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THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO
PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental
organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated
in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2003]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The right to self-determination of the Saharawi people and the UN peace plan

The U.N. Security Council expressed in a resolution which has been unanimously approved on July 30, 2002, its determination to “secure a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution which will provide for the self-determination of the people” of the northwest African territory. For the third time the U.N. Security Council rejected the “Draft Framework Agreement” proposal, offering Western Sahara autonomy within Morocco and instead appealed to the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and his Personal Envoy James Baker to continue their efforts to provide a genuine opportunity for the Saharawi people to exercise their right to self-determination. In January 2003, former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker started a new peace initiative by travelling to Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania to promote his latest plan for resolving the impasse, sparked by Morocco’s attempts to impede all efforts to organize a referendum on self-determination planned since 1991. While Baker’s earlier plan would have required only a year of residency in the territory for voters to be eligible, the latest plan would require a quarter of a century of residency. But that would nonetheless give the edge in a referendum to Morocco, whose hundreds of thousands of nationals living in the territory far outnumber the 86.000 indigenous Western Sahara residents. Deliberately the Moroccan authorities have encouraged the influx of Moroccan settlers to undermine the Saharawi people’s right to self-determination. Regarding this violation of the right to self-determination of the Saharawi people Society for Threatened Peoples calls for a referendum in which just indigenous Western Saharans should participate. The dispute over electoral lists has shown the extent to which Morocco is unwilling to respect the Saharawi people's right to self-determination.

With great concern the Society for Threatened Peoples has observed the continuing standstill of efforts to reinstate the U.N. peace plan for Western Sahara. We share the concerns of the U.N.'s Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who has expressed his profound disappointment at the lack of satisfactory progress made in implementing the U.N. peace plan and has called for substantial new proposals from Morocco aimed at resolving the issues which are still outstanding. We are convinced that the full implementation of the U.N. peace plan offers the only guarantee of a lasting, just and peaceful solution to the conflict in Western Sahara.

In spite of the new proposals of the Special Envoy Society for Threatened Peoples is appealing to the U.N. Human Rights Commission to urge the U.N. Security Council not to withdraw from conflict mediation in Western Sahara and to insist on implementation of the U.N. peace plan of 1991 and a referendum on self-determination, in which just indigenous Western Saharans should participate. The conclusive failure of the U.N. peace plan would not merely damage the reputation of the United Nations, it would constitute a serious reversal for the principle, enshrined in international law, of the right to self-determination.