

GA 4 – SpecPol

Question of the Western Sahara

Current Situation

The current stage of the situation in the Western Sahara began with Security Council Resolution 1754 (2007). In it, the council directed both The Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO to proceed with negotiations in good faith. The resolution also extended the mandate of MINURSO until October of 2007.¹ This resolution was spurred on in part by proposals presented by both POLISARIO and Morocco. The POLISARIO proposal advocated independence for the area, but pledged to act in accordance with whatever would be decided.² The Moroccan proposal suggested the region become an autonomous area of the Western Sahara. The region would be largely independent, with its own police force, legislature, and judicial systems, but would defer to Moroccan authority in the matters of defense and foreign policy.³ Initial consultations revealed the biggest sticking point would not be on whether or not the people of the region should exercise their right to self-determination, but *how*.⁴ The two parties, with the nations of Algeria and Mauritania present as observers, met in New York in May of 2007. This meeting achieved nothing substantial, but began the process of continuing negotiations and set up dates for further talks.⁵ The parties met again in August, and exchanged views on the subject. While nothing substantial was achieved, the parties did express encouragement over the opening of a dialog.⁶ Also, discussions began on the expansion of confidence building measures, although Morocco did feel such discussions were better relegated to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).⁷ It was clear, however, that both Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO were very firmly entrenched in their positions.⁸ The Personal Envoy of the Secretary General called for more guidance from the Security Council in order to encourage the parties to cooperate further. As he said, “Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.”⁹ In the region itself, the situation was tense, but stable. MINURSO reported peace, with some violations of agreements on both sides. The most encouraging news was that related to the confidence building measures put in place by UNHCR. Both a free-telephone service and air-based visits between refugee camps were meeting with great success.¹⁰

1 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/325/21/PDF/N0732521.pdf?OpenElement>

2 <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/infos/2007/04/sps-e130407-3.html>

3 <http://www.maec.gov.ma/Initiative/Docs/Initiative%20ang.pdf>

4 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/273/27/PDF/N0827327.pdf?OpenElement>

5 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/399/83/PDF/N0739983.pdf?OpenElement>

6 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/547/23/PDF/N0754723.pdf?OpenElement>

7 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/273/27/PDF/N0827327.pdf?OpenElement>

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

In October of 2007 the Security Council released resolution 1783 (2007). This resolution reiterated calls for Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO to negotiate with an aim for a long lasting solution. It also asked for more funding for the confidence building measures and extended MINURSO's mandate until April of 2008.¹¹

During this time, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SpecPol) took notice of the developing situation and began to hear petitions on the issue.¹² Their efforts resulted in GA Resolution 62/116. This resolution expressed appreciation towards both the Security Council and the Secretary General for their efforts and reaffirmed their support of the people of the Western Sahara.¹³

The third round of talks commence in January of 2008. In a working paper created by the Secretariat the talks were described thusly, "... although the parties dynamically interacted with each other, there had hardly been any exchange that could be characterized as negotiations." There was some discussion on additional confidence building measures, but no agreement was reached on those, either.¹⁴

Despite some tense events in February of 2008, the parties met again in March. Once again, there was little progress on the main issues, but major progress was made in establishing additional confidence measures, namely by extending the family visits between refugee camps to land routes in addition to the air routes already in place. The Secretary General expressed his wish that the donor community continue to finance these measures.¹⁵

In April of 2008, the Security Council adopted resolution 1813 (2008). This resolution extended MINURSO's mandate by one year and urged the parties to continue their negotiations. It also praised the confidence building measures and echoed the Secretary General's request for funding.¹⁶

As of August of 2008, no further plans have been made for a fifth round of talks. However, some controversy has erupted concerning the Secretary General's Envoy, Peter van Walsum. In statements to the press, the envoy said, "the independence of the Western Sahara is not an achievable objective." Due to his statements, the Frente POLISARIO has called for his replacement before they will continue. As POLISARIO has not transmitted any official requests for van Walsum's resignation, the diplomat has not stepped down.¹⁷

11 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/574/60/PDF/N0757460.pdf?OpenElement>

12 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/273/27/PDF/N0827327.pdf?OpenElement>

13 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/470/73/PDF/N0747073.pdf?OpenElement>

14 Ibid.

15 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/297/22/PDF/N0829722.pdf?OpenElement>

16 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/325/46/PDF/N0832546.pdf?OpenElement>

17 <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hzceZwajqSLQ9LorvoTvt17JAOg>