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**PRESS RELEASE**

**EUROPEAN UNION UNDERMINES THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN WESTERN SAHARA**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Brussels, 20 July 2016** – The EU's decision to appeal the Court of Justice of the European Union's (CJEU) ruling – that annulled the trade agreement between the EU and Morocco – is a tragic betrayal against fundamental values of human rights and international law. The decision to appeal the Court's ruling, led actively and particularly by France and Spain, is a significant failure to hold Morocco accountable for its repeated violations of the territorial sovereignty of Western Sahara. Furthermore the appeal delivers a significant blow to efforts to unlock the current political impasse.

The European Court of Justice has rightly determined that any agreement between Morocco and the EU must not apply to the territory of Western Sahara, which the UN has said Morocco has unlawfully occupied. The onus is on the EU and its Member States not to reward Morocco for this unlawful behavior, but instead to demand that it adheres to international law and stop the exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources. The appeal not only undermines the EU's own judiciary processes and values, it is also in disregard of Europe's international obligations to protect the rights of the Saharawi people.

Commenting on these developments today from Brussels, Emhamed Khadad, the Frente POLISARIO's MINURSO Coordinator said: "For over 40 years the Saharawi people have been denied the right to live peacefully in their own state. In parallel the Saharawis have been – and continue to be – subjected to systematic violations of their human rights, and the theft and plundering of their natural resources. We look to Europe to show leadership in our quest for freedom, democracy and the rule of law. Sadly the EU's decision to appeal its very own Court of Justice ruling undercuts the prospects of finding a sustainable political solution in Western Sahara."

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