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Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Question of Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, covering the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [73/107](#). It provides a summary of the two most recent reports submitted by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara ([S/2018/889](#) and [S/2019/282](#)), with information on subsequent developments added where appropriate.

* [A/74/150](#).



1. On 7 December 2018, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution [73/107](#) on the question of Western Sahara. The present report, covering the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019, is submitted in accordance with paragraph 7 of that resolution.
2. The Security Council addresses Western Sahara as a matter of peace and security, calling in successive resolutions for a “just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara”. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples address it as a Non-Self-Governing Territory and an issue of decolonization.
3. Pursuant to Security Council resolutions [2414 \(2018\)](#) and [2440 \(2019\)](#), during the reporting period I submitted two reports to the Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara ([S/2018/889](#) and [S/2019/282](#)), on 3 October 2018 and on 1 April 2019. The reports describe the situation on the ground; the status and the progress of the political negotiations on Western Sahara; the implementation of the resolutions; and the existing challenges to the operations of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), as well as steps taken to address them.
4. From 23 June to 1 July 2018, my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Horst Köhler, carried out his second visit to the region, travelling to Algiers, Dakhla, Laayoune, Nouakchott, Rabat, Rabouni, Smara and Tindouf.
5. In Rabouni, my Personal Envoy met with the Secretary-General of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), Brahim Ghali, as well as with the negotiation team led by Katri Idoh. Both expressed full support for my Personal Envoy and his mission, as well as their serious intention to help to find a solution for Western Sahara. Mr. Ghali confirmed to my Personal Envoy, as a sign of good faith, the withdrawal of Frente POLISARIO from Guerguerat and its commitment not to return or move any institutions to Tifariti or Bir Lahlou. Mr. Ghali, however, expressed concern about the “settlement policy” and new “administrative configuration” of Morocco, which he reported was changing the demographic composition of Western Sahara.
6. In Rabat, my Personal Envoy met with the Prime Minister of Morocco, Saad-Eddine El Othmani, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Nasser Bourita, and was assured of the full support of Morocco for his work. Mr. Bourita reiterated the call, made in resolution [2414 \(2018\)](#), for a realistic, practicable and enduring political solution and stressed the commitment of Morocco to its autonomy proposal of 2007, which, in his view, should be the basis for negotiations. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister stated that, while tensions in Guerguerat had significantly decreased, Morocco was still very concerned about Frente POLISARIO “provocations” east of the berm.
7. In Algiers, my Personal Envoy met with the Prime Minister of Algeria, Ahmed Ouyahia, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Abdelkader Messahel. Both reiterated the country’s consistent assurances of its full support as a neighbour and stressed the importance of self-determination. While insisting that it was not a party to the conflict and could not take the seat of Frente POLISARIO at the negotiating table, Mr. Messahel announced that Algeria was prepared to step up its role in the political process, as a neighbour, as required by resolution [2414 \(2018\)](#). In Nouakchott, the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ismael Ould Cheikh Ahmed, also expressed full support for my Personal Envoy and for the political process. They confirmed that Mauritania was also ready

to scale up its engagement in the political process in the hope of putting an end to the conflict.

8. In Laayoune, Dakhla and Smara, my Personal Envoy met with locally elected officials. He also convened meetings in Dakhla and Laayoune with civil society representatives, who presented a wide range of views.

9. Following his second visit to the region, in line with paragraph 14 of resolution [2414 \(2018\)](#), my Personal Envoy briefed the Security Council on 8 August 2018 on his mission and his plans for the way forward. He informed the Council that he intended to invite the parties and neighbouring States to a first round of direct negotiations in the fourth quarter of the year to build trust and discuss the way forward in the political process. My Personal Envoy received broad support from the Council for his initiative. Letters of invitation were subsequently sent to Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania on 28 September 2018.

10. On 5 and 6 December 2018, my Personal Envoy convened an initial round-table meeting on Western Sahara in Geneva that was attended by representatives of Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania. The round table was the first face-to-face meeting held in the context of the political process in six years and was characterized by a sincere, respectful and constructive atmosphere. At the conclusion of the meeting, all delegations underscored the difference in atmosphere between the Geneva round table and previous encounters, concluding that it could mark a new beginning for the political process. The delegations issued a joint communiqué conveying their willingness to meet again in the first quarter of 2019.

11. On 11 December 2018, at a meeting with King Mohamed VI of Morocco in Rabat, I expressed my gratitude for the constructive engagement of Morocco in the political process and the initial round-table meeting on Western Sahara held in December 2018 in Geneva. The King reiterated his country's commitment to the political process and commended my Personal Envoy on having brought Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania together.

12. On 10 February 2019, I met the Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO on the margins of the thirty-second ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union in Addis Ababa. During the meeting, I reiterated my intention to relaunch the negotiations and asked for the support of the parties. Mr. Ghali expressed his full support for my Personal Envoy and his mission and confirmed the serious intention of Frente POLISARIO to support the search for a solution.

13. My Personal Envoy convened the second round-table meeting on 21 and 22 March 2019, near Geneva. The second meeting followed the format established in December 2018, assembling Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania around the table. Delegations engaged courteously and openly, in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Delegations welcomed the intention of the Personal Envoy to invite them to meet again in the same format. They agreed that additional trust needed to be built and committed to continue to engage in the process. My Personal Envoy encouraged delegations to explore good faith gestures and build more trust.

14. On 30 April 2019, the Security Council in its resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#) decided to extend the mandate of MINURSO for a period of six months until 31 October. The Council welcomed the new momentum created by the two recent round-table meetings, as well as the commitment by Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania to engage in the political process. The Council also expressed its full support for my efforts and the efforts of my Personal Envoy to sustain the renewed negotiations process and noted the intention of my Personal Envoy to invite Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania to meet again in the same format.

15. On 22 May 2019, my Personal Envoy informed me of his decision to step down from his role for health reasons. I received the news with regret and expressed gratitude for his steadfast and intensive efforts over the past two years which had laid the foundation for the new momentum in the political process.

16. During the reporting period, the situation in Western Sahara remained relatively calm. The ceasefire, despite some significant violations, continued to hold, with both parties on the whole continuing to respect the MINURSO mandate in safeguarding the rules enshrined in military agreement No. 1 and other related agreements. In all instances of alleged or observed violations, MINURSO engaged with the parties to prevent or resolve them. Where violations were identified by the Mission, the parties did not, however, always show willingness to resolve them or find mitigating solutions. Both Morocco and Frente POLISARIO attempted to justify some of their violations of military agreement No. 1 as being necessary to prevent drug trafficking and other criminal activities, despite the agreement not making allowances for intervention by military forces or the use of military infrastructure in such cases.

17. No further presence of Frente POLISARIO “police” has been observed in the buffer strip in Guerguerat. MINURSO conducts frequent ground and air patrols in the area, adjusting the intensity of its monitoring to the prevailing situation. There was relative calm in the area until the latter part of December 2018, despite periodic roadblocks by civilians in the buffer strip protesting the lack of job opportunities in Western Sahara and increases in the fees levied by Morocco on commercial traffic. From late December, obstructions on the road increased, causing heavy traffic jams. The Moroccan coordinator wrote twice to my Special Representative to advise that Morocco may decide to intervene with force if the road blockages became unresolvable. My Special Representative urged that no intervention take place, mindful of the political sensitivity of the area. The Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO wrote to me to warn against any Moroccan intervention across the berm.

18. On 2 February 2019, a serious incident took place. After MINURSO military observers had left Guerguerat for the day, a young Sahrawi man lit himself on fire inside the Moroccan gate, reportedly in protest against the Moroccan “border” authorities. He suffered injuries that led to his death on 6 February. This prompted an emotional outcry on social media from many in the Sahrawi community, with some of the anger directed at the United Nations and MINURSO, largely inspired by incorrect reports that MINURSO military observers had witnessed the incident first-hand and had not intervened. MINURSO reached out through Frente POLISARIO to correct these impressions and calm the situation.

19. Moroccan investments west of the berm continued. Morocco maintains that such investments directly benefit the people of Western Sahara and are implemented in consultation with them. Frente POLISARIO continues to protest that they are in violation of international law and of the status of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory. Frente POLISARIO also continues to claim that all public expressions of dissent, especially pro-referendum or pro-independence demonstrations, west of the berm are violently repressed by Moroccan security forces.

20. Frustration at the lack of progress in the political process continues to prevail among the general population of the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, compounded by persistent difficulties, such as rising malnutrition, brought about by the steady reductions in humanitarian aid. No significant security incidents were reported in the refugee camps during the reporting period.

21. On 6 November 2018, King Mohammed VI delivered an address commemorating the forty-third anniversary of the Green March, reiterating the commitment of Morocco to cooperate in good faith with my efforts and those of my Personal Envoy to establish a serious and credible political process, while taking into

account the lessons of the past. He also highlighted the return of Morocco to the African Union and called for an end to “division and lack of unity in the Maghreb”, proposing a joint political mechanism for dialogue and consultation between Morocco and Algeria “using an open-ended agenda, without conditions or exceptions”. In an official statement on the same day, Frente POLISARIO, while reiterating its commitment to the peace process led by my Personal Envoy, denounced the Moroccan presence in Western Sahara as “an illegal military occupation” and described the address of King Mohammed VI as an attempt to “ignore one of the parties to the conflict”, “obstruct the efforts of the United Nations” and “determine the framework and conditions of the conflict resolution process”.

22. A review of MINURSO was undertaken during the reporting period, led by an independent expert, Diane Corner, former Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. The team travelled to the Mission area from 16 to 22 June 2018. The review determined that MINURSO performs three decisive conflict prevention functions. First, MINURSO prevents ceasefire-related incidents from escalating. Second, MINURSO ensures that the situation on the ground supports the efforts of my Personal Envoy to revive the political process. Third, the Mission’s presence contributes to the maintenance of regional stability in the Maghreb. The review found that there is significant scope for technical improvement in the Mission’s ability to carry out monitoring and conflict mitigation activities. A number of recommendations from the review are being implemented.

23. As at 28 February 2019, 81 known cluster strike areas and 26 known minefields remained to be addressed east of the berm. East of the berm, MINURSO, through the Mine Action Service, conducted survey and clearance of 2,881,436 m² of land contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war. Frente POLISARIO destroyed its last stockpile of 2,469 mines (2,465 anti-personnel mines and four anti-tank mines) on 6 January 2019, in compliance with the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action, which it signed in 2005. West of the berm, the Royal Moroccan Army reported the clearance of more than 126 million m² of land and the destruction of 679 items, consisting of 614 items of unexploded ordnance, 53 anti-personnel mines and 12 anti-vehicle mines.

24. During the reporting period, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continued to provide international protection and, together with the United Nations Children’s Fund and the World Food Programme, delivered humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees living in the five camps near Tindouf. The lack of funding remained a major challenge for humanitarian actors.

25. During the reporting period, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to receive reports of harassment, arbitrary arrests, confiscation of equipment and excessive surveillance of journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders covering human rights violations in the Territory.¹ OHCHR is concerned by the continued pattern of restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in Western Sahara.

26. The confidence-building measures, pursuant to Security Council resolution [1282 \(1999\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, to allow family links between Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps and their communities of origin in the Territory of Western Sahara remained on hold.

¹ Gaps in reporting on the situation of human rights in Western Sahara persist owing to the lack of access of OHCHR to the Territory. In its resolution [2440 \(2018\)](#), the Security Council encouraged enhanced cooperation with OHCHR, including through the facilitation of visits to the region.

27. I am encouraged that the parties, despite occasional violations and tensions, continue to maintain the ceasefire and generally observe related military agreements. Maintaining peaceful and stable conditions on the ground is essential to providing a climate for the resumption of the political process.

28. I call upon the parties to continue to engage with MINURSO to resolve the remaining long-standing and recent violations, in full respect for the Mission's mandate, the ceasefire and related military agreements. I call upon the General Assembly, Security Council members, friends of Western Sahara and other relevant actors to encourage Morocco and Frente POLISARIO to seize the current window of opportunity and continue to engage in good faith and without preconditions.
