

33 years is long enough!

The present situation cannot continue. The oppression of the Saharawis in occupied Western Sahara must stop. The refugees in the camps must feel safe to return to their own country after the referendum to be ruled by a government that they elect directly.

The UN, the African Union, the European Union and nations individually must act to ensure that Morocco no longer precludes the referendum on self-determination for the Saharawi people from taking place.

What you can do:

- join AWSA
- write to your MP
- ask your trade union to affiliate
- invite a speaker to your group
- make a regular donation for the Saharawi refugees via Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA www.apheda.org.au

Further information about AWSA

W: www.awsa.org.au

E: awsamel@alphalink.com.au

M: AWSA Victoria, PO Box 164, Clifton Hill 3068

Further information about the situation in Western Sahara, including links to other sites:

- www.arso.org
- www.asvdh.net/english

AWSA inc: 349639

Join the Australia Western Sahara Association (AWSA)

Name

Address

Telephone.....

Email

- I would like to receive regular e-bulletins about AWSA's activities
- I would like to help with urgent action letter writing etc
- I can offer the following help
.....
.....
- I enclose a donation of \$.....

I enclose my subscription:

- Organization \$100
- NGO \$50
- Employed \$25
- Concession \$10

Please make cheques payable to AWSA and post with this form to:

AWSA Membership Secretary
PO Box 457
Heidelberg VIC 3084

Western Sahara

has been occupied and its people living in exile for 33 years...



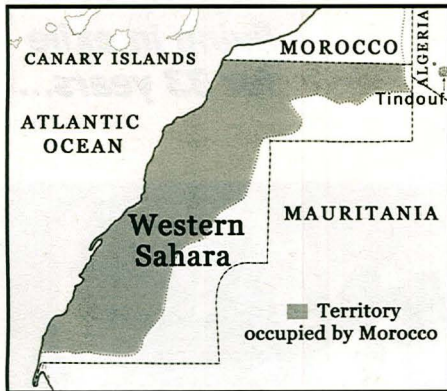
33 years is enough!

The Saharawi people must be allowed to determine their own future through a free and fair UN referendum

AWSA - Australia Western Sahara Association
Working for justice for the Saharawi people

Where is Western Sahara?

It is on the Atlantic coast of north-west Africa, between Morocco to the north and Mauritania to the south and east and Algeria to the north-east. Western Sahara is rich in mineral resources and has one of the best fishing grounds in the world. Currently its off-shore oil and gas resources are being explored.



Background

Morocco invaded Western Sahara in 1975 when Spain abandoned its former colony. Mauritania seized part of the land, but soon made peace with the Polisario Front, the Saharawi people's independence movement, which continued the fight against Morocco.

Many Saharawis fled the tanks and aerial bombardments of napalm and cluster bombs of the Moroccan invaders and set up refugee camps near Tindouf in south-west Algeria where more than 165,000 of them now live supported by the UN Food Program and other humanitarian aid.

Those who remained in their homeland have constantly faced arrest, imprisonment, death and "disappearance" at the hands of Moroccan occupying forces. Their escape is blocked by a 2,500km wall dividing Western Sahara into the coastal zone occupied by Morocco and the interior part held by the Polisario Front.

In 1975 the International Court of Justice held that Western Sahara was not *terra nullius* at the time of its colonisation by Spain and that neither Morocco nor Mauritania had sovereignty over it at that time and that the Saharawis had the right to self-determination.

The war between Morocco and the Polisario continued until a UN - African Union brokered ceasefire in 1991.

The UN has arrangements in place for a referendum of self-determination of the Saharawi people (see box), but Morocco refuses to let the referendum be held.

Moroccan oppression

Since May 2005 there has been an increase in this oppression. Peaceful demonstrations have been brutally put down. Many Saharawis have been arrested and imprisoned. Some have been tortured and some have "disappeared" and others killed. Women and children have been assaulted in their own homes and their property stolen by Moroccan police and soldiers. Outsiders, including parliamentarians and human rights bodies have been refused entry to Western Sahara.

Saharawi self-help

While climatic conditions at the camps are very difficult, the Saharawis have built their own schools and they teach their own children. They have hospitals, workshops and some gardens and keep themselves, their children and their culture alive as they await their return to their own country.

They have their own democratically elected government, the Saharawi Republic (SADR), with men and women ministers and parliamentarians. Its officials run the camps. The government looks after its people and seeks the support of other nations for the proposed referendum so that the Saharawi people can return to their own country.

SADR is recognised as the legitimate government of Western Sahara by over 80 countries worldwide. It is a member of the African Union (AU).

In May 2005 in preparation for the full recovery of all of the Western Sahara territory SADR announced the commencement of a licensing initiative to enable international oil and gas companies to participate in the exploration of its offshore territory.

This licensing initiative is open to all competent and qualified companies and has been arranged in accordance with the UN legal opinion regarding commercial activities in Western Sahara.

SADR believes that development of its significant natural resources will play an important part in developing a self-reliant, democratic and progressive nation in Western Sahara.

MINURSO: UN Mission for the referendum in Western Sahara

MINURSO was established to organise a referendum for self-determination of the Saharawi people in 1992 as part of a Peace Plan between Morocco and Polisario.

By 1996 the peace process was in stalemate.

In 1997, James Baker (George H. Bush's Secretary of State) became a UN envoy and drew up a new plan for the referendum. Morocco refused to co-operate. In 2003 Baker made a new plan accepted by the UN and Polisario. Morocco rejected it and still refuses to allow the referendum to take place.

Since 2007 there have been direct talks between the two parties under UN auspices but Morocco continues to insist on offering only limited autonomy which the Saharawi consider falls short of the right of self-determination. They believe that the only democratic, viable, legal and lasting solution is the organisation of a free and fair referendum under UN auspices.