

The fourteenth session of the General Assembly dealt first with the future of the Southern Cameroons. A decision had to be made as to who should vote in the plebiscite agreed on at the resumed thirteenth session and what questions the voters should be asked. In this there was considerable disagreement among the Southern Cameroonians themselves as indicated by the views of their leaders, Premier Foncha and Dr. Endeley, leader of the opposition group and former Premier, who appeared as members of the United Kingdom Delegation. Mr. Foncha wanted the choice to be either union with Nigeria or continued trusteeship. Dr. Endeley supported a choice between union with Nigeria and union with the French Cameroons. In their disagreement over who should vote, Mr. Foncha felt that the electorate should be restricted to native-born Cameroonians. Dr. Endeley wanted the electoral qualifications to be drawn so as to give the Nigerian minority in the Southern Cameroons the right to vote since that would strengthen support for his preference, union with Nigeria. Their arguments heard by the Fourth Committee, ultimately produced a compromise. The draft resolution presented to the General Assembly postponed the holding of the plebiscite until early 1961. It proposed an electorate restricted to native-born Cameroonians which would decide either on union with Nigeria or union with the French Cameroons (to become on January 1, 1960 the Republic of Cameroons). This resolution was adopted by the General Assembly (76 in favour—including Canada—none against, 2 abstentions).

In November 1959 the plebiscite was held in the Northern Cameroons and the majority of the electorate unexpectedly decided that they did not want immediate union with Nigeria but wished to decide their future at a later date. There were differences of opinion on the reasons for this result. Some members of the Fourth Committee believed that the Northern Cameroonians were dissatisfied with their system of local government and had chosen the only way open to them of protesting against it. Others thought that the results indicated such strong anti-Nigerian feeling that a complete and immediate separation of the Northern Cameroons from Nigeria was called for.

In the draft resolutions drawn up following discussions in the Fourth Committee it was agreed that the second plebiscite in the North should be held separately from that in the South, but that both should take place between September 1960 and the end of March 1961. The draft resolution also proposed that the questions to be put to the voters were to be the same as those to be voted upon in the South, that is, did they wish to achieve independence through joining the independent Republic of Cameroons, or through joining the future independent Federation of Nigeria?

Two other aspects concerning the Northern Cameroons were debated by the Committee. One was the question of votes for women. The idea of female suffrage aroused opposition in the conservative Moslem society of the Northern Region of Nigeria. However, since the previous plebiscite had indicated Cameroonian dissatisfaction with the character of the local government, there was not much sympathy in the Committee for the Nigerian point of view. The draft resolution, therefore, recommended that the new plebiscite should be conducted by universal adult suffrage. It also strongly recommended immediate reform of the local government of the Northern Cameroons, and the administrative, if not the legislative, separation of the territory from Nigeria before the latter achieved independence in October 1960. The draft resolution on the plebiscite in the Northern Cameroons, including the recommendations just mentioned, when presented to the General Assembly, was adopted unanimously.

The situation, when the General Assembly concluded its deliberations, was that plebiscites would take place separately in each of the Cameroons