

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

Topic: Reconsidering the sovereignty of Western Sahara

Student Officer: Eleanna Chalaraki

Position: Co-Chair

Personal Introduction

Dear Delegates,

My name is Eleanna Chalaraki and I am a 10th grade student of Ekpaideftiki Anagennisi. It is my utmost honor to serve as the Co-Chair of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee in the 9th session of the Campion School Model United Nations. I am really glad that you have chosen this committee and I hope this experience is educative, constructive, and at the same time entertaining.

I have been active in the MUN community for quite some time and from the conferences I have attended I have gained precious knowledge that will help me ensure that all of you can be able to actively participate in the discussion and have the opportunity to express your opinion. I aim to share with you my passion and enthusiasm for this activity as well as provide you with a well-structured study guide so as to understand the topic thoroughly.

This study guide will provide you with the necessary information about this topic. Hopefully, it will contain all the possible information, key factors, and identified problems on the question of Western Sahara. Of course, you will need to do your own research in order to understand where your country stands on this topic, by knowing its policy. Furthermore, your research and the solutions that you will come up with will help us have a fruitful debate. If you have any questions, or you need any help, do not hesitate to contact me through my email.

Yours truly,

Eleanna Chalaraki



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Topic Introduction

Western Sahara is a highly disputed area on the northwest coast and in the Maghreb region of North and West Africa. This territory is controlled by two opposed states that desire its governance. 20% of the territory is controlled by the self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, while the remaining 80% of the territory is occupied and administered by neighbouring Morocco. Its surface area amounts to 266,000 square kilometres and is one of the most sparsely populated territories in the world, mainly consisting of desert flatlands. The population is estimated at just over 500,000 the majority of which, nearly 40%, live in Laayoune, the largest city in Western Sahara.

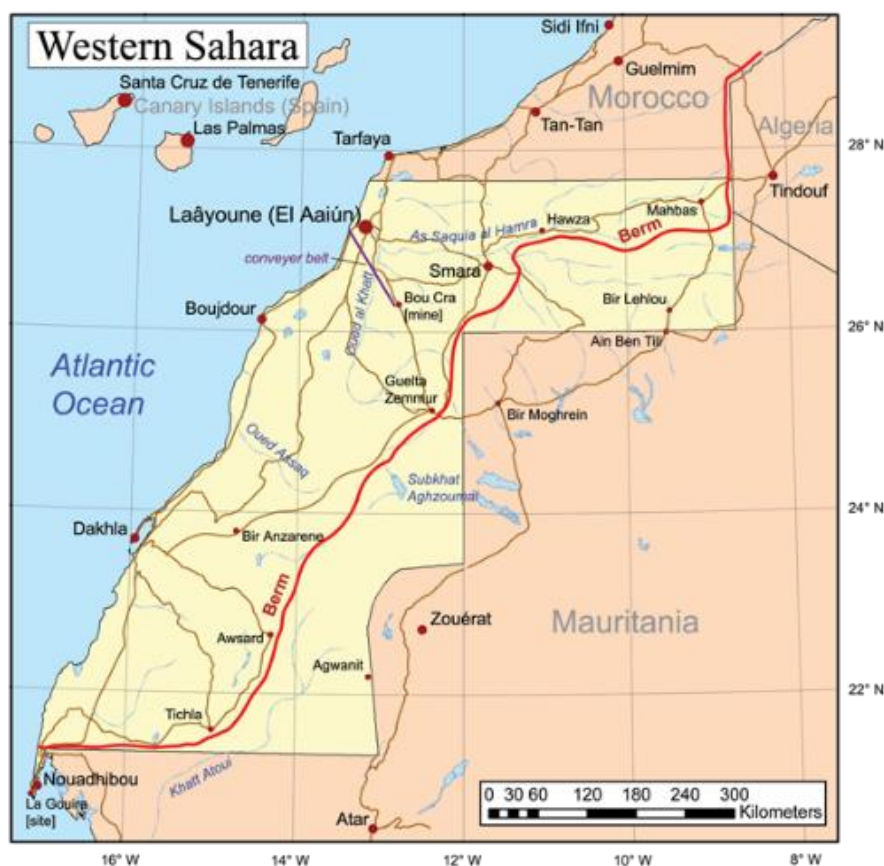


Figure 1: A map of western Sahara ¹

Morocco has been in conflict with the Algeria-backed separatist Polisario group over the Western Sahara since 1975 after the Spanish occupation ended. It turned into an armed confrontation that lasted until 1991 and ended with the signing of a ceasefire agreement.

On December 10 2020, the former president of the USA, Donald Trump announced that the US would recognise Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara if Morocco normalized its relations with Israel². In this way, the USA recognized Morocco's sovereignty of Western Sahara, a decision that is being reconsidered by Biden's administration.³

If no consensus can be reached among the affected member states, heavier fighting could be triggered by anything from increased weapons transfers to the Polisario Front to a shift in the movement's tactics. That would likely destabilize North Africa just as authorities in both Morocco and Algeria face dissatisfaction, anger from its citizens due to rising unemployment, corruption, and weak economies.

Definition of key terms

Buffer zone

The buffer zone is a neutral zonal area that lies between two or more bodies of land, usually pertaining to countries, and has as a goal to prevent violence and separate hostile forces or nations.

¹ Wikipedia. "Map of Western Sahara." *Wikipedia*, 1 Jan. 2007,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Sahara#/media/File:Westernsaharamap.png

² CambridgeCore. "United States Recognizes Morocco's Sovereignty Over Western Sahara." *Cambridge University Press*, 19 Apr. 2019, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-journal-of-international-law/article/united-states-recognizes-moroccos-sovereignty-over-western-sahara/36A7A41EC0BB341D79CE4661EDD8B60E.

³ Joseph Stepanky. "Why Biden's Western Sahara Policy Remains under Review." *Aljazeera*, 13 June 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/13/why-biden-administration-and-western-sahara.



Ceasefire

A ceasefire is an agreement, usually between two armies, in order to stop fighting and allow diplomatic discussions so as to achieve peace.

El Guerguerat crossing

El Guerguerat crossing is a road which serves as Morocco's main conduit for overland trade with Sub-Saharan Africa. This road is situated in a village called Guerguerat in the far southwest of Western Sahara, 11 km from the border with Mauritania and 5 km from the Atlantic Ocean and it is under the control of Morocco. This crossing is highly important to Morocco due to the fact that exports of vegetables to Mauritania run through this border station and it is the only way for Moroccans to leave their country by land without a visa to another country. Also, this crossing is essential to the SADR Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, as it is the only location where it can exert pressure on Morocco by isolating it from Mauritania.

Polisario Front

Polisario Front is a rebel liberation movement by the Sahrawi people aiming to take control of the Western Sahara, which had been controlled by Spain, Mauritania and as of 2021 was under the rule of Morocco. The Polisario Front is first and foremost a nationalist organization, whose main goal is the Independence of Western Sahara. It is outlawed in the parts of Western Sahara under Moroccan control, and it is illegal to raise its flag there.

Referendum

Referendum is a general vote by the electorate on a single political question which has been referred to them to a direct decision. In this case, the Polisario Front desires a referendum to take place including the option of Independence.

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)

The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic is a partially recognized de facto sovereign state located in the western Maghreb, which claims the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara but controls only the easternmost one-fifth of that territory. It is

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supported by the African Union, where it is a member. It is recognized as an Independent country by 46 UN member states, though several have recently withdrawn or frozen their recognition after lobbying by Morocco.

The United Nations' non-self-governing territories

Under Chapter XI of the Charter of the United Nations, the Non-Self-Governing Territories are defined as "territories whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government"⁴. Western Sahara is included in the list of 72 Territories to which Chapter XI of the Charter applied.

Background Information

Historical Background

Western Sahara has been provoking controversy in the African continent for years. Occupied by Spain until 1975, Western Sahara has been on the United Nations list of non-self-governing territories since 1963 after Moroccan demand. In 1965, the United Nations General Assembly adopted its first resolution on Western Sahara, asking Spain to decolonize the territory. One year later, a new resolution was passed by the General Assembly requesting that a referendum be held by Spain on self-determination. In 1975, Spain relinquished the administrative control of the territory to a joint administration by Morocco and Mauritania. A war erupted between these states



⁴ United Nations. "Non-Self-Governing Territories." *The United Nations and Decolonization*, 22 Sept. 2020, www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt.

and at the same time with a Sahrawi nationalist movement, the Polisario Front, which proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), supported by Algeria.

Figure 2: A profile of Western Sahara ⁵

In 1979, Mauritania withdrew its claim but the war continued between the Polisario Front and the state of Morocco, which after some time occupied de facto most of the control of the territory, including the major cities and the natural resources. In 1991 a ceasefire agreement was signed and stated that two-thirds of the territory, including most of the Atlantic coastline, will be administered by the Moroccan government, with tacit support from France and the United States, and the remainder by the SADR, backed by Algeria. The Polisario Front has won formal recognition for SADR from 46 states and has extended membership in the African Union. Morocco has won support for its position from several African governments and from most of the Muslim world and the Arab League. However, in the last two decades, recognitions have been extended and gone back and forth, depending on the interests of each country.

Until 2017, no other member state of the United Nations had officially recognized Moroccan sovereignty over parts of Western Sahara. Nevertheless, in December 2020, the former US President Donald Trump recognized Morocco's sovereignty of Western Sahara as a measure in order to ameliorate the diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel. On the contrary, the UN considers the Polisario Front to be the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people and maintains that the Sahrawis have a right to self-determination. In the same vein, Algeria has shown unconditional support for the Polisario Front since 1975, delivering arms, training, financial aid, and food as well as hosting refugees without interruption for more than 30 years.

⁵ BBC News. "Western Sahara Profile." *BBC*, 14 May 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14115273.



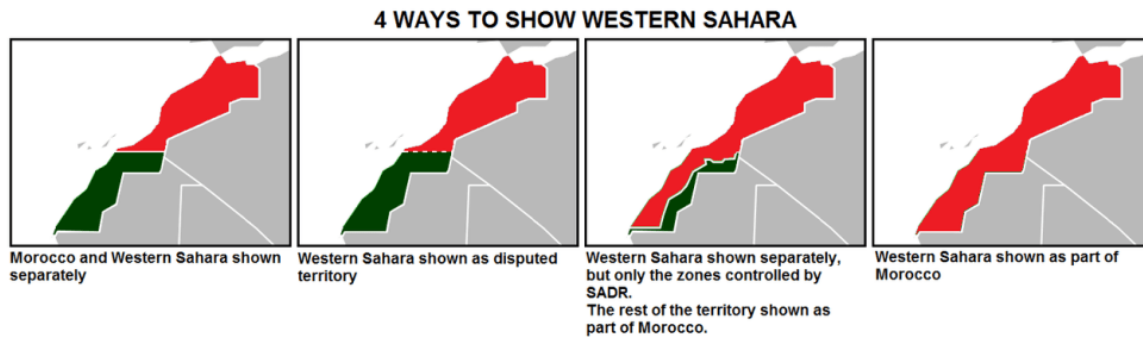


Figure 3: 4 ways to show Western Sahara ⁶

End of the 1991 ceasefire

The 1991 ceasefire agreement came to an end last year after Morocco resumed military operations in the El Guargarat crossing, a buffer zone between the territory claimed by the state of Morocco and the self-declared Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, which the Polisario said was a provocation. By launching this operation, Morocco “seriously undermined not only the ceasefire and related military agreements but also many chances of achieving a peaceful and lasting solution to the decolonization question of the Western Sahara” Ghali, leader of the Polisario Front, said in a letter to the UN. ⁷

Polisario supporters began a blockade of a Moroccan-built road leading to the El Guarguerat border crossing inside a UN buffer zone. The road serves as Morocco’s main conduit for overland trade with sub-Saharan Africa. Three weeks afterward, on 13 November 2020, Morocco sent troops into the UN-monitored buffer zone to end Polisario supporters’ three-week blockade of the strategic El Guerguerat road. In response, Polisario withdrew from the ceasefire as it perceived this act as a violation of the ceasefire agreement and renewed attacks on Moroccan military units.

⁶ “Western Sahara and Morocco, Libya.” *GuestHollow*, Dec. 2020, <https://questhollow.com/quest-hollows-geography-cultures-online-textbook/western-sahara-and-morocco-libya/>.

⁷ Sharif Paget And Mitchell McCluskey. “Western Sahara Independence Leader Declares the End of a 29-Year-Old Ceasefire with Morocco.” *CNN*, 15 Nov. 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/15/world/polisario-front-morocco-western-sahara-ceasefire-intl/index.html>

Reconsideration of Trump's recognition of Morocco sovereignty of Western Sahara

Trump's decision made the US the first Western nation to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the territory. However, 25 Senators, led by Senator James Einhoff, sent a letter to President Joe Biden asking him to reconsider Trump's decision regarding the Western Sahara issue. Morocco insists on its right to govern the region but proposed autonomous rule in Western Sahara under its sovereignty, but the Polisario Front wants a referendum to let the people decide the future of the region. Algeria has been supporting the Front's proposal and hosts refugees from the region.

The USA so far believes that an Independent Sahrawi State is not a realistic option for resolving the conflict and that genuine autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only feasible solution. The USA will encourage economic and social development with Morocco, including in the Western Sahara territory, and to that end will open a consulate in the Western Sahara territory, in Dakhla, to promote economic and business opportunities for the region.

Referendum

A referendum has not yet been able to take place due to the fact a serious problem arises regarding the eligible people that can constitute voters of it. Morocco regarded the list of persons counted in 1974 as a point of reference for the establishment of the voter lists. On the other hand, the Frente POLISARIO maintained that, in the initial agreement, the two parties had agreed that the 1974 list would be the sole basis for the application of the criteria for voter eligibility and that, accordingly, the Saharans counted in 1974 should constitute the vast majority of persons authorized to participate in the referendum, while Saharans omitted from the census should constitute an exception to that group. The two parties thus had radically opposing points of view, with one attaching primary importance to the list of persons counted in 1974, and the other considering that its importance was relative.



Major countries and organizations involved

Algeria

Since 1975 Algeria has supported the independence of the whole of Western Sahara when the Spanish colonization ended. Algeria's role became indirect, through political and military support for the Polisario Front but on 6 March 1976 Algeria recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. Algeria's involvement has created a lot of issues in the development of the Algerian-Morocco diplomatic relations but this has not stopped Algeria to continue its efforts in the independence of Western Sahara. For over 30 years, several tens of thousands Sahrawi refugees have been living in the region of Tindouf, Algeria, in the heart of the desert, in four refugee camps.

France

France, which is a P5 member, since now has remained neutral on this topic and does not want to have a say over the political status of Western Sahara. Nevertheless, even though France has always been an enthusiastic advocate for human rights, when it comes to Western Sahara has stayed silent. For several years behind the closed doors of the UN Security Council, France has used its veto power to keep the UN away from issues related to human rights in the territory annexed by its Moroccan ally in 1975. In this way, the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was blind to many conflicts that occurred in the area and could not guarantee the human rights of Sahrawi people.

Hungary

At 29 May 2020 the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade reiterated the country's official position on the Moroccan Sahara, saying that "Hungary has no relationship with the so-called 'SADR'". This central European country maintains long-standing relationships with the Kingdom of Morocco more than 60 years and its statement makes it clear that Hungary discredits any propaganda spread by the Polisario Front over its policy and thus consolidates the Kingdom in its legitimate stance on the Moroccan Sahara.



Israel

The state of Israel plays a significant role in this issue due to the fact it is one of the main reasons that the United States of America recognised the Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. The Moroccan state's historic deal with Israel and the United States has significant security, financial, and diplomatic implications. In exchange for partial — not full — normalization, the United States recognized Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara and this partial normalization could also ensure major benefits from Israel in terms of trade, investment, and cooperation in key sectors such as tourism and technology. The two states signed a cyber defence accord in July 2021, and are likely to increase security and economic cooperation down the line.

Russia

Russia has remained neutral in the issue of the sovereignty of Western Sahara. Nevertheless, Russia has started to review its arms sales policy to Algeria considering its increasingly closer ties with Morocco and the recent flare-up of tensions in Western Sahara. The transfer of the most up-to-date weapons in Algeria could antagonise Morocco with which Russia is developing substantial economic ties. In this way, Russia still plays a key role in the resolution of the issue.

Spain

Western Sahara was a Spanish colony from 1884 until 1976, and has remained on the UN Decolonisation Committee's agenda since October 1964. In December 1974, as international and local pressure in favor of decolonisation escalated, Spain conducted a census of the territory to prepare for a referendum on self-determination. Nevertheless, by the end of 1975, Spain had withdrawn from its colony without the need to conduct a referendum. Today, Spain, due to its history in the area, plays a vital role in order a consensus to be reached in the region and it coordinated with other European countries so as to prevent the EU from following the US move.



USA

The United States of America has played a huge role in the issue of Western Sahara and especially in encouraging Morocco's "claim" to the land. Former President Donald Trump in December 2020 recognised officially Western Sahara as part of the Kingdom of Morocco shocking many observers and countries. President Joe Biden's own policy regarding this long-disputed territory remains undefined. However, he may be forced into action soon due to the fact that violence in the territory escalates and there are signs the conflict is heating up.

African Union

African's Union role is one of the most vital in the issue of Western Sahara. Even though the goal of the African Union is to unite its member states there is a huge divide within the organization regarding recognition of Morocco or Polisario. After Donald Trump's recognition of the country's sovereignty over the disputed territory, many African states changed their policy and recognised it such as Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic, the Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gabon, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Zambia. In 2021, the wind of blessing continues to blow strong over the Kingdom of Morocco as recent African Union elections have brought a more pro-Morocco group of leaders to power.

Arab League

The Arab League has paid little attention to the issue of Western Sahara owing to the fact that it wants to ensure the solidarity among its member States and avoid a further fragmentation of the Arab World. This League did not favour the right of the Saharawi people for Self-determination and has provided a firm support to the autonomy plan which Morocco has tried to complete in the areas of the Western Sahara, which included the decolonisation of this territory. Although, individually, the positions of the member States have varied - according to their ideological beliefs, geostrategic interests and political alignments - between those supporting the Saharawi cause and those backing up the integration of the Western Sahara to



Morocco. In this way, it is not clear if the Arab League is in favor of the Polisario Front or Morocco.

European Union

Europe's economic interests in Morocco and the Western Sahara are substantial as the region contains the largest phosphorite reserves in the world, of which Europe is a leading customer. For this reason, the EU is unwilling to jeopardise good relations with a key neighbourhood partner, but is similarly unwilling to violate its commitment to the ongoing UN peace process by recognising Moroccan sovereignty over the territory. However, the EU cannot remain a passive observer to this dispute and should play a multilateral role in order to gain in leadership and global respect.

United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees

UNHCR operation supports exchange of family visits between Sahrawis living in the refugee camps near Tindouf in Algeria and those from the territory who have been separated for the last 39 years. To ensure a smooth implementation of the program, UNHCR cooperates with the Polisario Front, the Kingdom of Morocco and Algeria, as the host country. Mauritania also participates in the discussions as Observer. Also, the UNHCR works closely with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which provides logistical support on a reimbursable basis.

Timeline of events

<u>1884</u>	Spain colonized Western Sahara.
<u>1963</u>	Western Sahara entered the United Nations list of non-self-governing territories after Morocco's demand.
<u>1965</u>	United Nations General Assembly adopted its first resolution on Western Sahara.



<u>1966</u>	The new resolution was passed by the General Assembly requesting that a referendum be held by Spain on self-determination.
<u>1973</u>	Polisario Front was formally constructed.
<u>1975</u>	Spain pulled out of the area.
<u>1975</u>	Morocco, Mauritania, and Polisario Front claimed the area.
<u>January 1976</u>	The Royal Moroccan Air Force bombed the refugee camps in the northern part of the territory.
<u>26 February 1976</u>	Spain officially announced its full withdrawal from the area.
<u>1979</u>	Mauritania withdrew its claim.
<u>1991</u>	A ceasefire agreement was signed.
<u>2007-2008</u>	Manhasset Negotiations.
<u>27 April 2018</u>	Resolution 2414 adopted by the Security Council.
<u>30 October 2020</u>	Resolution 2548 adopted by the Security Council.
<u>November 2020</u>	Polisario supporters' blockade of El Guerguerat crossing.
<u>13 November 2020</u>	Morocco sent troops into the UN-monitored buffer zone.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The sovereignty of Western Sahara has been an ambiguous issue for years and as a result, many attempts have been taken in order to tackle it. Firstly, Horst Köhler, former Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, made a lot of efforts in holding the round-table process, which created a new momentum in the political process.

Moreover, another action refers to the efforts of the Secretary-General to keep all peacekeeping operations, including the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which reiterates the need for the Council to pursue a rigorous, strategic approach to peacekeeping deployments, and effective management of resources,



Furthermore, many proposals have been presented to the Secretary Generals, including the Moroccan proposal presented on 11 April 2007 welcoming serious and credible Moroccan efforts to move the process forward towards resolution and the note of the Polisario Front proposal presented 10 April 2007. Lastly, the Tindouf Refugee camps are of paramount importance. They are a collection of refugee camps set up in the Tindouf Province, Algeria in 1975–76 for Sahrawi refugees fleeing from Moroccan forces, who advanced through Western Sahara during the Western Sahara War. With most of the original refugees still living in the camps, the situation is among the most protracted in the world.

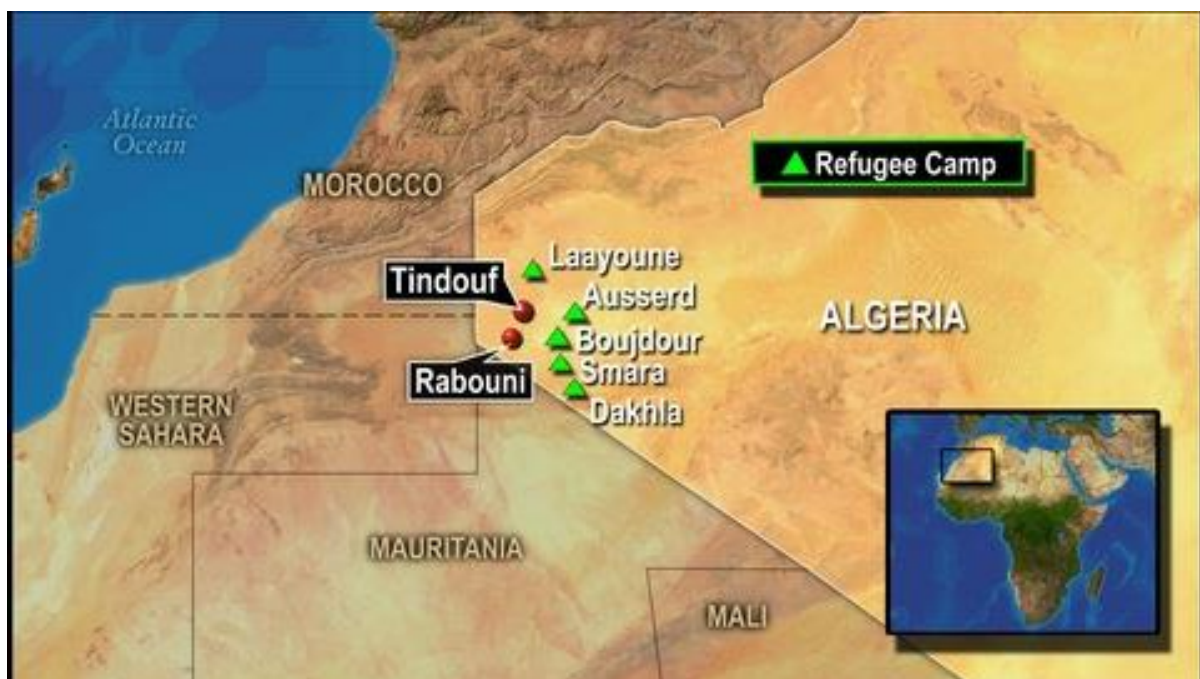


Figure 4: A map of the Tindouf Refugee Camps⁸

Relevant UN Resolutions, Events, Treaties, and Legislation

UN Security Council Resolution 690, 29/04/1991

The 1991 ceasefire agreement was a treaty that ended the conflict between the Polisario Front and the Morocco over the western Sahara which started at 1975, after

⁸ "Algeria." *Acaps*, 23 June 2020, www.acaps.org/country/algeria/crisis/sahrawi-refugees.

the Spanish occupation ended. Also, the report contained detailed proposals with regard to the composition, strength and timetable of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The mission would consist of three units. Firstly, a civilian unit would include an Identification Commission, charged with the central task of identifying and registering all Western Saharans eligible to vote in the referendum. Moreover, the second unit was called a Referendum Commission with the aim to assist the Special Representative in all aspects of the organization and conduct of the referendum. Lastly, the third component would be under the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in order to implement the repatriation programme and facilitate the voluntary return of identified eligible voters, security and military units.⁹

Manhasset Negotiations

Manhasset Negotiations were a series of talks that took place in rounds in 2007-2008 at Manhasset, New York between the Moroccan government and the representatives of the Sahrawi liberation movement, the Polisario Front to resolve the Western Sahara conflict. Also, present at the negotiations were the neighboring countries of Algeria and Mauritania. The negotiations were being supervised by Peter van Walsum, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's personal envoy for Western Sahara. In early January 2008, the third round of United Nations-sponsored negotiations on a political solution to the Western Sahara conflict ended without the parties reaching any kind of agreement other than to meet again in March, without again any effective outcome.

Resolution 2548 (2020)

Resolution 2548 was a resolution adopted by the Security Council on 30 October 2020. This resolution again decided to extend the mandate of MINURSO until

⁹ Peace Agreements Database. "UN Security Council Resolution 690." *The University of Edinburgh*, 29 Apr. 1991, www.peaceagreements.org/view/118.



31 October 2021 and proposed numerous measures in order to provide a solution to the question of Western Sahara based on compromise. ¹⁰

Resolution 2414 (2018)

By a vote of 12 in favour to 0 against, with 3 abstentions (China, Ethiopia, Russian Federation), the Council adopted resolution 2414 (2018), calling on parties to resume negotiations under the auspices of the Secretary-General without preconditions and in good faith, and on neighbouring States to “increase their engagement in the negotiating process”. The Council also called for the Polisario Front’s immediate withdrawal from the buffer strip in Guerguerat road, expressing its concern of a further instability in the region. ¹¹

Possible solutions

Member States’ action

Countries such as France, Russia, Algeria and the United States should begin to put more pressure on both sides of the conflict, so that they are pushed to revive negotiations and hopefully reach a point where a truce can be agreed upon. As there are many nations that hold a great amount of influence upon the decisions made by parties involved in the question of Western Sahara, it is necessary that this responsibility is used properly, so that the issue can be properly resolved. Examples of action that can be taken include imposing sanctions, offering various forms of aid and even advising representatives of either side.

¹⁰ Security Council. “Resolution 2548 (2020).” *United Nations Digital Library*, 30 Aug. 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3889420>.

¹¹ Security Council. “Resolution 2414 (2018).” *United Nations Digital Library*, 27 Apr. 2018, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1484890>



Cooperation with the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Refugees

UNHCR's contribution will help in identifying and implementing confidence-building measures that can serve to foster the trust necessary for a successful political process. The Tindouf Refugee camps, situated in Algeria, need funds in order to continue their goal and host the Sahrawi people. These funds can also help to ensure social integration, security and health services to refugees in the long run.

Ensuring the respect of Human Rights

It is crucial that the humanitarian situation in Western Sahara is closely monitored, and that necessary humanitarian aid is provided. There are many ways to do this, including getting certain NGOs involved, calling for humanitarian aid missions to be organised, and collecting resources and funding to ensure that such action is adequately equipped. Additionally, France and USA should pursue a "free association" option for Western Sahara – a third solution that offers a realistic means of fulfilling Sahrawi self-determination. France, a huge supporter of human rights can still overturn the situation and engage UN policy organs in the issue.

EU's policy

Correctly aligning the EU's political and trade relations will be vital to bringing this conflict to a close. The EU's decision affects the world on a huge scale, especially the African continent. Therefore, EU member states' interests should be made clear to help further encourage stability.

Potential voters of a possible referendum

Polisario's Front first desire is for a referendum to take place with the option of independence. However, in order a referendum to function, both states need to reach an agreement on the voters. In this way, Morocco and the Polisario Front should reach a consensus on what they call a potential voter so as a plebiscite is able to take place. Democratic process must be seen as a vital element of any potential solution reached.



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