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**LETTER DATED 12 SEPTEMBER 1997 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

I have the honour to refer to the question of Western Sahara, in particular the activities of my Personal Envoy, Mr. James A. Baker III, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1108 (1997) of 22 May 1997.

As may be recalled, it was my intention to evaluate the situation concerning Western Sahara in the light of the findings and recommendations to be provided by my Personal Envoy. In this connection, the Council, in its resolution 1108 (1997), urged the parties to continue to cooperate with my Personal Envoy in his mission and to demonstrate the political will to overcome the persisting stalemate, and find an acceptable solution. The Security Council requested me to submit, by 15 September 1997, a comprehensive report on the results of my evaluation of all aspects of the Western Sahara issue. In the meantime, the Council decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 September 1997.

As the members of the Security Council are aware, following his exploratory mission to the region in late April 1997, my Personal Envoy held separate meetings in London on 10 and 11 June with the two parties to the Settlement Plan, Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO, as well as the two neighbouring countries, Algeria and Mauritania. During these meetings, it was agreed with my Personal Envoy that the only way to assess the implementability of the Settlement Plan would be through direct talks between the two parties, under United Nations auspices, to address the obstacles in the implementation of the Plan. Algeria and Mauritania would be invited to the talks as observers, but would attend the discussions on issues directly affecting them. It was agreed that the talks would be private, would not constitute an international conference and would continue for as long as the Personal Envoy felt that there was progress. The parties also accepted my Personal Envoy's suggestion that, during those direct talks, no issue would be considered as finally agreed until all outstanding issues were agreed.

Under the conditions set forth and agreed to in London, the first round of direct talks under the auspices of my Personal Envoy was held in Lisbon on 23 June. At the end of the first round, my Personal Envoy submitted bridging proposals on the identification of prospective Saharan voters in the referendum. This led to a second round in London on 19 and 20 July, at which the parties

reached agreement on issues related to the identification process and to preparatory work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the return of refugees. A third round of direct talks was held in Lisbon on 29 August, during which the parties reached further agreement on issues related to the confinement of troops from the two sides and to the release of prisoners-of-war and of Saharan political detainees.

At the completion of the third round of direct talks in Lisbon, my Personal Envoy invited the parties to a fourth round, with a view to resolving satisfactorily the proposed code of conduct of the parties during the referendum campaign. The fourth round is scheduled to be held at the James Baker Institute for Public Policy in Houston, Texas, from 14 to 16 September 1997.

Given the progress made thus far, and in order to take account of the results of the forthcoming round of direct talks and undertake thereafter a proper evaluation of the situation concerning Western Sahara, I propose to defer the submission of my report to the Security Council until later this month.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN
