



**Forum:** 1<sup>st</sup> Committee of the GA

**Issue:** The conflict of Western Sahara

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### Description of the issue:

The region of the Western Sahara is located at the north-western coastal area of Africa, the area borders to Morocco, Mauritania and shares a short stretch of a border with Algeria. The region was a colony of the Spanish Empire and it was annexed by Morocco in 1975. Since the annexation by Morocco the region has had a long history of territorial disputes between Morocco and the indigenous Saharawi People, who are led by the Polisario Front. In 1976 the Polisario Front declared the Saharan Arab Republic. Today, the region is recognised as a country by many governments and is a full member of the African Union, however it is not considered a sovereign country according the United Nations.



### Background information:

The region of Western Sahara has a population of roundabout 500.000 people; the main city is Laayoune with a population of 217,732 people.

*“The Polisario Front proclaimed the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976, with a government in exile in Algeria.*

*Brahim Ghali was elected leader of the Polisario Front and president of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in July 2016 following the death of long-term president Mohamed Abdelaziz Ezzedine.*



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*A seasoned military leader, described both as a "hard-line supporter" and "historic figure", he was one of Polisario's founding members in 1973 and led the first raids against the occupying Spanish forces that sparked the armed struggle for Western Saharan independence.*

*In 2008 he left his post as ambassador to Spain with unresolved charges against him alleging inhumane treatment and the torture of Saharan prisoners, and became the ambassador to Algeria."*

*(BBC, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14115273>)*

The entire conflict has killed 10.000 people so far, more than 200.000 have been displaced and 194.000 refugees have fled due to this conflict.

### **Hassan II and the Green March**

Hassan II was the Moroccan king from 1961 until his death in 1999. In 1962 he tried to change the Moroccan constitution and to democratize the country. However he was the one who annexed Western Sahara and claimed Western Sahara as part of Morocco. In 1975 he called for a "Green March" where 350.000 unarmed Moroccan citizens cross the border to Western Sahara demonstrated their support for the annexation of Western Sahara.

#### **Historical background:**

The following timeline follows the "Chronology of Events" concerning the Western Sahara as stated on the Security Council website <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/chronology/western-sahara.php?page=6> in an abridged form.

1884	Spain colonises the region of Western Sahara
1934	The region of Western Sahara becomes a Spanish province and is called Spanish Sahara from now on
1960s	Nomads start to settle in the region. The nomads started a national movement.
1965	The United Nations encourages a decolonisation of the region
1973	The Polisario Front starts working to end the occupation of Spain
1975	Moroccan troops and the Polisario guerrilla fighters have an armed clash as a cause of



the Moroccan overrun of the borders.

16 October 1975	Morocco asks the ICJ (International Court of Justice) to legalize its claim of sovereignty over Spanish Sahara in 1974. However the ICJ denies that wish concluding: "the materials and information presented to it do not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco.
6 November 1975	The "Green March" across the border between Western Sahara and Morocco moves around 350,000 Moroccans into the territory.  In Western Sahara this day is known as "Black March"
14 November 1975	Spain officially hands over Spanish Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania
26 February 1976	Spain fully withdraws from Spanish Sahara, now known as Western Sahara
27 February 1976	Just one day after the Spanish withdrew, Morocco annexes Western Sahara. On the same day the Polisario Front proclaims the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). A fight between the Moroccan and Mauritanian armies against the Polisario breaks out. Most of the population flees into refugee camps in Algeria.
1979	Mauritania withdraw from Western Sahara; Morocco takes over the former Mauritanian territories.
1982	The SADR join the Organisation of African Unity, most member states recognise the SADR as a state.



1984	Out of protest with respect to SADR's membership in the OAU, Morocco leaves the organisation.
30 August 1988	Both conflict parties start negotiations and agree on UN "settlement proposals"
29 April 1991	The UN Resolution 690 sends a UN-Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) with the aim to implement the settlement proposals.
May 1996	The civilian police component of MINURSO is withdrawn and the military component of the mission is reduced.
20 June 2001	The first Baker plan is introduced by James Baker. In this plan Morocco is given the full control over the territories and the Saharawi People have exclusive competence over local issues. Morocco agrees on the plan, however the Saharawi Front rejects the plan. Because they felt that the Plan was not fair, and they did not want to live under Moroccan control.
23 May 2003	The next Baker Plan is proposed by James Baker. It offers the inhabitants a choice between either becoming an independent autonomy or reaching a complete integration into Morocco. All conflict parties except Morocco accept the plan.
11 June 2004	James Baker resigns from his job.
18-19 June 2006	The Polisario and Morocco meet in



Manhasset near New York. The talks are the first since 2000.

10-11 August 2006

The next round of the negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario are again held in Manhasset, with the same constellation as the previous round. Which means a second meeting between the Polisario and Morocco officials. The major topics are ways to reinforce confidence-building measures like contact between refugees and their relatives back in Western Sahara. Furthermore, the implementation of UN resolution 1754 is discussed.

14-20 December 2007

The Polisario holds a congress in Tifariti, the de-facto capital of the SADR. At the end of the congress, Polisario announces via the Algerian official news agency that if the negotiations with Morocco fail, the Moroccan government has to deal with violent actions by the front.

17-18 March 2008

The fourth round of talks between Morocco and the Polisario are held in Manhasset. The parties negotiate a mutually acceptable solution. The talks focus on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1754 and 1783. They also focus on issues concerning administration, justice and resources.

30 April 2009

The SC extends its mandate for the UN Mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO)



through resolution 1871

<p>11-12 February 2010</p>	<p>The Council holds informal consultations on 18 February. Morocco and the Polisario Front hold informal meetings from 11-12 February facilitated by the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, in accordance with resolution 1871, which urged the parties to continue dialogue to achieve acceptable political solution.</p>
<p>30 April 2010</p>	<p>The Security Council adopts resolution 1920 to renew MINURSO's mandate until April 2011.</p>
<p>8-9 March 2011</p>	<p>Informal talks on Western Sahara are held in Malta. While each party continues to reject the proposal of the other as a sole basis for future negotiations, they agree to explore innovative approaches.</p>
<p>27 April 2011</p>	<p>Another extension of the MINURSO Mandate is adopted with resolution 1979.</p>
<p>5-7 June 2011</p>	<p>The conflicting parties meet for another round of informal talks</p>
<p>22 July 2011</p>	<p>The next round of talks are held, they discuss, without finding agreements, the issue of electoral corps and mechanisms for self – determination.</p>
<p>24 April 2012</p>	<p>Security Council members adopt resolution 2044 extending the mandate of MINURSO for another year. Earlier, on 17 April, Council members receive a briefing in consultations on MINURSO and the Secretary-General's report from the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy and the head of MINURSO.</p>
<p>28 Jan. – 15 Feb. 2013</p>	<p>Christopher Ross and representatives of</p>



the supporters of the Polisario visit Western Sahara.

25 April 2013

On 25 April, Council members adopt resolution 2099 and extend the mandate of MINURSO for another year. A draft resolution prepared by the US, the penholder on Western Sahara, had been discussed earlier by the Group of Friends of Western Sahara (France, Russia, Spain, the US and the UK) and between the US and Morocco in bilateral consultations. The initial draft apparently included points on giving MINURSO a mandate to monitor and gather information on human rights violations and included a reference to human rights monitoring in the camps near Tindouf, Algeria, but by the time the draft was distributed to all Council members these aspects had been withdrawn.

29 April 2014

The next extension of the mandate for MINURSO, with resolution 2152, again it lasts for a year.

27 October 2014

Council members meet in consultations on the situation in Western Sahara on 27 October. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Hervé Ladsous briefs the Council on the current situation concerning the new Special Representative and head of MINURSO, Kim Bolduc (Canada), who was to assume her position on 1 August, but has not yet travelled to her post due to opposition from Morocco. Bolduc still briefs Council members in consultations on the situation in the territory along with Christopher Ross, the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara.

16 April 2015

Next extension of MINURSO, with resolution 2218.

March 2016

Council members meet several times following a visit by Secretary-General Ban



Ki-moon to the region and the dispute with Morocco that ensues in Morocco's request to have 84 members of MINURSO's civilian staff withdrawn.

29 April 2016

On 29 April, the Security Council adopts resolution 2285 renewing the MINURSO mandate.

18 October 2016

On 18 October, Special Representative and head of MINURSO Kim Bolduc and Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General Christopher Ross briefs Council members in consultations. The meeting focuses particularly on the situation in Al Guergarat, in the southern part of the territory within the buffer strip controlled by Frente Polisario, where Morocco is attempting to build a road connecting its position at the berm with the Mauritanian border.

October 2018

On 11 October, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of MINURSO Colin Stewart brief Council members in consultations on the Secretary-General's latest report. During the meeting, members express support for the UN-led efforts to renew a political process and the planned round table to be held in December in Geneva with the parties and neighbouring countries. A Council meeting with troop-contributing countries to MINURSO were held two days earlier, on 9 October. On 29 October, the Security Council extends the mandate of MINURSO for a further six months.

April 2019

On 10 April, Council members met in consultations to discuss MINURSO and the second roundtable of the parties in Geneva that occurred in March. Council members were briefed by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Colin Stewart and Personal Envoy Horst Köhler. On 24 April, Council members began negotiations to renew MINURSO's mandate. The Council voted on the renewal of MINURSO's mandate on 30 April.



October 2019

On 16 October, Council members met in consultations to discuss MINURSO before its mandate's expiry on 31 October. Special Representative Colin Stewart discussed the fragile peace and ongoing humanitarian challenges, such as water scarcity, food shortages and a lack of medical supply, in the region. The Council adopted a resolution on 30 October renewing MINURSO's mandate for 12 months.

April 2020

On 9 April, Council members held a closed VTC meeting on Western Sahara and MINURSO. Special Representative Colin Stewart and Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Bintou Keita briefed the council. Member states were apparently told that the Secretary-General is working hard to find a new Personal Envoy (the post has been vacant for 11 months). After the meeting South Africa appeared to suggest adopting press elements, however one permanent member was unable to agree, and no press elements were issued.

### **Previous attempts to solve the Issue and Possible Solutions**

Baker Plan I & II

There have been two major plans to solve the territorial disputes and the question of Western Sahara, these plans were created and presented by James Baker, the former US President's Chief of Staff. They were made in 2001 and 2003.

The first Plan was meant to give Morocco full power over the region, however the Saharawi would gain full control over local issues. The Moroccan Government agreed on this Plan but the Saharawi Front rejected the plan.

Two years later the second Plan was proposed by James Baker, which provided a referendum in a few years and offered the citizens the choice of independence, autonomy or integration with Morocco. All conflicting parties and the Security Council except Morocco, who denied the plan, accepted this plan.

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To solve this issue, multiple solutions are possible.

The first and probably the easiest solution is a two state solution. However this solution brings along three issues.

The first one is the distribution of the territory: should the land be divided between Morocco and the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic or does it fully belong to the SADR? The next issue is to



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convince Morocco to leave the occupied areas peacefully and the last problem is to ensure the stability of the government of the SADR and to ensure that the Polisario Front does not have any influence as a paramilitary- organization, more likely as a political party.

The next solution could be a settlement in which the Western Sahara becomes Moroccan territory and all people who live in the region should be made Moroccan citizens, with all rights and protection by the law.

The last option is to declare the region as an international zone and give the United Nations the full authority over the entire region.

## **Glossary:**

### **Term 1 – Saharawi People**

The Saharawi People were nomads who travelled from place to place in camel caravans. Today they live in northern Africa, in the west of the Sahara. Most of the people however live in refugee camps today, due to the civil war and the territorial disputes between the Saharawi People and Morocco. Their main religion is Islam and 99.86 % of the people are Muslims. Their main language is Hassaniya, which is an Arabic dialect. Their culture is a mix of Arabic lifestyle and influences from the Spanish colonial time.

### **Term 2 – African Union (AU) / Organisation of African Unity (OAU)**

The African Union is a continental union with members all of 55 African Countries. Their political centres are Johannesburg and Addis Ababa. It was established in 2001 in Addis Ababa. It replaced the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 2002.

### **Term 3 – MINURSO**

The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established by the Security Council resolution 690 of 29 April 1991 in accordance with settlement proposals accepted on 30 August 1988 by Morocco and the Polisario Front.  
<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minurso>

### **Polisario Front / Saharan Democratic Arab Republic**

The Polisario Front was originally founded as nationalistic organisation against the Spanish colonizers in 1973. However after Morocco annexed the region of Western Sahara they fought against the Moroccan military forces. In 1976 the Polisario Front proclaimed the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic. But the Government was not safe in the region; therefore the Government is in exile in Algeria. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Polisario Front has been supported by Algeria.

## **UN resolutions:**



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- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 29 April 1991, Resolution 609, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/MINURSO%20SRES690.pdf>
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 30 April 2007, (S/RES/1754) (2007) <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/MINURSO%20S%20RES%201754.pdf>
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 31 October 2007, (S/RES/1783) (2007) <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/MINURSO%20SRES1783.pdf>
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 30 April 2009, (S/RES/1871) (2009) <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/MINURSO%20S%20RES%201871.pdf>
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 30 April 2010, (S/RES/1920) (2010) <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/MINURSO%20S%20RES%201920.pdf>
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 27 April 2011, (S/RES/1979) (2011) <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WS%20S%20RES%201979.pdf>
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 24 April 2012, (S/RES/2044) (2012) <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/MINURSO%20S%20RES%202044.pdf>
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 25 April 2013, (S/RES/2099) (2013) [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s\\_res\\_2099.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s_res_2099.pdf)
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 29 April 2014, (S/RES/2152) (2014) [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s\\_res\\_2152.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s_res_2152.pdf)
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 28 April 2015, (S/RES/2218) (2015) [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s\\_res\\_2218.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9F96-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s_res_2218.pdf)



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- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 29 April 2016, (S/RES/2285) (2016)  
[https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF96FF9%7d/s\\_res\\_2285.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF96FF9%7d/s_res_2285.pdf)
- The situation concerning Western Sahara, 27 April 2018, (S/RES/2414) (2018)  
[https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF96FF9%7d/s\\_res\\_2414.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF96FF9%7d/s_res_2414.pdf)

### **How to prepare as a delegate:**

As a delegate you will have to write a position paper on two of the issues given, as well as at least one Resolution.

In your research it might be helpful to answer to following questions;

**Is your country directly involved in the conflict?**

**Which of the involved parties does your country support?**

How can this conflict be solved peacefully?

How can the humanitarian problems be addressed?

What other global conflicts, which have been solved, show similarities to this one?

### **Useful links and Sources**

1.

The complete timeline of events

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/chronology/western-sahara.php?page=6>

2.

All about Hassan the II and the Green March

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hassan-II#ref89567>

3.

UN Documents about Western Sahara

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/western-sahara/>



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4.

Information about Western Sahara

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14115273>

5.

All you need to know about MINURSO

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minurso>