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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 2016 to 30 June 2017, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [71/106](#) of 27 December 2016. It summarizes the most recent report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara ([S/2017/307](#)), with information on subsequent developments added where appropriate.

* [A/72/150](#).



1. On 27 December 2016, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution [71/106](#) on the question of Western Sahara. The present report, covering the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017, is submitted in accordance with paragraph 7 of the aforementioned resolution.
2. The Security Council addresses Western Sahara as a matter of peace and security, calling in successive resolutions for a “mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara”. The Fourth Committee of the General Assembly (the Special Political and Decolonization Committee) 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 resolution [2285 \(2016\)](#), I submitted a report to the Security Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara ([S/2017/307](#)) on 10 April 2017. In that report, I informed the Council of the situation on the ground; the status and the progress of the political negotiations on Western Sahara; the activities of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy; 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, in keeping with the request of the Security Council in its resolution [2285 \(2016\)](#).
4. On 7 October 2016, insofar as MINURSO could ascertain, legislative elections were held without incident in Morocco and in the part of Western Sahara under Moroccan control. On 6 November 2016, King Mohammed VI delivered an address to mark the forty-first anniversary of the Green March. Regarding Western Sahara, the King stated that Morocco’s “southern provinces” were strong “thanks to their populations’ commitment to their Moroccan nationality”. The address also praised “the specific development model and projects launched in the region”, and the potential for Western Sahara “to become an integrated development hub, at both the regional and continental levels, and a platform for economic cooperation between Morocco and Africa”. He also indicated that “Morocco will remain open and ever ready to engage in constructive dialogue in order to find a final political settlement”. In a letter to my predecessor dated 24 September 2016, the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario denounced Morocco’s conduct of the elections in Western Sahara, calling them an “illegal and provocative act given its status as a Non-Self-Governing Territory”.
5. In the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, public life and social activities were conducted peacefully and in a relatively calm atmosphere. The humanitarian situation in the refugee camps remained challenging. Operations continued to be affected by underfunding, despite high-level efforts to mobilize additional assistance. Donor briefings were organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in September and November 2016, in Algiers and Geneva, respectively. In June 2017, I expressed deep concern over the plight of tens of thousands of Sahrawi refugees faced with cuts in food rations owing to lack of donor funding. I noted that funding shortages had forced the World Food Programme to cut food rations by almost one fifth and to halt distributions of nutritional supplements to treat anaemia and malnutrition in pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children. Acute funding shortages continue to affect the provision of basic services and other programmes, including the efforts of UNHCR to pursue a multi-year livelihoods strategy with a particular focus on youth empowerment.
6. Representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights last visited Laayoune and Dakhla from 2 to 18 April 2015 and

Tindouf from 29 July to 4 August 2015. The special procedures of the Human Rights Council did not visit Western Sahara during the reporting period. The Government of Morocco has maintained its request that a follow-up visit to Western Sahara by the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, originally scheduled for April 2015, be delayed. Frente Polisario continued to express its readiness to cooperate with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

7. On 31 May 2016, the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario, Mohammed Abdelaziz, passed away. Brahim Ghali was elected as his successor at an extraordinary congress, held on 8 and 9 July, following his nomination by the National Secretariat of Frente Polisario.

8. In June 2016, the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General began to consult the parties and neighbouring States on a resumption of the negotiating process. In a letter dated 29 July 2016 addressed to both parties and both neighbouring States, the Personal Envoy formalized his request and indicated his desire to visit the region to review recent developments and their implications, as well as the regional situation. Frente Polisario, Algeria and Mauritania responded that they stood ready to receive him at any time. Morocco replied positively, in principle, but deferred providing a concrete response.

9. On the margins of the opening of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly in September 2016, the Personal Envoy met with senior representatives of both parties and both neighbouring States. The then Minister-Delegate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco, Nasser Bourita, reiterated that his country “remains a defender of, and engaged in, the negotiating process, to which it is committed on the basis of its autonomy initiative”. He noted that, for Morocco, the conflict is a regional dispute with Algeria. He also indicated that the Personal Envoy would be welcome to visit Morocco after the new Government had been formed and ideally after the conclusion of the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Marrakech, Morocco, from 7 to 18 November 2016.

10. A member of the National Secretariat of Frente Polisario, Mohammed Salem Ould Salek, expressed regret over the lack of progress in the negotiating process. He emphasized the eagerness of Frente Polisario for the process to resume and reiterated its readiness to receive the Personal Envoy. He also described the difficulty that Frente Polisario was facing in maintaining the commitment of Western Saharans to the 1991 ceasefire in the absence of any progress towards the referendum for which the ceasefire had been established.

11. The Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Algeria, Ramtane Lamamra, underscored the importance of reviving the negotiating process, welcomed the Personal Envoy’s proposed visit and stressed that his country would play a positive role in support of the parties when the process was once again under way. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih, also welcomed the Personal Envoy’s visit and stressed his country’s concern regarding the security situation in the region, including the worrisome developments in the Guerguerat region of Western Sahara, as well as the need to resolve the overall conflict in order to improve the living conditions of all of North Africa’s populations through economic integration.

12. In response to an invitation from the Government of France, the Personal Envoy visited Paris from 21 to 23 November 2016 to exchange views on the stalemate in the negotiating process and the tense situation in Guerguerat. His interlocutors expressed continued support for United Nations efforts, heightened

interest in working to revive the negotiating process and a readiness for further dialogue on how best to proceed in the light of seven years of deadlock.

13. On 15 November 2016, my predecessor met with King Mohammed VI on the margins of the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties (see para. 9 above) and underscored the importance of making progress in the Western Sahara negotiating process, as called for in the relevant Security Council resolutions. A senior member of the Secretariat was told in a subsequent meeting that Morocco would no longer receive the Personal Envoy because of his alleged bias in favour of Frente Polisario and Algeria. The Personal Envoy sent me a letter dated 23 January 2017 tendering his resignation effective on a date of my choosing. His assignment consequently ended on 30 April 2017.

14. In August 2016, increased tensions in the vicinity of Guerguerat in the buffer strip in southern Western Sahara saw armed elements of Morocco and Frente Polisario in close proximity to one another. In response, from 28 August 2016, MINURSO deployed a static team of military observers between the Moroccan and Frente Polisario positions along the road during daylight hours. On 25 February 2017, I issued a statement strongly urging Morocco and Frente Polisario to unconditionally withdraw all armed elements from the buffer strip near Guerguerat, to adhere to the letter and spirit of their obligations under the ceasefire agreement and to refrain from obstructing regular commercial traffic. On 26 February, Morocco announced its unilateral withdrawal from the buffer strip so as “to immediately apply and respect the request made by the United Nations Secretary-General”. The withdrawal of all Frente Polisario elements from the Guerguerat area, between the berm and the border with Mauritania, was confirmed by MINURSO observers as having occurred over the course of 27 and 28 April.

15. MINURSO was unable to return to full functionality within the 90-day time frame stipulated by the Security Council in its resolution [2285 \(2016\)](#). On 12 June 2016, an agreement was reached with the Government of Morocco on the return of 25 of the expelled international staff members, who were subsequently redeployed to the Mission. On 4 and 5 April 2017, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations conveyed, in separate meetings, to my Under-Secretaries-General for Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Operations his authorities’ readiness to accept the immediate return of all 17 MINURSO staff members who had been unable to return to their duty station since March 2016.

16. In its resolution [2351 \(2017\)](#) of 28 April 2017, the Security Council extended the mandate of MINURSO until 30 April 2018. The Council affirmed its full support for the commitment of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to relaunch the negotiating process with a new dynamic and a new spirit leading to the resumption of a political process with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. The Council recognized that the recent crisis in the buffer strip in Guerguerat raised fundamental questions related to the ceasefire and related agreements and encouraged the Secretary-General to explore ways that such questions could be resolved.

17. The conflict over the future legal status of Western Sahara must come to an end as soon as possible to enable the region to confront security threats, economic challenges and human suffering in a coordinated and cooperative manner. Despite the achievements of two successive Personal Envoys in providing the necessary facilitative framework, the parties have not taken advantage of the framework to engage in a cooperative search for a solution. On the basis of consultations with the parties and neighbouring States, members of the Group of Friends on Western

Sahara and the Security Council, as well as other important stakeholders, I intend to propose that the negotiating process be relaunched with a new dynamic and a new spirit that reflect the Council's guidance, with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. For progress to be made, the negotiations must take into consideration the proposals and ideas of both parties. In addition, neighbouring countries can and should make important contributions to this process.
