make statements and to have them noted in the report of the Rapporteur was not the way the United Nations carried out its functions. The duty of representatives was to harmonize the various views and make suggestions regarding draft resolutions, not to delete or suppress views.

58. Some of the suggestions which had been made were constructive. The proposal for the insertion of the words "with satisfaction" in the second paragraph of the preamble was satisfactory to the Syrian delegation, and Mr. Shukairi believed, although he had not consulted them, that it would also be acceptable to the other sponsors of the draft resolution.

59. The suggestion, however, that the third and fourth paragraphs of the preamble should be deleted was not easy to accept. The two paragraphs were harmless and had no ulterior motive, nor were they controversial. They included an appeal to the parties—an appeal which it was quite normal for the United Nations to make and which was, indeed, the least it could do. The United Nations, moreover, should express hope as to the outcome. Even if the existing wording were unacceptable, surely the spirit of those two paragraphs could be retained, or the draft resolution would become lifeless. Then it would merely note that negotiations were in progress and resolve to postpone further consideration of the problem. It would be preferable to have a resolution full of hope and aspirations.

60. The co-sponsors would be glad to receive any suggestions or amendments to the paragraphs. If any representative felt strongly about them, perhaps the Chairman would declare a brief recess to permit consultations.

61. The Reverend Benjamin NUÑEZ (Costa Rica), as a contribution to the conciliation which the representatives were endeavouring to bring about, suggested the following wording as a substitute for the third and fourth paragraphs:

"Confident that the spirit of understanding in which the said negotiations are being carried out will bring about a satisfactory solution".

That suggestion did not constitute a formal amendment.

62. Mr. BLANCO (Cuba) stated that his delegation would support the suggestion made by the representative of the United States that no resolution be adopted, because negotiations were in progress concerning the Tunisian question. The aim which the Committee had sought earlier had been achieved. However, if the Committee wished to adopt a resolution of a purely procedural character, his delegation would support the suggestion that the third and fourth paragraphs of the fourteen-Powers draft resolution (A/C.1/L.128), be deleted, because those two paragraphs were of a substantive nature.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.