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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 12 October 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Aljarralah (Vice-Chair)..... (Kuwait)

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In the absence of Mr. Bowler (Malawi), Mr. Aljarralah (Kuwait), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 63: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (continued)

Hearing of petitioners (continued)

1. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with the Committee's usual practice, petitioners would be invited to take a place at the petitioners' table and would withdraw after making their statements. He reminded all speakers to observe decorum, refrain from personal remarks and limit themselves to the agenda items under consideration.

Question of Western Sahara (continued) (A/C.4/70/7)

2. **Mr. Strömdahl** (Föreningen Västsahara) said that Sweden, seeking to end the brutal military occupation of Western Sahara, had recognized the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic as a first step towards moving the Sahrawi refugees back from the camps to their own land. While the African Union and over 50 States recognized the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, no other Western State did yet. The European Union had been more interested in lucrative trade with Morocco in fish, oil and phosphates.

3. The royal occupier's reaction to Sweden's decision was instructive. Morocco had cancelled the opening of Swedish-related businesses; threatened to boycott all Swedish corporations, including Volvo, Ericsson, and H&M; sent large political delegations to Stockholm to convince Swedish politicians and NGOs that Western Sahara did not exist and was just a southern region of the Kingdom; and ordered Moroccans from all over Europe and Morocco to demonstrate in Rabat and Stockholm against Swedish support of Western Sahara. Morocco's indignation demonstrated the importance of the question of Western Sahara and the extent of the repression against Sahrawi activists and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente Polisario). Its fight against Sweden was child's play compared to the fight against the occupied people. Morocco's reaction also signified that Sweden, refusing to be terrorized, could not possibly change its policy on Western Sahara; nor should any other State.

The petitioner urged the international community to join the recognition movement.

4. **Mr. Custers** (Groupe de recherches pour une stratégie économique alternative (GRESEA)) said that Morocco, which controlled phosphate extraction in Western Sahara through the State-run company Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP), possessed three-quarters of the global phosphate reserves and was its third-largest producer. No substitute existed for phosphate, which was used to produce fertilizers and plant feed and was of vital importance to global agriculture. It could not be recycled and was thus a non-renewable resource.

5. Morocco considered Western Sahara to be its southern provinces and always consolidated and presented the Territory's data as Moroccan data. Morocco had given itself the right to mine Bu Kraa, the sole phosphate extraction site in Western Sahara, which it had acquired from the former Spanish colonial administrators. OCP's strategy was to develop its assets in Morocco while maintaining only production capacity in Western Sahara. Of its three so-called cash-generating units, the two branches in Morocco had become integrated industrial hubs, while Bu Kraa remained a mine that produced raw materials for export through Laayoune.

6. Continued mining at Bu Kraa was illegal from the people's point of view. Although Morocco had acquired Western Saharan mining rights from Spain, the permanent sovereignty over the Western Saharan natural resources belonged to its people. A possible solution was to impose a moratorium, a tactic local communities had used successfully in Bolivia to wrest control of their lithium mining from foreign interests.

7. **Ms. Huff** (Teach the Children International) said that there was simply not enough food for the people of the Tindouf camps, who needed humanitarian aid. In 1999, on her first visit to the camps, her organization had been asked by the Frente Polisario to send aid. Over the next seven years, she had facilitated the shipment of over 30 ocean-going aid containers, trusting that they would arrive and be distributed safely. Several years later, she had discovered that a container of specialized wheelchairs had gone missing and had been unable to account for the arrival of others. Finally, she had decided not to send any more aid because too much of it had gone missing. Owing to her experience, she had gone from supporting the

Frente Polisario to believing that the autonomous resettlement plan offered by Morocco was a reliable and credible solution to the issue of Western Sahara. When the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) had published its findings in April 2015, she was further saddened that her trust in the Frente Polisario had been misplaced: it was at last known for certain that copious amounts of humanitarian aid had been sold on the black market, most likely diverted at the port of Oran in Algeria. Evidence collected by OLAF between 2003 and 2006 had shown that the diversions had been operated by and for the benefit of some Frente Polisario leaders.

8. The fact that the Frente Polisario had sold humanitarian aid intended for the Tindouf camps showed its blatant disregard for the very people it was using to make a political statement to the world. It made an enormous difference to that child in the Dakhla camp who needed food or a wheelchair. The international community must not allow that unresolved situation to continue, for it would result only in more opportunists taking advantage of the very people it was trying to help.

9. **Ms. Pearson** (Protected Future) said that, whether one supported Morocco's or the Frente Polisario's perspective on the issue of Western Sahara, one must agree that the conditions for the Sahrawis in the Tindouf camps were inadequate and unacceptable, and that ample resources existed to help them return to their families and lead civilized lives.

10. The international community was no longer ignorant of the plight of the victims in those camps. Calling them refugees was an insult to legitimate refugees elsewhere and allowed their captors to exploit the availability of humanitarian aid sent to support an inflated, self-reported and unconfirmed population. Excess aid was illegally and fraudulently siphoned off and used for the purpose of global terrorism, creating a well-supplied black market of resources that put everyone in danger. The Sahrawis were not refugees, but undocumented prisoners.

11. Members of the Committee heard testimonies annually and failed to stop the suffering in the desert. In 2014, they had heard from women who had escaped and relayed the brutality of the camps and from families whose members had been killed while on outside visits or when they had acted as whistle-blowers, and had heard accounts of Sahrawi girls

routinely being raped and used for procreation or of young men being recruited by regional terrorist groups. The Security Council itself had in 2015 confirmed that humanitarian supplies intended for refugees had ended up benefiting extremist groups.

12. The burden fell on the United Nations to do something about the camps. Since the Committee as a whole had failed in that mission, the responsibility lay with each individual member to wield personal influence to effect change. The atrocities inflicted on the Sahrawis could no longer be blamed on a formerly oppressive Morocco or their current abusive and well-compensated Frente Polisario captors, because those crimes could now be attributed to their United Nations keepers, who held the key to their liberation. Member States must restrain the reach of terrorist groups and put an end to the black market of humanity and resources that fuelled their operations.

13. The United Nations had options to resolve the long-standing conflict in Western Sahara; its decision did not have to please Algeria, Morocco or the Frente Polisario, but must free those voiceless prisoners. She urged the Organization to consider the Moroccan autonomy plan as a viable option and dismantle the camps, providing their inhabitants with protected passage to the destination of their choice and enlisting the help of humanitarian organizations in the resettlement process. It was time for the United Nations to make history, tear down the walls of captivity and liberate Western Saharan mothers, fathers, sons and daughters.

14. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that if Ms. Pearson's statement had been objective, it would have included a description of the situation in Western Sahara as well as in the refugee camps. If the situation was really as she had described it — great resources not reaching the refugees in the camps, to whom she denied the status of refugees, terrorists in the camps — he asked, in view of the work there of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme and several other United Nations agencies, if she was pointing a finger at UNHCR or the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which paid regular visits to the Territory and the camps. He wished to clarify the contradictions between her statement and the reality on the ground.

15. **Ms. Pearson** (Protected Future) said that she had summarized personal accounts that the Committee had already heard. She asked why the census had been denied in the camps and why the Algerian representative objected so vehemently to her statement, since it was not clear what his country had to lose.

16. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that he had not received a clear answer to his question and was uncertain if the petitioner was there to provide information or address questions to the Committee members.

17. **Ms. Pearson** (Protected Future) said that perhaps she had misunderstood the question. She asked again why no census had been conducted in the camps. The information she had related was open and public and included the Security Council's own report.

18. **Ms. Eads** (Capitol Hill Prayer Partners) said that, although she had never visited the refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, she had taken up the cause of Sahrawi refugees and had worked closely with those who endeavoured to see the Sahrawis returned to their homeland. She had visited United States congressmen, ambassadors and key leaders, urging them to become active on behalf of the people who could not speak for themselves. The issue was of deep concern not only for the Sahrawi people, but for the entire world. She applauded the United Nations for all it had done to bring an end to the separation of families and children. However, the Organization, having reached a stalemate in determining who could vote if a referendum was to be held in Western Sahara, had judged that a referendum was impossible for many reasons, including the fact that a census of the camps had never been allowed. The United Nations could not go beyond the will of the people in deciding for them who could vote. It must consider the autonomy plan proposed by Morocco, which had been described by the Security Council as a reliable, serious and credible option for the resolution of the issue of Western Sahara.

19. **Ms. Sams** (Antioch Community Church) said that the United Nations had come to realize that the planned referendum could never be held in Western Sahara without the voluntary cooperation of both parties to the dispute, and their willingness to compromise on some of the issues involved. The most vulnerable people involved were the Saharan children living in the Tindouf camps in Algeria; and the Committee must consider the plight of the young refugees who had few

opportunities to obtain a good education and secure a job that would provide for them and their families in the future. The United Nations had long called for a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the question of Western Sahara, and had persevered for years to bring that about. Now, it must look to another option, the autonomy plan proposed by Morocco to end the suffering of the refugees in the Tindouf camps, a plan advocated as feasible by two of the Secretary-General's former personal envoys and special representatives and supported by the Security Council.

20. **Mr. Björnsson**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that there was a growing threat of insecurity in the Sahel region, which stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to Somalia and where broader international action was highly needed to help weak Governments control grinding poverty. The Sahel had become a safe haven for Islamic terrorist groups and for human, gun and drug traffickers that clearly threatened international and regional security. Organized criminal groups engaged in cross-border terrorism and trafficking had sought to take advantage of the Tindouf camps' remote situation by actively recruiting there. According to media reports, there was a growing danger of radicalization in the refugee camps run by the Frente Polisario. Terrorism and separatism were behind a phenomenal growth of violence and instability in two-thirds of Mali, for instance, and had become a threat to the region. Food and nutritional crises caused by environmental deterioration, drought and poorly-functioning markets had made populations exceedingly vulnerable in the region. Most recently, large-scale movements of refugees to neighbouring countries had also taken place.

21. The United Nations should focus on developing regional cooperation among all the countries in the Maghreb and the Sahel. In that regard, Morocco was the most secure and stable nation in North Africa and the Sahel. It had undertaken a number of important recent bilateral, subregional and regional initiatives to resolve the challenges facing the Sahel region. The time had come to remove all obstacles and establish cooperation and coordination among the States of the Sahel and the Maghreb, and Morocco should be supported as an active, credible and committed actor for peace and stability and a key partner in the fight against terrorism.

22. Morocco should also be supported for its praiseworthy domestic reforms and enhancement of

human rights at home. The international community should endeavour to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly by achieving a political, just and acceptable solution to the Saharan regional conflict in the framework of the Moroccan proposal to give the Saharan population autonomy within Morocco.

23. **Mr. Diarra** (Mali) said he regretted that the Chair had allowed the petitioner to refer to his country, which was in no way related to the subject under discussion. He asked the petitioner to withdraw his statements on Mali because his country was not on the agenda.

24. **The Chair** reminded speakers to restrict themselves to the agenda item under consideration.

25. **Ms. Eddarhem** (Saharan member of the Moroccan Parliament) said that during the recent Moroccan elections of September 2015, a higher percentage of people had voted in the Saharan provinces than in the country as a whole. That constituted a defeat for the Frente Polisario and the Algerian military, both of which had conspired to prevent Saharans from voting by calling for a boycott and encouraging what they called “civil disobedience.” The failure of those efforts clearly demonstrated the desire of Saharans to be a part of Morocco’s democratic system. Many women had voted, and many women candidates had been elected owing to the positive discrimination enshrined in Morocco’s new Constitution. The new decentralization and regionalization of the Moroccan political system would give the southern provinces a greater say in determining their own future, including the implementation of the autonomy proposal.

26. **Mr. Lippiatt** (WE International) said that as a long-time student of the situation in Western Sahara, he had been to the refugee camps in Tindouf over half a dozen times with United States congressional delegations, and various NGOs. The Sahrawi people were not terrorists; they wanted a peaceful resolution to the dispute over the Territory in order to return to their homeland and needed protection from the calculated human rights violations committed by the Moroccan Government. A number of international organizations and over 70 sovereign nations recognized the right to self-determination of Saharawis, who looked to the United Nations for help. The Committee and the international community must press for giving the

United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) a human rights monitoring mandate and making arrangements to hold the long-promised self-determination referendum. The NGO Human Rights Watch had argued that unbiased human rights monitoring by the Mission would deter abuses and promote accountability. Moreover, the Frente Polisario would welcome the extension of monitoring to the camps.

27. Morocco, as a State Member of the United Nations, had a number of obligations under the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the many international human rights treaties it had ratified, the provisions of which were legally binding. The Moroccan Government clearly did not consider itself bound by those obligations. It professed its belief in human rights, but denied the Sahrawis their rights. The creation of the National Human Rights Council was a farce. Moroccan human rights mechanisms were not independent and far from impartial and had failed the Sahrawi people. Furthermore, the visits of Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council had proven grossly insufficient, having been neither comprehensive nor sustained. A recent Human Rights Watch report based on 2014 events had noted that Moroccan authorities prohibited all public gatherings deemed hostile to their contested rule, policed the Territory heavily and blocked access to demonstration venues. The Sahrawis were often tortured behind the walls of prisons and in secret detention centres, denied jobs and education and prevented from practicing their traditional nomadic lifestyles. On 6 November 2014, the King of Morocco had delivered a speech rejecting outright any attempt to expand the MINURSO mandate to include supervision of the human rights situation, thereby giving human rights violations and the repression of self-determination aspirations a royal endorsement. All the while, MINURSO was a silent — or indifferent — witness. It was the responsibility of the international community to uphold respect for international law and the United Nations decolonization process.

28. **Ms. Daoudi** (Sahara Medias Center) said that she had travelled thousands of kilometres to make a plea before the United Nations to help members of her family, only to be informed that, as a matter of procedure, she could not mention their location because it was not on the list of 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories within the Committee’s mandate.

She hoped she had misunderstood that she, a Saharan, was allowed to speak only of Western Sahara. Unfortunately, like all Saharan families, half of hers was still held captive somewhere outside of the region. That somewhere was not on another planet, but a parcel of land called the Tindouf camps, which were in Algerian territory. It was staggering to think that she could not ask the Committee for assistance without mentioning where her family was.

29. Efforts were being made to present the question of the Sahara region as a simple dispute about sovereignty over a Territory, ignoring the essential component and greatest victims thereof — the people. All the reports of the Secretary-General and his envoys and representatives and all the relevant Security Council resolutions cited the Tindouf camps as a fundamental part of the problem. Furthermore, one of the two main offices of MINURSO was situated in the camps. She was not afraid to say it loud and clear, and any attempt to cut her short would be all the more reason to voice her anger.

30. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), speaking on a point of order, said that the language of the United Nations was clear and it was intolerable for a petitioner to address a Member State in such a manner in a meeting room. He invited the Chair to call her to order.

31. **Ms. Daoudi** (Sahara Medias Center) asked whether the Chair could instruct the representative of Algeria to tell her what wording she should use. She had come to defend an honourable cause and could not be censored. She had not said anything disrespectful with regard to his position or his country and would like to be allowed to continue. Just as it was impossible to speak of her family without speaking of the camps, it was impossible to speak of the question of the Sahara region without highlighting the proven responsibility of Algeria in the perpetuation of the tragic situation and the suffering long endured by Saharan families.

31. **Ms. Lenz** (Not Forgotten International) said that, unlike many of those present, she had spent much time living with the Sahrawis in their desert homes and had come to talk not about statistics or politics, but about the daily reality of the people. She recounted the story of a Sahrawi girl, Lalia, born with severe asthma and skin problems, so unlike her very own healthy, American grandson of the same age. Already fragile, Lalia had succumbed to a fatal asthma attack for lack of available medical care. The situation could have

been avoided. The Sahrawis did not deserve to be the pawns in the predatory political games played for power and wealth at the expense of human beings who followed the rules and held tenuously to peace. Too many families, too many Lalias had paid the deadly price in that manoeuvring of nations and powers.

32. Every year, the Committee and the Security Council reaffirmed the right of Sahrawis everywhere to a referendum on self-determination. She urged the Organization to set a date for the referendum; to take action on Morocco's pillaging of the natural resources of Western Sahara, which belonged to the Sahrawi people, in line with Article 73 e of the Charter; and to take action on the human rights abuses being reported by all reputable NGOs in Western Sahara. She also asked for the "wall of shame" dividing the Territory to be dismantled. She pleaded for an end to the political game.

33. **Ms. Pfoestl**, speaking in her personal capacity as a professor of comparative constitutional law at an Italian university, said that since the outbreak of hostilities between Morocco and the Frente Polisario, Algeria had been one of the most important actors in that conflict as the latter's chief diplomatic, military and financial supporter. It was clear that the conflict would not exist without Algeria's direct involvement. Given the post-colonial tensions between Morocco and Algeria and Algeria's new desire for regional prominence through territorial hegemony, integrating the Sahara and thus the Atlantic shore into the nascent nation had been a major objective. The Algerian Government had seen in the Frente Polisario a legitimate means of keeping Morocco in check and possibly reversing the regional balance of power.

34. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), speaking on a point of order, said that the statement had no relevance to the agenda item under consideration, which was the question of Western Sahara, and he asked the Chair to remind the petitioner that she must abide by the Committee's guidelines.

35. **Mr. Laassel** (Morocco), also speaking on a point of order, said that, yet again, the Algerian delegation was commandeering the Committee, as it had done since the beginning of the session. Algeria should know that the hearing of petitioners was relevant to the Committee's work in order to understand better the situation in the Territories within its mandate. The agenda item under consideration dealt with Territories

and peoples and, in that regard, the Committee could not overlook the population in Tindouf. The Secretary-General's report and relevant Security Council resolutions all made mention of the Tindouf camps and he could specify them upon request. The attitude of Algeria was proof of its responsibility in the current dispute over the Sahara region, and its attempts to exclude petitioners shed light on its refusal to allow UNHCR to conduct a census of people living in Tindouf.

36. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), noting that he had not finished speaking on his point of order, said that the issue mentioned by the Moroccan representative was not the purpose of the meeting. As Algeria was an official observer of the settlement process, his delegation was not opposed to comments made in that regard. However, it would not tolerate comments that were not related to the meeting agenda and he requested that speakers should respect the agenda.

37. **Mr. Laassel** (Morocco) said that while the Algerian delegation might wish to give lessons on the conduct of multilateral meetings, according to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly it was at the discretion of the Chair to allow points of order. Morocco respected freedom of expression and his delegation had therefore not deigned to interrupt petitioners, even when harmful allegations were being levelled against Morocco.

38. **The Chair** reminded petitioners that they should refrain from belabouring points not directly related to the agenda item.

39. **Ms. Pfoestl**, resuming her statement and drawing on her 25 years of experience in constitutional law, said that all the actors in a conflict had to be taken into account when discussing an item. It was evident that the birth of a friendly State in Western Sahara, headed by the Frente Polisario, would further serve Algerian interests and tip the balance of power towards Algeria. There was little probability that Algeria would change its policy on Western Sahara; all Administrations had continued to support the Frente Polisario, even by training its militias and ceding territory for resettlement and the creation of the new State.

40. **Mr. Haidara** (Fédération mondiale des Amis du Sahara marocain) said that history had shown that the Kingdom of Morocco had been making every effort to solve a conflict which, spurred on by imperialist designs on its southern provinces, had gone on far too

long. Much had changed since the Spanish colonization, but it was important to recall that Western Sahara had always been a part of Morocco, as maintained by Kings of Morocco past and present. On the issue of territorial integrity, King Mohammed VI had recalled in a recent speech that Morocco's frame of reference and the guiding principles for dealing both domestically and internationally with the Moroccan Sahara issue had been clearly spelled out, and that subsequent developments on the issue at the United Nations had justified the country's position and its sincerity.

41. The advanced regionalization policy instituted by the King would enhance local development and involve the population in making decisions and taking steps to improve sociopolitical and economic well-being. Building a modern democratic society based on the rule of law, individual and collective freedoms and socioeconomic development brought hope for a better future for the region's population, put an end to separation and exile and promoted reconciliation. The high voter turnout in the southern provinces in the recent elections was proof that the Saharans had an interest in supporting the King's actions in their favour and confirmed their total commitment to safeguarding the nation's territorial integrity through full integration with the Kingdom of Morocco. They understood that greater decentralization put the levers of power in their hands, allowing them to participate in the strategic choices regarding national institutions with the same level of self-determination enjoyed by all regions of the Kingdom. More than just an opportunity, the promotion and development of the southern provinces were being carried forward by a series of strategic and financial programmes for the creation of businesses and employment.

42. **Mr. Gil Garre** (Global Security Institute) said that from a security standpoint, the only solution to the Western Sahara dispute was the Moroccan proposal for advanced regionalization, which would implement autonomy within the only secular nation in the region, the Kingdom of Morocco. The Frente Polisario was a dictatorial movement that the United Nations had admitted into the fold and tried to regard as the sole representative of Saharans, as though they were a homogenous whole and all of them lived under the yoke of a movement that had sprung up artificially against the backdrop of the political blocs of the 1960s and 1970s.

43. By maintaining the status quo without taking the developments of the last 50 years into consideration, the United Nations was heightening frustrations that, in the very short term, could lead to violence in a region already bordering on the breeding grounds of international jihadist terrorism. The Organization's actions — for which every State represented in the Committee bore some responsibility — were leaving the door open to the re-ignition of a conflict that, left unchecked, would have dire consequences on the region and on international security, ushering in jihadist terrorism. Those very predictions had been made in the cases of Mali, Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic and had come to pass in practically all countries that had experienced their misnamed Arab Springs. Terrorism had reared its head in every conflict and recent events involving members of the Frente Polisario confirmed that the same would occur in Western Sahara.

44. The United Nations had the power to prevent international terrorism from becoming entrenched in the region by focusing international action on the regionalization proposal. That would allow Saharans to preserve their cultural expression, heritage and language within the Kingdom of Morocco, a stable country that was committed to the fight against terrorism alongside the European Union, in particular France and Spain, and the United States. In that context, it was hoped that Algeria would also commit to regional stability, the harmonious development of the Arab Maghreb Union, and the security of the Euro-Maghreb region, in line with the demands of its own people.

45. **Ms. Warburg** (Freedom For All) said that on her visit to the southern provinces of Morocco early in 2015 she had been struck by rising living standards and substantial public and private investment in infrastructure and commercial facilities, including industrial zones and new port facilities. Expansion in the fishing and service industries had provided employment to thousands of locals and improved socioeconomic conditions. There was a vibrant civil society, with numerous human rights groups and NGOs, including opponents of the Moroccan Government and two previously banned associations, operating freely. Furthermore, under the advanced regionalization policy and as the first step towards establishing autonomy in the south, local and regional elections had been held recently, with 80 per cent participation and a particularly

high youth turnout. Local Sahrawis had been elected to new, locally-accountable regional councils empowered to govern, develop and implement their own policies, and manage local natural resources for the benefit of the Sahrawi people.

46. Morocco had continued to build upon its human rights, economic, judicial and social reforms and to cooperate fully with United Nations bodies. Civilians were tried in civilian courts only. The local offices of the National Human Rights Council in Laayoune and Dakhla continued their investigations of human rights violations, as well as their work in prisons and assistance to the vulnerable, earning praise from the Secretary-General.

47. Meanwhile, for 40 years tens of thousands of men, women and children had been enduring appalling conditions in the Tindouf camps, exacerbated by poverty, hunger, illness and brutality. Fundamental human rights, including freedom of movement and the right of return, were ignored. Countless demands from the international community for unrestricted access to the Tindouf camps and for a census of the inhabitants remained unheeded, which facilitated the endemic misappropriation of humanitarian aid by the Frente Polisario and Algerian officials. The Tindouf region, overrun by criminal and terrorist groups and a hub of trafficking of all kinds, was increasingly unstable and dangerous. Sahrawi sources had informed an Italian newspaper that Boko Haram was recruiting fighters from the Tindouf camps and holding captive some 100 kidnapped young women there.

48. Morocco's serious and credible autonomy plan for the Sahara remained the best solution to the conflict. The optimism and dynamism of the southern provinces of Morocco contrasted starkly with the despondency and desperation in Tindouf. Freedom for All demanded resolute action to close the camps.

49. **Ms. Stame Cervone** (Internazionale Femminile Democratica di Centro) said that she was before the Committee, once again, to appeal to the international community to end the suffering of women and children in the Tindouf camps.

50. **The Chair** asked the petitioner to restrict her comments to the agenda item under consideration.

51. **Ms. Stame Cervone** (Internazionale Femminile Democratica di Centro) said that in her search for justice for the population of those camps, she had

travelled to the south of Morocco to meet escapees, mostly women, who had endured human rights violations, extreme living conditions and the psychological trauma of having their children deported to distant countries where they were brainwashed with hatred for Morocco. In a desert area bereft of conditions conducive to a life of dignity, those women had been subjected, in flagrant breach of the Charter of the United Nations and international human rights instruments, to daily horrors that included sexual abuse, forced pregnancy and even slavery. Several of the escapees, many of them women of colour, told how they had been at the mercy of their “owners”, who could sell them to others or force them to marry, with the approval of Frente Polisario judges.

52. The rights of the women of the southern provinces of Morocco were guaranteed and protected under national legislation. Their sisters in the Tindouf camps appealed for rapid action by the international community to end the violations there. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and all international organizations must intervene to free the captive women and the innocents in the camps from the stranglehold imposed by the Frente Polisario in the Algerian desert.

53. **Mr. Ayachi** (Comité national algérien de solidarité avec le peuple sahraoui) said that his organization was extremely concerned because despite many valid denunciations and repeated reports by respectable multilateral organizations, NGOs and international observers, Morocco continued to violate human rights in Western Sahara, a Territory that no one had given it a mandate to administer. The daily, deliberate terrorizing of the Sahrawi population by Moroccan armed forces and authorities aimed at intimidating and silencing them so that they would drop their legitimate claim to a right to freedom and dignity. There was irrefutable evidence documenting daily beatings, arbitrary arrests, torture, forced disappearances and extra-judicial killings. Morocco, clearly identified as the perpetrator of those human rights violations, sought to suppress freedom of expression and refused access to international observers in order to maintain a media blackout and continue its violations behind closed doors.

54. By signing the ceasefire in 1991, the Sahrawi side had expressed trust in the United Nations, which had devised its settlement plan stipulating the holding of a referendum the following year and had established MINURSO for that purpose. Twenty-three years later,

the referendum still had not taken place because of the stalling tactics, arrogance and stubbornness of the Moroccan authorities and their defiance of the international community.

55. It was time to end the suffering of the Sahrawis. The United Nations must implement its own decolonization doctrine and respect its commitments to the Sahrawi people. It must expand MINURSO’s mandate to include human rights enforcement and it must, at the earliest, organize the referendum in line with the relevant resolutions and the United Nations settlement plan.

56. **Mr. El Mokhtar El Kantaoui** (Association marocaine pour le développement d’Oued Eddahab-Lagouira) said that for over four decades, residents of the Tindouf camps had been living in tents in an inhospitable climate where temperatures could go from over 50°C to below 0°C. If those people were really refugees, why did Algeria not permit the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to count them, issue them identity cards and provide them with assistance? It was clear that the host country was inflating the number of refugees in order to obtain more aid for the Frente Polisario to divert for its own purposes. The Algerian authorities were also concealing the misery in which the inhabitants of the camps lived, and the fact that they were depriving Saharans of work by secretly importing undocumented labour from areas further south in violation of the provisions on gainful employment contained in articles 17-19 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The host country was exploiting Western Sahara as both a commercial asset and a political pawn in its attack on the territorial integrity of Morocco, while hypocritically claiming to defend what it called “the Sahrawi people.” He appealed to the Committee to apply greater pressure to the Algerian authorities to allow the residents of the Tindouf camps to be counted and to be issued refugee cards.

57. **Mr. Assor** (Surrey Three Faiths Forum) said that, once again, the United Nations had overlooked the oldest political detainees in the world: those incarcerated by the Frente Polisario in the Tindouf camps. He wondered whether the silence the United Nations imposed on a situation involving torture and starvation signified its approval of the impunity enjoyed by the individuals responsible for such an enduring and despicable state of affairs. According to the unremitting flow of damning information from the

camps, the inhabitants' health was deteriorating and the ailing were denied basic treatment. Malnutrition prevailed as humanitarian aid was diverted; time and again, his organization had denounced the embezzlement of international aid by the jailers and their sponsors for their own benefit, which enabled them to feast while their captives starved. Slavery as well continued to be an approved practice.

58. Those wretched people deprived of their basic human rights in the camps must be allowed to vote with their feet and return to their welcoming homeland, Morocco, to rejoin their waiting families. The United Nations held the key to the solution and, overcoming its inaction, must open the door to justice and aspiration, alleviating the suffering of thousands and ending their illegal and immoral separation. Otherwise, the cost would be incalculable in terms of vulnerability and radicalization, and would make it appear that protecting human rights did not have the profile it once did for the Organization.

59. **Mr. Mahraoui** (Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS)), speaking in his personal capacity as a Moroccan, said that the Saharans living in the Tindouf camps were appealing to the United Nations for help. For the past 40 years, the armed separatist groups of the Frente Polisario, the self-proclaimed representative of the Sahrawis, had taken away the camp population's rights, dictating and imposing laws, manipulating them and subjecting them to all forms of violence. The Saharans' most basic human rights to a life of dignity, to freedom of expression and freedom of movement, were being flouted, sparing no one. As poverty and insecurity spread, malnutrition was affecting women, children and the elderly, largely owing to the diversion of international aid by the Frente Polisario and their Algerian accomplices, who had made a business out of their poverty. One needed only to consult the latest report of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) to grasp the magnitude of those diversions. Monitoring that aid was rendered virtually impossible by the Algerian Government, which refused, despite repeated calls by the Security Council, to carry out a census and register the camp population. He wondered how the people in Tindouf, whose number and identity were unknown, could have been considered refugees for the past 40 years when they had neither refugee rights nor refugee identification.

60. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), speaking on a point of order, said that the agenda item under consideration pertained to Western Sahara and not Algeria. The Algerian Government must not be implicated in any way.

61. **The Chair** reminded the petitioner to limit himself to the current agenda item.

63. **Mr. Mahraoui** (Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS)) said that he was speaking for the Saharan people and no one had the right to dictate what one could do or say about one's fellow people.

64. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that under the Committee's mandate, petitioners had no right to discuss any subject of their choosing. The petitioner had to respect the Committee's rules and confine himself to the agenda item and question before it.

65. **Mr. Mahraoui** (Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS)), resuming his statement, said that, to put an end to the Saharan conflict with its ensuing human drama and the risks it posed to the entire region, the international community must pressure the Algerian Government to authorize the Frente Polisario to participate seriously in the negotiations on a fair and mutually acceptable solution, instead of arguing for a referendum forsaken by the international community since 2003 for technical reasons related to the electoral rolls.

66. The majority of Saharans, including those living in the Tindouf camps in Algeria, considered Morocco's autonomy proposal as the most realistic and fair solution. For the Saharans, it was the political proposal that reconciled their own self-determination and autonomy with their country's territorial integrity and national unity, and it must serve as the basis for negotiations to break the current impasse, find a definitive solution to the conflict and allow the countries of the volatile Maghreb to resolve all the regional challenges they faced.

67. **Ms. Bahajjoub** (Family Protection) said that the refugees crossing into Europe and those living in the camps in Jordan and Lebanon had little in common with the Western Saharan refugees detained in the Tindouf camps, who did not have the right to travel and relocate to other countries, even as Frente Polisario leaders travelled about campaigning for their cause and professing to represent the Sahrawi people.

68. Sahrawi women who had escaped the Tindouf camps had reported on the inhumane conditions of life there. Illegal violations of freedom of movement were particularly blatant: even internal movement within the camps required official authorization; the passport of a Sahrawi visitor from Spain to Tindouf had been confiscated, effectively depriving her of the right of return; participants in the MINURSO-facilitated family reunion visits to Western Sahara were routinely forced to leave one family member behind in the camps as a hostage to ensure their return. The escapees had also reported widespread sexual abuse: forced marriages of even very young girls were a regular practice, as the Frente Polisario sought to increase the population under its control. Some of the Tindouf women were even held in slavery, along with a system that left no room for freedom of speech. By contrast, in Morocco there were women's organizations to defend women's rights.

69. In the absence of a census of the camp inhabitants — once again requested in Security Council resolution 2218 (2015) — the international community could not know the exact number of births and early marriages or cases of disability, death and violence. Nor could UNHCR profile the population for humanitarian and protection needs or monitor aid distribution, even though already in 2007 a joint assessment mission conducted by the World Food Programme and UNHCR had recommended a more transparent and accountable distribution system, and in 2015 the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) had reported decades of embezzlement by the Algerian authorities and Frente Polisario leaders of humanitarian aid destined for Sahrawi refugees.

70. The only viable solution for the people of the Tindouf camps was Morocco's autonomy plan, which was beginning to be successfully introduced in the country itself through regionalization. Stability and progress, both social and economic, was evident across the entire Kingdom. Morocco, moreover, offered nationwide security, for it was working with international partners to prevent and stop acts of terrorism. In the camps instead, there were disaffected young people ripe for recruitment into terrorist groups when they could be living a peaceful and productive life.

71. **Ms. Walleka Krüger Alves da Costa**, speaking in her personal capacity as a clinical psychologist and coordinator of a research group on crime and violence, urged the international community to intervene to stop

the suffering of the Sahrawi women sequestered in the Tindouf camps. Sahrawi women being groomed as leaders were stripped of their femininity and their identity by the ideological training they received from the Frente Polisario machine, which aimed to attract international NGOs by promoting itself as an organization that gave women a place in the social hierarchy and camp organization. At the same time, women were subjected to exploitative physical violence ranging from sexual harassment and rape to slavery.

72. Persecution had been the primary reason behind several women's escape from the camps. Indeed, a recent psychological field study had confirmed the numerous accounts of Sahrawi women experiencing deep post-traumatic stress disorder, many of them having been discouraged from seeking mental health help because they could not express themselves freely. The same study had revealed that the confusing design of the camps, fragmented as they were into a number of widely separated units patrolled by Frente Polisario militias, had caused a spatial perception disorder among most of the population.

73. It would be impossible for the United Nations and the international community to help the camp population deal with such trauma and violence and ensure the psychological security of all the people of the Territory, as demanded by international law, without firmly supporting the Moroccan autonomy proposal as a realistic solution to the Western Sahara conflict.

74. **Mr. El Ahmadi**, speaking in his personal capacity as a community worker in Boujdour, said that the report published in 2015 by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) — the latest in the line of reports from several international organizations confirming the systematic embezzlement of humanitarian aid to the camps in Tindouf — had not spared Algerian and Frente Polisario leaders, who stood accused of diverting funds for their personal gain. The report detailed how the Algerian Red Crescent and Frente Polisario leaders benefited directly from humanitarian aid, the embezzlement reaching its peak with the illegal levying of Algerian taxes on locally acquired goods purchased with European funds earmarked for such purchases. Thus, European aid was not only diverted, but it was also used to fill Algerian coffers.

75. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), speaking on a point of order, reiterated that the levelling of accusations against Algeria during the consideration of an agenda item that had nothing to do with his country was unacceptable. He asked the Chair to instruct the petitioner to respect the agenda.

76. **Mr. Laassel** (Morocco) said that, once again, the Algerian delegate was attempting to employ the same repression with which his regime treated the refugees in Tindouf. He proposed that the petitioner should be allowed to continue his statement.

77. **The Chair** reminded petitioners to restrict their statements to the question under consideration.

78. **Mr. El Ahmadi**, resuming his statement, said that the deception orchestrated by the Frente Polisario, with the help of the Algerian authorities, included requesting additional donations while the aid that had been siphoned was stocked in hidden warehouses, presenting false invoices for construction carried out by unpaid Moroccan prisoners of war and overestimating the number of refugees in the Tindouf camps.

79. He therefore welcomed the European Parliament resolution adopted on 29 April 2015 which called on the European Commission to clarify the measures taken in response to the findings of the OLAF report; noted that the failure to register a refugee population for such a prolonged period constituted what it termed an abnormal and unique situation in UNHCR history; and urged the Commission to ensure that the Algerian or Sahrawi individuals incriminated by the OLAF report no longer had access to aid funded by European Union taxpayers. The resolution also called on the Commission to re-evaluate and adapt Union aid to the actual needs of the population concerned and to ensure that the interests and needs of the refugees, the most vulnerable to any possible irregularity, would not be harmed.

80. The Committee as well must react to those abject violations of the most basic human rights of the people in the Tindouf camps and compel Algeria, the so-called host country, to comply with its international obligations. In so doing, it would put an end to the diversion of aid and allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to register those populations in order to quantify the aid that should be given and ensure them a minimum of human dignity.

81. **Ms. Baiba** (Forum de la femme pour l'égalité et le développement) said that she had been born in the Tindouf camps, but had moved with her family to Laayoune in her Moroccan homeland. She had taken advantage of the excellent educational system provided by the Moroccan Government after the end of the Spanish occupation to become an industrial engineer, and was working for a multinational clean-energy company that was installing a wind-power project on the outskirts of Laayoune. However, there were other Sahrawis her age who were unable to contribute to their region's development because they remained trapped in the Tindouf camps, and were even at risk of being brainwashed by the Frente Polisario into becoming enemies of their homeland.

82. **Ms. Lamine** (Centre Sahara de l'information, des études et des recherches) said that while petitioners hoped against hope that appearing before the august Fourth Committee would help to solve the question of the Sahara region, each year brought with it even more bitter disappointment. Those who suffered were the thousands of women, children and elderly persons who were still languishing in the Tindouf camps in Algeria in ever worsening conditions. Some, be they misleading or misinformed, would say that Morocco was to blame. However, the fact was that since recovering the Sahara region in 1975, Morocco had been spending billions of dollars to make the region habitable, to the point that it was now better off than some northern areas. Born and raised in the Sahara region, she could attest to the peaceful and happy existence in the southern provinces.

83. On the other hand, the Tindouf camps languished under the double yoke of the nepotism and despotism of Algeria and the Frente Polisario respectively. Fundamental freedoms were totally repressed and, far from the prying eyes of the media, enslavement, paedophilia, arbitrary detentions and kidnappings were commonplace. The sole tribunals were military, raising the spectre of enforced disappearances, torture or assassination for anyone daring to criticize the outdated dictatorship.

84. It could rightly be said that the Frente Polisario was responsible for that situation, but it perpetrated crimes in a lawless area created and run by Algeria. Therefore, that country's international responsibilities were clear. As international NGOs and the United States State Department had reiterated, although the Frente Polisario ran the refugee camps, it fell to

Algeria to protect the rights of all people living in its territory. Yet it remained to be seen what that country would do for foreigners when it did not respect even the rights of its own citizens. Alarm bells had been ringing since the 1992 state of emergency there. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reports detailed several violations that were not committed elsewhere in the region, among them restrictions on the freedom of expression and assembly, and impunity for perpetrators of serious human rights abuses committed during the 1990s. The United States State Department's 2015 "Trafficking in Persons Report" made particular mention of human trafficking, forced labour and sex trafficking in Algeria, particularly among migrants.

85. **Ms. Ramos** (American Association of Jurists) said that her association saw the case of Western Sahara as one of decolonization and illegal occupation. The Sahrawi people had an inalienable right to self-determination and independence, in line with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The military and administrative occupation of the Territory by Morocco was in flagrant breach of international law, as confirmed by the rejection of that country's sovereignty claim by the International Court of Justice in 1975. The General Assembly had consistently condemned the exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources by Morocco, as highlighted in a letter addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2002/161) by the Legal Counsel of the United Nations; and the African Union as well had recently issued a similar legal opinion. In addition to the human rights violations and climate of repression in Morocco and the inhumane conditions of political prisoners in Moroccan jails, where they were tortured and mistreated, the serious humanitarian situation of the more than 160,000 Saharan refugees who had fled to the Tindouf camps as well as the illicit exploitation and extraction of the Territory's phosphate and fisheries resources through agreements between Morocco and other States or multinational corporations were extremely worrying and all stemmed from colonialism, occupation and violation of the most fundamental human right — the right to self-determination.

86. Her organization supported the 1990 United Nations settlement plan that had been accepted by both parties as the framework for the conduct of a referendum on self-determination and decolonization. Furthermore, Spain, which the American Association

of Jurists considered the *de jure* administering Power, could assist in the decolonization of Western Sahara. Her organization hoped that the United Nations and the Secretary-General would take action to break the deadlock and the wall of silence and implement the relevant resolutions, thus creating the prospect of a near future in which Morocco and Western Sahara coexisted in peace and fraternity.

87. **Mr. Vidal**, speaking in his personal capacity as a Canary Island journalist and doctoral researcher, said that what had not changed in the 33 years he had been following the developments in the Sahara region was the dictatorial structure of the Frente Polisario, which was rife with totalitarianism, despotism and corruption. While the leaders had switched their positions and ministries over the past years to give an appearance of democracy, in reality their system was based on repression, denunciation and close vigilance. Profits and aid were distributed within a closed circle of leaders and their entourage based on kinship or tribal links. The result was that a minority lived in opulence, while most of the population lived in deprivation. Furthermore, under Frente Polisario militias, the population was subjected to psychological terrorism and repeated human rights violations, including the separation of children from their families for indoctrination with an imaginary Sahrawi identity.

88. That dictatorial policy had been condemned in the various reports of international NGOs that had visited the camps, which, on occasion, had been expelled for their criticism. The unsustainable situation could implode at any moment, endangering the lives and interests of the thousands of Sahrawis in the camps who were stuck between insecurity and poverty. The United Nations and the international community therefore had a moral and legal obligation to recognize publicly the dictatorship of the Frente Polisario and act accordingly to free a population at risk.

89. **Ms. Pellegrin**, speaking in her personal capacity as a freelance reporter, said that she was deeply concerned about the danger that the Tindouf camps posed not only to the immediate surroundings but to the whole African continent. The global terrorism threat was very present in Africa, as evidenced by such groups as Boko Haram and Al-Shabab. According to a 2012 strategic study by the United States non-profit research and analysis organization CNA, there was evidence that Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb had infiltrated the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf and

that many from the camps had joined terrorist groups based in Mali. In addition, a recently published report from The Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies revealed that terrorist attacks in the region had jumped alarmingly compared to the previous record high of 2013. One of many tactical recommendations to reverse the situation included in that report was to work to settle intra-regional conflicts, such as the Western Sahara dispute and the problem of refugees in the camps in Algeria, which provided openings for extremists.

90. The world was clearly not paying attention to the new terrorist threat emerging near Western Sahara, nor was the United Nations taking the urgent action needed to find a settlement to the dispute. Reluctant to see neighbouring States become yet more terror statistics, she called upon the Organization to bring justice to the population of the camps. The only way to achieve that was by implementing the Moroccan proposal for autonomy, which offered a win-win solution and could end the real threat of extremism and destruction in the region.

91. **Mr. Laghzal** (Moroccan National Human Rights Council), speaking in his personal capacity, said that he had been a member of the Frente Polisario, but, after much soul-searching, had abandoned the idea of separatism and reached the conclusion that reconciliation was the best path to overcoming a painful past. The Equity and Reconciliation Commission created by the King of Morocco operated on the basis of the principles of victim compensation and transitional justice. The Moroccan autonomy proposal had been well received in the Saharan region, where a number of human rights offices had been established. Saharan civil society was also playing an important role in monitoring the human rights situation, and residents of the Saharan provinces had voted at higher rates than Morocco as a whole in the recent elections, in which even pro-separatism groups had taken part. He called on his fellow Saharans who were still members of the Frente Polisario to have a change of heart and to engage constructively with the autonomy proposal.

92. **Mr. Rabbou**, speaking in his personal capacity as a deputy-head of a salt mining company, said that the Sahara region had been completely transformed since 1975, when it had the lowest human development ratings in the country owing to rampant poverty and illiteracy. The provinces currently ranked among the highest in the country for education, health, literacy

and access to infrastructure. It was a common misconception that the conflict was a war over resources: the provinces were not rich in resources and Morocco had invested much more money in the development of the provinces than it had earned from natural resource exploitation. The financial contribution assumed by Morocco in international fisheries agreements was significantly outweighed by the funds allocated by the Moroccan Government to develop the sector in the southern part of the Kingdom. Furthermore, the Fisheries Partnership Agreement signed with the European Union, which was legal and in full compliance with international law, contained specific provisions for the benefit of the local population and, in general, for the entire population of Morocco.

93. However, the most common misconception was that the Sahara region was phosphate-rich. The Bu Kraa phosphate mines represented approximately 6 per cent of the country's total phosphate sales and only 1.6 per cent of its proven reserves. Moreover, continued investment of more than US\$2 billion had been required to maintain mining operations there, resulting in operating losses over 27 years. All revenues from the Bu Kraa mines — the single largest private employer in the Sahara region — were reinvested in order to sustain the company and to improve the social and economic conditions of employees and the region. That was why more than half of the employees, including 78 per cent of new hires between 2001 and 2011, were from the region and the company invested extensively in developing employee skills and providing essential benefits for them and their families. Morocco had embarked on an ambitious development programme intended to benefit the provinces of the Sahara region. The objective was to double the GDP of those regions in 10 years, creating over 120,000 jobs and halving unemployment while specifically targeting youth and women.

94. **Ms. Dlimi** (Coordination droits de l'homme à Dakhla) said that the petitioners who were calling for expansion of the MINURSO mandate to monitor what they called "human rights violations by the Moroccan authorities in occupied Western Sahara" were sounding like a broken record. They appeared to have forgotten that it was Morocco that had issued a standing invitation to the Human Rights Council to send representatives to the country, while Algeria refused to allow any human rights organizations on its soil for

fear that they would expose the daily violations being committed by the regime against its people and against the Saharans living in the Tindouf camps. One notable example of the latter was the imprisonment of the popular singer Najm Allal for the crime of merely expressing in song popular resentment of the corruption of the authorities running the camps.

95. **Mr. El Baihi** (Forum social pour le développement humain de Laayoune) said that he wished to alert the Committee to misappropriation by Frente Polisario militias and Algerian officials of humanitarian aid intended for the Tindouf camps. As a former Frente Polisario official, he had personally accompanied a convoy of 20 trucks carrying humanitarian aid that had entered Algeria through the port of Oran. Only 13 of those trucks had actually reached Tindouf. The trucks themselves were owned by a general from the Algerian regime.

96. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), speaking on a point of order, said that he regretted being forced repeatedly to raise the point, but the issue at hand was Western Sahara and not the Algerian authorities. Petitioners should stick to the agenda at hand. He noted that if the name of any State was to be dragged into the discussion, it should be that of Morocco, which was the occupying Power.

97. **Mr. Laassel** (Morocco) said that the attitude of the representative of Algeria suggested that he had something to hide. The petitioner's eyewitness report about the diversion of humanitarian aid intended for the Tindouf camps was completely germane to the agenda item. He challenged the representative of Algeria to produce a single United Nations document that identified Morocco as the occupying Power.

98. **The Chair** reminded all speakers to restrict their remarks to the agenda item.

99. **Mr. El Baihi** (Forum social pour le développement humain de Laayoune), resuming his statement, said that the opportunity to profit from misappropriated humanitarian aid was one of the main reasons that both the Frente Polisario and Algeria insisted on perpetuating the conflict.

100. **Ms. Brahim-Bouneb** (Groupe inter-parlementaire d'amitié Algérie-Sahara Occidental) said that the crimes being committed against the Sahrawi people had been condemned by anyone with a conscience. The Sahrawi people had been struggling peacefully for the

return of their land and international recognition of their plight, and their voices would not be silenced. She had visited the "wall of shame" that separated Sahrawis from their kin, and experienced the struggle of Sahrawi women for a life of independence and dignity. She called on the United Nations to hold the self-determination referendum and to act to protect the Sahrawi people from human rights abuses and the plunder of their natural resources. In keeping with its policy of supporting oppressed peoples, Algeria would spare no effort in the pursuit of a just and permanent solution that would guarantee the Sahrawi people their right to determine their fate.

101. **Ms. Hassiba** (Comité national algérien de solidarité avec le peuple sahraoui), speaking in her personal capacity as an Olympic champion, said that she felt obligated to appear before the Committee to tell the truth about the Western Sahara. During her many visits to the Tindouf camps, she had looked into the eyes of children full of innocent hope for the future. As difficult as life was in the camps, the refugees were determined to maintain their independence in the face of difficult circumstances. The rest of the Western Sahara was suffering because of Moroccan colonialism. The referendum should be held, and the people of the Western Sahara should be allowed to determine their own fate.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.