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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 4th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 4 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Vice-Chair) . . . . . (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)  
*later:* Ms. Joyini (Chair) . . . . . (South Africa)

## Contents

Agenda item 58: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*continued*) (*Territories not covered under other agenda items*)

*Hearing of representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories and petitioners  
(continued)*

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*In the absence of Ms. Joyini (South Africa), Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.*

**Agenda item 58: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (continued)**

*Hearing of representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories and petitioners (continued)*

**Question of Western Sahara (A/C.4/78/6)**

1. **Ms. Stame** (Il Cenacolo) said that the situation of the civilian population in the Tindouf camps was becoming increasingly desperate over time. The leaders of the host country should grant freedom to the individuals concerned, including the hundreds of disappeared persons and others suffering from poverty and mistreatment, who had no means of testifying to their plight. Black ethnic minorities suffered in particular, as they were enslaved. As the international community bore witness to a human tragedy, the United Nations was responsible for guaranteeing protection to the civilian populations in the Tindouf camps. Human rights were being used as a means of blackmail by the Polisario and its supporters, thereby perverting their very essence and serving to manipulate international opinion, with the complicity of certain non-governmental organizations.

2. **Ms. Pace**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that Sahrawis in the Tindouf camps of southwest Algeria were trapped in the oppressive stronghold of the Polisario in breach of international law, with the complicity and support of the host country authorities. Many United Nations mechanisms and international human rights organizations, including the Human Rights Committee and Human Rights Watch, continued to express concern over the long-standing suffering of the Sahrawis in the camps. The Polisario had turned the Tindouf camps into a lawless zone, including through systematic violations committed against a population that lacked its basic rights and freedoms. So far, over 15 Sahrawis had fallen victim to extrajudicial killings by the army of the host country. Meanwhile, young Sahrawis who fled the camps became part of terrorist and organized crime networks in the Sahel and the Sahara region.

3. **Mr. Suárez Moreno** (Juntos por Guía) said that the international community had not done enough to resolve the dispute over the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Western Sahara. Morocco, the occupying Power, sought to entrench a new form of colonialism

and impose an apartheid regime on the Sahrawi people. It denied the legitimacy of Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), which had international legal capacity and represented the Indigenous Sahrawi population rather than settlers. For 50 years, Morocco had perpetrated expropriation, torture and systematic violence aimed at exterminating the Sahrawi people, while the international community remained silent. The Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, was now defending the illegal annexation of Sahrawi territory. In so doing, he disregarded the will of the Spanish people and the responsibility of Spain as the administering Power. Canary Islanders, who had historic ties with the people of Western Sahara, urged the United Nations to ensure that the Sahrawi people could exercise their right to self-determination.

4. **Mr. Omar** (Frente POLISARIO) said that, under the relevant United Nations resolutions, Frente POLISARIO was the sole legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara. The question of Western Sahara had been a decolonization issue on the agenda of the Fourth Committee since 1963, as the people of Western Sahara had an inalienable and non-negotiable right to self-determination and independence. That right would not be affected by the lapse of time or the facts on the ground imposed by the occupying State of Morocco. The General Assembly had recognized the legitimate struggle of the Sahrawi people.

5. There was no alternative to the free and democratic exercise of the inalienable and non-negotiable right to self-determination and independence by the people of Western Sahara. The policies of fait accompli carried out by the occupying State of Morocco since 1975 were doomed to failure. The sooner that fact was recognized by the occupying State of Morocco, the better it would be for peace and security in the region. It was shameful and insulting to the United Nations and its Charter that a rogue nation such as the occupying State of Morocco came before the Committee with its apologists to talk about international law and human rights while continuing to illegally occupy parts of the Territory under consideration. That situation could no longer continue; the only way forward was to enable the people of Western Sahara to exercise, freely and democratically, their right to self-determination and independence.

6. **Ms. Laariche** (Member of Parliament) said that, as a member of Parliament for Laayoune, in the Moroccan Sahara, she had been elected in a free and fair vote, something that was the cornerstone of any genuine multiparty system. Saharans trusted in their elected institutions, and their turnout in the most recent

elections had been among the highest in Morocco. The contract between citizens and their elected representatives had borne fruit in the form of development and improved living standards. That form of government was an example of local governance, plurality and the peaceful transition of power.

7. Regrettably, an armed group left over from the cold war forcibly imposed its control on the residents of the Tindouf camps. Only a minority of the residents were descended from Saharans from the southern provinces; many had been brought by the host country from neighbouring States in an endeavour to legitimize the ruling clique, which was itself not of Saharan descent. That clique had imposed a single political ideology for 50 years, repressing any dissent in the camps.

8. **Mr. González Sánchez** (Asociación Internacional de Juristas por el Sahara Occidental (IAJUWS)) said the United Nations had taken no action while the occupying Power, Morocco, plundered the natural resources of Western Sahara. Morocco was exploiting Sahrawi phosphates, fisheries and sand. Its vessels relied on refuelling, repairs and crew changes carried out in the ports of the Canary Islands. The vessels' navigation routes were often falsified, as were indications of origin on products from Western Sahara. Such activities generated millions of euros per year. The Spanish Government stated that its agreements with Morocco and Mauritania had advantages for Spanish fishing vessels, but the latter had only a minimal presence in the area. That situation meant that Spain was effectively supporting Morocco in its attempt to annex Western Sahara. States and international organizations, including the United Nations, were obliged avoid any *de jure* or *de facto* recognition of the exclusive economic zone claimed by Morocco that covered the territorial waters of Western Sahara, not to mention encroaching on the waters of the Canary Islands.

9. **Ms. Dahi** (Member of Parliament for Laayoune) said that she was one of dozens of Moroccan Saharan women in public office. She was proud of the confidence shown in her by her constituents and by Morocco, which she represented in the Pan-African Parliament. In the latter role, she chaired the Caucus on Youth, which addressed such areas as peacebuilding, countering violent extremism and combating organized crime. Her case was not unusual for her generation of Saharans, which had been raised with the values of openness and peace, in a nation that embraced its cultural pluralism and committed to the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

10. Whereas Morocco trusted in the United Nations, other parties sought to foment tension in the region and used their diplomatic corps to hamper the initiatives led by the Secretary-General and the Security Council. The Moroccan autonomy initiative reflected a spirit of good faith and pragmatism, and could serve as a basis for a solution to the dispute under the auspices of the United Nations. In contrast, other parties clung to discredited ideas that no longer had an audience among Member States.

11. **Ms. Travieso Hernández** (Asociación Canaria de Mujeres Tejiendo Futuro) said that the illegal occupation of Western Sahara was enabled by the silence of the international community, the complicity of the Government of Spain and the violence of the invader, Morocco. The violence of the Moroccan occupation affected all areas of Sahrawi life. The militarized berm divided families, and landmines continued to kill Sahrawis. The offences perpetrated by the occupying forces included the rape of women and girls; enforced disappearances; physical abuse; trials used as instruments of repression; and political imprisonment. In addition, Morocco continued to exploit natural resources, despite such actions being denounced by European courts. Spain, the administering Power of the Territory, failed to comply with its obligations under Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations; but the Organization had failed to intervene. The Government of Spain had also defended the Moroccan invasion of Western Sahara and denial of the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people.

12. The role of Sahrawi women, both in the refugee camps and in the occupied Western Sahara, was essential to peacebuilding. It was disappointing that no progress had been made to confront the occupation of Western Sahara. There were, nevertheless, peaceful ways to end the current catastrophe. The right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination must be respected; a referendum must be held under international supervision; the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara must be brought to an end; and Sahrawi political prisoners must be released.

13. **Ms. Hernández González** (Asociación Canaria de Solidaridad con el Pueblo Saharaui) said that the Sahrawi people continued to live in a situation of uncertainty, due to the stagnation of the conflict, the intransigence of Morocco and the passivity of the international community. That situation denied them their rights to freedom and self-determination in accordance with General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#). The armed conflict had resumed, and the referendum on self-determination had still not taken place. The situation in the territories occupied by the

Government of Morocco was intolerable, and involved such grave violations as illegal detentions, torture, genocide and war crimes. Meanwhile, the Sahrawi people continued to await decolonization and independence.

14. *Ms. Joyini (South Africa), Chair, took the Chair.*

15. **Ms. Sosa Guerra** (Federación Estatal de Instituciones Solidarias con el Sahara (FEDISSAH)) said that the Canary Islands had strong historical and cultural ties with Western Sahara. The current deterioration of the human rights situation, particularly in such territories as Western Sahara, were deeply perturbing. The return to force the use of weapons was regrettable after the 29-year ceasefire negotiated by the United Nations. Many Sahrawi people had moved to the Tindouf camps, where they faced torture, attacks and incursions, leading to the loss of civilian lives.

16. In his 2022 report on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2022/733), the Secretary-General had expressed concern that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continued to be denied access to Western Sahara. As the administering Power of Western Sahara, Spain had a legal and moral responsibility to play a decisive role, within the framework of the United Nations and international law, in resolving the colonial conflict. The walls that limited the freedom of movement of the Sahrawi population must be broken down. The United Nations should intensify its role as mediator and peacekeeper, conclude a new ceasefire and include a human rights component in the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

17. **Ms. Arbesu Sancho** (Observatorio Asturiano de Derechos Humanos para el Sahara Occidental) said that the people of Western Sahara was indisputably suffering from attacks on their fundamental rights, first and foremost the right to self-determination. Not only was Western Sahara a Non-Self-Governing Territory awaiting decolonization; it was also a territory that was militarily occupied by Morocco. That country was not an administering Power, but rather an occupying Power, and should therefore be subject to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

18. In Western Sahara, the human rights of the Sahrawi people were systematically undermined on a daily basis through employment discrimination, unfair trials, illegal detention and the imprisonment of human rights defenders. Morocco was also relocating the colonial population to the occupied territory, with a view to modifying the ethnic configuration of Western

Sahara, something that amounted to a war crime. Following the resumption of armed conflict between Frente POLISARIO and the Moroccan army, the latter had bombarded the civilian population with drones, another war crime. While responsibility for the situation lay with Morocco, the role of Spain should also be noted in view of to the most recent statements by its Prime Minister. The Committee should remain committed to upholding international law and ensuring that the Sahrawi people were able to determine their future.

19. **Mr. de la Vega** (Asociación Ecuatoriana de Amistad con el Pueblo Saharaui) said that Morocco continued to systematically exploit the natural resources of the Sahrawi people, directly challenging international law and human rights. The construction of wind infrastructure and a desalination plant by Moroccan, French and Chinese businesses and the Moroccan Government was an example of the connivance between an occupying State and corporations operating on the margins of international human rights law. Dozens of vessels from the European Union operated in the occupied waters of Western Sahara under an illegal fisheries agreement with Morocco, even though the Court of Justice of the European Union had overturned that agreement on the ground that Morocco had neither sovereignty nor jurisdiction over the waters adjacent to the Territory. Morocco continued to exploit phosphates illegally, and had opened a huge fertilizer plant and a new port. The Committee should express its profound concern at the systematic and ongoing violations of human rights, and particularly the economic rights of the Sahrawi people, who had not been consulted regarding the corporate projects on their territory and received no benefit.

20. **Mr. Aly**, speaking in his personal capacity as a member of Parliament for Dakhla, said that he had been elected in a vote which numerous international observers had described as free and fair. The region's development path included all relevant actors, such as Government institutions, civil society and entrepreneurs. Areas that had previously been wasteland now had a robust infrastructure, including a 1,000 km highway that made the region a hub connecting sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Investments in renewable energy had created a self-sufficient, environmentally renewable energy sector. The region now had new medical and research facilities and a vocational training centre. Elected officials were involved in formulating development plans, and Saharans served in prominent official positions. The voter turnout at the recent elections, which was the highest in Morocco, showed that Saharans were

committed to managing their own affairs under Moroccan sovereignty.

21. **Mr. Salvia** (European Coordination of Committees in Solidarity with Sahrawi People) said that the illegality of the occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco had been confirmed in multiple General Assembly resolutions and in the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. Morocco was an occupying Power, and the United Nations had never recognized it as an administering Power of Western Sahara. The Sahrawi people had the right to self-determination, and Frente POLISARIO was their only legitimate representative.

22. The Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, was persisting with his efforts to resume negotiations between Frente POLISARIO and Morocco with a view to enabling the Sahrawi people to exercise their right to self-determination. The delay in his visit to the occupied territories of Western Sahara had been caused by obstacles deliberately created by the Moroccan authorities. Moroccan occupying forces carried out human rights violations including repression, attacks and arbitrary arrests of activists and Sahrawi human rights defenders, with complete indifference from the international community. Many Sahrawi political prisoners had undertaken hunger strikes to assert their rights, which were infringed daily by the Moroccan prison authorities. Several complaints had been brought against Morocco before the Committee against Torture, which had found that Morocco had violated several articles of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

23. **Ms. Déniz Verona** (Nueva Canarias Telde) said that Western Sahara was militarily occupied by Morocco and had been abandoned by Spain, its administering Power. The inaction of the United Nations enabled Morocco, the occupying Power, to subject the Sahrawi population to apartheid with absolute impunity. The occupation had forced generations of Sahrawis to face violence, prolonged displacement and exile, social and economic exclusion and cultural repression, violating their human rights. That situation must be brought to an end.

24. Frente POLISARIO was the sole legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people, as recognized by the United Nations and the international community. The Moroccan occupation was illegal and could produce neither legal nor political effects that would undermine the rights to self-determination and independence of the Sahrawi people. The stance of the Prime Minister of

Spain in favour of the occupation was also illegal. All political prisoners and prisoners of conscience should be immediately freed and the human rights violations in Moroccan prisons should cease. MINURSO should protect human rights and the United Nations should promote, without further delay, a just and definitive solution to the conflict through a self-determination referendum.

25. **Mr. Gómez Justo** (Universidad Pablo Olavide Sevilla) said that the situation in Western Sahara and of the Sahrawi people in the territory was one of occupation and human rights violations. International legal doctrine provided that Western Sahara was a Non-Self-Governing Territory; that Spain was the administering Power; that Frente POLISARIO was the legitimate representative of its people; that the natural resources belonged to the Sahrawi people; and that Morocco was an occupying Power. As injustices accumulated in the Sahrawi territory, the passivity of the United Nations, despite the clear mandate of MINURSO since 1990, was unacceptable.

26. The Sahrawi population in Western Sahara faced multiple challenges, including in relation to access to work, education, expression of their identity and freedom of movement. Meanwhile, their natural resources served to increase the wealth of others. Spain should therefore rectify its position and assume its legal role as administering Power. Human rights must be protected in Western Sahara as a matter of urgency, and the United Nations and MINURSO must redouble their efforts to accelerate the referendum process.

27. **Ms. Fortea Sevilla** (Fundación Canaria de Apoyo a los Trastornos del Neurodesarrollo (FUNTEAC)) said that Morocco had been repressing the Sahrawi people for over 50 years, while Spain ignored its responsibility as administering Power and the United Nations took no action. There was evidence that Morocco did not respect the right to education of the Sahrawi population in the occupied areas of Western Sahara, where the education system reflected inequality, discrimination and repression, and schools lacked sufficient material and human resources. Public schools promoted the Moroccan culture and its vision of history, seeking to eliminate the Sahrawi identity. Owing to the lack of universities in the occupied Sahara, those wishing to pursue higher education were obliged to move to Morocco, where they suffered further repression and discrimination. They were denied access to certain studies deemed useful to the Sahrawi cause, including journalism and medicine, and faced difficulties in renting properties due to anti-Sahrawi discrimination by Moroccans. Without self-determination and a

referendum, the Sahrawi people would not have access to a dignified and quality education.

28. **Mr. Santosa** (RMOL Network) said that the development of the region of the Moroccan Sahara showed that Morocco was committed to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing its peace proposal within the framework of special autonomy. Morocco had an increasingly significant role in Africa, and provided assistance to several countries on the continent. However, those efforts were being hampered by certain actors for hegemonic reasons. Finding a solution to the issue of the Sahara would undoubtedly accelerate such integration.

29. Some of the founding figures of Polisario had decided to return to Morocco and were attempting to convince others with loyalties to the Polisario armed group to do the same. The Moroccan autonomy proposal had been supported by many States worldwide, and offered the best and most credible solution to improve peace, stability and security in the region. In addition, the opening of consulates in the Moroccan Sahara by numerous States signalled a strong recognition of the sovereignty of Morocco over the territory.

30. **Ms. Jimenez Martín** (Nueva Canarias Gran Canaria) said that Western Sahara was illegally occupied by Morocco. Morocco violated the human rights of the Sahrawi people, particularly Sahrawi women, with complete impunity. Sahrawi women actively resisted the illegal occupation at a significant personal cost, and had established one of the most progressive Arab societies in terms of gender equality.

31. In order to uphold universally recognized human rights, a referendum on self-determination and independence for the Sahrawi people was urgently required, within the framework of the United Nations and with guarantees of legality and transparency. Sahrawi political prisoners, some of whom had been given life sentences, must also be freed. The United Nations must assume its responsibilities and promote a peaceful and lasting solution that involved returning Western Sahara to the Sahrawi people, something that was essential in order to restore peace and stability in North Africa.

32. **Ms. Molina García Alcañiz** (Plataforma 8m Toledo) said that Moroccan military officers had attacked many individuals, including Sultana Khaya and Mina Baali, and had subjected the Sahrawi people, particularly women, to numerous forms of suffering and torture. The Sahrawi people in the occupied territories could not exercise their political rights and fundamental freedoms; instead, as had been documented by Amnesty

International, they faced arbitrary arrests, torture and unjustified detentions and imprisonment.

33. Sahrawi women provided an example of peaceful struggle and resistance in a chronic conflict. They had showcased their capacity for compromise, creativity and resistance in the political project for the liberation and independence of the Sahrawi people. The weather conditions in the camps, with extreme temperatures of over 50 degrees Celsius, as well as torrential rain and strong winds, made it difficult to achieve self-sufficiency and created a dependence on humanitarian aid. Nonetheless, Sahrawi women continued to promote a development process for the territory in preparation for the political and social organization of Western Sahara upon resolution of the conflict.

34. **Mr. Ramirez Marrero** (Consejero Cabildo de Gran Canaria) said that the conflict in Western Sahara was a case of unfinished decolonization. The right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination and independence was recognized in General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#), but had been obstructed by the Government of Morocco. The Sahrawi people and their sole legitimate representative, Frente POLISARIO, had been expelled from their territory. Morocco systematically violated their human rights and plundered their natural resources, while the United Nations remained a passive bystander.

35. As the colonial Power, Spain also had responsibilities, despite never having fulfilled its legal and moral obligations towards the Sahrawi people. The Prime Minister of Spain should therefore modify his current position of recognizing the sovereignty of Morocco over the Territory. A peaceful solution to the conflict was required as a matter of urgency, including a referendum on the self-determination and independence of the Sahrawi people, the liberation of Sahrawi political prisoners by the Government of Morocco, and an end to the human rights violations and to the plundering of natural resources in the Territory. The escalating conflict must be halted, as it endangered stability and development in the region and abetted the expansionist pursuits of Morocco.

36. **Mr. Crespo Aguilar** (Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de Castilla-La Mancha para el Sáhara Occidental) said that Morocco had no sovereignty over Western Sahara. Sovereignty over the natural resources of Western Sahara belonged to the Sahrawi people, through their legitimate representative, Frente POLISARIO. Since the start of its occupation, Morocco had exploited and plundered the resources of Western Sahara and entered into illegal commercial agreements with transnational corporations. Looting of occupied territories was prohibited under international law and



could amount to a war crime. While Morocco got richer, thousands of Sahrawis were living in exile or in refugee camps, unemployed and dependent on humanitarian aid. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights stated that businesses must respect human rights and international law, as well as international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict, and that violations could result in civil and criminal sanctions. In the absence of binding measures, the pillage would continue.

37. **Mr. Ramirez Galindo** (Asociación Siembra Canaria) said that the fisheries agreement between the European Union and Morocco had been ruled illegal. That ruling should put an end to the plundering of the natural resources of Western Sahara, which belonged unquestionably to the Sahrawi people, by companies that operated in the illegally occupied territory with the blessing of the occupier and made large profits thanks to their ties to the royal family of Morocco. The Committee had not been able to support the just and lasting solution already agreed upon by the parties and supported by the international community, namely a free and democratic referendum. States must not, in the name of *realpolitik*, reject a solution that had already been accepted. Western Sahara had the right to be a country: it had a people, a territory and a recognized Government, Frente POLISARIO. MINURSO could not protect the Sahrawi population, as it did not have a human rights mandate. Some organizations based in Spain, particularly in the Canary Islands, did not dare to speak out in favour of a referendum for fear of reprisals from Morocco, including the boycott of companies interested in establishing themselves in Morocco. Member States, in particular those that had achieved independence through national liberation movements, must support the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination. Sahrawi prisoners were being held in deplorable conditions in Moroccan prisons for fighting peacefully against the occupier.

38. **Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco), speaking on a point of order, said that petitioners had an obligation to respect Member States and their institutions. Petitioners who used unacceptable language and made comments concerning the institutions of Member States should be asked to withdraw by the Chair.

39. **Ms. Travieso Darias** (Asociación Canaria de Juristas por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos) said that her organization, which had observed the situation in Western Sahara since 2002 and had attended illegal trials of Sahrawi civilians, had repeatedly informed the Committee of the human rights abuses committed by Morocco against the Sahrawi people, who faced systematic repression, extermination and persecution.

The political stratagems employed by Morocco to violate international law had led Spain, the administering Power, to cooperate with Morocco in covering up serious crimes, including war crimes, committed by Morocco against the Sahrawi civilian population. In June 2023, she and another lawyer had been violently prevented from entering the Territory, in violation of international law. The right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people had been recognized in numerous resolutions spanning decades, yet there was no end in sight to the conflict, and the war crimes committed by Morocco continued to go unpunished. Spain continued to breach its obligations to the United Nations and the Sahrawi people and had maintained a complicit silence in the Committee. The support of the Government of Spain for the Moroccan proposal to annex Sahrawi territory was illegal and would make Spain, a country that professed to respect human rights, a safe haven for war criminals.

40. **Ms. DiCianni** (Rescue and Relief International) said that photographs and eyewitness accounts confirmed that the Polisario was training child soldiers in the Tindouf camps. There was mounting frustration among young people in the camps, who were confined with limited educational and other opportunities. In a letter sent to the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General in August 2023, the Movimiento Saharaui por la Paz had shared first-hand accounts of the deteriorating conditions in the camps, including gang fighting, armed clashes among residents and property destruction. The lack of basic security measures in the camps had created a pervasive climate of corruption. The letter contained allegations that certain members of the Polisario were involved in drug trafficking and smuggling operations run by cartels and organized criminal groups, and had stolen livestock belonging to the local population. According to the Movimiento Saharaui por la Paz, the lack of employment opportunities was partly due to mismanagement of the camps. Her organization believed that the dangerous situation in the camps and the inevitable repercussions for regional stability should compel the Committee to support the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was the most humane, expeditious and peaceful solution.

41. **Ms. Dail** (Classical Conversations Foundation) said that the Polisario, created by the regime of Muammar Qadhafi, had confiscated the livestock of the nomadic Sahrawi people and persuaded them to move to the Tindouf camps by promising them freedom, education and prosperity. The Polisario used the camps as a visual example of poverty and oppression to entice donors to send humanitarian aid. The camp schools were failing, owing to a high turnover of teachers and a

shortage of educational resources. After graduation, most children left in search of poorly paid jobs in Algeria or Europe, so that they could send money home to their families. The United Nations, which described quality education for all as a fundamental right, should be deeply concerned about the quality of education in the camps. A failing school system was a sign of a community in jeopardy. Sahrawi children must be imbued with a spirit of solidarity and compassion towards those they had been taught to hate. They should be made aware that they had hope and a future and were not victims. The time had come to implement the Moroccan autonomy initiative as the best solution for children in the camps, who could then be reunited with their families in Western Sahara.

42. **Ms. Cordoba Heredia** (Fundación Universitaria Compensar) said that the Sustainable Development Goals would not be fully attained until a definitive solution was found to the occupation of Western Sahara. The Sahrawi people deserved to live in an environment where their rights, dignity and potential were not restricted and their identity was not erased. Although the occupation had limited the agency and right to self-determination of Sahrawi women, they had shown extraordinary courage and resilience, leading the struggle for their rights and becoming symbols of peaceful resistance. However, Sahrawi women would not be able to effect real societal change until there was lasting peace. The Committee should change the course of history and ensure that future generations in Western Sahara could prosper. Her own country, Colombia, was committed to the liberation of the last remaining colony in Africa. Spain, as the administering Power, must assume its legal responsibility to return what belonged rightfully to the Sahrawi people.

43. **Mr. Aljabari** (Palestinian Moroccan Friendship Society) said that, while the artificial conflict involving the southern provinces of Morocco remained unresolved, Morocco had made several gains. The United States had recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the region, and Spain, the former occupying Power, had abandoned its negative stance in that regard. The Moroccan autonomy initiative thus provided a solid foundation for negotiations towards a just, lasting and acceptable solution.

44. The appeal of the United Nations for a return to round-table negotiations had prompted the so-called Polisario to attack the Guerguerat crossing, in violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. King Mohammed VI of Morocco had, however, emphasized the bonds of friendship between Morocco and the neighbouring State, and remained prepared to reopen the border between the two countries. It was unfair to

compare the question of the Moroccan Sahara to that of Palestine; the former involved the restoration of Moroccan territorial integrity, whereas the latter involved Israeli settler colonialism.

45. **Ms. Basinet**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that she had in 2001 visited the Sahrawi refugee camps, which were located in the most inhospitable area of the Sahara. For over 40 years, Sahrawi refugees had found themselves in a situation of stalemate and displacement. Around the world, ever-increasing numbers of people faced that same fate, most recently in Ukraine. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced. Meanwhile, the rest of the world was distracted by big technology, social media and celebrity culture.

46. **Ms. Huff** (Teach the Children International) said that humanitarian aid intended for the Sahrawi people living in the Tindouf camps must be delivered securely to them. She commended the Sahrawi people living in the Western Sahara towns of Laayoune, Dakhla, Boujdour and Smara for coming to the aid of their compatriots in the camps following the recent earthquake by organizing caravans of aid, participating in blood donation drives and raising money to support those who had lost everything. A 2015 report of the European Anti-Fraud Office had detailed Polisario involvement in the theft and diversion of humanitarian aid from 2000 to 2007. In 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) had published a scathing report on the management by Algeria of food aid, in which it noted that there was no direct oversight of aid distribution. Food aid was distributed to the entire camp population, rather than only to the most vulnerable individuals, in a deliberate attempt to inflate the number of camp residents. The authors of the report emphasized the need for UNHCR to register the population. The main distributor of food aid, the Algerian Red Crescent, allowed the Polisario to distribute the aid to residents with little to no oversight, something that benefited the Polisario. Those behind the theft of food aid remained untouched because they were not subject to Government or United Nations oversight. The solution would be for the Organization to support the Moroccan autonomy initiative.

47. **Ms. Eads** (Capitol Hill Prayer Partners) said that she had been advocating for the Sahrawi people for over 10 years and remained concerned for the youth in the camps, who faced a lack of prospects for the future. The Committee should accelerate its efforts to settle the issue by promoting the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#), and the holding of round-table discussions.



Given the broad international support for the Moroccan autonomy initiative – some 30 States had opened consulates in Dakhla and Laayoune, and the United States of America and Israel had recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara – the United Nations should endorse the initiative as a solution to the artificial conflict. The shifting geopolitical situation was affecting regional security and the continued collaboration between the Polisario and rogue groups. The Committee should insist on a comprehensive data collection plan for camp residents. In the absence of such statistics, it was difficult to plan for the delivery of humanitarian aid. By giving a head count, the Polisario could show good faith and bridge the credibility gap caused by its lack of transparency. The Committee should endorse the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which would make it possible to dismantle the camps and create peace and stability.

48. **Mr. Sánchez Serra** (Federación de Periodistas del Perú) said that the host country of the Tindouf camps had created the “Polisario” in 1973 for geopolitical reasons, to undermine the efforts of Morocco to regain its territorial integrity following independence. The dispute had yet to be resolved 50 years later. There were serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in the Tindouf camps, which were run by the Polisario following the delegation of authority by the host country. The Polisario was an armed separatist group inherited from the cold war that rejected democracy and destabilized the region; it was not the elected representative of the 40,000 Saharans it kept sequestered in the camps with no freedom of movement. He had personally witnessed the hellish living conditions in the camps. In Dakhla, on the other hand, Saharans lived freely and could elect their own representatives. The host country should take responsibility and participate in round-table discussions with a view to achieving a definitive solution to the artificial conflict, based on the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which the Security Council had deemed serious and credible. The Committee could make history by endorsing the initiative, which would end the suffering of Saharans held captive in camps and allow them to exercise their right to self-determination by participating in the democratic process in Morocco. MINURSO, which no longer had a *raison d’être*, should be replaced by a peacekeeping operation.

49. **Ms. Angola Mejía** (Asociación Colombiana de Amistad con el Pueblo Saharaui) said that all people were created equal and had certain inalienable rights, including the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In Western Sahara, which had yet to be decolonized, the rights of the inhabitants were violated

on a daily basis by the occupying Moroccan forces. With no effective oversight and no population registration, the inhabitants were forgotten, resulting in a sense of complete abandonment by the international community. Her organization called for justice for the Sahrawi people and for respect for their rights as individuals and as a people, including the right to self-determination and to return to their territory, which had been illegally occupied. She hoped that Western Sahara could achieve full independence from Morocco in a peaceful manner and finally be free.

50. **Ms. Roios**, speaking in her personal capacity, said that the approach of Morocco to managing the abundant natural resources of Western Sahara was ethical and sustainable. The region’s phosphate reserves and fish stocks, as well as its potential to generate wind and solar power, could bring prosperity to locals and the entire region. Morocco had invested in those resources and demonstrated its commitment to managing them responsibly. The European Commission, in a 2022 report on the benefits for the people of Western Sahara of extending tariff preferences to products originating in Western Sahara, noted that the pragmatic approach of the European Union, including trade agreements applicable to imports from Western Sahara, and the efforts of Morocco were conducive to a better socioeconomic environment in the Territory. That approach was part of its continued commitment to support the Organization’s efforts to find a lasting political solution to the question of Western Sahara. Not resolving the political status of Western Sahara would foster a climate of uncertainty that discouraged investment and sustainable development. The claim of Morocco over the region and its approach to the use of natural resources should be assessed honestly, taking into consideration the investments made in the region. The Moroccan autonomy initiative would promote the sustainable use of natural resources and uphold the rights of all citizens.

51. **Mr. Botero Martínez** (Plataforma Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Solidaridad con el Pueblo Saharaui) said that MINURSO had been established in 1991 as part of a mutually agreed settlement plan to facilitate the holding of a referendum on self-determination, something that had yet to happen. In the late 1990s, Morocco had changed its position and offered the Sahrawi people broad autonomy instead, through the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which had been endorsed by the United States, Israel and the administering Power, Spain. However, according to international law and the Charter of the United Nations, colonial situations should be resolved through a process of self-determination; autonomy was not a solution to

colonization. The autonomy initiative and the existence of a country within another was inconsistent with the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which stated that the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constituted a denial of fundamental human rights. Even the broadest possible autonomy would mean the continued domination and exploitation of the Territory and the Sahrawi people, most of whom did not feel any ties to Morocco.

52. **Ms. Teatin Rosas** (Corporación Líderes Unidos para Servir) said that the 40-year conflict in her own country, Colombia, had had serious consequences for the mental health of the Colombian people. Similarly, the conflict in Western Sahara had ripped the Sahrawi people away from their roots and destroyed the hopes of an entire generation. Death, destruction, a lack of basic necessities and the fear of dying or losing a loved one exacted a terrible psychological toll. Decades of research into behavioural epigenetics had shown that one's own traumatic experiences or those of one's ancestors left scars at the genetic level. Hence, the Moroccan occupation was creating memories that would be inherited by future generations of the Sahrawi people, causing them to suffer from mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. All armed conflicts reflected the failure of human beings to resolve their problems. She urged Morocco to have empathy for the Sahrawi people, who were suffering as a result of the occupation and conflict and whose families would be affected for generations. She hoped that the parties would reach agreement and a definitive solution. All human beings should cultivate within themselves the peace that they would like to see in the world.

53. **Mr. Guevara Rodríguez** (Episcopal Church – Colegio Ramón B. Jimeno) said that the human rights of the Sahrawi people must be protected and the systematic violation of their dignity and their right to self-determination could not be allowed to continue. It was time to put an end to colonialism in Africa. Article 20 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which dealt with the right to self-determination, had implications for third-generation rights, since collective rights and the rights of peoples were key to building fairer States and societies. Neutrality in the face of injustice was equivalent to complicity.

54. **Mr. Tamekamta** (Centre africain de recherche pour la paix et le développement durable (CARPADD) – Montréal/University of Yaoundé) said that the geopolitical agenda of the host country of the Tindouf camps was the source of deep divisions among African States and within the African Union. The host country

had sponsored the declaration on its territory of a "Sahrawi republic" and was responsible for that entity's admission to the African Union, an illegal decision and error that the vast majority of African States were seeking to rectify. Those same States also supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative. The African Union had made clear that the United Nations was the only body competent to address the question of the Moroccan Sahara and supported the Secretary-General's efforts to relaunch the political process. Forty per cent of African States had opened consulates in Laayoune or Dakhla, thus recognizing the sovereignty of Morocco over the Sahara. The Moroccan Sahara had become a trade and investment hub, was home to several projects in areas such as renewable energy and agriculture, and hosted many diplomatic events. The remaining African States should recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara and support the Moroccan autonomy initiative with the aim of guarding against separatism and instability on the continent.

55. **Ms. Mason** (Safety and Security Instructional Services) said that a recent article published by Medafrika Times and other media outlets had featured pictures of Sahrawi children engaged by Polisario in military training. Such practices violated the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Fourth Committee must openly condemn the use of children in conflict. The situation had continued for years but had only recently begun to be addressed in public forums by the international community. School was the primary location where students learned the mantras of hate. They were taught that they were victims of the Moroccans and that their fate rested in the hands of others who would not give them their freedom. Children engaged in armed conflict would most likely be unable to overcome the trauma they experienced. The international community must not remain silent while children were being taught victimhood and hate. She called on the Committee and the Security Council to implement, as quickly as possible, the Moroccan autonomy initiative. The plan was credible, and the Western Sahara infrastructure was already in place to help children settle into normalcy.

56. **Ms. Goebel** (The On Purpose Group LLC) said that the number of residents of the Tindouf camps must be determined as a matter of urgency. That simple action could upend the instability created by those who used the camp population for their own benefit. WFP had recently encountered difficulties in distributing food in the camps and had hired an independent team to investigate why much of the aid sent to the camps never reached its intended recipients – the most vulnerable residents. It had subsequently highlighted the need to

strengthen advocacy for the registration of the population by UNHCR, since registration was a key tool for protection, needs assessment and solutions. Given its oversight of the camps, the United Nations was well within its rights to know the exact numbers for which it was responsible; but it had allowed conflicting information to abound by failing to provide a head count. It was easy to see why no permanent solution had been found. It was in the best interests of those who had lived in camps for 48 years to accept the Moroccan autonomy initiative as the most credible solution.

57. **Mr. Ortiz Palacio** (Fórum Canario Saharaui) said that Algeria had for decades been providing Frente POLISARIO with military, political and diplomatic support. That armed group blocked all peaceful solutions to the dispute and the conflict posed a threat to peace and security in North Africa. The inhabitants of the Tindouf camps were victims; they were trapped in an inhospitable desert environment where they suffered harsh conditions and were subject to the control of Frente POLISARIO and the interests of the host State. Dissidents were repressed and were tried in military courts, in violation of their rights. By contrast, most Sahrawis in the Moroccan Sahara enjoyed a life of prosperity, employment and social progress, and were able to elect their representatives. Almost half of European Union countries supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative already endorsed by the Security Council in its resolutions, which had not mentioned the word “referendum” since 2007. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was the obvious solution; it would put an end to decades of suffering and allow for family reunification and for the reconciliation of all Sahrawis.

58. **Mr. Rodríguez Mackay** (Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Internacional), speaking as a former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru, said that consideration of the question of the Moroccan Sahara by the Fourth Committee was anachronistic and was based on ideological reasons. The signing of the Madrid Accord in 1975 had put an end to the colonization of the Moroccan Sahara. The question of the Moroccan Sahara was a territorial dispute that was geopolitical in nature and had been instigated by the host country of the Tindouf camps. The vast majority of States supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative as the only solution to the regional dispute.

59. The “Sahrawi republic” did not exist, either in law or in practice. It had no Government, no territory and no population. It was merely a branch of Polisario, and its creation had been sponsored by the host country of the Tindouf camps, in violation of international law, with the aim of undermining the territorial integrity of Morocco. For that reason, 85 per cent of the States

Members of the United Nations, including his own, did not recognize the “Sahrawi republic”. The international community had adopted a new, results-oriented approach to the question of the Moroccan Sahara that was pragmatic and took account of the geopolitical realities of the Maghreb region. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was the only solution to the dispute and was supported by over 100 countries.

60. **Mr. Debeche** (Front de libération nationale (FLN)) said that, regrettably, nothing had changed for the people of Western Sahara since he had last addressed the Committee in 2016. In fact, the situation had worsened, especially over the previous four years. Not only had Morocco violated international law and human rights in the occupied territory and stepped up exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara, in contravention of international law; it had also threatened the very existence of MINURSO in the liberated area through its savage treatment of Sahrawis in Guerguerat in November 2020. The international community must listen to the people of Western Sahara, beginning with those in the occupied territory, where Morocco had been denying access to human rights observers to prevent them from witnessing the oppression and the humiliation inflicted by Moroccan military forces. Silence on Moroccan expansion was a dangerous precedent that could jeopardize peace and security. Despite the challenges, the Sahrawi people continued to trust in the United Nations and ability of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara to enable them to fulfil their right to self-determination. The MINURSO mission must be realized through direct negotiations between the two parties, namely Morocco and Frente POLISARIO. A settlement on decolonization would strengthen bilateral and regional relations, including relations between Western Sahara and Morocco, based on respect and mutual benefit.

61. **Mr. Vidal** (University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) said that the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which had been welcomed by Spain, could provide a viable solution. Having ignored the calls made by Morocco in the United Nations in the 1960s to decolonize the Sahara, Spain had abruptly abandoned the Territory. The result had been a low-intensity conflict that affected relations between Spain and its neighbours, and brought about in a serious deterioration in intra-Maghreb relations. It had not been easy to find a viable solution, one that was accepted by a large part of the international community, including the United States and the main European powers, which included Spain. Not only was the autonomy initiative a realistic and practicable solution, it also addressed the need to

leave behind outdated positions from the cold war era that bore no relation to the experiences of the inhabitants of the Sahara, who were fully integrated into Moroccan society.

62. Morocco had continued to promote its initiative, including in its Constitution of 2011, which was its first step towards making the autonomy of the Sahara a reality. Morocco had demonstrated a genuine willingness to integrate the entire population, as could be seen in the old Spanish cities of Laayoune, Smara and Dakhla. That effort had not been matched by the parties that simply proposed a return to conflict. Spain and its Government had taken a decisive step by taking a proactive stance towards the conflict. Solutions could be found only through persistent effort, good faith and an active role. That had also been understood by some 30 countries that had opened diplomatic representations in Laayoune and Dakhla.

63. **Mr. Vucic**, speaking in a personal capacity, said that the principle of territorial integrity was a universally recognized principle of international law that took precedence over other rules of international law. Clear safeguards had been established to ensure that upholding the right to self-determination did not harm the territorial integrity of any State Member of the United Nations. Morocco had a unique colonial past in which its territory had been occupied gradually by more than one Power, and thus the decolonization process had been gradual. Morocco itself had brought the issue of the Sahara to the United Nations in 1963, 10 years before the creation of the Polisario movement. However, the host country of the Tindouf camps had exploited the right to self-determination in order to sustain the regional dispute and had been harbouring, financing, arming and providing diplomatic support to Polisario for over 50 years. The majority of the Sahrawi population lived in the Moroccan Sahara and were represented by democratically elected local officials, in accordance with the Constitution of Morocco.

64. The Moroccan autonomy initiative remained the only win-win option. It respected both the right to self-determination and the fundamental norm of the territorial integrity of States. The international community must urge the host country of the Tindouf camps to participate in the round-table process with a view to achieving a realistic, practicable and enduring political solution to the dispute.

65. **Mr. Bouamama** (Association algérienne de soutien au peuple Sahraoui) said that the question of Western Sahara was one of decolonization, and it should be resolved by enabling the Sahrawi people to exercise the right to self-determination in a free referendum

under United Nations auspices. Contrary to the claims of some petitioners, that right was not obsolete; it was inherent and inalienable. Colonialism was itself obsolete, and its eradication remained on the agenda of the General Assembly. The Sahrawi people were increasingly frustrated. They failed to understand why they had been denied a right afforded to so many other peoples in the same situation, or why they had been roundly ignored after placing their trust in the United Nations in 1991, while a rogue State had been allowed to shirk its obligations in full view of the world.

66. **Mr. Buchanan Aboui** (University of Rwanda) said that the host country of the Tindouf camps continued to be the main sponsor of separatism and division on the continent, with the aim of gaining access to the Atlantic Ocean and establishing hegemony in the northern Africa region. It was prepared to deprive its own population of gas and oil revenue in order to support Polisario, a separatist armed group with proven links to terrorists in the Sahel. Since 1973, that country had been delegating part of its territory to Polisario and supporting it financially, militarily and diplomatically. Its irresponsible strategy put the entire region at risk.

67. The membership of the "Sahrawi republic" in the African Union was an aberration, since that entity did not meet the criteria for statehood under international law. Several African States were actively opposed to that masquerade, which undermined the credibility of the African Union.

68. The Moroccan autonomy initiative had laid the foundations for a settlement to the dispute and given impetus to the search for a realistic, practicable, enduring and compromise-based political solution. The new development model for the southern provinces laid the ground for autonomy status by presenting the Moroccan Sahara as an African hub of stability and economic prosperity. Forty per cent of African countries had acknowledged the sovereignty of Morocco over the Sahara by opening consulates in the region.

69. **Mr. Ramírez Soler** (Fondazione Proclade Internazionale ONLUS) said that development was one of the three pillars of the United Nations, together with human rights and peace and security. However, in order to leave no one behind, the conflict in Western Sahara must be resolved and a decolonization process undertaken in accordance with United Nations resolutions. For successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, structural problems such as governance and the sovereignty of peoples must be addressed, in order to ensure the legitimacy and effectiveness of the multilateral system. Many difficulties with the implementation of the 2030

Agenda and the functioning of the United Nations were the result of political confrontations between States, which prevented them from keeping people at the heart of their action. Maintaining territories under occupation or colonization, as Morocco was doing in the case of Western Sahara, was one such confrontation. The right to self-determination must be recognized and the situation of the 170,000 Sahrawi refugees living in the Tindouf camps in Algeria must be resolved.

70. **Mr. Alkhalaileh** (Moroccan Jordanian Friendship Association) said that, contrary to the claims of the Polisario and its host country, the question of the Moroccan Sahara had nothing to do with colonialism. The Moroccan Sahara had been added to the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1963 at the request of Morocco, ten years before the creation of the Polisario. Its decolonization had been completed upon the signature of the Madrid Accord, of which the General Assembly had taken note in resolution 3458 B (XXX). The host country of the Tindouf camps had manufactured a regional dispute by establishing the separatist Polisario group to undermine the sovereignty of Morocco and impose its own hegemony on North Africa. However, the Moroccan Sahara had always been part of Morocco, with which it had historic, human, cultural, social, religious and economic ties. In its advisory opinion of 16 October 1975, the International Court of Justice had recognized that Moroccan Saharan tribes had pledged allegiance to the Moroccan sultans. Moreover, Morocco had made considerable efforts to develop the region and improve living standards. It had invested \$10 billion in large infrastructural projects in the region, including the Dakhla Atlantic port and a major highway.

71. **Mr. Abugamel** (Coalition for Sahara Autonomy – Jordan Branch) said that separatist movements posed an existential threat to the security and stability of Arab States, and their use as proxies in inter-State disputes was a clear violation of international law. The Polisario posed a manifest threat to the security and stability of the Sahel-Sahara region. It had been founded in 1975 by the host country of the Tindouf camps and by the Qadhafi regime in an attempt to undermine the territorial integrity of Morocco. It was controlled by the security services of the host country, which stage-managed the sham congresses at which its leaders were chosen. The host country had spared no effort to provide the Polisario with weapons and logistical support. In violation of its international obligations, it had handed over control of the camps to the Polisario. Moreover, it refused to register the population of the camps and enabled the Polisario to divert humanitarian aid, which was then sold in neighbouring States. The Polisario was

now an integral part of regional transnational criminal networks whose activities included trafficking in drugs and weapons.

*The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.*