

PEACE FOR WESTERN SAHARA

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Abstract

Morocco militarily occupied Western Sahara in 1975 after Spain relinquished colonial rule. Following a war of independence the Sahrawi, the people of Western Sahara, defeated by well-equipped Moroccan forces, signed peace agreements in 1991 which promised a UN referendum on independence. Morocco reneged and now maintains a berm, a 2700 km. long sand wall, between occupied Western Sahara and a narrow liberated zone, guarded by 40,000

Moroccan troops and 10 million landmines.

Algeria accepted civilian refugees, driven from their homeland in 1976, into camps where more than 200,000 Sahrawi now live, dependent on aid from Algeria and UN.

More than 2000,000 Sahrawi live under Moroccan occupation where peaceful demonstrations of Sahrawi civilians are met by home destruction, beatings, detention, jail and torture.



UN maintains a mission to oversee a referendum in the region, MINURSO, with 200 personnel; it has not fulfilled its important mandate and ignores gross human rights violations of Sahrawi by Morocco.

Occupied Western Sahara is a resource-rich region with phosphates, purchased by Canadian companies, off-shore fishery and possible diamond deposits and off-shore petroleum which Canadian companies are exploring.

Peace for Western Sahara includes the right of return of exiles (Article 13 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and the independence referendum in which only those of Saharawi origin may vote.

The Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic government-in-exile, a member of the Organization of African Unity, is recognized by 44 countries. Peace for Western Sahara requires global support for the return of exiles and for Saharawi's right to independence. This presentation details the background of this issue, the Canadian connections and how we can contribute to peace for Western Sahara.

Introduction

Peace cannot exist for a people divided; peace cannot exist in a division which includes half of a population living in exile in refugee camps and the other half of the people living under brutal foreign occupation.

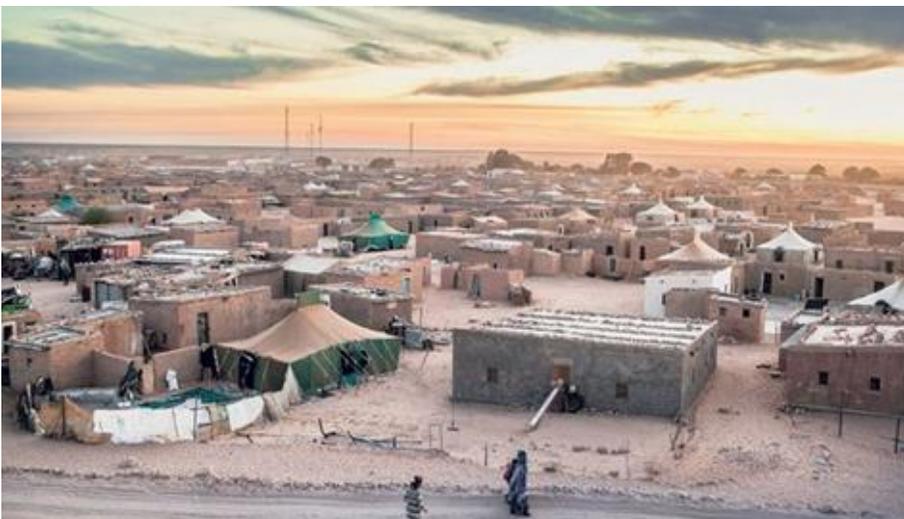
Uniting these people and supporting their right to self-determination and independence is the peaceful solution and this paper sets forth the peace research which documents this right.

Western Sahara is a small country with an area of 266,000 square kilometres on the Atlantic coast of northern Africa. It is the home of the Saharawi people; a people with a distinct culture and its own dialect of Arabic. The UN classifies it as a “Non-autonomous territory.” Morocco’s occupation of Western Sahara for the last thirty-nine years is not officially recognized by any nation.



Spain’s Last Colony; Africa’s only Colony

The Spanish occupied Western Sahara from 1884 until 1975 when a failing Franco withdrew Spain’s troops and presence, including bodies exhumed from graves, and gave up its colony. The Saharawi had been fighting for their independence against Spain in the 1970s and in 1973 the POLISARIO FRONT (Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro) was created and began an organized armed struggle against Spain which continued after Spain’s withdrawal against Morocco. In spite of promises made to the Saharawi by Spain and international court rulings, Spain did nothing to prevent Morocco from occupying Western Sahara.



In 1975 the International Court of Justice ruled that although some tribes in Western Sahara had ties to Morocco, they were not sufficient to establish Morocco’s sovereignty over the region and that the people of Western Sahara had a right to choose independence. However, in November, 1975, following the withdrawal of Spain, the so-called

Green March into Western Sahara began when 300,000 unarmed Moroccans accompanied by the Moroccan Army armed with heavy weapons entered Western Sahara. Morocco's occupation was soon a *fait accompli*. Today Western Sahara is Africa's last colony.

The armed struggle of the Polisario Front continued after the occupation. But many civilians, driven out of their homes by Moroccan troops, were forced to flee across the desert to Algeria, pursued by the Moroccan Air Force, dropping napalm and phosphorus bombs on the desperate people, mainly women, children and the elderly. Many died or were killed during this arduous flight. They were established in refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, where they remain today..

Life in the Camps



Approximately 250,000 people live in 5 camps south and east of Tindouf; they are named after cities and towns in their homeland – Layoun, Smara, Dakla, Baijdur and Aused. The camps are organized with local governments, schools, health facilities and the administrative centre of the government-in-exile in Rabuni. Residents are almost completely dependent on food aid from the UN World Food Program which they say is diminishing. The food aid is very basic and anemia and other health problems are common. Those who have money can supplement food aid with commercially sold food brought in from Algeria. Workers who went to Spain sent back funds and consumer goods to the camps, but the after the economic crisis in Spain, most were forced to return home. Water, electricity (some camps have only wind & solar power) fuel, and communication technology are provided by Algeria.

The camps are home to organizations that foster the culture, independence aspirations and history of Saharawi. They work on many issues, including the role of women in society, in both the camps and the occupied territory, arts and crafts, dance and music, an annual Sahara Marathon, research and action on political prisoners and the disappeared in the occupied territory.

Saharawi are Moslem, practising a very liberal form of this faith, committed to democratic process and the equality of women. Accusations of Islamic extremism are not based in fact.

Life is unsustainable and hard in the harsh desert area; residents resist by trying to live a normal life, but they say they will never give up hope that they will return to their homeland.



Life under Occupation

It is thought that approximately (lacking a neutral census) 250.0000 Saharawi live in occupied Western Sahara, Morocco has so many settlers in the occupied territory that they may outnumber the native Saharawi. Life there is very difficult for Saharawi. Any expression of independence or freedom for Western Sahara is answered with brutal treatment. Detainment, random home attacks, beating on streets, torture and prison are the fate of peaceful activists.

Aminatou Haider, often called the Saharawi Gandhi, has been beaten and tortured and threatened with deportation to Spain but after her 30 day hunger strike the Moroccans had to return her to her homeland. She says that she and other activists are committed to non-violence but young people are growing frustrated with the lack of progress towards independence.



**AMINATU HAIDER: ACTIVIST FOR LIBERATION IN OCCUPIED WESTERN SAHARA
NOW & JUST AFTER BEING TORTURED & HER FACE ON THE FLAG**



BRUTAL TREATMENT ON THE STREET



PRISONERS IN MOROCCAN JAIL

(SHUVELED PHOTO)

In 2010 an independence camp was set up at Gdaym Izik (also spelled Gdeim) which Noam Chomsky called the beginning of Arab Spring. More than 20,000 Saharawi participated in the camp until it was attacked and destroyed by the Moroccan military after one month, injuring many and reportedly killing eleven or more campers. After three years of detention in harsh conditions, 24 Saharawi prisoners were tried in a military court and were given sentences of 10 years to life imprisonment for their participation in the camp.

In 2013, Juan Mendez, Special Rapporteur on Torture, noted in his report to the United Nations Human Rights Council (A/HRC/22/53/Add.2) the urgent need for an international mechanism for monitoring human rights as a means to improve their protection.

The importance and illegality of resource exploitation and the Canadian connection

The Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Western Sahara is one of the richest fisheries in the world. Morocco has an agreement with the EU Parliament to allow EU fishers to exploit this resource. Those who take omega-3 supplements may well be ingesting oil of fish from these waters. Recently Morocco has granted off-shore petroleum permits to companies, including Vancouver-based Imara Energy. Kelowna-based Metalex Ventures has a permit to explore for diamonds in Western Sahara from Morocco. Western Sahara has some of the major phosphate deposits in the world. They are mined in Boucraa and exported by Office Chérifien des Phosphates, a company wholly-owned by the Moroccan government. PotashCorp and Agrium Inc. are Canadian companies and are major purchasers of these phosphates. Many home and industrial fertilizers sold in Canada contain phosphate from Western Sahara. All this exploitation, export, and sale of phosphates, fish and derivatives is illegal under international laws and agreements that Canada is a signatory to.

International law as articulated in Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 explicitly prohibits commercial activities on the part of an occupier in occupied countries, and such commercial activity is prohibited by the Rome Statute 1998 of the International Criminal Court, as being the war crime of pillage. The former United Nations senior jurist, Hans Corell (the Under-secretary-General for Legal Affairs) told the Security Council on the subject of development and exploitation of Saharawi resources: [I]f further exploration and exploitation activities were to proceed in disregard of the interests and wishes of the people of Western Sahara, they would be in violation of the principles of international law applicable to mineral resource activities in Non-Self-Governing Territories. (29 January 2002)

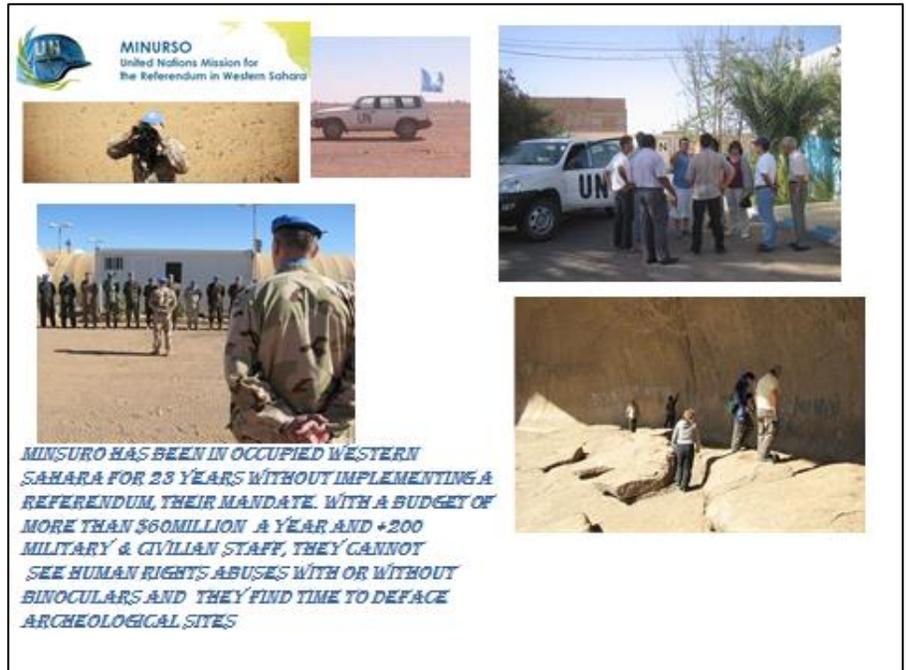
Resolutions #242 & #338 of the UN Security Council include statements that prohibit permanent settlement of occupied lands for domestic or commercial purposes; the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits (and makes criminal) settlement of a population into the occupied lands of others: Canada is supposed to respect these international agreements. The government pension plans of Norway and Sweden have divested from PotashCorp as a consequence of its purchase of Western Sahara phosphates – as has the Ethical Fund of Vancity, one of Canada's largest financial institutions. The Canada Pension Plans invests in PotashCorp & Agrium. Canada is negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with Morocco; so far no details are available to Canadian citizens. Many Canadians have expressed their concern about Western Sahara and its occupation by Morocco to the federal government.



The role of the UN & its agencies

Many African countries gained their independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Spain's colony of Western Sahara was first on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly in 1965. The UN General Assembly had passed Resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960, the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Also as stated above the UN Security Council has passed Resolutions #242 & #338 which are directly relevant to the occupation of Western Sahara. The UN has a Human Rights Council which has heard many submissions on the violation of human rights in occupied Western Sahara.

MINURSO (the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) was created by Security Council resolution 69,f 29 April 1991, and accepted by Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO). MINURSO consists of a group of civilians and military personnel, currently numbering over 200, with an annual budget of more than \$60M, renewed every year by the Security Council. It was mandated to (among other duties) to prepare a qualified voters list and then to organize and ensure a free and fair



referendum and proclaim the results; all to be overseen by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Since 1991, the budget and existence of MINURSO have been renewed by the Security Council annually, even though it has failed to carry out these important functions. It takes no part in monitoring or reporting on human rights abuses in Western Sahara that are so severe as to make a fair and free referendum impossible in spite of appeals from human rights organizations and some governments. There has been no progress on the gaining of independence of Western Sahara. The government in exile of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) located in the refugee camps of Algeria just celebrated its 38th year of existence – but still in exile.

Some observers believe that this failure of the world community and its agencies to support the independence of Africa's last colony is directly attributed to Morocco's main ally, France, and its threat of a veto in the Security Council, the importance of resource extraction by a government friendly to and supported by France, USA and other nations which have major economic interests in the resources and future resource potential of the occupied region as well as Morocco's claim to a greater Morocco that includes Western Sahara.

Without independence there can be no peace for Western Sahara.

An overview of the Future for Peace in Western Sahara

Obstacles to Peace

Small population- less than one million
Very few in diaspora, so little global presence
No large global power supports Western Sahara
No terrorist activity, no suicide bombers
No mass media interest (if it bleeds, it leads)
Not fundamental Islamic- no support from nations that support fundamentalism
Morocco has powerful friends- in particular, France & USA. Morocco is supported by these powers even as it breaks international law; the Geneva Conventions on War prohibit commercial activity or residential settlement in occupied lands. Torture is condoned by Morocco's friends. Still many Saharawi disappeared & unaccounted for by Morocco.
Morocco may have more people in Western Sahara by now than Saharawi- no neutral census
Morocco has 33 million people
Morocco (ruled by a monarchy which wields much power over elected politicians) is seen as a stable moderate friend of global powers & is the 'gatekeeper' to Mediterranean for them
Morocco markets resources- phosphates, fishing rights & possibly petroleum (off-shore potential, now under exploration) exploited in Western Sahara to these powers.
Western European & other countries want to secure their economic advantage and protect MOROCCO. *Photo: She holds photo of a disappeared relative*



Advantages for Peace

There are many nations in world with less than ½ million; size is not relevant to nationhood
The Saharawi Democratic Arab Republic (SADR) is recognized by 45 nations at this time. It is a member of the African Union (Morocco is not a member)
The rights of Saharawi have been confirmed many times in international law and by the UN
The Geneva Conventions on War prohibit SADR has a democratic government in exile
Last election saw 2nd highest % of women elected in world
SADR believes in the equality of women; high participation of women in public & professional life. Female sexual mutilation is unknown in this culture. Domestic abuse of women is reported rare to unknown
SADR believes in non-violent resistance.
Saharawi practise a liberal form of Islam that does not involve itself in government.
Saharawi has dedicated support from many non-governmental organizations, especially in Western Europe.
Algeria continues to support SADR and provides invaluable assistance to the refugee camps, including high school and university level education. Saharawi also earn scholarships for education in Spain, Cuba, Austria, UK & other countries; they have a high level of literacy and education, particularly among the young.
In the light of global powers like USA & EU constantly espousing support for democracy and international law. It would seem that supporting the independence of SADR is a more just and rightful cause than supporting Morocco (& other undemocratic & authoritarian regimes that are friends of the 'West') *Art by Mohamed Sulaiman*



Conclusions

"The world has forgotten us." said a young woman to me, over tea in a tent in Smara refugee camp.

Peace research reveals many inconsistencies in the processes that were created to facilitate a peaceful transition from colonization in Western Sahara and to uphold the rights of a colonized people and reveals the failure of implementation of many resolutions passed by international bodies that would allow Saharawi their promised independence. Indeed, it seems the world has forgotten Western Sahara.



Canada, within days of Russia's entry into Ukraine, was prepared to condemn this invasion and to send military aid to the Ukrainian government; but for 39 years Canada has remained silent on the issue of the invasion of Western Sahara.

The reasons for silence and inaction have been documented in this paper, but that does not excuse 'western democracies' for failing to support a democratic process and their continuing support of an undemocratic regime and its brutal occupation of a neighbour.

Peace for Western Sahara will come when the country is independent and exiles return from refugee camps (Article 13, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Peace can be achieved for Western Sahara if governments, international bodies, civil society and committed individuals work to achieve this peace. Organizations, nations and individuals world-wide who believe that peace is a concept that can be not only researched, but implemented, will have to act, not just talk, about their support for peace and democracy in Western Sahara and elsewhere in the world.

The moral imperative is there; we must initiate political will. If informed citizens act, politicians will follow.



**MOHAMED
SULAIMAN WAS
BORN IN A REFUGEE
CAMP; HE WANTS HIS
ART TO SERVE THE
CAUSE OF
INDEPENDENCE.
HE CREATES
POETRY &
CALLIGRAPHY
WHICH EXPRESS THE
CALL FOR
WESTERN SAHARA
INDEPENDENCE 36
YEARS AFTER
OCCUPATION &
EXILE.**

**MY HOMETLAND: LIVES INSIDE OF ME THOUGH I DO NOT
LIVE IN IT/IT SETTLED IN MY HEART THOUGH I WAS
BORN FAR AWAY FROM IT**



Fatimatou & Sulaiman wait to return to their birthplace

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Film

Sons of the Clouds 2012 Spain. "Hijos de las nubes, la última colonia" Director: Álvaro Longoria

El Problema 2010 Spain. Directors: Jordi Ferrer Cortijo and Pablo Vidal Santos. Awarded Amnesty International Prize – San Sebastian Human Rights Documentary Festival 2010.

Photos in paper: all photos taken in refugee camps by author. Others from various sources listed in references



APPENDIX 1: Action for Western Sahara

POTASHCORP The Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan Inc.

This Canadian company buys Western Sahara phosphates, from a company owned by the Moroccan government. Morocco has occupied Western Sahara (WS) by military force since 1975. Resolutions #242 & #338 of the UN Security Council include statements that prohibit permanent settlement of occupied lands for domestic or commercial purposes; the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits (and makes criminal) settlement of a population into the occupied lands of others: Canada is supposed to respect these international agreements. (Morocco has settlers in WS and also benefits from off-shore WS fisheries.) 6 major Nordic investors have divested from international fertiliser firms importing from occupied Western Sahara; Norway's & Sweden's state pension funds have divested from PotashCorp because of its purchase of phosphate from occupied WS. Vancity's Ethical Fund has divested from Potash Corp.

CONTACT: William J. Doyle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan Inc. # 500, 122 - 1st Avenue South, Saskatoon, S7K 7G3, SK and ask that Potash Corp stop buying phosphates from Western Sahara and for Potash Corp. to support an end to colonization of Western Sahara so it may negotiate & buy phosphates from the legitimate owners of the resource. <http://www.potashcorp.com>

AGRIUM INC. has recently bought 2 shiploads of phosphates, unloaded in North Vancouver for its fertilizers. Please write to Agrium with the same information as for PotashCorp, asking it to source phosphates elsewhere. You might mention that Australian Impact Fertilizer Co. has stopped buying phosphates from Western Sahara.

CONTACT: Michael Wilson, CEO, Agrium Inc. 13131 Lake Fraser Dr. SE, Calgary AB, T2J 7E8

Friends of Western Sahara also are initiating research into the use of **phosphoric acid in Coca-Cola & other cola makers** which may be made from WS- sourced phosphates. **Retail sales of fertilizers in Canada**, including by Federated Co-ops may be using WS- sourced phosphate. We recommend asking sellers to tell us where the phosphorus in fertilizers comes from.

METALEX VENTURES LTD a Canadian diamond company has an exploration project for properties in Western Sahara as a joint venture between Metalex and ONHYM (Moroccan Government) in which Metalex has a 60% contributing interest.

CONTACT: Chad Ulansky, President & CEO, Metalex Ventures Ltd. #203, 1634 Harvey Avenue, Kelowna, BC V1Y6G2 Ask that Metalex relinquish its shares in Western Sahara & end its association with the Morocco government and to call for the independence of Western Sahara so Metalex can work with its legitimate government. <http://www.metalexventures.com/html>

IMARA ENERGY has permits from Morocco to explore for off-shore petroleum on the coast of Western Sahara.

CONTACT: Alwyn Wright, CEO, & Samuel Jonah, Chair, Imara Energy Corp.#1200 – 570 Granville St. Vancouver, BC, V6C 3P1

SAMPLE WORDING (please use your own words) ...*Since 1975 Western Sahara has been illegally occupied by Morocco. Western Sahara has an elected government in exile; the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) has been recognized by more than 50 countries. Under many international laws and the Geneva Conventions on War, all of which Canada recognizes, commercial activity in occupied territory is forbidden. The government of Morocco has no legal right to allow any commercial activity in SADR without the permission of its own government. I hope you will reconsider your plans to engage in seabed drilling and will support the internationally accepted rights of the legitimate government of the region, SADR, and relinquish your licence which was granted illegally by the government of Morocco.*

PENSION PLANS Canada Pension Plan invests in Potash Corp and Agrium. We need to publicize this and oppose this use of our contributions. Also many other pension funds, provincial, municipal, professional unions, etc. may have invested in these companies. Recipients of these pensions are encouraged to research and act on such investments of their money.

For information on the Canada Pension Fund Investments in PotashCorp see: <http://www.bbcf.ca/articles/cpp.pdf> and http://www.bbcf.ca/articles/letter_potash.pdf

CANADA-MOROCCO FREE TRADE AGREEMENT This agreement is in the final stages of negotiation. Media releases do not mention Western Sahara or include mineral products imported from Morocco. This may be because PotashCorp imports them into the USA for processing, not Canada. Contact your own Member of Parl. & Ed Fast, MP, Minister of International Trade, House of Commons, Ottawa, On, K1A 0A6.

SEE: consultations@international.gc.ca <http://www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/morocco-maroc.aspx?v>

FORM A SUPPORT GROUP: Victoria Friends of Western Sahara (FWS) have sponsored speakers, film showing, discussions, media & MP interviews. See: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1444266325819855/> & <https://www.facebook.com/fwsahara> For more information contact Victoria FWS: [bbcf\(at\)bbcf\(dot\)ca](mailto:bbcf(at)bbcf(dot)ca)