

**Statement by Ahmed Boukhari, Representative of the Frente POLISARIO to  
the UN  
Special Committee on Decolonisation-C24  
13 June 2017  
United Nations**

Mr President,

On behalf of the Sahrawi people, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address this important Committee where our country is still on its agenda as the last African colony.

Morocco has been occupying our country since 1975 in flagrant violation of the resolutions of the African Union, the General Assembly, the Security Council, the opinion of the International Court of Justice of 16 October 1975 and the recommendations of the Special Committee contained in the report of the mission that it had sent to Western Sahara in May 1975.

The crimes that it has committed and continues to commit against our people are unspeakable and history will judge them fully someday and reveal their tragic dimensions.

From day one, Morocco resorted to the use of prohibited weapons such as NAPALM with which it bombed the locality of Um Dreiga in February 1976, the Sahrawi Guernica. Dozens of our fellow citizens were executed in the desert and buried in mass graves, some of which were discovered in 2013 and exhumed in the presence of the UN.

Six hundred civilians and 151 soldiers captured on the battlefield are still unaccounted for. Some were thrown from helicopters. Dozens of our fellow citizens, women and men, are still victims of violence, rape, torture, harassment, in several cases leading to death in prisons or during the repression of demonstrations. More than sixty political prisoners have been held in Moroccan prisons for years, including Gdeim Izik's group, whose members were sentenced to life imprisonment by the military court of a politically motivated occupying country.

The specific report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of September 2006 states that human rights violations by Morocco are due for the most part to the fact that the Sahrawi people have not exercised their right to self-determination.

To cite the most recent testimony, the Human Rights Committee, in its conclusions adopted on 2 November 2016 (CCPR/C/MAR/CO/6 referred to in the recent report of SG S/2017/307 of 10 April, *(I quote)*:

“its concern about continued reports of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment perpetrated by the Moroccan State in...Western Sahara” (*unquote*). The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Méndez, who visited Western Sahara in 2013, reached the same conclusion.

Many observers and journalists who tried to come to the occupied territory were expelled. In paragraph 72 of the report, the UN Secretary-General says that, (*I quote*): “The Government of Morocco confirmed to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that some 187 foreigners were forcibly expelled from Western Sahara” under the argument of (*I quote*) “undermining national security” (*unquote*). No witnesses are allowed to see what is happening in this open prison.

Morocco admits only part of the truth when it confirms, according to paragraph 73 of the report, that “776 demonstrations of protest” against the occupation took place last year in Western Sahara, of which 66 according to Morocco were suppressed by force. In paragraph 75, the report says, (*I quote*) “Sahrawis continue to be discriminated against in their economic, social and cultural rights and that little has been done for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara who are not consulted on the exploitation of their natural resources” (*unquote*).

Mr President,

The Sahrawi people are victims of a colonialist attack that has lasted 42 years. We have faced armed aggression on the battlefield where thousands of Sahrawi martyrs have fallen in defence of the right to live in our free and sovereign country. In 1979, Mauritania signed a peace accord and ended its occupation of the south of our country. Sixteen years later, when the United Nations and the African Union asked us in 1991 to have trust in the peaceful way, the referendum on self-determination, we responded positively to the call. Having declared the independence of our country on 27 February 1976 and having been a Member of the Organisation of African Unity since 1984, accepting the referendum was a tangible proof of cooperation.

Where is the referendum today? Who obstructs it? We have been waiting for 25 years.

The facts show that Morocco accepted the solution of the referendum with the option of independence and manoeuvred to involve the UN and the Organisation of African Unity in a sham poll, by granting the right to vote to thousands of Moroccan settlers who were transferred to our country during and after the military invasion. The UN and the OAU did not want to legitimise the fraud. That is why Morocco ended its participation in the process in April 2004, but we still hear it saying that the self-determination referendum was abandoned by the UN because it considered it unrealisable. This attribution to

the UN is simply false. Each year, the Security Council extends the mandate of the UN Mission for the referendum in Western Sahara. Since 2015, the African Union has been calling on the UN to establish a date for the self-determination referendum. The UN has a list of voters and a detailed plan contained in the Houston Agreements that the two parties had negotiated and signed in 1997. The UN can hold the referendum within three to four months. The only thing needed is political will.

The failure of the Security Council to respond to the Moroccan obstruction of the referendum has undermined the credibility of the UN and has led Morocco to believe that it has been granted a right to impunity. In fact, the UN Mission is today a prisoner of the occupying power that forces it to look the other way, not even to inform New York of facts of extreme gravity that took place. Its cars still have Moroccan registration numbers. It is the only peacekeeping operation created since 1978 that has no prerogatives to protect human rights. It cannot interact with the population or the human rights defenders. On 16 March of last year, its political and civilian components, 87 officials, were expelled by Morocco within a 48-hour threatening deadline. In his briefing to the Security Council meeting on 17 March, Mr Feltman, UN Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs said, “We see this action [expulsion] as contrary to the international obligations of Morocco under the Charter and the Agreement on the Status of the Mission with regard to MINURSO”.

Morocco has refused since 2012 to continue direct negotiations with the Frente POLISARIO in contravention of Security Council resolutions. A year later, in 2013, it declared as persona non grata the former Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Christopher Ross. In January of this year, it demanded his resignation, which it obtained. In March 2016, it prevented SG Ban Ki-Moon from visiting the occupied territory where MINURSO is based; it publicly denigrated him and then expelled the civil and political component of MINURSO.

In August last year, Morocco took us to the brink of a military confrontation when it decided, in violation of the terms of the ceasefire, to build a road for commercial traffic to Africa in the El Gargarat area, which is a zone restricted by the military agreements with the UN.

The situation created in the area led the Security Council to ask the UN SG in the latest resolution 2351 (2017) to examine and seek solutions to the problem created by Morocco in El Gargarat.

In this resolution, the Security Council called for the direct negotiations between us and Morocco to be held without delay and wanted the Secretary-General to submit to it a clear roadmap within six months. Morocco has done its utmost to delay the designation of the new Personal Envoy of the SG and thereby the negotiations.

In the meantime, the African Union of which our country is a Member State admitted Morocco last January after signing and ratifying the Organization's Constitutive Act. Article 4 of the Act stipulates that the borders of the Member States of the Union are those existing on achievement of independence. Morocco obtained its independence in 1956. This means that it must withdraw from the territories of another State of the Union, which it has illegally occupied since 1975. This would enable the resolution of the conflict. Facts and Moroccan official statements in recent months show however that Morocco will not respect what it has signed and ratified. We have within the African Union a Trojan horse that stands once again to threaten continental unity and security. At the same time, Morocco does not miss any opportunity to denigrate the African Union in order to prevent the natural and institutional cooperation between the Union and the United Nations to achieve a just solution to a conflict that is on the agenda of the two organisations.

Mr President,

The Sahrawi people have full confidence in the work of the Committee.

The General Assembly each year adopts a resolution calling on the Committee to follow closely the question of Western Sahara. This requires that it is only logical to go to the field. The last mission was sent on 12 May 1975, 42 years and a month ago. I reiterate our invitation and our full cooperation with that mission.

In addition, Mr President, we believe that it would be useful for the Committee to decide on a date for the special meeting on Western Sahara that has already been agreed. This will serve to bring the subject to the daylight and to release it eventually from the invisible chains of silence.

Furthermore, I would like to convey to the Committee our desire that it takes a decision on the plundering of the natural resources of our country such as phosphate and the fishing ground. The plunder annually gives Morocco around \$ 5 billion, which serves to strengthen the occupation and, hence, to take us farther away from peace. We have filed lawsuits against some foreign companies involved in the plundering, and hopefully the European Union will be able to respect international law and the ruling of its Supreme Court of December last year in which it made it clear that Western Sahara is not part of Morocco. According to the Court, it is (*I quote*), "a distinct and separate Territory" (*unquote*). This means that the natural resources of our country should not be involved in any commercial transaction with the occupying power.

Mr President,

The Committee has on its agenda a highly sensitive conflict that saw 16 years of

bloody war, which has brought insecurity and instability to the whole region. Solving it is fundamental because the risk of regression is real. There is a people that continue to see that their country is under illegal occupation in the XXI century, while being forced to live under repression in the occupied territory, or in exile or on the brink of the resumption of war. The international community should not accept failure. It has the means that it should use to put an end to this injustice.

Morocco must come to the next negotiations, which the Security Council has called upon us to do, in a spirit of honest cooperation free from hidden agendas and delaying tactics, so that a just and lasting solution can be achieved by the UN and the AU to a question of decolonisation that will undoubtedly serve to restore stability and security in our region.

The Committee, in keeping with its decolonising mandate, will contribute to making this just solution possible.

Thank you very much!