

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee

Issue: The Question of Western Sahara

Student Officer: George Moneftsis

Position: Main Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is George Moneftsis, I am a student of the German School of Thessaloniki and I am most delighted to be given the position of Main Chair in the first ~~ever~~ DSTMUN conference. I must congratulate you for deciding to partake in this novel experience and I hope that we will achieve an active and absorbing debate. As a member of the student officer team of this conference, I can assure you that we shall do our best to meet your expectations, make you feel welcome and ensure your utmost satisfaction.

This study guide shall provide you with necessary information on the situation in the land of Western Sahara. This issue has for the longest time been hidden from sight, despite it affecting hundreds of thousands of people. Some of you will also find information on your own countries in this document. After reading it carefully, you are expected to conduct research on your own. In addition, you are encouraged to check the bibliography down below for more information.

I personally started MUN just to practice using my English. Despite that remaining an important motivation for me to continue, I also find it very entertaining and inspiring. It is not very often that one gains the ability to strive and plan for change in this world. Humanity faces countless issues at present and MUN is a way for us to prepare those who will make this change happen. I truly hope that you too shall enjoy yourselves in our committee and I encourage you to be active and involved.

My email address remains open to any questions regarding the topic, your delegation's policy, the rules and procedure of the conference or anything else you may wish to ask.

Best of luck in your research,

George Moneftsis

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The region of Western Sahara is a sparsely populated, arid, underdeveloped region of Africa, which holds large deposits of phosphate, and rich fishing grounds. It was previously a colony of Spain, and is currently split between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, a self-proclaimed state of the indigenous Sahrawi people. Morocco controls roughly 80% of the land, including the largest city, also the former colonial capital, Laayoune. As the Spanish forces withdrew from the land in 1975, fighting erupted between the Moroccan army and the Sahrawi people, who organized themselves into the Polisario Front. The situation escalated into the Western Sahara War (1975-1991). Various sources put the death toll of this conflict between 10.000 to 20.000 people. It ended with an armistice signed in September 1991. At present, some 45 countries recognize the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, while no state has formally recognized Morocco's claim on the land. The United Nations' efforts on the matter can at best be considered futile. It falls into your hands to find an effective and long lasting solution on the matter, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Polisario Front

The Polisario Front is a rebel national liberation movement formed in May 1973 by Sahrawi Arabs in the Western Sahara region fighting for the independence of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. Upon the partition of Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania, it relocated its base of operations to Algeria, a firm supporter of the organization. The Polisario Front presently controls only 20% of Western Sahara, mostly uninhabitable desert.

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

The Sahrawi Arab Democratic (SADR), also known as the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic or Western Sahara, is a self-declared state that claims authority over the disputed territory of Western Sahara which is concurrently claimed and occupied by Morocco.¹

¹ Kenneth Kimutai Too, (2017). What Is The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (Western Sahara)?. WorldAtlas (<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-the-sahrawi-arab-democratic-republic-western-sahara.html>)

United Nations list of non-self-governing territories

The United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories is a list of places that the United Nations General Assembly deems to be "non-self-governing" and subject to the decolonization process.²

Self-Determination

Determination by the people of a territorial unit of their own future political status.³

Green March of 1975

The Green March was a strategic mass demonstration in November 1975, coordinated by the Moroccan government, and escorted by Moroccan soldiers to force Spain to hand over the disputed, autonomous semi-metropolitan Spanish Province of Sahara to Morocco.⁴

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Pre-Colonial Era to Spanish Colonization

The land of Western Sahara has never been a nation in the modern sense of the word. There are very few historical records of its history. However, it is known that the region has been inhabited at least since the 5th Century B.C.E. During the 11th century, the nomadic Sanhaja people formed a tribal confederation known as the "Almoravid State" in Western Sahara. They later left their land and settled in Morocco. It is they who founded notable centres like Marrakesh, the 4th largest city in Morocco. As time went by, they lost contact with their homeland. The modern inhabitants of Western Sahara can be traced back to Yemeni tribes who



The Almoravid State of the nomadic Sanhaja people.

² United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories

³ Self – Determination (Merriam- Webster Dictionary)

⁴ The Green March of 1975 (Essaouira.nu)

migrated during the 15th century. They were nomads and traders. Towards the end of the 15th century, the Sultan of Morocco led an expedition against Timbuktu, a significant trade centre to the south of Western Sahara, rich in salt and close to gold mines. This resulted in Timbuktu paying tribute to Morocco for almost a century; however, most of the local people remained unaffected by the Moroccan conquests. During the 19th century, the Spanish started to express interest in the region, primarily to protect the Canary Islands and their fishermen. In 1884, Spain officially proclaimed a protectorate over the northern parts of Western Sahara. During the Berlin Conference of 1884- 1885, in which the powers of Europe carved up the African continent, Spain officially gained the whole of Western Sahara as a colony.

The Struggle for Independence

The Sahrawi people, much like the people of Mauritania and Morocco, fiercely opposed subjugation, but their resistance was futile. Various revolts sprung up in the region, but the question of the independence of the “Spanish Sahara” only came up during the decolonization era. As Morocco and Mauritania gained independence from France, they both lay claim to the land at the time owned by Spain, due to presumed historic ties. After Morocco’s efforts for Western Sahara to be added to the list of territories to be decolonized, The United Nations General Assembly examined this case in 1966 on the basis of the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and passed Resolution 2229 on the matter, urging Spain to hold a referendum on the self-determination of the people of her colony. In 1973, The Sahrawi people formed the Polisario Front to combat the Spanish forces. This organization saw the immediate support of Algeria. Spain agreed to hold a referendum in which independence or unification with either Mauritania or Morocco would be offered as options. The referendum was postponed in order for the International Court of Justice to publish its Advisory Opinion on the matter. No referendum has to this day taken place in Western Sahara regarding its future. The International Court of Justice’s opinion came out in 1975, stating that Morocco and Mauritania’s historic ties to Western Sahara do not constitute a territorial claim and that the will of the people of the region should be upheld. In



The “Green March” of 1975. Some 350.000 Moroccans entered Western Sahara

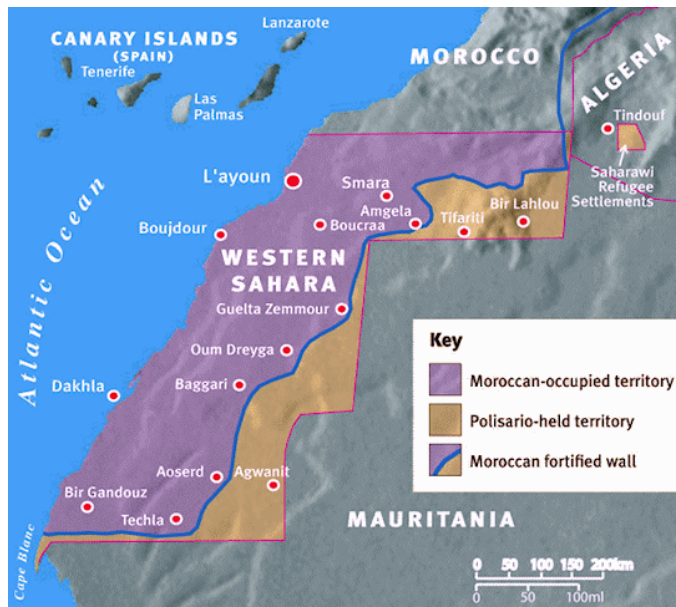
November of the same year, Morocco organized the “Green March” into Spanish Sahara to put pressure on Spain. Spain invited Morocco and Mauritania to negotiate the fate of Western Sahara in an event that came to be known as the “Madrid Accords”. It was decided that Morocco

would gain the upper two thirds of the land, while Mauritania would control the other third. The agreement was fiercely opposed by the Polisario Front and Algeria. By February 1976, the last of Spain's soldiers left the former colony and the Polisario Front immediately proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

Hostilities

Fighting started as soon as the Polisario Front was formed. Sahrawi separatists assaulted Spanish garrisons in the region with the intent of gaining independence. As soon as the Madrid Accords were signed, Moroccan and Mauritanian troops entered Western Sahara to exercise said treaty. The Polisario Front engaged in guerrilla warfare against both of these powers and moved their base to Tindouf in Western Algeria, where the first refugee camps were established in May 1976. Algeria and Libya provided arms and funding for the movement, and it gained manpower from the number of Sahrawis fleeing the Moroccan and Mauritanian armies. In 1977, France intervened due to a number of French technicians being taken prisoner by the Polisario Front. It used Mauritanian air bases to bombard Polisario targets.

In 1979, after a coup d'état, Mauritania made peace with the Polisario Front, renounced its claim on Western Sahara and withdrew its forces from the region, but Morocco then moved in and asserted its control. During the 1980s, Morocco built walls in Western Sahara and stationed large garrisons in the region, thereby securing the economically



The border between Morocco and the Polisario Front. This is the result of the long Western Sahara War.

significant parts of Western Sahara. In 1982, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was admitted to the Organization of African Unity (also known as African Union). In protest to this action, Morocco seceded from the A.U. The African Union continues to support the right of the Sahrawis to self-determination as well as facilitate talks and negotiations between the two parties. In 1989, the war escalated greatly with major offensives from both sides. A cease fire was signed in 1991, under the Settlement Plan, an agreement between the Polisario and Morocco, under which a referendum were to be held in 1992 for Western Sahara's "self-determination". This agreement also established

MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), a peacekeeping force of the United Nations that remains active to this day.

Efforts for a Referendum

The referendum agreed upon in the Settlement Plan was postponed due to the stark disparity of opinions on voter eligibility. After intense negotiations, the two sides ratified the Houston Agreement in 1997, according to which a referendum were to be held in 1998. This effort also proved to be futile. Various U.N. envoys tried to resume talks but also failed. The U.N. diplomat and former U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker proposed what came to be known as the Baker Plan, an initiative aimed at breaking the diplomatic stalemate and solving the problem of self-determination in Western Sahara. However, he resigned in protest to the irresponsibility of the two parties and the reluctance of the United Nations Security Council to enforce a solution in spite of the will of the two parties. Morocco has since declared that it will not accept any referendum that includes independence as an option, while the Polisario Front has threatened to resume combat if Morocco does not comply with a referendum.

Recent Events / Human Rights concerns

Little progress has been made to solve this problem. The various U.N. envoys have been unable to make progress. The Non-Governmental-Organization called “Human Rights Watch” reports that the Sahrawi people living under Morocco are



Sahrawi troops march in the Dakhla camp in February 2016, as the United Nations distributes water.

subject to discrimination and their freedom of speech and assembly is heavily constrained. The mandate of MINURSO continues to get extended by the U.N. Security Council. The courts of the European Union as well as the African Union both are in favour of self-determination in Western Sahara.

However, on January 30th, 2017, Morocco was readmitted to the African Union, despite the stark protest of members like Algeria and South Africa. This means that

Morocco now has obligations towards the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, despite its non-recognition of the state. There are no specific guidelines for an entity to become a state. In general, an entity is considered a sovereign state when other states recognize it as such. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic is currently recognized by 45 U.N. member states, while 39 U.N. members have either “frozen”, “withdrawn” or “suspended” their previous recognition of the state. It must be noted that according to the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States: “Recognition is unconditional and irrevocable”...

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Morocco

The Kingdom of Morocco presently occupies a large portion of Western Sahara, while presenting its historic ties to the area as a legitimate claim on the land. It fought a war against the Polisario Front, which ended in 1991. It has ignored countless U.N. and A.U. resolutions on the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination. It has constructed walls between its Saharan possessions and what it perceives as a “buffer territory”.

Algeria

As a regional rival of Morocco, Algeria perceives Moroccan expansion into the resource rich land of Western Sahara as an integral threat to its existence. It has therefore provided the Polisario Front with arms and funding ever since its existence, while diplomatically standing for the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

Mauritania

Mauritania has presented historic ties to Western Sahara as a valid claim to the territory. It annexed the lower third of the land in accordance with the Madrid Accords. However, after a war with the Polisario Front, it renounced its claim on the land and has since refrained from interfering in the matter. It has fully recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

Spain

As the former colonizer of the region, Spain ignored multiple U.N. resolutions on the decolonization of Western Sahara. Spain instead agreed on the partition of its former colony between Morocco and Mauritania. It does not maintain diplomatic ties to the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. However, many Spanish Prime Ministers have met with Sahrawi Arab officials. In March 2017, Spanish Foreign

Minister Alfonso Dastis affirmed Spain's support to a solution for the Sahrawi people.

African Union

The African Union (A.U.) is a union of all states in the African continent. It was established on 26 May 2001 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to replace the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.), which was established in 1963. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic is a considered a founding member of the African Union, as it joined the OAU in 1982. The African Union remains a supporter of self-determination and decolonization in Western Sahara and aids the United Nations in solving this problem. Morocco left the Organization of African Unity when a majority of its members voted in favour of recognizing the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic as a Member State in 1984, but re-joined on January 30th, 2017.

France

As the former colonial overlord of Mauritania and Morocco, France supports Sahrawi autonomy under Morocco and fought on the side of Mauritania against the Polisario Front. It does not recognize the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. It has reaffirmed its belief in the ability of the United Nations to resolve the matter peacefully.

European Union

The European Union has economic and strategic interests in the greater Maghreb area. However, the contrast between the interests of the member states has made it difficult for the EU to intervene in the issue of Western Sahara. It is important to note that European Courts continuously rule against Morocco. For example, In December 2016, the European Court of Justice held that EU–Morocco trade agreements did not extend to resources taken from the SADR.

BLOCKS EXPECTED

It is expected that the committee will be divided between those who support Morocco's desire to claim Western Sahara as its own, like Morocco and Saudi Arabia, and those who object to this move by Morocco and instead support Sahrawi independence, like Algeria and Iran.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description
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1884-1885	Berlin Conference
16 December 1965	U.N. General Assembly Resolution 2072
1956	Morocco claims Western Sahara
1957	Mauritania claims Western Sahara
10 May 1973	Proclamation of the Polisario Front
May- June 1975	UN visiting mission to Western Sahara
October 16 1975	ICJ Advisory Opinion
6 November 1975	Morocco launches the “Green March”
14 November 1975	Madrid Accords
26 February 1976	Last Spanish troops withdraw
27 February 1976	Proclamation of the SADR
October-November 1977	French Operations in Western Sahara
15 August 1979	Mauritania leaves the war
1982	Admission of SADR to the African Union
6 September 1991	Cease-Fire
14-16 September 1997	Houston Accords
11 June 2004	James Baker resigned
March 2008	The two sides resume talks unsuccessfully
4 May 2011	6.000 Sahrawi’s protest peacefully
30 January 2017	Morocco re-joins the African Union
27 April 2018	The Security Council most recently renews MINURSO’s mandate

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Madrid Accords

The Madrid Accords, also known as the Declaration of Principles on Western Sahara, were an agreement between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania that determined the process of decolonization of Western Sahara by Spain. It established a temporary tripartite administration comprised of these three states, while setting the date for Spain's withdrawal from Western Sahara to be 28 February 1976. They also divided Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania for the period after Spanish decolonization. It is important to note that The Madrid Accords are not considered a transfer of sovereignty.

UN Resolutions 1108, 1238, 1292, 1301, 1308, 1309, 1324, 1463, 1495, 1754... on the extension of MINURSO's mandate

The mandate of the United Nations mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) has to be renewed by the United Nations through the Security Council. These are but a few of the Resolutions that extend the mandate of MINURSO. Most of them come with a renewed call for negotiations between the sides of this conflict and the assurance that the UN will continue to try to resolve this issue.

UN Security Council Resolution 380 on Morocco's movement into Western Sahara

This resolution was passed on 6 November 1975 by the U.N. Security Council to criticize the Green March and to call upon Morocco to withdraw its militants and civilians from Western Sahara.

OAU Resolution AHG/Res. 104 (XIX)

The Resolution adopted at the 19th Summit of the Organization of African Unity in 1983 arguably set the precedent for all other U.N. resolutions on the issue of Western Sahara, by urging for negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario to be held, requesting that a U.N. peacekeeping force be stationed in Western Sahara and calling for action by the other OAU bodies to ensure the implementation of the cease-fire and the undertaking of the referendum at that time planned for December 1983.

Houston Agreement

The Houston Agreement was the product of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front in 1997 in Houston, United States. It expanded upon the Settlement Plan of 1991 and laid the groundwork for a referendum on Western Saharan independence. The Polisario, Morocco, Spain, Algeria and the U.N. all

expressed satisfaction over the agreement. However, the issues voter eligibility and identification rendered the Agreement a failure, as no referendum was held.

Baker Plan

The Baker Plan was an initiative of the top United Nations envoy to Western Sahara James Baker III. The Baker Plan had two drafts, the second of which was endorsed by the United Nations. The first proposed Sahrawi Autonomy under Morocco. This was supported by Morocco but rejected by the Polisario. The second proposed self-rule for Western Sahara for 5 years followed by an independence referendum. Morocco rejected this plan and James Baker resigned in protest.

Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

This Declaration was passed by the U.N. General Assembly on 14 December 1960 which, amongst other things, defines that subjugation and exploitation are a denial of human rights, that all peoples have the right to self-determination and that action shall be taken in places included in the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories to ensure that power is transferred to the people of said territories.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Ever since the outbreak of hostilities, numerous parties have tried to put an end to the Western Saharan issue. The United Nations have overseen all negotiations between the two sides, have adopted resolutions calling for peace and self-determination in Western Sahara and have assisted in the preparation for the referendums. The African Union has held meetings on the matter on many occasions and has proven itself to be a defender of Sahrawi self-determination. Its resolution AHG/Res. 104 (XIX) on the topic remains relevant to this day. The 1991 cease-fire and the Settlement Plan agreed upon by Morocco and the Polisario Front with the aid of the U.N. and the African Union solved the short term issue of the waging conflict. This resulted in the stark reduction of refugees and casualties in the region. However, the referendum that was agreed upon in the Settlement Plan never came, thereby prolonging the issue greatly. The Houston Agreement came soon after to try to expand upon the Settlement Plan, but it too failed. The Baker Plan, as proposed by top U.N. envoy to Western Sahara James Baker III, also did little to solve the issue. The resignation of James Baker in protest to the stubbornness of the two parties highlights the true problem in solving this issue. Recent calls for a renewed peace deal and a referendum have not resulted in much action.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Solving the issue of Western Sahara initially seems to be rather straightforward. All existent approaches fall under the notions of independence for the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic or a state of autonomy under Moroccan rule. The real question lies in the conduction or not of a referendum which would allow for the voice of the people of Western Sahara to be heard and the conditions of such a referendum. It is crucial to notice where the previous attempts to solve this issue have failed and to present to the people a solution that would guarantee peace, stability and prosperity for the region.

A successful resolution should include all of the following. First of all, it must focus on the ideas of self-determination, national sovereignty, referencing important documents on the creation of nation-states like the Montevideo Convention on statehood (1933). To focus on the idea of self-determination, it may be important to refer to a referendum. However, this leads to the second point, which is to have a good framework behind the referendum and the whole solution process. This means that in order to be able to reach a solution that would be accepted by all parties, the UN and other international organizations must be monitoring any possible votes, referendums, or meetings, that would occur.

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Sahrawi troops march in the Dakhla camp in February 2016, as the United Nations distributes water. (2017). [image] Available at:
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