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GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. RAKOTOMALALA (Madagascar) said that while his delegation did not wish to take a stand on the substance of the Mauritanian problem, it did not consider the solution sought by Morocco to be in keeping with the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations.

2. Furthermore, he disagreed with the Saudi Arabian representative’s assertion that the three ballots in which the Mauritanian people had been called upon to decide its future had been held under conditions of coercion. The referendum of September 1958, with which he was very familiar, had been held simultaneously throughout the French Union, an entity which had embraced some twenty territories covering more than 7 million square kilometres. It was hardly conceivable that military compulsion could have been employed over such a vast area. In his own electoral district, which had a population of more than 160,000, there had been no more than a dozen French policemen to maintain order. Accordingly, he was convinced that Mauritania’s decision to choose autonomy and, subsequently, independence had been a voluntary one.

3. With regard to the possibility that Mauritania might be prevented by its military agreements with France from deciding its own destinies, Mauritania would be free, once it was independent, to denounce any agreement calculated to impair its sovereignty or prevent it from fulfilling its obligations as a Member of the United Nations.

4. He appealed to Morocco to welcome Mauritania’s attainment of independence and entry into the United Nations. That country would then surely forge strong ties of friendship with Morocco, with which it was closely linked by blood, language, history and religion; and if it wished, the Mauritanian people could even request union with Morocco.

5. As for the two companies set up with foreign capital which were to develop Mauritania’s mineral resources, he failed to see why, at a time when the under-developed countries were calling for foreign investment, Mauritania should be reproached and denied independence because foreign capital had been attracted by its undeveloped resources.

6. At a time when it was demanding the liberation of peoples still under foreign domination, the General Assembly should not refuse to welcome the advent of Mauritania, to which France was to grant full national sovereignty on 28 November 1960.

7. Mr. RIFA’I (Jordan) said that the problem of Mauritania was one involving a threat to the sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of Morocco. Mauritania was an area in which Arab civilization and Islamic thought had long flourished. Under the rule of the Al-Murabitun (Almoravide) dynasty, starting in the year 1053, the territory extending south from the northern coast of Morocco to the Senegal River had formed a single entity.

8. The French representative, in his statement at the 1109th meeting, had rejected the Moroccan argument based on the common religious heritage and the affinities between the Arab and Berber peoples. However, it was largely the Muslim religion and the Arab language which had produced an Arab nation extending from the Tigris River in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. It was to be noted that France saw enough in the relations between France and Algeria, including that resulting from military conquest, to justify treating them as a single nation; yet it denied the existence of unifying factors in the case of Morocco and Mauritania.

9. Like the attempt to establish a French State on Algerian territory and the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine, the present French policy in regard to Mauritania was part of the constant effort to keep the Arab world divided. The Arabs believed that their independence could not be protected without unity, just as unity could not be secured without independence.

10. France’s military occupation of Mauritania in no sense gave it the right to determine that country’s destiny. Furthermore, the French conquest of Mauritania, starting with exploratory expeditions in the early nineteenth century and culminating in the military invasion of 1902, had always been firmly resisted both by the Mauritanian people and by the Sultans of Morocco, to whom at that time the Mauritanians had owed allegiance. In the French-Moroccan war begun in 1902, the Mauritanian forces had been commanded by Moulay Idris, the Sultan’s uncle. It was also significant that armed resistance had continued in several parts of Mauritania until 1934, fourteen years after that country’s annexation by France; that Moroccan sovereignty over Mauritania had never been challenged by any Power prior to the French invasion; that Morocco’s boundaries had never been defined by any treaty in such a way as to exclude any part of Mauritania; that the transformation of Mauritania
into a French colony in 1920 had been contrary to France's pledge, in the Protectorate Treaty/ which it had imposed on Morocco in 1912, to respect the sovereignty of the Moroccan Kingdom; and that Morocco had continued to assert its claim to Mauritanian throughout the period of that country's occupation. After Morocco's attainment of independence, on 2 March 1956, the mixed commission set up to discuss the delimitation of the frontiers of Morocco had been unable to meet because of the unco-operative stand taken by France, which had barred from the agenda the question of territories under the sovereignty of France and the States members of the French Community.

11. The problem of Mauritanian could not be regarded as a separate question of recent origin, for France's refusal to relinquish control over Mauritania had long constituted an infringement of Morocco's territorial integrity and, since 2 March 1956, of its independence. Morocco was not seeking to deny Mauritania its independence, but was unwilling to approve a fictitious grant of independence which served to destroy Moroccan unity. France should withdraw from Mauritania forthwith, so that Morocco could restore its sovereignty in its southern territory just as it had done in the northern zone, in the international zone of Tanger and in Tarfaya in the south. That would enable both Mauritania and Morocco to enjoy genuine independence. Moroccan sovereignty over the territory enclosed by Algeria, French West Africa and the Spanish colony of Rio de Oro had been recognized by the Anglo-Moroccan Agreement respecting the purchase by Morocco of the property of the North-West Africa Company in Tarfaya, signed at Cape Juby on 13 March 1895; the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Spain and Morocco, signed at Tetuan on 26 April 1860, which contained an article relating to the area of Ifni; the General Act of the International Conference of Algeciras of 7 April 1906; and the Convention between France and Germany respecting Morocco, signed at Berlin on 4 November 1911. The problem of Mauritanian involved the principle of political independence and territorial integrity, one which the Members of the United Nations were pledged to respect and protect. The First Committee must take action before 28 November, when the unity of a nation was to be shattered by the dictates of a foreign military power.

12. Mr. GALLIN-DOUATHE (Central African Republic) said that the Mauritanian question was a paradoxical one, and unique in United Nations history; as a matter of common sense, it should not have been discussed in the First Committee at all. At a time when nearly all the former African colonies were emerging as independent and sovereign States, it was strange to find the independent African State of Morocco laying claim to the territory of the autonomous State of Mauritania, which stood on the very threshold of full independence. While it was true that the two States were linked by ethnic, linguistic and religious affinities, there was nothing to justify a political union between them based on tenuous historical and geographical considerations. Whatever the validity of the case put forward by Morocco, there could be no question of the annexation of part or all of Mauritania. In the atomic age, in any event, territorial claims were an absurdity.

13. In 1960, the "year of Africa", a year in which the colonial Powers were to consummate the task of promoting the progressive development of their colonies towards independence, as most of them had already done most honourably, it was inconceivable that an African nation which enjoyed full sovereignty and membership in the United Nations should stand in the way of the complete emancipation of the African continent. The linguistic, cultural and religious affinities and the bonds of sentiment between Morocco and Mauritania could strengthen the relations between those two sovereign States; similarly, the two countries could complement each other economically; but that should not be allowed to prejudice Mauritania's attainment of independence. The Mauritanian people had come of age and should be allowed to decide their own future in full sovereignty and independence, as provided by the United Nations Charter. The Central African Republic had a considerable admiration and sympathy for the courageous and liberal Moroccan people, and was confident that as an African nation, Morocco would not oppose the emergence on 28 November of the last country of the Franco-African community as an independent State.

14. Mr. BOUCETTA (Morocco), exercising his right of reply, said he wished to dispel the confusion which appeared to exist in the Committee, and in particular, to relieve the conscience of delegations which believed that by supporting the position of Morocco they would be denying the legitimate aspirations of Mauritania to freedom and independence and thus acting in defiance of the principles of the United Nations Charter.

15. Morocco had always held national independence to be a sacred and inalienable right. It had won its own independence after much struggle and sacrifice, and would continue to fight for the emancipation of all colonial peoples. However, the real question before the Committee was whether it should allow a colonial Power falsely to invoke the pretext of independence in order to divide a people, dismember a nation and impose the territorial integrity of a State. There was no need to proclaim the so-called independence of Mauritania on 28 November, under the protection of tanks and machine-guns; it had already been proclaimed on 16 November 1955 by King Mohammed V, when he had announced that all the provinces of Morocco were and would thenceforth be free and independent.

16. Through patient negotiation, Morocco had, in the years following that proclamation of independence, gradually reclaimed the various parts of its territory. On 2 March 1956, France had restored to it an area formerly under protectorate; on 7 April 1956, Spain had handed over the four provinces constituting Northern Morocco; on 30 October 1956, after negotiation with eight Powers, the province of Tanger had been recovered; in 1957, Cap Spartel had become part of Morocco; and in April 1958, Spain had restored the province of Tarfaya, which extended to a point 700 kilometres from the Oued Noun.

17. It was significant that on 15 November, the very day when the debate on the Mauritanian problem had begun in the First Committee and when the repre-
sentative of France had called upon all States to allow Mauritania to become independent in peace and to be master of its own destinies. General Bourgiraud, the rapporteur of the Committee on National Defence of the French National Assembly, had told that Assembly that the French military installations in Mauritania were the only safeguard of the new nation’s independence, indeed of its very existence. He had stressed the need for the maintenance in Mauritania of a permanent military cover of French troops based at five strategic points in the country, and for the immediate conclusion of the military defence agreements with the new Government. Such was the independence which France was granting to Mauritania. As King Mohammed V had said on 18 November 1960, the pseudo-independence granted to Mauritania was nothing more than a trap, whose purpose was not only to sever Mauritania from its mother country, but to exploit its wealth and use it as an artificial barrier between Morocco and its African neighbours—whereas Mauritania had throughout history served as a bridge with Africa south of the Sahara—and to convert it into a strategic base threatening the security of the Maghrib and of all of Africa.

18. He called upon the members of the Committee to consider the Mauritanian problem as one involving the violation of a basic principle of the Charter: respect for the territorial integrity of States.

19. Mr. ARY (Niger) said that independence could not be denied to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. African independence was indivisible; the same rights and the same morality applied to all peoples, and the peoples of Africa had not been freed from colonial rule only to be subjected to a new domination. An African country would be betraying the cause of African independence if it used its privileges as a Member of the United Nations to deprive other African peoples of the benefits of freedom, or to promote their annexation or partition. The delegation of Niger regretted that the Mauritanian question had been raised and was being debated. The debate revealed the dangers threatening the independence of the new nations and showed how the United Nations might be misled if its authority were to be invoked to sanction territorial claims. If Morocco’s claims were upheld, any country would be able to jeopardize the sovereignty of a neighbouring country by similarly bringing before the Organization some purely artificial problem designed to cast doubt on the legality of a Government effectively exercising power.

20. Mauritania was a nation with a long history and an age-old culture, with borders well established in fact and in law. Since 1948, it had progressively acquired democratic institutions, a Parliament elected by universal suffrage and a responsible Government. On 28 November 1958, its Parliament had freely chosen statehood and had proclaimed the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Within a few days, Mauritania’s independence would be consummated and it would apply for admission to membership in the United Nations. Yet, precisely at the moment when Mauritania stood on the threshold of full freedom, another African State, already sovereign and independent, which had no common frontier with Mauritania—as could easily be seen from the map—was asking the United Nations to deny admittance to the new applicant.

21. His delegation recognized that Mauritania had close ties with Senegal and Morocco. They were similar to the ties which bound Niger to the other countries of the Entente-Dahomey, the Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta—or, for example, to the Federation of Nigeria. Such ties offered the hope of close co-operation between the nations concerned, but they could in no case justify political unions or associations contrary to the will of their peoples.

22. As the Prime Minister of the Federation of Nigeria had stated in his address at the 83rd plenary meeting of the General Assembly, the frontiers of the countries of Africa, although they had been created artificially by the colonial Powers, should be left undisturbed; only thus could an atmosphere of confidence be created in which sovereign and independent States would be able to negotiate effectively on all matters of common interest. It was within those frontiers that African nationalism had developed and unless they were respected there could be no peace and stability on the continent of Africa. It was interesting to note that at a meeting recently held in Tunis, representatives of trade unions affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions from thirty-eight African countries had accepted that fact by adopting with only five negative votes a motion recognizing the independence of Mauritania.

23. As for the will of the people of Mauritania, that had been expressed freely, by universal suffrage, in favour of the independence of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. It would be a blatant injustice to deny to the last of the Republics of former French West Africa the right to recover its sovereignty, when sovereignty had been granted to all the other members of the French Community in Africa. Surely the United Nations would not wish to compel the people of Mauritania to sacrifice their blood in fratricidal struggles to achieve their independence, or needlessly to create another Congo situation in Africa.

24. The solidarity of the nations of Africa must be based on mutual respect for sovereignty. Any ties between them must be the result of negotiation, and should be established with the consent of the peoples concerned. In view of the statements made by the head of the Mauritanian Government that Mauritania desired to be a bridge between the Maghrib and Africa south of the Sahara, it was to be hoped that the new independent State would establish peaceful and friendly relations with all the other countries of Africa.

25. Mr. SON SANN (Cambodia) said that he had listened attentively to the statements made on the problem of Mauritania. Both sides had invoked the argument of the right of self-determination in support of their case. Thus, there was common ground between them which might provide a basis for seeking an equitable solution. A referendum had already been held in Mauritania, and the freely expressed wishes of the people would have to be respected. Cambodia was entirely in favour of the principle of self-determination; but if one of the parties challenged the conduct—not the principle—of the referendum, the best course would be to hold a fresh referendum under the supervision of the United Nations, so as to ascertain the real wishes of the people and determine whether there were any questions which should be settled before Mauritania attained independence or became reunited with Morocco. Only that course
would ensure that the future the Mauritanians desired for themselves would evolve in an atmosphere of lasting peace and confidence. For no institution would be stable unless it satisfied all the aspirations of the Mauritanians themselves.

26. Mr. FEKNI (Libya) said that his delegation had supported the inclusion of the item concerning Mauri-
tania in the Committee’s agenda in the belief that it was the duty of the United Nations to assist in the peaceful settlement of the Mauritanian question before the world was confronted with a “fait accompli”. The situation was fraught with dangers, and in such situations, as Libya knew from its own experience in the years preceding its independence, any preventive action by the United Nations was particularly necessary. For only after long struggle and with the assistance of the United Nations had Libya been able to realize its aspirations for national unity and territorial integrity, despite the dividing tactics and intrigues of foreign Powers. Since attaining its independence, Libya had made it a duty to give full support to all peoples who were struggling for their independence and sovereignty. Thus, while it had rejoiced at the triumph of a number of African States which had gained admittance to the United Nations, it could only regret that similar progress had not been made towards settling the problem of Algeria.

27. Those who tried to represent one of the parties to the present dispute, and its supporters, as seeking to prevent an African territory from gaining independence were not only distorting the issue but hoping to sow the seeds of discord throughout the new Africa. Libya, which had Africa’s true interests at heart, would continue to work for co-operation and solidarity among its peoples.

28. The facts of the situation were quite clear. On the eve of its independence, Morocco had been divided into a number of areas under French or Spanish administration. National sovereignty should have been extended de jure to all the regions of which Morocco had been made up before 1912; it would be recalled in that connection that the signatories to the Act of Algeciras of 1906 had solemnly pledged themselves to accept the principle of the independence of the Sultan and the liberty of his domains. In March and April 1956, following the declaration of independence, Morocco had sought the restitution of all the territories to which it had a claim under international treaties and agreements. Its claims had been confirmed by the fact that until the imposition of the protectorate in 1912, the Sultan had continuously exercised sovereignty over all his domains.

29. Owing to the negative attitude of the French Government, the mixed commission established to delimit the frontiers of Morocco had been unable to begin its work. Then, in a note of 20 January 1960, the French Government had stated that it intended to exclude from the frontiers discussion the territories which were under the sovereignty of France and the States members of the French Community. That unilateral action had set up a serious obstacle to the projected negotiations on the Moroccan frontiers. For its part, the Moroccan Government had continued to protest to France, to other countries and to international organizations whenever France, in defiance of its pledges, had engaged in actions impairing Mor-
occo’s territorial integrity. Having tried all peace-
ful means, Morocco had finally decided to take the matter to the United Nations, in the hope that Mem-
ers would exercise their responsibilities and pre-
vant a dangerous situation from arising in the part of Africa concerned. Libya was particularly concerned over the situation, in view of its geographical posi-
tion and the traditional ties it had with the countries bordering on the Sahara. It earnestly desired to see peace and security established in the area, and hoped that the question would be settled in accordance with the true wishes of the peoples concerned, who from time immemorial had aspired to Moroccan unity.

30. The Libyan delegation had therefore paid close attention to the statements made by the opposing sides, and to the pertinent documents. The representative of Morocco had clearly demonstrated that, geographically, Morocco’s natural frontier to the south was the Senegal River, and had had no difficulty in refuting arguments to the contrary. Certain mem-
bers had asked what was the reason for the dis-
continuity shown on the map between the northern and southern regions of Morocco. The explanation was very simple: the Power which had exercised con-
control over that part of Africa had drawn up and altered maps to suit its own convenience and to anticipate situations such as the present one.

31. From the historical point of view, it was clear that for centuries the spiritual and temporal authority of the sovereigns of Morocco had extended as far as the Senegal River.

32. From the legal standpoint, too, there could be no doubt that Morocco had exercised continuous and effective jurisdiction over Mauritania. The Mauri-
tanian emirs and chiefs enjoyed the respect and obedience of the people, and had always stated that they derived their authority from the sovereigns of Morocco. Moreover, in moments of danger the emirs had appealed to the Sultan of Morocco for protection.

33. Thus Libya did not agree that Morocco had placed the Mauritanian problem in a false historical perspective, as had been alleged. No one denied that the independence of African countries formerly under French domination had been granted on the basis of existing frontiers. But Morocco’s independence had been granted on the understanding that the entire Moroccan State, as it had existed up to 1912 and as it had been explicitly guaranteed by the Act of Alge-
ciras, would be restored. As a territorial entity, that State embodied the aspirations of both its northern and its southern populations which, throughout the present century, had constantly shown their desire for reunification. The peoples of both regions made up a single ethnical, religious and linguistic com-

34. The Moroccan case was thus supported by rea-
sons even more compelling than those based on geography, history or ethnic affinity: it was backed by the will of the people concerned. During the deci-

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sentative, King Mohammed V, during his years of exile. Moreover, their elected representatives had persisted with equal courage in voicing their people's aspirations in the French Parliament and other political forums. Among the outstanding personalities who, by their presence in Morocco, had sought to show Mauritania's adherence to the great Moroccan family, there was the Moroccan Ambassador to Libya—a genuine Moroccan nationalist who had been born in Mauritania. If Mr. horma Ould Babana had chosen to leave Mauritania, it had not been because of electoral defeat—as had been insinuated—but because he had conscientiously carried out his duties as representative of Mauritania. Between 1946 and 1951, when Morocco had been unable to speak freely, he had persistently upheld Mauritania's ties with Morocco, emphasizing that he represented Mauritania as a Moroccan province. In 1947 he had come to the defence of King Mohammed V when the latter had been attacked by certain French deputies after having publicly demanded the independence of his country. In 1950 he had gone even further and demanded the unification of Mauritania with Morocco. Mr. Horma Ould Babana was typical of countless other Mauritanian leaders who had braved death, imprisonment or banishment for their patriotic views. Far from being embittered by electoral failure, Mr. Horma Ould Babana had actually been victorious in both the 1951 and 1956 elections.

35. France's attempts to conceal its self-interest under the cloak of independence would deceive no one. However, the Mauritanians greeted the proclamation of Independence on 28 November, their real feelings of joy would be displayed on the day when their aspirations for the national unity and territorial integrity of Morocco were fulfilled. Pending that event, the United Nations should seriously weigh its responsibilities; it should reflect well before taking its decision. The issue involved in the problem of Mauritania was the violation of the integrity of a Member State by another Member State, against the wishes of the peoples concerned. Accordingly, the United Nations, in urging the two parties to seek a peaceful solution through negotiation, should refuse to endorse any unilateral action which would constitute such a violation and would create a dangerous situation not only in North Africa but also in the rest of Africa and of the world in general. Far from harbouring expansionist designs, Morocco was seeking by peaceful means to defend its territorial integrity against outside intrigue.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.