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Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Question of Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report, covering the period from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [76/89](#). It provides a summary of the most recent report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara ([S/2022/733](#)).

* The present report was submitted after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



1. On 9 December 2021, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution [76/89](#) on the question of Western Sahara. The present report, covering the period from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022, is submitted in accordance with paragraph 7 of that resolution.
2. The Security Council addresses Western Sahara as a matter of peace and security, calling in successive resolutions for a “just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara”. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples address it as a Non-Self-Governing Territory and an issue of decolonization.
3. Pursuant to Security Council resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#), I submitted a report to the Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara ([S/2022/733](#)), on 3 October 2022. The report describes the situation on the ground; the status of the political negotiations on Western Sahara; the implementation of resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#); and the existing challenges to the operations of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), as well as steps taken to address them.
4. During the reporting period, the situation in Western Sahara was characterized by low-intensity hostilities between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) and enduring challenges to the operational environment of MINURSO, including related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.
5. Most firing incidents across the berm reported to MINURSO by the parties were concentrated in the north of the Territory, near Mahbas. According to MINURSO calculations based on the reported incidents, the incidents of firing reported by the parties have steadily decreased since January 2021. While MINURSO was not able to independently confirm the number and location of the reported firing incidents, their impact remained the subject of divergent claims.
6. MINURSO continued to note reports of strikes conducted by Royal Moroccan Army unmanned aerial vehicles east of the berm. In some instances, media reports indicated that civilian casualties had occurred as a result of the aerial strikes. Owing to the time needed to receive authorization from the parties to visit these sites, MINURSO was only able to independently confirm that casualties had occurred on one occasion, on 16 November 2021 in the Mijek area. In addition, MINURSO observed traces of human remains at four other sites.
7. Legislative, regional-level and commune-level elections were held in Morocco and in the part of Western Sahara under Moroccan control on 8 September 2021. In a letter addressed to me on 13 September, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations referred to the reported rates of participation by voters in Western Sahara as “a new confirmation, through the ballot box, of the unwavering commitment of citizens of the southern provinces to their Moroccaness”. On 19 September, the Frente POLISARIO representative in New York and coordinator with MINURSO, in a letter addressed to me, stated that the elections “cannot have any effect on the legal status of Western Sahara”.
8. During the reporting period, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Suriname, Togo and Cabo Verde inaugurated “Consulates General” in Dakhla. In letters addressed to me on 31 March, 26 May, 21 July and 1 September 2022, the Frente POLISARIO called these diplomatic representations a “violation of international law and ... breach of the international legal status of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory”.

9. In a letter addressed to King Mohammed VI of Morocco on 14 March 2022, the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, stated that “Spain considers the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007, as the most serious, credible and realistic basis for resolving the dispute”. On 21 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain met at his request with my Personal Envoy. My Personal Envoy took good note of the Minister’s support for a United Nations-facilitated process on Western Sahara aimed at a mutually acceptable solution, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions. On 19 March, Frente POLISARIO issued a statement stating that Spain’s position was “absolutely in contradiction with international legality”.

10. West of the berm, Morocco continued investing in infrastructure development. On 23 June 2022, the Moroccan authorities announced the signature of four agreements related to a seawater desalination project for the city of Dakhla, which is expected to have a capacity of 37 million cubic meters of water per year. Frente POLISARIO continued to protest that such investments are in violation of international law.

11. My new Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, took up his functions on 1 November 2021 and has held consultations with all concerned.

12. From 13 to 20 January 2022, my Personal Envoy completed an initial tour of the region, visiting successively Rabat, Tindouf/Rabouni, Nouakchott and Algiers. The purpose of this first visit was to hear the views of all concerned on how to make progress towards a constructive resumption of the political process on Western Sahara.

13. In Rabat, my Personal Envoy had in-depth discussions with Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Nasser Bourita, during which he was briefed in detail about the 2007 Moroccan autonomy proposal. The Minister expressed interest in seeing the political process relaunched.

14. On 16 January, in Rabouni, my Personal Envoy met with the Secretary-General of the Frente POLISARIO, Brahim Ghali. Frente POLISARIO interlocutors reiterated their position concerning the need to achieve the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, and that there was currently a “situation of war”, with daily casualties on both sides. In their view, the “lack of attention” by the international community to the issue of Western Sahara, in addition to facts on the ground, made the return to hostilities their “only option”. Their “commitment to the ceasefire had ended”. Several Frente POLISARIO interlocutors, however, expressed hope for a renewed process and confidence-building measures that could make a positive impact on the situation on the ground.

15. In Nouakchott, on 17 January, the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, and the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, expressed to my Personal Envoy the support of Mauritania for the United Nations-facilitated political process and indicated their country’s availability to assist within a context of “positive neutrality”.

16. Receiving my Personal Envoy in Algiers on 19 January, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, Ramtane Lamamra, and Algeria’s Special Envoy for Western Sahara, Amar Belani, reiterated the Algerian position that the issue was one related to decolonization. Algerian interlocutors furthermore reaffirmed that Algeria should be considered along with Mauritania as a “concerned neighbour” and expressed doubts on the round-table process and any effort they might see as aiming to reframe the situation as a “regional conflict”.

17. In the third quarter of 2022, my Personal Envoy completed a second set of visits to all concerned actors in the region. During a visit to Rabat from 2 to 7 July, the

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco further shared his sense that the time had not come for his Government to elaborate on their proposal. The Minister suggested that my Personal Envoy should first reconvene round tables with the participation of Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania, for a discussion to be based exclusively on the Moroccan proposal and in the context of Morocco's "national sovereignty and territorial integrity".

18. Before that visit, my Personal Envoy had communicated to the Moroccan authorities his intention to visit Western Sahara. He also flagged this intention publicly ahead of his trip, noting that he would be guided by the format of the visits undertaken by his predecessors. In the course of consultations with the Moroccan authorities about the planning of his proposed visit to Western Sahara, my Personal Envoy was informed of the position of the Government of Morocco that it would not be possible for him to meet with civil society representatives and women's organizations on the occasion of this first visit. In light of United Nations principles, in particular the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and also considering the importance of engaging civil society organizations, my Personal Envoy decided not to proceed with a visit to Western Sahara during the trip, but stated that he looked forward to doing so during his next visits to the region.

19. On 3 and 4 September, my Personal Envoy travelled again to Rabouni to meet with the leadership of Frente POLISARIO. With reference to the 2007 proposal by Frente POLISARIO, and in light of the political and security environment, he engaged with his interlocutors concerning their approach to the next steps. The Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO and other senior officials repeated the emphasis they placed on the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara through a referendum and how the political impasse had led them to "resumption of armed conflict". My Personal Envoy expressed the hope that a resumption of the ceasefire could be pursued, in an effort to reduce tensions and build an environment more conducive to the political process. In the course of the visit, my Personal Envoy met with local women's organizations and civil society groups, including youth representatives, to hear their perspectives on the general situation and the political process. His interlocutors expressed their frustration at the lack of a political solution. They also emphasized their concern about the further reduction in humanitarian aid in the refugee camps and the negative impact of that unsustainable situation on the population.

20. In Algiers, on 5 September, my Personal Envoy met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Special Envoy for Western Sahara, who discussed the issue of Western Sahara at length and reiterated the full support of Algeria for his efforts and for the political process, emphasizing that it should lead to the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara and noting the need for a direct dialogue between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO. My Personal Envoy visited Nouakchott on 12 and 13 September, where he was received by the President of Mauritania and the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, who reiterated the principle of their country's "positive neutrality", while signalling readiness to assist his efforts when circumstances would be conducive to progress.

21. My Personal Envoy also undertook consultations on the issue of Western Sahara with members of the Security Council, members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara and other interested actors. Among others, he met with New York-based interlocutors during his visits to United Nations Headquarters in November 2021 and February and April 2022; the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, and senior Italian government officials in Rome in December 2021; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain, José Manuel Albares Bueno, also in Rome on 3 December 2021, in Madrid on 21 January

and in Brussels on 21 March 2022; senior French government officials in Paris on 27 January 2022; the United States Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, in Washington, D.C., on 3 February 2022; various senior international officials on the margins of the Munich Security Conference in February 2022; senior government officials of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in London on 28 March 2022; senior officials in the Government of Sweden in Stockholm on 9 May 2022; and senior officials in the Government of Germany in Berlin on 10 May 2022. He furthermore spoke by telephone with senior government officials of the Russian Federation. In these meetings and interactions, my Personal Envoy noted with appreciation the expressions of support by his interlocutors for the efforts by the United Nations to facilitate a political settlement of the situation in Western Sahara.

22. During the reporting period, mine action activities were limited to emergency disposal of explosive ordnance, route verification and combined explosive ordnance risk education and COVID-19 prevention messaging for civilians. Owing to the suspension of operations, no land release activities could be conducted. MINURSO continued to work to resecure permission from the parties to resume demining activities.

23. The Government of Morocco, Frente POLISARIO and the Government of Algeria continued to cooperate fully with MINURSO on COVID-19-related matters. MINURSO military and civilian staff continued to receive vaccinations provided in the Territory west of the berm by the Royal Moroccan Army and the Ministry of Health of Morocco, and in Tindouf by the health authorities of Algeria. As at 31 August 2022, at least 95 per cent of all international civilian and 30 per cent of national civilian staff had received two doses of the vaccine, and all military staff had received two doses of the vaccine, with 79 per cent having also received a third, booster dose.

24. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continued to provide international protection and, together with the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme, delivered humanitarian assistance to the Sahrawi refugees living in the five camps near Tindouf, Algeria. However, with alarming trends of malnutrition and over 80 per cent cuts in food rations due to funding shortfalls, increased shipping costs and unavailability of food items, the refugees were at risk of serious food insecurity and malnutrition.

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

26. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human rights was unable to conduct any visits to Western Sahara for the seventh consecutive year despite multiple requests and despite the Security Council in its resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#) strongly encouraging enhanced cooperation. The lack of first-hand information was detrimental to a comprehensive assessment of human rights in the region. Moreover, international human rights defenders, researchers, lawyers and observers were allegedly expelled from or denied entry into Western Sahara.

27. I remain deeply concerned by the developments in Western Sahara. The resumption of hostilities between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO remains a major setback to the achievement of a political solution to this longstanding dispute. Daily incursions into the buffer strip adjacent to the berm and hostilities between the parties in this area violate its status as a demilitarized zone that should instead remain a cornerstone of a peaceful solution to the situation of Western Sahara. The continued lack of an effective ceasefire threatens the stability of the region, with a risk of escalation while hostilities persist. The conduct of aerial strikes and firing across the berm continues to contribute to increasing tensions.

28. Despite this challenging context, it remains my belief that a political solution to the question of Western Sahara is possible, provided that all concerned engage in good faith and there is continued support from the international community. The United Nations remains available to convene all those concerned with the issue of Western Sahara in the search for a peaceful solution. The efforts by my Personal Envoy provide an opportunity that I urge all to seize. Strong political will is required to find a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in accordance with Security Council resolutions [2440 \(2018\)](#), [2468 \(2019\)](#), [2494 \(2019\)](#), [2548 \(2020\)](#) and [2602 \(2021\)](#).

29. To that end, I urge all concerned to approach the facilitation of the process by my Personal Envoy with an open mind and to desist from preconditions for the political process.
