



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
2 October 2019

Original: English

---

## Situation concerning Western Sahara

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 October 2019 and requested me to submit a report on the situation in Western Sahara before the end of the mandate period. The report covers developments that have occurred since the issuance of my previous report of 1 April 2019 ([S/2019/282](#)), and describes the situation on the ground, the status and progress of the political negotiations on Western Sahara, the implementation of resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#) and the existing challenges to the Mission's operations and steps taken to address them.

#### II. Recent developments

2. During the reporting period, the situation on the ground in Western Sahara remained relatively calm despite some uncertainty. Overall, both parties continued to abide by military agreement No. 1 and other related agreements, and the ceasefire between the parties was respected. MINURSO continued to implement its mandate to observe and report on the ceasefire, to act as an early warning mechanism and, by engaging the parties to resolve their violations and allegations, prevent conflict and maintain a conducive environment for the peace process led by my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Horst Köhler.

3. Since my most recent report, as a result of cooperation from the Royal Moroccan Army, all four of the violations referred to in paragraphs 32 to 35 of that report, and a subsequent fifth violation of the same nature, have either been removed (three violations) or a mitigating solution was found that was satisfactory to both the Royal Moroccan Army and MINURSO (two violations). No further such violations have been registered on either side of the berm.

4. The crossing between Western Sahara and Mauritania at Guerguerat, at the southern extreme of the Territory, has been the source of increased tension among traders, protestors and Moroccan customs officials. Individuals and small groups claiming to be objecting to the lack of socioeconomic opportunities or to customs policies and actions have conducted temporary protests on the paved portion of the road inside the buffer strip on 54 occasions since my previous report – including 7



protests that did not include a roadblock, 18 with complete roadblocks and 29 with partial roadblocks – for periods varying from one hour to several days.

5. MINURSO continued to monitor the situation in Guerguerat closely with a day patrol of United Nations military observers assigned to the area. MINURSO has informally intervened on a number of occasions to reduce tensions and restore the flow of traffic, or to assist foreign tourists stranded in the buffer strip. On 23 July, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, Omar Hilale, wrote to my Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations asserting that the individuals who had been blocking the road were smugglers posing as demonstrators. The letter indicated that Morocco could no longer tolerate obstructions to the flow of civilian and commercial traffic and informed my Under-Secretary-General that Morocco might decide to intervene if the road blockages persisted. On 12 August, the Secretary-General of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) wrote to me denouncing the presence of “Moroccan agents” in the buffer strip in Guerguerat, describing it as a violation of the ceasefire and of military agreement No. 1. In the letter, Frente POLISARIO also called for the dismantling of structures in the area and added that it reserved the right to act in response to any act it deemed provocative.

6. Two conferences on Western Sahara were held in late March. On 25 March, Morocco convened the African Ministerial Conference on the African Union’s support to the United Nations political process on the regional dispute over the Sahara in Marrakech, Morocco. The conference, which was attended by participants from African Union member States, adopted a declaration welcoming and reaffirming their support for “the exclusivity of the United Nations as the framework for seeking a mutually acceptable, realistic, pragmatic and lasting political solution to the Sahara issue” (S/2019/351, annex). On 26 March, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) convened the SADC Solidarity Conference with Western Sahara in Pretoria. SADC member States and other countries, including Cuba, Nicaragua, Timor Leste and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, participated, as did representatives of political parties and civil society organizations. The conference issued a final declaration expressing, inter alia, “solidarity with the people of Western Sahara” and support for United Nations efforts led by my Personal Envoy, and reiterated “the role of the African Union...in remaining seized with the question of Western Sahara”.

7. From April to June, small groups of Sahrawi civilians protested several times a month in the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, against regulations adopted by Frente POLISARIO governing the border crossings from the Sahrawi refugee camps into Mauritanian territory and east of the berm. They also called for freedom of movement and general reforms. In Rabouni, Algeria, protests were also organized to demand that Frente POLISARIO obtain information from Algeria on the fate of Khalil Ahmed, a member of Frente POLISARIO who was reported missing in Algeria in 2009. On 15 July, Ahmed’s wife and children began a sit-in outside the United Nations multi-agency compound in Rabouni and on 29 July, approximately 60 protesters pushed their way into the compound. While there was no explicit threat to United Nations staff, the 13 United Nations staff members and 11 staff from international non-governmental organizations were relocated to nearby Tindouf as a precaution. On 4 August, following negotiations with Frente POLISARIO and tribal chiefs, Ahmed’s family left, and United Nations agencies resumed normal operations at the compound.

8. On 20 May, the Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO, Brahim Ghali, gave a speech on the occasion of the forty-sixth anniversary of its founding. He called upon the Security Council “to shoulder its responsibility and to exert all the necessary pressure to put an end to Morocco’s intransigence and obstructive position”.

Mr. Ghali also pleaded for an acceleration of the implementation of United Nations resolutions aimed at “the decolonization of Western Sahara”.

9. On 21 May, the Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO wrote to me (S/2019/424, annex) to report on the “rapidly deteriorating situation” in Western Sahara, including with regard to “the proliferation” of ceasefire violations by Morocco and alleged human rights abuses. In the letter, Mr. Ghali stated that Moroccan authorities had prevented seven independent legal observers from entering Western Sahara, thereby preventing them from observing the trial of Sahrawi journalist Nazha El Khalidi, who had been arrested on 4 December 2018 for having live-streamed “State-sponsored harassment of peaceful Sahrawi protesters in the occupied territories”. He also stated that Morocco maintained its presence in Guerguerat and that hundreds of trucks and vehicles crossed into the buffer strip every day, in violation of military agreement No. 1. On 17 September, I received a letter from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations stating that Ms. El Khalidi was arrested when filming a law enforcement operation with her mobile telephone without professional accreditation as a journalist, and that she left the police premises freely after being auditioned.

10. On 8 June, Frente POLISARIO wrote a letter to the Security Council, my Under-Secretaries-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and for Peace Operations and MINURSO condemning the alleged excessive use of force by Moroccan security forces against young Sahrawi people in Smara, who were reportedly celebrating the release of “political prisoner” Salah Labseer. The letter denounced the conduct of the Moroccan police and paramilitary agents and called for independent monitoring of human rights in the Territory. On 17 June, an estimated 70 people rallied peacefully in Rabouni to protest the alleged human rights abuses committed by Morocco in Smara, west of the berm.

11. On 26 June, Côte d’Ivoire opened an “honorary consulate” in Laayoune and Mohamed Imam Malainine was designated “Honorary Consul” of Côte d’Ivoire for Western Sahara. In a letter dated 3 July, Secretary-General Ghali wrote to me expressing concern over this action, which he stated constituted “a violation of international law and a serious breach of the international legal status of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory”.

12. On 19 July, after the victory of Algeria in the Africa Cup of Nations football championship, a public celebration in Laayoune led to clashes with Moroccan law enforcement agencies. A young woman was reportedly hit by an auxiliary force vehicle responding to the demonstrations and died from her injuries. Various media reported that approximately 21 people were injured, and more than 100 people were arrested. The wilaya (governorate) of the Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra region was quoted in the media saying that the city of Laayoune had witnessed “acts of sabotage” by a group of individuals who used the celebrations to loot public and private property, and security forces were compelled to intervene to protect the property. In a letter dated 9 September from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, Morocco reported that the celebration of the victory was “exploited by trouble-makers, who... perpetrated acts of violence and vandalism in the city of Laayoune”. In the letter, Morocco also stated that the Moroccan authorities had ordered the initiation of an investigation under the supervision of the “competent Prosecutor’s Office”. On 20 July, the Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO wrote to me calling for an independent investigation to reveal the circumstances surrounding the events, and some Sahrawi people on social media called for a blockade in Guerguerat in reaction to the incident.

13. On 29 July, King Mohammed VI of Morocco delivered an address celebrating the twentieth anniversary of his ascension to the throne. He reiterated the commitment

of Morocco to the political process on Western Sahara, under the exclusive aegis of the United Nations, and stressed that a settlement, in his view, could only be achieved “through full Moroccan sovereignty” and within the “framework of the autonomy initiative”.

14. Separately, on the same day, a video circulated online showing a speech by Mr. Ghali in which he stated that “the war of liberation” was “inevitable and a mandatory step”, and appealed for volunteers.

15. On 27 July, the “Prime Minister of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic” Mohamed al-Wali Akeik, stated separately that since “the international community had not done anything”, they were “forced to prepare to enter into war”. Speaking at the closing ceremony of the tenth edition of the Summer University of Sahrawi in Boumerdes, Algeria, on 7 August, Mr. Ghali extended “the hand of peace, reconciliation, cooperation and good neighbourliness” to “brothers” in Morocco. This, he said, would “bring the two countries and two peoples, and the peoples and countries of the region, many more achievements” and would be “better than the consequences of following an unjust policy that violates legitimacy and history”. Frente POLISARIO leaders are preparing for internal elections later in 2019.

16. During the reporting period, Moroccan investments west of the berm continued as previously reported, in particular in the city of Laayoune. 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.

17. East of the Berm, there continues to be relatively little development by comparison. Since the ceasefire, six small civilian settlements have been established in Bir Lahlou, Tifariti, Mehaires, Mijek, Agwanit and Dougaj. MINURSO has observed an increase in civilian activities and presence, mainly in Bir Lahlou, Mehaires and Tifariti. Due to the local nomadic lifestyle, the populations of these villages fluctuate. There are rudimentary social structures in most of the locations, such as schools, hospitals, mosques and small local administrative units, and there are some commercial activities, in particular herding. Morocco considers those settlements to be illegal.

### **III. Political activities**

18. During the reporting period, my Personal Envoy continued his exchanges on the issue of Western Sahara with relevant interlocutors, including Security Council members, members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara and regional organizations.

19. At the invitation of my Personal Envoy, delegations from Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania came together for a second round-table meeting near Geneva on 21 and 22 March 2019. In accordance with its resolution [2440 \(2018\)](#), my Personal Envoy briefed the Security Council on the outcome of the second Geneva round table on 10 April. He conveyed the parties’ commitment to continuing the discussion on the question of Western Sahara in order to identify elements of convergence, with a view to achieving a mutually acceptable political solution to the question of Western Sahara that is realistic, practicable, enduring, based on compromise, just, lasting, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in accordance with resolution [2440 \(2018\)](#). The Personal Envoy also indicated that all delegations attending the second Geneva round table in late March had welcomed his intention to invite them to meet again in the same manner.

He informed the Council of his intention to engage bilaterally with all participants to explore the best way of making substantive progress towards a solution. He announced his intention to convene a third round table only once there were signs of real substantive progress and a negotiations process was established that would give space to everyone, without preconditions.

20. On 15 April, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, Omar Hilale, addressed a letter to my Personal Envoy regarding the country's position on recent developments in the political process. The letter called for the stronger involvement of Algeria, stressed that Morocco, for its part, had submitted a proposal for autonomy, and called on the other party to "show the same commitment and demonstrate a real desire to move towards a solution". Finally, the letter underlined the importance of maintaining the presence of MINURSO.

21. 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 new momentum in the political process.

22. The reaction of the international community was one of sincere regret. King Mohammed VI, Frente POLISARIO Secretary-General Ghali and the head of the negotiating team, Khatri Addouh, as well as Ministers for Foreign Affairs Sabri Boukadoum of Algeria and Ismael Ould Cheikh Ahmed of Mauritania all sent letters to Mr. Köhler expressing their regret at his resignation and thanking him for his engagement during his time as my Personal Envoy. The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the Chair of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, also sent letters thanking Mr. Köhler for his efforts and for the close cooperation they had had throughout his tenure.

## **IV. Activities of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara**

### **A. Operational activities**

23. As at 31 August, the military component of MINURSO consisted of 236 personnel, 49 of whom were female, against the authorized strength of 245. From 1 March to 31 August, MINURSO conducted approximately 427,913 km of ground patrols and 989 hours of air patrols. Cooperation between MINURSO team site commanders and the parties was generally satisfactory. During the reporting period, 1,076 headquarters, units, sub-units, strongpoints and observation posts east and west of the berm were monitored monthly, for a total of 6,866 verification visits by either ground or air patrols.

24. The overall security situation continued to impose some constraints on MINURSO operations. Night patrols remain suspended on either side of the berm. In addition, for security reasons, the radius of ground patrols east of the berm was limited to 125 km from each team site, although this was a slight increase from the previous limit of 100 km. The deployment of a third helicopter has allowed MINURSO to significantly increase the number of air reconnaissance flights to fill the gaps in ground patrolling, extend the area and frequency of coverage and reduce the most risky and inefficient ground patrols. In view of these improvements, MINURSO is exploring opportunities to rebalance the deployment of United Nations military observers in 2019/20. Protective bunkers, which have been a priority investment over the past year, have now been installed at all team sites east of the berm.

25. In line with the recommendations of the independent review conducted in June 2018 (S/2018/889, paras. 72–75), MINURSO has reviewed its ceasefire monitoring operational arrangements. The Mission’s area of operation has been divided into three sectors and one helicopter has been assigned to each of them to cover broader areas and free up ground patrols for more targeted activities. With bilateral support from the European Union, the Mission is also introducing new geospatial imagery and analysis, which will enhance early warning of possible violations or threats to the ceasefire.

26. To better address and prevent any violation of both military agreement No. 1 and the ceasefire agreements, MINURSO has taken steps to increase its engagement and dialogue with the parties. MINURSO has developed a draft bilateral working and coordination mechanism with each of the parties to provide a venue for dialogue to more proactively tackle potential violations before they become formalized, and to allow opportunities for the parties to articulate any technical perspective which might be at variance with the Mission’s determinations. The mechanism consists of monthly military coordination meetings at multiple levels, from team sites to higher command levels.

27. In April, the leadership of the Royal Moroccan Army agreed to participate in the mechanism, and it has already proved highly successful at bridging differences in understanding. The leadership of Frente POLISARIO also welcomed the idea of the proposed mechanism; however, its implementation remains pending owing to an impasse over the location of meetings. In support of this mechanism, and to pre-empt misunderstandings over the scope of authorized maintenance and construction works by the parties, where military agreement No. 1 requires approval by MINURSO, the required paperwork has been made more prescriptive, descriptive and detailed.

28. In a letter addressed to me on 20 May, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations rejected the Mission’s determinations concerning five of the violations committed by the Royal Moroccan Army highlighted in my previous report and denounced other alleged violations by Frente POLISARIO “not mentioned in the report”. In another letter dated 19 June, the Permanent Representative alleged additional violations by Frente POLISARIO. The Secretariat and MINURSO reviewed the information provided, and I reaffirmed to the Permanent Representative that MINURSO was available to review and respond to concerns at any time. Eventually, and in cooperation with the Commander of the Southern Zone of the Royal Moroccan Army, solutions were found to address all five of these violations. The new 80.26 km sand wall near Mahbas was de-operationalized in April and, at the time of writing, remains non-operational; the 38 new observation posts in Oum Dreyga and the 29 new observation posts in Bir Gandouz have been abandoned and dismantled; a ditch running along the inner part of the berm near Awsard has been filled; and 18 M-109 155-mm artillery guns, used to replace the 20 much smaller L-118 105-mm guns, which have been considered a long-standing violation since 2017, have been moved out of the restricted area.

29. Between 1 March and 31 August, the Mission observed a total of 24 violations – 19 general and 5 freedom-of-movement – committed by the two parties. Nine of the violations were committed by the Royal Moroccan Army (7 tactical reinforcement and 2 freedom-of-movement), in addition to 10 long-standing violations, which remain unaddressed. Fifteen violations were committed by Frente POLISARIO military forces (12 general and 3 freedom-of-movement), in addition to 4 long-standing violations, which remain unaddressed. In the past year, the number of violations determined by MINURSO has increased, mostly due to the Mission’s increased monitoring capacity and improved operational arrangements.

30. West of the berm, MINURSO detected discrepancies between the order of battle inventories of arms and equipment and the number of heavy weapons on the ground at a number of locations and declared them violations in April and May 2019. Moreover, a violation was declared related to the replacement of arms and equipment by those of higher capability on two occasions: the first in April, regarding artillery guns in the Royal Moroccan Army's 4th Royal Artillery Group; and the second in August, regarding armoured fighting vehicles at the 1-8 armoured fighting squadron in sub-sector Al Farcia, near Mahbas. The Royal Moroccan Army contests the Mission's finding of a violation. MINURSO has insisted that they be removed from the restricted area.

31. MINURSO found that authorized maintenance works along a stretch of the berm in Oum Dreyga had exceeded the authorized scope owing to the installation of a line of barbed wire, and declared it a violation. The Royal Moroccan Army argued that the line of barbed wire had been in place for a long time and was needed to protect the berm from floods, winds and camels, as well as smugglers – a claim that is not material to the rules set out in military agreement No. 1.

32. East of the berm, MINURSO regularly monitors a number of buildings recently constructed by Frente POLISARIO in various locations outside of the restricted area to ensure their compliance with paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution [2440 \(2018\)](#). They remained in compliance during the reporting period. A logistics hub consisting of 10 new buildings located inside the restricted area near Bir Lahlou, which had already been declared a violation in 2017 and included in the list of long-standing violations in 2018, remained operational. Four new buildings in Tifariti used by the military forces of Frente POLISARIO and the relocation of a security detachment in Tifariti were declared a violation. One new building at the relocated Signal Company of the 7th Military Region (whose relocation was itself declared a violation in November 2018) and the unauthorized relocation of an engineering company in Tifariti were detected and declared violations. Five new observation posts established by Frente POLISARIO in Agwanit, Bir Lahlou and Tifariti were also declared violations. Frente POLISARIO has so far failed to comply with requests by MINURSO to resolve any of the violations.

33. The military post of Frente POLISARIO at “waypoint 6” ([S/2019/282](#), para. 36), in the restricted area 16.6 km east of Guerguerat, consisting of two tents, two to three vehicles and between two and six personnel, was again declared a violation in April as, although it had been moved out of the buffer strip, it remained in the restricted area. A request to Frente POLISARIO to abandon the post remains unheeded.

34. Discrepancies observed between the order of battle and the number of heavy weapons held by Frente POLISARIO units in Agwanit and Tifariti were declared a violation. A request to Frente POLISARIO to remove the surplus weapons from the restricted area remains unheeded.

35. On many occasions during the reporting period, Morocco reported to MINURSO the alleged presence of civilian and military personnel inside the buffer strip. On six occasions, the Royal Moroccan Army reported small groups of individuals inside the buffer strip in the areas adjacent to Oum Dreyga, between 1.4 and 4 km from the berm, and claimed they had been firing shots in the direction of its positions. MINURSO continuously monitors the situation through its ground and air patrols, but has so far not been able to confirm these allegations.

36. On 1 June, a vehicle hit an anti-tank mine inside the buffer strip near Mijek, leading to one fatality and two injuries. Upon investigation, MINURSO determined that the individuals involved in the incident were Frente POLISARIO military personnel, and their presence in the buffer strip was declared a violation. The presence of civilians in this heavily mined and sensitive area and the potential tensions brought



about by any presence inside it are also of concern. On two occasions in July and August, the Mission's military observers reported that demonstrations took place in the buffer strip near the berm, in front of the Mahbas "M18" Royal Moroccan Army position. The Royal Moroccan Army repeatedly protests against such demonstrations, claiming they are a source of tension and are deliberately staged provocations.

37. On several occasions, Frente POLISARIO raised allegations with MINURSO that the Royal Moroccan Army had been flying unmanned aerial vehicles or fighter jets across the berm near Mehaires and Mijek. The Royal Moroccan Army categorically denied the allegations. MINURSO military observers have never witnessed such flights.

## **B. Mine action**

38. Landmines and other explosive remnants of war continue to pose a threat to MINURSO personnel and logistical convoys. As at 31 August, 70 known cluster strike areas and 24 known minefields remained to be addressed east of the berm.

39. East of the berm, MINURSO, through the Mine Action Service, conducted survey and clearance of 421,489 m<sup>2</sup> of land contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war, releasing 17 (of which 12 were newly recorded) medium- and high-priority cluster strike areas and conducting 12 explosive ordnance disposal spot tasks. A total of 1,265.4 km (equivalent to 7,592,400 m<sup>2</sup>) of Mission patrol and logistic routes have been verified east of the berm, enabling the movements of MINURSO military observers. A total of 231 items of explosive remnants of war were destroyed, consisting of 116 submunitions, 20 anti-tank mines, 4 anti-personnel mines and 91 items of other unexploded ordnance, including two 500 lb air-dropped bombs.

40. Operations east of the berm were monitored through 17 quality assurance assessments by the MINURSO Mine Action Service team. In addition, MINURSO, through the Mine Action Service, conducted landmine safety briefings for 92 newly arrived civilian and military personnel of MINURSO, and conducted sessions on mine risk education for 581 personnel. Despite the efforts of the MINURSO Mine Action Service in reducing the threat of unexploded ordnances and mines, accidents still take place in the Territory. During the reporting period, six landmines and explosive remnants of war caused 17 civilian injuries and 1 civilian death east of the berm, as recorded in the Information Management System for Mine Action.

41. MINURSO, through its cooperation east of the berm with the Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office, remains in contact with Frente POLISARIO on matters related to mine action to better ascertain the impact of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. MINURSO, through the Mine Action Service, also continues to provide technical assistance to the Office in the areas of operations, programme management, data management, administration and finance.

42. Since 1 March, west of the berm, the Royal Moroccan Army has reported no civilian deaths due to accidents related to landmines and explosive remnants of war, but did report 12 injuries to military personnel and 3 to civilians. The Royal Moroccan Army reported the release and clearance of more than 98 million m<sup>2</sup> of land west of the berm from 1 March to 31 July and the destruction of 441 items, consisting of 415 items of unexploded ordnance, 17 anti-personnel mines and 9 anti-vehicle mines during that same reporting period. MINURSO continues to invite cooperation between the Royal Moroccan Army and the MINURSO Mine Action Service.



## C. Security

43. The security environment in Western Sahara remained relatively stable but unpredictable. Post-mitigation, the overall risks in the four security areas (Laayoune, Tindouf, and west and east of the berm) remain low to moderate. So far in 2019, 35 security incidents have been reported, an increase of 35 per cent compared with the same period in 2018. Among the 35 incidents, there were 6 harassment cases targeting MINURSO personnel, 4 of which were against women (3 cases in Laayoune and 1 in Tindouf), 1 attempted break-in, 1 burglary, 4 cases of vandalism of United Nations vehicles, 5 traffic accidents with a third party and 18 other traffic accidents across the area of responsibility. An ad hoc security risk assessment of the buffer strip at Guerguerat is ongoing, and consideration is being given to designating the area a fifth distinct security area owing to the increase in tensions there, the lack of local authority responsible for MINURSO security and a few cases of aggressive attitudes towards unarmed United Nations personnel.

44. There have been increased reports of smuggling and other illegal activities on both sides of the berm. Frente POLISARIO security officials have told MINURSO that the region as a whole is facing increased drug trafficking activity. The Royal Moroccan Army has reported five successful anti-smuggling operations in Smara and Oum Dreyga. At the beginning of July, Frente POLISARIO military forces arrested drug smugglers east of the berm and confiscated drugs and weapons. Despite our full confidence in the commitment of the parties to protect MINURSO, such armed groups pose a growing and unpredictable threat to MINURSO personnel.

45. East of the berm in the Mijek region, small-scale illicit gold mining, which attracts people from across the region, is an ongoing concern, and is in an area where most of the shooting heard by the Royal Moroccan Army seems to have occurred.

46. The risk of terrorist attacks targeting MINURSO remains a concern owing to the prevalence of malicious actors in the surrounding region. In April 2019, the leader of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, issued a statement calling for militants operating in West Africa to multiply attacks against “Crusader France and its allies”, raising terrorism-related concerns. There have been no new direct or explicit threats against the Mission since 2017; however, arrests of terrorist suspects in Laayoune and in the Tindouf refugee camps within the past year are a reminder that the threat remains real. The installation of protective bunkers at MINURSO team sites east of the berm, which was completed in June, fulfils a significant security recommendation to enhance existing mitigating measures against this threat, in keeping with the report of Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, entitled “Improving security of United Nations peacekeepers: we need to change the way we are doing business”, of December 2017, and in support of the primary security role played by the two parties.

47. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there have been reports of an increase in migration and human trafficking to Europe using a route that passes through Western Sahara. Since the unauthorized entry of three individuals in the team site in Mijek, east of the berm, on 17 October 2018, MINURSO has reviewed the security procedures for all team sites and continues to implement the additional security measures.

48. Morocco and Frente POLISARIO retain primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel, assets and resources west and east of the berm respectively, and MINURSO continues to have full confidence in the commitment and capability of both parties. Nevertheless, the lack of access to interlocutors and security-related information-sharing from local authorities continues to impede situational awareness west of the berm; and inadequate channels

of communication between the military leaderships of MINURSO and Frente POLISARIO create challenges for security-related contingency planning east of the berm.

49. The Government of Algeria and Frente POLISARIO continue to provide security to the staff and premises of the United Nations and international implementing partners in Tindouf and in the refugee camps, respectively. During the reporting period, three instances of peaceful civil protest occurred, targeting the United Nations compound in Tindouf, and five occurred targeting the multi-agency United Nations compound in Rabouni. These culminated on 29 July, when protesters forcibly entered and staged a sit-in inside the compound in Rabouni, resulting in the temporary relocation of United Nations personnel until 4 August.

#### **D. Substantive civilian activities**

50. MINURSO provided the Secretariat and my Personal Envoy with regular reports and analysis on developments in and affecting Western Sahara and the political process. The Mission's liaison office in Tindouf closely followed developments and trends in and around the refugee camps. Representatives of Member States visited Mission sites in Laayoune and in Tindouf on several occasions and my Special Representative for Western Sahara continued to regularly brief Member States in Rabat and New York.

51. MINURSO continued to engage the parties at every possible level, despite the constraints they have each put on meetings with the Mission's leadership. In support of the day-to-day work of the military observers in seeking resolution of violations and threats to stability, my Special Representative continued to reach out to the parties at higher levels with a view to avoiding, wherever possible, the need to bring unresolved issues before the Security Council.

52. MINURSO has continued developing and strengthening civilian and military collaboration in fulfilling its mandate. The Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) has developed a protocol to assess the implementation of requests for authorization made by the parties under the terms of military agreement No. 1 and their compliance with it. In addition, JMAC has been developing new procedures for the use of geospatial imagery to enhance the Mission's performance and effectiveness. The Mission has also further strengthened its early warning mechanism by closely monitoring and analysing information stemming from social media and, in Tindouf, from communities.

#### **E. Challenges to the operations of the Mission**

53. As reported previously and further detailed above, the constraints imposed by the parties, in terms of both communication with MINURSO leadership and access to interlocutors and relevant information, hinder MINURSO in the implementation of its mandate and continue to pose a challenge to the Mission's operations and security.

54. After my meeting in the margins of the high-level week of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Nasser Bourita, I believe progress can be achieved to overcome constraints regarding these aspects on the Moroccan side. It is also my hope that Frente POLISARIO will resume its longstanding practice of meeting MINURSO leadership in Rabouni.

55. Frente POLISARIO continues to refuse all meetings with the Mission's leadership, both civilian and military, in Rabouni, where all meetings had previously been held in accordance with long-standing practice. During the reporting period, this

policy has been extended to include all MINURSO military personnel based in Laayoune. In the Tindouf area, the Mission's Liaison Office maintained regular, but limited, communication with Frente POLISARIO, but interacted openly with civil society and other relevant interlocutors through visits to the refugee camps, other contacts and electronic means. The overall situation impedes good communication and effective working relationships with the parties, and handicaps MINURSO in the implementation of its mandate.

56. MINURSO continues to lack access to any local interlocutors west of the berm, which has an impact on its capacity to collect reliable information and assess and report on the situation across its area of responsibility. This also handicaps MINURSO in the implementation of its mandate.

57. The UNHCR programme of confidence-building measures remains suspended, affecting mainly the most vulnerable Sahrawi families, who benefited from the programme when it was operational.

58. The imposition by Morocco of the use of Moroccan vehicle number plates on MINURSO vehicles west of the berm, in contravention to the status-of-mission agreement, continues to give the population a negative perception of the Mission's impartiality. In March 2014, my Special Representative reached a verbal agreement with the Government of Morocco to gradually replace Moroccan licence plates with United Nations licence plates (S/2014/258, para. 50). The agreement has yet to be implemented.

59. The threat related to terrorist groups and criminal activities in the region continues to cause great concern owing to its unpredictability and the unknown level of risk, especially with regard to the team sites located in remote areas east of the berm, the unarmed ground patrols covering long distances across the Territory and the resupply of convoys.

60. The building tension in Guerguerat represents a challenge to the Mission's operations and security, and a potential threat to the stability of the Territory.

## **V. Humanitarian activities and human rights**

### **A. Persons unaccounted for in the conflict**

61. The question of individuals who are still unaccounted for, in relation to past hostilities, remains a major humanitarian concern. The International Committee of the Red Cross remains ready to act as a neutral intermediary between the parties and play an advisory role on the issue.

### **B. Assistance to the protection of Western Saharan refugees**

62. UNHCR continued to provide international protection and, together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), delivered humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees living in the five camps near Tindouf.

63. Malnutrition and anaemia prevalence remained public health concerns. UNHCR and WFP continued to work closely together on the treatment and prevention of anaemia, stunting and malnutrition among young children, girls, and pregnant and lactating women. WFP provided mid-morning snacks to more than 40,000 boys and girls in primary schools and kindergartens to encourage attendance and retention. To contribute to resilience and improve food security, WFP scaled up its hydroponic

projects to produce fresh animal fodder and launched a fish farm project in 2019, and provided training, financial grants and material assets. UNHCR also continued to facilitate youth self-employment and business development. In April, UNHCR and WFP carried out a nutrition survey. The results have shown a worsening situation compared with 2016. All malnutrition indicators have increased from the survey conducted in 2016, including global acute malnutrition (from 4 per cent in 2016 to 7 per cent in 2019), stunting (from 18 per cent in 2016 to 28 per cent in 2019), anaemia in children (from 38 to 50 per cent) and anaemia in women (from 43 to 52 per cent).

64. The UNHCR-led inter-agency vulnerability assessment to identify needs by sector remains ongoing. WFP completed a separate assessment to measure food insecurity among the refugee population, finding that refugees rely heavily on food assistance and that only 12 per cent of the Sahrawi camp population is food secure. In addition, 58 per cent of refugees are vulnerable to food insecurity and 30 per cent are food insecure. WFP continues to cover the refugees' basic food and nutrition needs through monthly distributions. New distribution figures from WFP amount to 133,672 rations.

65. UNICEF is also present in the camps and provides support to maternal and child health programmes, including the expanded programme of immunization and capacity-building for health staff; primary education activities related to a quality learning environment, with a particular focus on water, sanitation and hygiene in school; child protection through the inclusion of children with disabilities; and youth activities by promoting life skills.

66. The main challenge for humanitarian actors remained the funding shortfall. UNHCR is struggling to meet international standards in its life-saving activities in the areas of protection, shelter, water and sanitation, health, nutrition, education, energy, provision of non-food items and livelihoods. None of the targets for 2018 were achieved in these sectors. The departure of skilled personnel for better-paying jobs ("brain drain") in several sectors, such as health and education (because of lack of financial incentives and difficult working conditions) is becoming a major concern. The health infrastructure is in urgent need of rehabilitation, and the distribution of hygiene kits to women and girls of reproductive age was insufficient to meet needs. New water sources are urgently required as the population receives on average only about 12 litres of drinking water per person per day, which is well below the minimum standard of 20 litres per person per day.

### **C. Confidence-building measures**

67. 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.

### **D. Human rights**

68. Despite a lack of access, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is concerned by the continued reported pattern of restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in Western Sahara by Moroccan authorities. During the reporting period, OHCHR continued to receive reports of harassment and arbitrary arrests of journalists, lawyers, bloggers and human rights defenders covering human rights violations in the

Territory.<sup>1</sup> OHCHR also received information on the reported forced displacement of human rights activists from their places of residence. Information received by OHCHR reportedly pointed to the use of excessive force to disperse peaceful demonstrations, which resulted in injuries in several instances, and in the death of an individual on one occasion.

69. Torture and ill-treatment of Sahrawi prisoners in Morocco also continued to be reported. OHCHR received several communications from lawyers and/or family members of Sahrawi prisoners, including the Gdeim Izik group of prisoners, alleging that several had been subjected to torture, ill-treatment and medical neglect. OHCHR received information on two hunger strikes by the Gdeim Izik group of prisoners during the reporting period. OHCHR also received information on the transfer of Sahrawi prisoners from the Territory, impeding the possibility of family visits.

70. With regard to the human rights situation in the Territory, I note that I received a letter from Morocco on 9 September providing “information concerning the efforts and achievements of the Kingdom of Morocco for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”, including information on the specific incidents outlined in my regular reports to the Security Council.

71. During the reporting period, OHCHR received information on the harassment, arrest, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment by Frente POLISARIO security forces of a human rights defender and a blogger engaged in documenting human rights violations in the region. Both had denounced the management of the Tindouf refugee camps on social media. They were reportedly arrested in June 2019 by Frente POLISARIO security forces following a sit-in at the Rabouni camp to protest the disappearance in 2009 of Khalil Ahmed.

## VI. African Union

72. A meeting of the African Mechanism on Western Sahara, comprised of the Troika of the African Union,<sup>2</sup> to be held in Niamey on 8 July to consider and adopt the working modalities of the Troika, could not take place and was rescheduled for 2020. This would have been the first meeting of the Troika, which was established in July 2018 in Nouakchott.

## VII. Financial aspects

73. By its resolution [2468 \(2019\)](#) of 30 April 2019, the Security Council extended the mandate of MINURSO until 31 October 2019.

74. The General Assembly, by its resolution [73/324](#) of 3 July 2019, appropriated the amount of \$56.3 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of MINURSO beyond 31 October, the cost of maintaining the Mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, special procedures mandate holders’ allegation letter AL MAR 1/2019 of 3 April 2019 and the response of Morocco to the communication; and special procedures mandate holders’ allegation letter AL MAR 2/2019 of 4 June 2019 and the response of Morocco to the communication.

<sup>2</sup> The Troika is composed of the outgoing, the current and the incoming Chairpersons of the African Union.

75. As at 20 August 2019, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for MINURSO amounted to \$63.2 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$4,890.9 million.

76. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 October 2017, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned major equipment and self-sustainment has been made for the period up to 30 September 2017, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

## VIII. Observations and recommendations

77. I remain convinced that a solution to the question of Western Sahara is possible. Finding a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in accordance with resolutions 2440 (2018) and 2468 (2019) will, however, require strong political will from the parties, and from the international community. My Personal Envoy, Horst Köhler, was able to reinstate a much-needed dynamic and momentum to the political process, including through the round-table process he launched which brought together Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania. It is therefore essential that the continuity and momentum in this political process is not lost. I call on Security Council members, friends of Western Sahara and other relevant actors to encourage Morocco and Frente POLISARIO to engage in good faith and without preconditions in the political process as soon as a new Personal Envoy is appointed.

78. There is continued lack of trust between the parties. Despite their respective declarations, neither Morocco nor Frente POLISARIO seem to have confidence in the other party's willingness to seriously engage and make the compromises that are necessary to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. I believe, however, that the parties have a great number of interests in common that should encourage them to work together. I therefore urge the parties to make active gestures of good faith that demonstrate their willingness to make progress towards a political solution to the conflict, and to refrain from rhetoric harmful to such a resolution.

79. MINURSO has continued to play a valuable role, despite the challenges discussed above, in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the military agreements and in engaging with the parties to prevent or reduce tensions. This role remains crucial to sustaining a conducive environment for the success of the political process. The resolution of the significant violations from my previous report, and the absence of major new violations during the reporting period, reflect the value of this conflict-prevention engagement and illustrate the benefits of effective communication, for which more open channels are needed. MINURSO has continued to conduct this engagement impartially and effectively, with demonstrated results. As detailed in the present report, MINURSO has also taken significant steps to improve its effectiveness and efficiency.

80. The Mission's ability to continue playing this role depends in large measure on the commitment of the two parties to support and facilitate the implementation of the Mission's mandate, to accept and implement its findings and to respect its independence and impartiality. In all three of these areas, I urge the parties to live up to their obligations.

81. In the interests of all, I call once again on all the parties to remain committed and to maintain regular contacts with MINURSO leadership, both civilian and military. My Special Representative's unhindered ability to meet with either party as necessary is essential to his role as my representative in the Territory.

82. I welcome the cooperation of Morocco in addressing the violations outlined in my previous report to the Security Council, and I urge both parties to cooperate fully

with MINURSO, respecting the impartiality of its findings, in resolving all outstanding violations.

83. As I have detailed in the present report, I am concerned about the recent trends in Guerguerat. The increasing commercial traffic across the buffer strip and the growing civilian activities to impede it are creating tensions in that sensitive area. I call for regular civilian and commercial traffic not to be obstructed. I strongly urge both sides to refrain from any deliberate actions at Guerguerat, or anywhere else in the buffer strip. I also urge the parties to speak out against those who would foment such tensions. Both sides must abide strictly by the terms of the ceasefire agreements, and I stress that any intervention in the buffer strip – military or civilian – would be viewed as an escalation that could lead to another crisis in the Territory.

84. Both parties are committing efforts to combat increased drug smuggling and other criminal activities in the Territory. Recognizing that this is a valid concern, I remind the parties that addressing these challenges with military means in a manner that contravenes military agreement No. 1 undermines the ceasefire and therefore cannot be justified.

85. UNHCR and humanitarian actors in the Tindouf camps are facing increased challenges in meeting the needs of vulnerable Sahrawi refugees. Health and nutrition indicators have reached alarming rates and the provision of drinking water continues to fall well below international standards. These challenges, among others, stem from chronic underfunding of humanitarian operations in the Tindouf camps, causing donors to withhold support as they question the evidence base pertaining to programmes. I underscore that figures related to refugees in the Tindouf camps are strictly for humanitarian assistance and protection services, and do not in any way constitute eligibility for political settlement or referendum purposes.

86. I urge the parties to respect, protect and promote human rights, to address outstanding human rights issues and enhance cooperation with OHCHR and the United Nations human rights mechanisms and to facilitate their missions. Independent, impartial, comprehensive and sustained monitoring of the human rights situation is necessary to ensure the protection of all people in Western Sahara.

87. I commend the Mission's troop-contributing countries for their contributions and for the deployment of an increased number of women among the military observers. The growing presence of women has a positive impact on the work of the Mission and supports my efforts to pursue gender parity in the United Nations. I also wish to thank all Member States for their support in securing sufficient resources needed to maintain the Mission's current operations and effectiveness.

88. MINURSO is the main and often sole source of impartial information and advice to me, the Security Council, the Member States, the Secretariat and my Personal Envoy concerning developments in the Territory. In this regard, the Mission plays a key role in the effort to reach a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the conflict in Western Sahara in accordance with resolutions [2440 \(2018\)](#) and [2468 \(2019\)](#). MINURSO is a vital early warning mechanism that can prevent developments that could affect the climate necessary for the resumption of the political process. I therefore recommend that the Council extend the mandate of MINURSO.

89. I would again like to thank Horst Köhler for his relentless efforts as my Personal Envoy, for reinvigorating the political process and for reviving much-needed hope that a political solution to the question of Western Sahara is possible. I also thank my Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, Colin Stewart, for his dedicated leadership of MINURSO. Finally, I thank the Force Commander, Major General Zia Ur Rehman, and the men and women of MINURSO for their continued commitment, under difficult and challenging circumstances, to fulfilling the Mission's mandate.



## Annex I

## United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

## Contributions as at 13 September 2019

<i>Country</i>	<i>Military observers<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Troops<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Civilian police<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Total</i>
Argentina	3	–	–	3
Austria	5	–	–	5
Bangladesh	8	19	–	27
Brazil	9	–	–	9
Bhutan	2	–	–	2
China	12	–	–	12
Côte d'Ivoire	2	–	–	2
Croatia	7	–	–	7
Djibouti	1	–	–	1
Ecuador	2	–	–	2
Egypt	27	–	–	27
El Salvador	3	–	–	3
France	3	–	–	3
Germany	3	–	–	3
Ghana	7	7	–	14
Guinea	5	–	–	5
Honduras	11	–	–	11
Hungary	7	–	–	7
India	3	–	–	3
Indonesia	4	–	–	4
Ireland	3	–	–	3
Italy	2	–	–	2
Jordan	4	–	–	4
Kazakhstan	6	–	–	6
Malawi	3	–	–	3
Malaysia	10	–	–	10
Mexico	4	–	–	4
Mongolia	4	–	–	4
Montenegro	1	–	–	1
Nepal	7	–	–	7
Nigeria	6	–	–	6
Pakistan	13	–	–	13
Poland	0	–	–	0
Portugal	–	–	0	0
Republic of Korea	2	–	–	2
Russian Federation	14	–	–	14
Sri Lanka	4	–	–	4
Sweden	2	–	–	2
Switzerland	1	–	–	1

---

<i>Country</i>	<i>Military observers<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Troops<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Civilian police<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Total</i>
Togo	2	–	–	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>238<sup>c</sup></b>

---

<sup>a</sup> Authorized strength is 246, including the Force Commander.

<sup>b</sup> Authorized strength is 12.

<sup>c</sup> Actual strength on the ground, for military and civilian police, including the Force Commander.

# Annex II

## Map

