

## **Special Committee on Decolonization Background Guide**

**Written by:** *Sarah Jessup, Jagiellonian University*

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The Special Committee on Decolonization (C-24) was established by the General Assembly on November 27, 1961, following the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples<sup>1</sup> in December 1960 which sought to address the pressing issue of colonization. The C-24 was initially established in New York City with 17 members with the goal of producing recommendations to progress decolonization measures.<sup>1</sup> The Special Committee on Decolonization implores that the Member States work collectively to establish and protect self-governance by encouraging democratic political institutions and taking into consideration the political will of the peoples. The UN Special Committee on Decolonization is an independent body that has worked to achieve independence for a plethora of former colonies and territories throughout the world. Since the United Nations was founded in 1945, 750 million people living throughout more than 80 former colonies and territories have gained independence.<sup>2</sup>

### **I. Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples**

#### **Statement of the Issue:**

The issue of colonization has been in the international dialogue for more than several decades as colonies and territories have sought to regain their independence. As of 2022, there are still 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs) comprised of about two million people.<sup>3</sup> The majority of NSGTs today are located in the Atlantic and Caribbean with the dominant administering power being the United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Disputes over the continued colonization of the Falkland Islands (known as the Malvinas Islands to Argentina) by the United Kingdom have led to political tensions between the two states, spurring the Argentine government to seek

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<sup>1</sup> “United Nations decolonization,” United Nations, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/about>.

<sup>2</sup> “United Nations decolonization.”

<sup>3</sup> “Effects of colonialism ‘still being felt to this day’,” United Nations, last modified February 18, 2022, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2022/02/effects-colonialism-still-being-felt-day>.

<sup>4</sup> “Non-Self-Governing Territories,” United Nations, accessed June 13, 2022, [https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt#\\_edn2](https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt#_edn2).

political support in its quest to reestablish sovereignty over the islands. The conversation surrounding the continued existence of the Commonwealth was brought up once again after a controversial trip made by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, shedding light on whether it is truly a mutually beneficial partnership or a neo-colonial ownership as the legacies of slavery and exploitation go unaddressed.

The remnants of colonialism have continued to negatively impact both NSGTs and former colonies. The Third Committee<sup>ii</sup> of the United Nations found that states with a colonial legacy often face severely impeded access to food, water, and health care, a situation that has been further aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disparities that persist in the health, social, and economic sectors of NSGTs. From the lack of access to affordable vaccines to severely underfunded healthcare systems, the struggles of NSGTs throughout the pandemic are easily traced back to their colonial history. The pandemic magnified the need for European states to aid their former colonies, such as Portugal which donated 5% of its COVID-19 vaccination supply to former colonies in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Former colonies and NSGTs continue to be impacted by less social mobility while exploitative systems have left some of the world's poorest states without clean drinking water, diminished natural resources, lack of healthy food, struggling economies, and advanced environmental degradation.

Access to safe, clean drinking water remains one of the most substantial issues facing Indigenous people today. Colonial legacies have continued to impede Indigenous peoples' right to clean water as the existing framework established by governments ignores their water rights and responsibilities, manifesting into the phenomenon of 'water colonialism'. Water colonialism is a persisting issue that strips Indigenous peoples of clean, reliable drinking water and leads to the exploitation of the natural resource by national governments.<sup>7</sup> In Canada, dozens of First Nations lack clean drinking water despite an abundance of fresh water. Many of the First Nations

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<sup>5</sup> "Legacies of Colonialism, Patriarchy, Neoliberalism Impede Access to Food, Water, Health Care for World's Poor, Third Committee Hears as COVID-19 Exposes Gaps," United Nations, last modified October 20, 2021, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/gashc4327.doc.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Reuters Staff, "Portugal to share COVID-19 shots with its former colonies in Africa, E. Timor," *Reuters*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-portugal/portugal-to-share-covid-19-shots-with-its-former-colonies-in-africa-e-timor-idUSKBN2AO1S8>.

<sup>7</sup> Kat Taylor, Sheri Longboat, and Quentin Grafton, "Countering water colonialism: Indigenous peoples' rights, responsibilities and international water governance frameworks," *Undisciplined Environments*, June 16, 2020, <https://undisciplinedenvironments.org/2020/06/16/countering-water-colonialism-indigenous-peoples-rights-responsibilities-and-international-water-governance-frameworks/>.

communities of Canada have been denied guaranteed access to drinking water as water treatment infrastructure is lacking in large swaths of the territory.<sup>8</sup> Access to clean water continues to be a problem for Native American tribes throughout the United States as sanitation facilities near reservations are often in disrepair, leading to the inability of families to attain consistently safe drinking water.<sup>9</sup> The need for Indigenous peoples to have reliable access to safe drinking water is an important issue that must be addressed by the international community and governments.

Last year marked the beginning of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (2021-2030). The Fourth Decade reaffirms commitment to multi-lateral cooperation between the United Nations and Administrating Powers to review the current situations of NSGTs in order to assess the desires of the peoples for self-determination referendums. The C-24 has urged the Member States to renew their commitment to decolonization efforts and make the Fourth International Decade the last for the final eradication of colonialism in the remaining 17 NSGTs.

### **History:**

Colonialism is defined by Merriam-Webster as, “The domination of a people or area by foreign state or nation: the practice of extending and maintaining a nation’s political and economic control over another people or area.”<sup>10</sup> The history of colonialism is traced back all the way to the Antiquity era (1550 BC) when the empires of Ancient Greece, Egypt, Phoenicia, and Ancient Rome sought to expand their borders to distant lands, acquiring a plethora of natural resources and new sources of labor.<sup>11</sup> From that point forward, colonialism would become deeply rooted in the history of the world, touching every corner. The modern wave of colonialism, which legacy persists today, began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Known as the “Age of Discovery”, this period marked the beginning of an era where Europe’s largest powers began their explorations and colonization of the Americas, Far East, India, and East Asia.<sup>12</sup> This wave

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<sup>8</sup> Leyland Cecco, “Dozens of Canada’s First Nations lack drinking water: ‘Unacceptable in a country so rich’,” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/30/canada-first-nations-justin-trudeau-drinking-water>.

<sup>9</sup> Celina Tebor, “On Native American reservations, the push for more clean water and sanitation,” *LA Times*, June 26, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-06-26/native-americans-clean-water>.

<sup>10</sup> “Colonialism Definition & Meaning,” Merriam-Webster, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colonialism>.

<sup>11</sup> Erin Blakemore, “What is Colonialism?” National Geographic, last modified February 19, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/colonialism>.

<sup>12</sup> Blakemore, “What is Colonialism?”

of colonialism bore witness to the mass exploitation of resources, forced conversion of local populations, and a power struggle between European states over acquiring the most territory.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century marked just the beginning of one wave of colonialist expansion, the second wave began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century over the African continent. In what became known as the ‘Scramble for Africa’, European powers fought over the ability to control territory throughout Africa in order to exploit the abundance of natural resources, leading to the division of borders and the creation of ethnic tension.<sup>13</sup> Great Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal were the powers that led the colonization efforts of Africa. The effects of this event were devastating as the native peoples' traditional way of life was stripped away and their socio-economic and political structures were annihilated. The rich histories, cultures, and communities of Africa were destroyed by the Europeans' struggle to obtain as much land and resources as possible, Liberia and Ethiopia were the only two not colonized.<sup>14</sup> The second wave of colonialism ended in 1914, at which point European states established colonial state systems that governed the political and economic structures of the newly acquired colonies. The implications of the Scramble for Africa would have long-lasting effects as the arbitrary division of land fostered ethnic tensions that continue to exist to this day.

Decolonization measures began following the Second World War after European states no longer had the resources or power to maintain control over their colonies. The United Kingdom especially felt the depletion of capabilities after the heavy human and financial cost of the war.<sup>15</sup> Colonies saw the emerging post-war structure as an opportunity to break free from European control and pursue self-determination. The first wave of decolonization was from 1945 to 1955, with the second, and current, wave beginning in 1955. Decolonization efforts mainly began in the Middle East and South-East Asia, before spreading to North and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>16</sup> After the inception of the United Nations in 1945, there was a new reality of a world

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<sup>13</sup> Jamila Osman, “What is Colonialism? A History of Violence, Control and Exploitation,” *Teen Vogue*, October 11, 2020, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/colonialism-explained>.

<sup>14</sup> “The Europeans called Africa the ‘Dark Continent’ because it was unknown to them,” St. John’s College University of Cambridge, accessed June 15, 2022, [https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/library\\_exhibitions/schoolresources/exploration/scramble\\_for\\_africa](https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/library_exhibitions/schoolresources/exploration/scramble_for_africa).

<sup>15</sup> Marco Gabellini, “The beginnings of decolonisation and the emergence of the non-aligned states,” CVCE, accessed June 15, 2022, <https://www.cvce.eu/en/recherche/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/0397bac4-10f2-4b69-8d1a-366ca4a08c34>.

<sup>16</sup> Gabellini, “The beginnings of decolonisation.”

transformed from war and the prospect of rapid progress; the topic of decolonization began to take precedence.

The United Nations marked 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, calling for enhanced dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous People. Colonialism had led to the exploitation of natural resources which has damaged the Earth and destroyed the way of life for Indigenous Peoples. The year was meant to foster dialogue around the issues that Indigenous People face, such as oppression of their culture, stripping of rights, occupation of land, the persisting idea of cultural imperialism, and dealing with ethnocentrism that favors the historic colonizer.<sup>17</sup> Topics that are still continuously discussed today as greater awareness around the legacy of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples around the world is made more widely known.

### **Analysis:**

Ensuring the right of self-determination for NSGTs and former colonies remains a top priority of the United Nations. Through international cooperation, the implementation and protection of self-determination for NSGTs is vital to the continued progress and betterment of society as a whole. There is a continued need for dialogue to be encouraged between the Administrative Powers and NSGTs in order to foster a constructive relationship that may implement and facilitate decolonization measures.<sup>18</sup> The promotion of the right to self-determination remains the most important objective for the C-24, keeping in mind the political aspirations of people living in Non-Self-Governing territories as well as the stage of development they are currently in. The UN's role in this objective is to facilitate dialogue between both parties and encourage the movement for independence in order to engender a swift end to all forms of colonialism. The UN identifies three parameters to measure when self-government has been achieved: emergence as a sovereign independent state, free association with an independent state, and integration with an independent state.<sup>19</sup> The right to self-determination does not just mean political independence of choice, but also economically.

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<sup>17</sup> Sean Byrne, "The Legacy of Colonialism Among Indigenous Peoples: Destructive Outcomes, Healing and Reconciliatory Potentials," *Peace Research* 49, no. 2 (2017): 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, "Effects of colonialism."

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, "United Nations and decolonization."

Economic self-determination for NSGTs refers to the rights of the people to make their own decisions over how natural resources are used, access to personal use, and the ability for the territory to independently make their own economic decisions regarding spending, trade, and borrowing.<sup>20</sup> Enhanced international cooperation and dialogues have to happen to realize all of the goals of the Implementation of the Declaration on Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People, most especially in the right to self-determination and independent resource control.

The issue of reparations has emerged as one of the topics at the forefront of dealing with colonial legacies and the continued decolonization efforts. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has called for reparations in light of the decades of colonization and genocide of Indigenous people by Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and Portugal.<sup>21</sup> There is a pressing need to address the financial scars that linger from the long period of colonization, and how the historic exploitation of natural resources and forced labor continue to impact the economies of both former colonies and current Non-Self-Governing Territories. The issue of reparations is one that has been pushed by dozens of former colonies as they argue that their underdevelopment and poverty are direct consequences of their decades-long colonization.<sup>22</sup> Establishing Truth and Reconciliation Committees may provide a space in which Administrating Powers and former colonies & NSGTs could have the opportunity to meet and discuss issues of reparations and political accountability. Providing access to funds to support the people and strengthen the economies of former colonies and current NSGTs remains one of the foremost important conversations regarding the implications of decolonization measures.

### **Conclusion:**

The full realization of the mandate for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples continues to remain a work in progress. Until every NSGT is given the right to self-determination, the work of the Special

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<sup>20</sup> Alice Farmer, "Towards a Meaningful Rebirth of Economic Self-Determination: Human Rights Realization in Resource-Rich Countries," *International Law and Politics* 417, no. 39 (2016): 418.

<sup>21</sup> "Caribbean asks for reparations," Colonialism Reparation, accessed June 15, 2022, <https://www.colonialismreparation.org/en/>.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Dunham, "Should There Be Reparations to Post-Colonial States?" *Old Dominion University*, 2017, <https://www.odu.edu/content/dam/odu/offices/mun/2017/ib-2017-fourth-reparations-final.pdf>.

Committee on Decolonization will continue to foster multinational cooperation in realizing this goal. Addressing the legacies of slavery and exploitation is vital to repairing the wounds caused by the colonial past and forging a stronger bond of cooperation for the future. Ensuring that every NSGT and former colonies have access to political, social, and economic freedom of choice is a value and objective of the United Nations. Addressing issues of environmental degradation, access to clean drinking water, rights of Indigenous People and people in NSGTs, and vaccine nationalism should be matters of top priority for the international community.

### **Questions:**

1. How does the legacy of colonialism impact environmental degradation in NSGTs, and what measures should be taken to prevent it on the international level?
2. How can Truth and Reconciliation Committees encourage dialogue on the issues of reparations and political accountability?
3. What are ways the United Nations can foster international cooperation in implementing the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples for the remaining 17 NSGTs?

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## **II. Expanding the List of Territories/Groups of Non-Self-Governed People the Declaration Applies**

### **Statement of the Issue:**

A topic of conversation that has permeated the United Nations' Special Committee on Decolonization is whether to expand the existing list of territories and groups of non-self-governed people that the Declaration on Granting Independence applies. The emergence of new independence movements around the globe has brought attention to the conversation of expanding the list. As the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization works towards initiating and encouraging the decolonization process for the remaining 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGT), it is important to not forget about those peoples fighting for independence that are not on the list.

One of the most prominent case studies for expanding the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples is that of West Papua. For the past six decades, a separatist movement has gained momentum in the territory of West Papua, a region annexed and subsequently occupied by Indonesia in 1963. Over the past two decades, West Papua has been caught in violent clashes between separatists and the Indonesian authorities, leading to countless deaths of activists, church workers, and Indonesian security services.<sup>23</sup> The individuals behind the push for the independence of West Papua identify themselves with the *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM), or the Free Papua Organization. The organization was founded on the belief that the Indonesian government has stripped away the legal and moral rights of the Papuan people, withholding their right to self-determination and criminalizing the desire for independence. Under the current Indonesian law, calls for independence and public displays of the flag of West Papua may be considered treason, a sentence that could carry up to 15 years in prison.<sup>24</sup> The position of the Indonesian government has fueled calls by Papuans for a referendum to be held, but the government has continuously refused. The OPM has struggled to achieve substantial progress in their case for independence as the group is divided between clans,

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<sup>23</sup> Richard C. Paddock, "'Free Papua Movement' Intensifies Amid Escalating Violence," *The New York Times*, December 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/world/asia/west-papua-independence.html>

<sup>24</sup> Paddock, "'Free Papua Movement.'"

ideology, and future objectives.<sup>25</sup> Despite the division that exists within the OPM, it does not influence the growing desire by many Papuans to have the right to self-determination as the Indonesian government has swiftly crushed independence protests.

The violence that has erupted in West Papua has led to members of the pro-independence movement labeling the actions of the Indonesian government as genocide, especially in the aftermath of President Joko Widodo's re-election.<sup>26</sup> The fight for the right to self-determination and aspirations for independence are motivated by a plethora of factors, including the continued exploitation of their natural resources, state-sanctioned human rights violations, and subjugation to institutional racism. The introduction of new development projects by the Indonesian government in the secluded area of West Papua has been environmentally destructive and wrought with economic injustice for the local peoples.<sup>27</sup> A controversial framework recently drafted by the Indonesian government has enflamed tensions as it plans to further divide Papua and West Papua into five new provinces, a move that has angered the Papuan People's Assembly as they argue that it would encourage further in-flow migration of Indonesians from other parts of the islands. This has caused concern amongst the Papuan people as conflict rises as a result of the competition over land and resources between the Indonesians and indigenous Papuans.<sup>28</sup> This is just one example of many independence movements globally that need to be addressed by the international community.

## **History:**

Over the past decade, there have been calls for expanding the United Nations' list of non-self-governing territories in order to bring attention to territories not traditionally labeled as such

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<sup>25</sup> Olivia Tasevski, "Indonesia Can't Quell West Papua's Growing Independence Movement," *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/18/west-papua-indonesia-jokowi-independence-movement-human-rights/>

<sup>26</sup> Tasevski, "Indonesia Can't Quell."

<sup>27</sup> Jason MacLeod, "The struggle for self-determination in West Papua (1969-present)," *International Center on Nonviolence Conflict*, March 2011, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/struggle-self-determination-west-papua-1969-present/>

<sup>28</sup> Sebastian Strangio, "Indonesian Governor in Papua Casts Doubt on Plan for New Provinces: Report," *The Diplomat*, May 30, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/indonesian-governor-in-papua-casts-doubt-on-plan-for-new-provinces-report/>

yet are fighting for the right to self-determination. In every corner of the globe, both new and historic movements for independence have arisen. Puerto Rico joins a growing list of territories that are calling for the right to self-determination. Since 1917, Puerto Rico has been a territory of the United States with its citizens receiving mainland citizenship. In 1952, Puerto Rico became a commonwealth which expanded the rights and funds granted to it.<sup>29</sup> As a result of the status change, the United Nations removed it from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1953. Though Puerto Rico is no longer considered an NSGT, it does not have full independence but rather a self-governing status. The issue of Puerto Rican right to self-determination has spanned decades as the issue of its status is raised both domestically and on the mainland. Supporters of the self-determination referendum in Puerto Rico argue that under the criteria established by the United Nations for self-governance, Puerto Rico does not meet the standards.<sup>30</sup> With this in mind, there needs to be greater international dialogue on the topic of ensuring that the right to self-determination is both fostered and actively encouraged. Many in the international community, especially in Latin America, have called upon the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization to review the case of Puerto Rico and ensure that the citizens' right to self-determination is guaranteed.

The Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2021<sup>iii</sup> was introduced in the United States House of Representatives. This bill would lay the groundwork for Puerto Ricans to vote on the political status of the territory which in turn would need to be ratified by the U.S. Congress. The bill would need to be passed in both the House and the Senate to be implemented, providing Puerto Rican voters the right to choose from three options: statehood, sovereignty in free association with the U.S., and full independence.<sup>31</sup> This new bill comes during a time of greater debate about the future of Puerto Rico's status and the desire of young people to have the right to self-determination. Support for Puerto Ricans' revived movement for self-determination has been supported internationally, most especially by the Special Committee on Decolonization as it

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<sup>29</sup> "Today in History – October 18," Library of Congress, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/october-18/>

<sup>30</sup> "The International Place of Puerto Rico," in *Developments in the Law*, 130 HARV. L. REV. 1616, 1656 (2017). <https://harvardlawreview.org/2017/04/the-international-place-of-puerto-rico/>

<sup>31</sup> Lilia Luciano and Cristina Corujo, "Lawmakers draft historic bill on Puerto Rico's territorial status," *CBS News*, May 23, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/puerto-rico-territorial-status-bill/>.

approved a resolution urging the United States government to promote the process.<sup>32</sup> Puerto Rico is just one of many that are seeking the right to self-determination, another notable example being Scotland.

Scotland provides a historic case of a people that have pushed for the right to self-determination for decades. The movement for Scottish independence has gained momentum over the past decade as there has been a renewed push to break away from the London-based British government. Scotland, in the past, had been colonized by England but its contemporary connection is a result of the conscious decision to join the union as an independent, sovereign kingdom through the Act of Union with the Kingdom of England in 1707. Since then, a key issue in the debate of Scotland's historic status stems from the controversy over its historic profiting off of Great Britain's colonial ambitions and its attempts to establish a Scottish colony in Panama.<sup>33</sup> But as decisions taken unilaterally by Westminster have produced negative consequences for the country, Scotland has sought to reinvigorate the debate of independence and the right to self-determination. Enshrined in the main political base of the Scottish National Party (SNP), the independence movement was put to a referendum vote in 2014. Ultimately, the referendum for independence failed with results showing 55.3% voting "No" and 44.7% voting "Yes". The issues that prevented the majority of Scots from voting in favor of independence were primarily focused on fears that an independent Scotland would have a weak economy, the issue of citizenship, the loss of the military, and the issue of currency.<sup>34</sup> Many Scots chose to remain with the United Kingdom as the country was still a member of the European Union (EU), resulting in the Scottish independence movement being put on hold. The issue of self-determination was revisited in 2016 after the Brexit vote.

In 2016, the United Kingdom voted in favor of leaving the European Union by a margin of just 4%. Though the whole of the UK voted in favor of leaving the EU, 62% of Scots voted in favor of staying. The argument made by First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP

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<sup>32</sup> "Special Committee on Decolonization Approves Resolution Calling upon United States to Promote Process for Puerto Rico's Self-Determination, Eventual Independence," United Nations, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/gacol3360.doc.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Allan Little, "The Caribbean colony that brought down Scotland," *BBC News*, May 18, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27405350>.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Mullen, "The Scottish Independence Referendum 2014," *Journal of Law and Society* 41, no. 4 (December 2014): 627-640. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43862407>

is that Scotland was forced to leave the EU against their will in a historic display of its right to self-determination being violated.<sup>35</sup> In light of the Brexit referendum, recent economic chaos, and controversy surrounding Prime Minister Boris Johnson during the COVID-19 pandemic, the SNP is pushing for a second referendum. Sturgeon has argued that the right to hold a second independence referendum is an “indisputable democratic mandate” that needs to be upheld in the protection of the right to self-determination.<sup>36</sup> UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has made it explicitly clear that Westminster does not intend to grant Scotland the section 30 order, which grants Holyrood the power to hold a referendum vote, anytime soon given the current state of world affairs. The Scottish government and people have argued that they have a right to choose their future and decide their fate.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of the challenges that the international community faces today, the right to self-determination needs to be upheld, encouraged, and protected. The United Nations recognizes the desire of peoples around the world to have their voices heard and have a say in the future of their country.

### **Analysis:**

The United Nations actively works to facilitate and advance the decolonization process globally. Conversations on expanding the list of territories of non-self-governed people the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples applies to have increased in recent decades as more communities have argued that their right to self-determination is nonexistent. This debate encourages the international community to take a closer look at the issue of unresolved movements for independence and redefine the traditional boundaries of colonialism. By expanding the list of territories, greater international attention and effort will be focused on ensuring that all people, in every corner of the Earth, have the right to self-determination. Through the Special Committee on Decolonization, multi-state dialogue is

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<sup>35</sup> Meilan Solly, “A Not-So-Brief History of Scottish Independence,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/brief-history-scottish-independence-180973928/>

<sup>36</sup> “Nicola Sturgeon unveils case for Scottish independence,” *BBC News*, June 14, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-61796883>

<sup>37</sup> “Scotland’s right to choose: putting Scotland’s future in Scotland’s hands,” Scottish Government, published December 19, 2019, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-right-choose-putting-scotlands-future-scotlands-hands/documents/>

encouraged to ensure the right of self-determination that is granted in the Charter of the United Nations is upheld internationally.

As geopolitical conflicts play out globally, the issue of newly occupied territories and groups that may become non-self-governing people arises. A framework must be in place to expand the traditional list in order to address this problem by guaranteeing the right of individuals to self-determination and the protection of human rights. The war in Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of Crimea, Donbas, and Luhansk by Russia creates a complex situation of occupation where the voices of the individuals may not be heard. The international community needs to ensure that people living within those newly occupied territories are granted the right to self-determination and the protection of their political rights. The same situation applies to Hong Kong with the expiration of the Basic Law in 2047, bringing into question what the future status of the territory will be. Under the Basic Law, the political structure has been “one country, two systems”. In recent years, the Chinese government has undermined Hong Kong’s independent system by oppressing its democratic sentiments through the use of violent force and political manipulation, bringing the issue of Hong Kong’s right to self-determination to the forefront. The United Nations and the international community must work together to address these areas of conflict to ensure that the rights of the people living there are protected. By expanding the list of territories that the Declaration applies to, it may create a structure through which these unique cases may be addressed.

### **Conclusion:**

The advancement of decolonization measures continues to be one of the United Nations' top priorities to this day. As the work towards fostering and facilitating the right of self-determination for the existing 17 NSGTs continues, we need to ensure that others are not left behind. As the geopolitical landscape becomes increasingly more complex, we must not digress on the mission of ensuring the full realization of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by widening the scope of what constitutes an NSGT.

## Question:

1. What is the current state of Scotland's right to self-determination, and how can the international community encourage dialogue between the Scottish and English governments?
2. How will expanding the list of territories/groups of non-self-governed people the Declaration applies to advance decolonization measures globally?
3. How can the international community support the independence sentiments held by those not included in the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories?

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<sup>i</sup> General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV)

<sup>ii</sup> The Third Committee covers issues of Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

<sup>iii</sup> Find the details of the proposed bill here: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2070>