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REPORT ON THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S  
MISSION TO THE CANARY ISLANDS

presented by  
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REPORT ON THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S MISSION TO THE CANARY ISLANDS5 - 8 JUNE 1981

The Secretary-General left Geneva on Friday, 5 June 1981 for Madrid on a fact-finding mission on the situation in the Canary Islands. The Secretary-General, accompanied by other members of the General Secretariat, was welcomed at the Madrid International Airport by Mr. Carlos Robles Piquer, Secretary of State of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by other senior officials of that Ministry.

2. On that same day, the Secretary-General met the President of the Government, Mr. Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo. The two men discussed matters relating to the situation in the Canary Islands. Prior to their meeting, the Secretary-General held discussions with the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jose Pedro Perez Llorca. Present at that meeting were the Secretary of State, the Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as senior officials of that Ministry. After welcoming the Secretary-General, the Minister reviewed the situation prevailing on the Canary Islands and underscored the historical, economic, cultural and linguistic links existing between the Islands and Spain. The Minister added that the Islands were an integral part of Spain although one could feel among the population some desire for autonomy for the Canaries. The Secretary-General, for his part, informed the Minister of the purpose of his mission. He said the question of the Canaries had been discussed on several occasions at the meetings of the OAU, hence his mission to the Canary Islands.

Moreover, the Council of Ministers had clearly decided at most of its Sessions that the Secretary-General should go to Spain in order to visit the Canary Islands for on-the-spot information and to submit a detailed report to the Council.

3. The following morning, the Secretary-General and members of his Secretariat were welcomed at the airport at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, capital of Tenerife, by the Governor of the Island, the Mayor of the City and senior officials of the local Government. The Secretary of State Mr. Robles and the Director-General in charge of International Organizations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were with the OAU delegation until the end of its mission.



4. Soon on his arrival, the Secretary-General proceeded to the Santa Cruz de Tenerife Town Hall where he held discussions with the Mayor, senior local Government officials and regional representatives of the political parties in the Tenerife Island. The Mayor gave a short speech to welcome the Secretary-General to Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

5. The Secretary-General later met with CABILDO members on the Tenerife Island at the CABILDO headquarters. The Governor of the Island, representative of the political parties on the Island and members of the local government were present. CABILDO is the local government of the Island. Several members of CABILDO who spoke said the Canary Islands were part of Spain and emphasized their identity with Spain. They said, antropologically, historically and culturally, the people of the Canary Islands were european and that the Islands were characteristically an euroepan entity. The speakers added that for administrative and economic reasons, they were seeking regional autonomy while remaining attached to Spain.

6. In the afternoon of that same day, the Secretary-General met at the headquarters of CABILDO de Tenerife, various representatives of the political parties, representatives of the Trade Unions and of the Chamber of Commerce.

MEETING WITH THE REGIONAL PRESIDENT, MR. JUAN JULIO FERNANDEZ AND THE PROVINCIAL PRESIDENT, MR. ZENON MASCARENO, OF THE "UNION DU CENTRE DEMOCRATIQUE" (U.C.D.) (CENTRAL DEMOCRATIC UNION), THE RULING PARTY IN SPAIN

7. The U.C.D. won 56.5% of all the votes in the Canaries during the last elections held in 1979. That Party therefore had 9 seats of Deputies and 10 seats of Senators in the Spanish Parliament.

The two personalities affirmed that the Canary Islands were part of Spain because the people of the Islands were of Spanish and european origin, and that the Islands had european features. They said that their Party which was the ruling Party in Spain had a majority representation in five out of the seven islands constituting the country. They added that to enable them have administrative powers over their affairs, the Islands should become autonomous and that the administrative decentralization should be effected as in the other regions of Spain. According to those officials only a handful of people were seeking independence, who were directed and financed from abroad.



REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "PARTI SOCIALISTE OUVRIER ESPAGNOL" (P.S.O.E.)  
(SPANISH SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY)

8. During the last elections held in 1979, the PSOE won 17% of the total votes in the Canary Islands. That Party therefore had 3 seats of Deputies and one Senatorial seat in the Spanish Parliament.

9. The representatives of the Socialist Party said they were Spanish, that the Islands were Spanish in character and that their peoples identified themselves with Spain. They declared that the population enjoyed freedom of expression, and that during elections, they voted freely for national Parties just like the rest of Spain. When they were asked whether they wanted autonomy or independence, they said that they formed an integral part of Spain but that they wanted autonomy within Spain. Only a minority of the population sought the independence of the Islands. The population of the Canaries wanted to live in peaceful co-existence with neighbouring African States and would want to see its co-operation strengthened with the African continent. The representatives of the Socialist Party were against Spain joining NATO. They expressed the hope that the question of Western Sahara would be solved soon.

10. The representatives of the Socialist Party observed that despite the high degree of industrial development, there were still economic problems. Regarding employment opportunities, some inhabitants of the Island felt there was discrimination in that area and that good jobs were offered to natives of the mainland. Consequently, that argument was being used against Spain. The representatives of the Socialist Party pointed out that those economic problems were not Spain's responsibility as an entity but of the Spanish Government.

11. When asked whether all the Parties were unanimous on the question of autonomy, the Socialist Party representatives replied that their Party was thinking of a form of Federation with Spain in the future. One representative stated that since OAU gave attention to a small insignificant Party, the Organization should also take cognizance of the wishes of the majority of the people of the Canary Islands.



TWO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

12. The Communist Party won 8% of the total votes during the 1979 elections in the Canary Islands. The representatives of that Party intimated that relations with Spain were not of a colonial nature. The islands were characteristically Spanish and the inhabitants favoured autonomy. However, the status of autonomy would have to be approved by the inhabitants of the Canary Islands before being presented to the Spanish Congress. They said they feared the possibility of Spain joining NATO because of the possible establishment of military bases in the Canaries.

13. The Communist Party representatives reported that the population of the Canary Islands was made up of peoples of Spanish descent and a cross-breed of Spaniards and the natives. All the inhabitants of the Canaries speak Spanish and shared Spanish and European cultures. According to the Communists, the Canaries were not part of the African continent and African culture was non-existent on the Islands. There were historical links between the peoples of the Canaries and the Saharawis however, the only historical relationship they had with Africa was economic. The Communist Party representatives declared that they supported POLISARIO in its struggle for independence.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "UNION DU PEUPLE DES CANARIES" (U.P.C.) (CANARY PEOPLE'S UNION) A COALITION OF THE SMALL POLITICAL PARTIES ON THE ISLANDS

14. During the 1979 elections, the U.P.C. coalition won 11% of the total votes in the Canary Islands. Several representatives of the U.P.C. spoke and declared self-determination as their objective. When questioned as to what they meant by "self-determination", they replied that they wanted to be autonomous within Spain and not independence. They explained that the Spanish Constitution did not provide for the independence of the Canary Islands. They said the economic structure of the Islands was colonial in nature and that the population of the islands suffered from job discrimination. They noted that the U.P.C. coalition represented a total of 60,000 votes on all the Islands.

15. A member of MPAIAC declared that his Party wanted the independence for the Canaries and that it fully identified itself with Africa. The MPAIAC representative contended that there was repression on the Islands and that certain people could not express their opinion freely. He presented a specimen of his Movement's flag to the OAU Secretary-General.



REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LAGUNA UNIVERSITY

16. The representatives of the University spoke of the activities of the University founded in 1927. They talked about the exchanges of programmes between the Island's University and certain European and American Universities. Consequently, European students were sent by their Universities for courses in astronomy. Regarding political activities on the islands, the representatives of the University said they had been low-keyed since the change of Government in Spain. To their mind, the inhabitants of the Islands feared the economic consequences of the possibility of Spain joining the European Economic Community, a decision about which the people of the Canaries should be consulted.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "ALLIANCE POPULAIRE" (A.P.) (POPULAR ALLIANCE)

17. The Popular Alliance is a conservative Party which obtained 8% of the votes in the Islands. The spokes-man of this group declared that his Party fully identified itself with Spain. He however commented on the special features of the islands. He noted that the inhabitants wanted administrative decentralization which would not mar the national unity. The administrative structure of each of the Islands should be strengthened. The spokesman of the "Alliance Populaire" revealed that the MPAIAC movement which was operating from abroad was launched by certain African governments to destabilize NATO's southern wing. The "Alliance Populaire" favoured Spain's entry into NATO. The spokesman added that for political reasons, the radical parties were adopting a position which endangered the national unity of Spain. Asked whether his party would like to co-operate with Africa, the spokesman replied in the affirmative, adding that his Party was for co-operation especially with West Africa, particularly, in the field of maritime activities.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

18. The representatives of the Chamber of Commerce pointed out that agricultural production on the islands was inadequate and that trade between the islands was highly developed. The islands also exported agricultural produce to certain European countries, especially the United Kingdom. The representatives of the Chamber of Commerce felt that Spain's entry into the European Economic Community would help increase the island's exports to Europe. They added that Spain maintained close economic relations with Europe. Asked whether the population of the islands opted for independence, the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce replied that five years ago, there was a feeling for self-determination; however, things had changed ever since. At present, they said, only a minority of the population advocating the independence of the Islands.



LE PARTINATIONALISTE DES ILES (THE ISLANDS' NATIONALIST PARTY)

19. The spokesmen of that party declared that the people of the Islands had Spanish and European heritage. They pointed out that the Canary Islands were Spanish in spite of their geographical proximity with Africa. The inhabitants would like to live in peaceful co-existence and in co-operation with Africa. The nationalists stressed that they wanted to maintain the neutrality of the Islands and were therefore opposed to Spain joining NATO. They declared that they wanted autonomy within Spain.

REPORT ON THE MISSION TO LAS PALMAS

20. The Secretary-General and members of his delegation arrived in Las Palmas in the morning of 7 June 1981. They immediately began hearing the various representatives of the political parties and other organized groups. The first meeting was held with the representatives of the Municipal Council. After the introductions, the Secretary-General briefly explained the purpose of his mission organized at the invitation of the Government of Spain so as to hear the views of the inhabitants of the Canary Islands to their status and political future.

21. The Secretary-General stressed that he had undertaken the mission without any pre-conceived idea and that he was prepared to listen to all points of view. The following groups represented on the Municipal Council made statements.



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REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "UNION DU PEUPLE DES CANARIENS" (U.P.C.)  
(CANARY PEOPLE'S UNION)

22. Like the representatives of this party at Tenerife, the UPC representative in Las Palmas talked about self-determination and preferred not to mention independence which was not provided for in the constitution. The UPC representative was of the opinion that the Islands had been colonized by Spain because of their strategic importance, and that that dependence had impeded the development of the identity of the Canaries. UPC opted for the neutrality of the Canary Islands and its representative said that the Islands should not be used as platform for launching attacks against progressive African states. The UPC representative emphasized the need to establish peace by getting rid of colonialism and imperialism.

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE "PARTI SOCIALISTE" (P.S.O.E.)  
(THE SOCIALIST PARTY)

23. The representative of this party took the same stance as his colleague at Tenerife; namely, to obtain for the Canary Islands a greater autonomy under the 1977 Spanish constitution. Such autonomy was necessary especially in the financial, economic and cultural fields so as to preserve the identity of the Canary Islands. The representative of the Socialist Party expressed the wish that there would be a close co-operation between the Islands and the neighbouring African states, particularly with Western Sahara whose self-determination, he hoped, would be obtained



peacefully and quickly so that the fishermen from the Canary Islands would no longer be subjected to attacks.

"UNION CENTRE DEMOCRATIQUE" (U.C.D.)  
(CENTRAL DEMOCRATIC UNION)

24. The representative of the UCD, which is the ruling party in Spain said that UCD had the majority within the Municipal Council and the "CABILDO". Even though the Canary Islands had had trade links with Latin America and Africa, their Spanish and European characteristics could not be denied. He went on to say that as far as his party was concerned, autonomy simply meant administrative decentralization, and that while the democrats favoured co-operation with the neighbouring African countries, they were totally against separation of the Islands from Spain.

25. The Canary People's Union was no power to reckon with and the MPAIAC which was advocating independence was virtually non-existent in the Canary Islands. The representative of that movement stressed that the Canary had never been colonized but rather conquered by the King of Spain in the 15th century and that the Islands had always been an integral part of Spain. Even the United Nations had never considered them as a colonial territory.

26. To conclude this exchange of views, the Mayor of the Las Palmas pointed out that the majority of the people of the municipality considered the Canary Islands as an integral part of



Spain and that only a minority of the people was in favour of separation.

MEETING WITH VARIOUS PARTY MEMBERS OF THE "JUNTA CANARIOS"

27. In the afternoon, the Secretary-General and members of his delegation held a long session at the "CABILDO" Headquarters, during which many other representatives were heard. Below is the summary of the views expressed.

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CANARIES COMMUNIST PARTY

28. The representative of the Communist Party repeated what his colleague had already said; namely that, even though geographically the Canary Islands formed part of Africa, they were an integral part of Spain from the ethnic, economic and cultural view points. Consequently, internal political problems concerned exclusively Spain. The Communist Party favoured autonomy for the Islands under the Spanish constitution, but the inhabitants of the Islands must be consulted on the issue beforehand. The representative of the Community Party pointed out that the Canary Islands had always been subjected to the hegemonic powers which controlled the Atlantic Ocean, adding that he understood why the African countries were opposed to those powers. His party was therefore against the use of the Islands as a NATO base. Only the Spanish forces should be on the Islands; NATO and supranational forces should not be allowed to station there.



"PARTI DU PAYS CANARIEN" (PARTY OF THE "CANARIAN COUNTRY")  
(Partido del Pais Canario)

29. This party, according to its representative, came fourth in the elections held at Las Palmas. Despite their geographical proximity to Africa, the Islands formed part of Spain, historically and politically. During the Spanish conquest, the Islands had no political structure worthy of the name. The Europeans had transferred their culture to the Islands and over the centuries the inhabitants of those Islands had become Europeans. His party therefore favoured cooperation with neighbouring states but was against the independence of the Canary Islands because the Islands had no national identity and there was no social or economic basis to justify such an independence.

"UNION DU PEUPLE DES CANARIES (U.P.C.)  
(THE CANARY PEOPLE'S UNION)

30. The UPC representatives were once again heard. They reiterated their party's belief in a policy of self-determination and close economic and cultural co-operation with Africa. The people of the Canary Islands had becoming gradually aware of their African origin, the liberation struggle and the measures being undertaken against the establishment of military bases on the Canary Islands which they considered as instruments of imperialism. The MPAIAC was not involved in the UPC coalition in which could be found not only autonomists but also a group which favoured independence.



SOCIALIST PARTY (P.S.O.E.)

31. The representative of the Socialist Party intimated that his party's views had already been sufficiently expressed during an earlier intervention.

WORKERS UNION (S.O.T.)

32. The SOT representative, the Minority Workers' Association said that the trade union firmly supported the right to self-determination as recognized by the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations, and stressed that according to the constitution it was illegal to advocate independence. The SOT representative questioned the impartiality of the administering authorities which, in his opinion, had not adequately informed all the parties about the Secretary-General's visit. According to the SOT representative, the Islands formed part of Africa, and the Guanches, despite being the Spanish, Portuguese and British blood had a legitimate right to self-determination.

WORKERS' COMMITTEES

33. The representative of the Workers' Committees, the second largest trade union of the Islands, declared that the Canaries formed an integral part of Spain. He, however, added that he was in favour of regional autonomy. The Organisation of Workers' Committees wanted co-operation with the neighbouring states and was opposed to Spain joining the NATO so as to avoid the danger that it might constitute for Africa.



UNION GENERALE DES TRAVAILLEURS (U.G.T.)(GENERAL WORKERS' UNION)

34. This Union which had won 35% of the votes during the last trade union elections is the largest trade union. The UGT representative declared that his Organization was affiliated to the General Workers' Union of Spain and Europe, and that the UGT was opposed to independence since the Canary Islands were profoundly Spanish in character despite their geographical appurtenance to Africa. In his view, the parties that wanted independence were in a minority attempting to use the OAU to portray a bad image of the Canary Islands. The Islands were neither historically, culturally nor ethnically African, but European.

INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION OF THE CANARIES

35. According to the representative of this Association, the Islands had special geographical features which, taken together with the fact that the Islands serve as a free-port, encouraged industrialisation. The population of the Islands, though geographically part of Africa, was European and its culture had been so during the last five centuries. From the industrial point of view, independence was out of the question. Nonetheless, it might be possible to support a demand for economic autonomy, but to separate the Islands from Spain was out of the question.



AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATION

36. The representative of this Association intimated that members of the Agricultural Association considered themselves more Spanish than the inhabitants of certain provinces on the mainland; for, they had been attached to Spain before the latter. Only a tiny minority wanted the independence of the Islands.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

37. The representatives of the Chamber of Commerce maintained that the Africanity of the Canaries was an artificial problem created by a minority which wanted power. The Islands were linked to Spain commercially and culturally; and, even on matters of independence, they would rather lean towards Europe and America than towards Africa.

DEMOCRATIC COALITION (Popular Alliance)

38. The representative of this coalition reiterated what his counterpart had already said to the members of the delegation; namely, that the members of his Organisation considered the Canary Islands as an integral part of Spain. The persistent interference in the Spanish and Canarian affairs by Algeria through her support and military aid to MPAICA as Free Radio of the Canaries would bear out, tended to create an Anti-Africa sentiment while the coalition wished to strengthen relations with Africa. The members of the Association were in favour of autonomy because of the distance separating the Islands from



Spain, but that process should aim solely at helping to simplify the administrative procedures and should not constitute a factor of disintegrating Spain.

THE NATIONALIST PARTY OF THE CANARIES (P.N.C.)

39. - The representative of the Nationalist Party of the Canaries said that his party drew its power from the Spanish Constitution. Members of the PNC also supported full neutrality for the Islands except the presence of Spanish troops.

THE CONFEDERATION OF WORKERS OF THE CANARIES (C.T.C.)

40. The representative of this group expressed his disappointment at the way the meeting was organised. He alleged that the representatives of his group were arrested as they were trying to present their points of view.

41. The representatives of the CTC, were of the opinion that the Canary Islands were basically an African country colonized by Europeans, geographically and economically as well as culturally and militarily. The migrational patterns have tended to reinforce this premise. The economy was totally dependent and the population of the Islands did not participate in the decision-making process. According to the representatives of the CTC autonomy was not the solution to the problem because that was merely another form of domination. The only solution was decolonisation through a process of self-determination.



since it was legally impossible to speak of independence under the provisions of the Spanish Constitution.

#### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The Canary Islands are composed of: Tenerife, Grande Canary, Lanzarote, Gomera, Las Palmas and Hierro.

The population is about one and a half million (1.5 m.) the majority of whom live in the Tenerife and Grande Canary. The other islands are not as densely populated as Tenerife and Grande Canary.

In the opinion of the majority of the elected representatives, the inhabitants of the Islands consider themselves Spanish. When the Constitutional Referendum which re-established Parliamentary Democracy in Spain in 1978 was carried out, results from the Canary Islands revealed that 508,000 inhabitants voted for and 24,000 against.

The Secretary-General wishes to convey his deep gratitude to the Spanish Authorities for the warm hospitality extended to him and to the members of his delegation. The OAU delegation is particularly grateful to the Spanish Authorities on the Peninsula as well as on the Islands for the excellent facilities placed at its disposal.

At the end of the Mission, the Secretary-General and members of his delegation were received by His Excellency King Juan Carlos I in his Palace in the afternoon of 8 June 1981.



The Secretary-General wishes to state formally that his Mission, given the mandate defined by the Liberation Committee and the Council of Ministers, was conducted under auspicious conditions. Not only did the delegation listen to the representatives of all the political parties, trade unions and the active forces on the Islands, it also insisted that even those who had not been expressly programmed to speak were allowed to air their views. It was in this spirit that the Secretary-General insisted on hearing the demonstrators who, had welcomed him at Tenerife, with shouts of: "Long live the OAU!!" They were received several times. The Secretary-General made it clear right from the start that even individuals who wished to meet him in his hotel could do so and submit petitions and documents useful for the accomplishment and success of his mission. This was complied with.

In short, the contents of this Report are, therefore, as faithful a reflection as possible of what was said and heard throughout our Mission.