



PRESS RELEASE

**SECURITY COUNCIL CALLS FOR END TO DEADLOCK ON WESTERN SAHARA; POLISARIO DEMANDS
DECISIVE ACTION TO RESTORE UN MISSION AND TALKS ON SELF-DETERMINATION**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York, 29 April 2016 – Following the first divided vote in Security Council deliberations on Western Sahara in more than 15 years, the Frente POLISARIO welcomed the renewal of the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), and called for more urgent and decisive Council action to reverse Morocco’s expulsion of MINURSO’s civilian personnel, and to set a firm timeline for final negotiations on a referendum.

Today’s two votes against the resolution (Venezuela, Uruguay), as well as three abstentions (New Zealand, Angola, Russia), sends a powerful signal that business as usual on Western Sahara is unacceptable and cannot continue. Council members expressed strong support for MINURSO’s full mandate, and a solution which provides for Saharawi self-determination.

“The days of Security Council members having their head in the sand on Western Sahara are over,” said Ahmed Boukhari, the Frente POLISARIO’s UN Representative. **“Today’s vote sends a message, loud and clear, that the status quo is unacceptable, and that Morocco will not be allowed to obstruct the UN’s mission in Western Sahara, nor to kill off our long-promised right to vote in a referendum to decide our political future. The POLISARIO leadership will consider today’s resolution carefully, and decide on next steps. Justice and international law will prevail.”**

In today’s Security Council debate, the majority of Council members criticized Morocco’s unprecedented challenge to the authority of the Security Council, which has set a dangerous precedent for peacekeeping worldwide. Today’s resolution requires the Secretary-General to brief the Council within 90 days on whether MINURSO has been restored to “full functionality” by the return of MINURSO’s civilian personnel, and to consider further action against Morocco if it has not.

“Whether MINURSO operates in Western Sahara is not a decision that can be taken unilaterally by an illegal occupier in a Non-Self-Governing Territory”, added Boukhari. “The legality of the situation is clear. The International Court of Justice confirmed in 1975 that Morocco has no sovereign ties to Western Sahara, a legal reality that led the European Court of Justice to recently strike down the EU agricultural trade agreement with Morocco.”

Speaking to the Security Council on 26 April, African Union Special Envoy for Western Sahara Joaquim Chissano reaffirmed the AU’s strong support for the Saharawi people’s right to self-determination, who must be given “the opportunity of choosing freely their destiny.” Morocco is the only African country that is not a member of the AU because it has isolated itself with its illegal occupation of Western Sahara.

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