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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 5th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 11 June 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Rambally (Saint Lucia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

1. **The Chair** informed the Committee that the delegations of Belize, Benin, Botswana, Comoros, Gabon, Haiti, Mozambique, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates had indicated their wish to participate in the work of the Committee as observers.

Question of Gibraltar (A/AC.109/2024/8)

2. **Ms. Gómez Aoiz** (Observer for Spain) said that the interpretation into English of the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Spain at the third meeting of the Committee (see [A/AC.109/2024/SR.3](#)) had been marked by numerous contradictions, inconsistencies and mistakes, even though her delegation had made the written statement available on the eStatements portal in good time. For example, her delegation had referred to negotiations among the European Union, Spain and the United Kingdom, adding that those negotiations did not involve Gibraltar; but the phrase “and not Gibraltar” had been omitted in the interpretation. Secondly, where the interpretation had referred to differences in income, her delegation had given detailed figures: per capita income was €21,000 in Andalusia and €94,000, or 4.5 times more, in Gibraltar. Lastly, and most seriously, her delegation had referred to the Fence separating the territory of Spain, but that term had been rendered as “the frontier”.

Question of Western Sahara (A/AC.109/2024/17)

3. **The Chair** drew attention to the working paper prepared by the Secretariat on the question of Western Sahara ([A/AC.109/2024/17](#)). In accordance with the Committee’s usual practice, bodies and individuals granted a hearing would be invited to take a place at the table and would withdraw after making their statements.

Hearing of interested bodies and individuals

4. **Mr. Omar** (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO)) said that the Committee had dispatched a visiting mission to Western Sahara in 1975 with a view to ascertaining the views and aspirations of the people of the Territory. The authors of the resulting report had concluded, firstly, that the people of the territory were overwhelmingly in favour of independence; secondly, that Frente POLISARIO was the dominant political force that enjoyed the support of the population; and thirdly, that the General Assembly should enable the people of the Territory to decide their own future in complete freedom, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#). Those points remained valid. The people of Western Sahara, under the leadership of its

sole legitimate representative, Frente POLISARIO, had only one demand, namely independence. That demand had been consolidated by decades of resistance against colonialism and foreign occupation, and crowned by the establishment of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in 1976. The expansionist so-called proposals made by Morocco, the occupying State, and by its apologists and puppet entities, were intended only to deprive the Sahrawi people of that inalienable right. Such proposals went against everything that the Committee and the United Nations stood for.

5. In May 2024, the Sahrawi people had celebrated the fifty-first anniversary of the foundation of Frente POLISARIO and the beginning of their national liberation struggle. They remained determined to intensify their struggle by all legitimate means in order to resist the illegal Moroccan occupation of their land and to defend their inalienable and non-negotiable right to freedom and independence.

6. **Ms. Bahiya** (Conseil Régional de Dakhla-Oued Eddahab) said that she was a democratically elected representative of the population of the Moroccan Sahara. In 2015, Morocco had adopted a development model for its southern provinces, taking into account the specificities of those regions and the aspirations of the local population. Large-scale structural projects, with a budget of more than \$10 billion, had been launched in such critical sectors as infrastructure, training, industry, agriculture, renewable energy and tourism. Some 80 per cent of the projects had now been completed, and the economic growth rate in the Moroccan Sahara was now 50 per cent higher than the national average.

7. On 6 November 2023, the King of Morocco had set out an ambitious geopolitical vision focusing on the Atlantic seaboard. A Morocco-Nigeria gas pipeline, an African-Atlantic initiative and an initiative to promote access to the Atlantic Ocean for Sahel countries would establish the Moroccan Sahara as a platform for security, stability and co-development in Africa. Numerous other infrastructure projects were under way, including the Dakhla Atlantic Port and a highway linking the cities of Tiznit, Laayoune and Dakhla.

8. Women in the Moroccan Sahara played prominent role in society and were well represented in elected regional and local councils. In contrast, women in the Tindouf camps faced serious and systemic human rights violations, including torture and rape, in which the host country was complicit. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had repeatedly denounced the harassment, unlawful arrests and abuse perpetrated by the “polisario”, whose embezzlement of humanitarian assistance had been

documented by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

9. **Mr. Abba** (Conseil Régional de Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra) said that he was a native of the Moroccan Sahara and, in contrast to the Polisario, had been elected democratically to hold local office. In the most recent elections, the Moroccan Sahara had seen the highest turnout in Morocco, and the process had been monitored by international observers.

10. The Moroccan autonomy initiative, which had been proposed in 2007, was intended to resolve the protracted and artificial conflict concerning the Moroccan Sahara. It was described as serious and credible in successive Security Council resolutions, and was now supported by more than 100 States. Under the initiative, the local population of the Moroccan Sahara had wide-ranging prerogatives to manage their own affairs.

11. The Moroccan Sahara was rapidly becoming a regional economic hub and logistical platform. The focus would now be on developing the Atlantic seaboard to promote regional economic integration and international trade. Port infrastructure was being developed in Boujdour and in El Marsa, to complement the new port that was being built in Tarfaya. The Tiznit-Dakhla highway was nearing completion. Those projects, which were part of the development programme launched in 2015, reflected the commitment of Morocco to shared prosperity across the continent.

12. In view of the catastrophic situation in the Tindouf camps, the international community must prevail on Algeria and the Polisario to put an end to the lawlessness in the camps and allow the population to return to the Moroccan Sahara.

13. **Mr. El Ouali** (African Forum for Research and Studies in Human Rights (AFORES)) said that the leaders of the secessionist group Polisario, along with the host country Algeria, bore responsibility for the repeated and systematic human rights abuses in the Tindouf camps. The Polisario recruited children, in flagrant violation of the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles). From the age of five, children were sent to indoctrination centres and then to military training centres so that they could be used directly or indirectly in combat operations. It was high time for non-governmental organizations to inspect the camps and uncover those violations, and for Algeria to be held responsible for acts that were perpetrated on its territory by an armed group to which it gave safe haven. Algeria had a duty to comply with the international instruments on the rights of the child. In accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, it should

allow a census of the inhabitants of the camps to prevent the embezzlement of humanitarian assistance. A census would also shed light on the demographic composition of the camps and the true number of armed combatants. Such findings could undermine the Polisario strategy of recruiting children and civilians to take part in the artificial dispute.

14. **Ms. Ezaoui** (Association 9 mars) said that repression, extreme poverty and malnutrition had now become the norm in the Tindouf camps. Humanitarian aid intended for the camps was embezzled by Polisario officials with the active complicity of the host country, Algeria, or was diverted for sale outside the camps or in neighbouring States. That process had been conclusively documented by OLAF and WFP. It was made possible by the refusal of Algeria to allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to register the inhabitants of the camps. Algeria had devolved its authority over the camps to the Polisario, making them effectively a lawless zone. When any of the inhabitants dared to raise their voice, they were met with brutal repression or arbitrarily detained. Numerous international non-governmental organizations and media outlets had drawn attention to human rights violations including enslavement. Women, in particular, were subjected to violence by Polisario and Algerian forces. The international community must act swiftly and decisively to address the humanitarian disaster and hold Algeria to account over its refusal to allow the registration of the population held hostage in the camps. The only solution was to allow the safe and dignified return of that population to the Moroccan Sahara, in accordance with the Moroccan autonomy initiative.

15. **Mr. Fall** (CODESA) said that the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was recognized by more than 80 States, had strong diplomatic representation in Africa, Europe and Latin America, and was a member of the African Union. It had a proven record of fostering security, stability and peacebuilding in the region. In the liberated areas, it had built institutions and guaranteed the peaceful transfer of power. It cooperated with neighbouring States to combat terrorism and organized crime. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and Morocco participated in the work of the African Union on an equal footing, and numerous States hosted diplomatic missions from both countries. It was time for Morocco to recognize that fact so that the two sides could work together to fulfil their peoples' aspirations for peace, stability and development. The United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council should address the unjustifiable and unacceptable delay in the decolonization of Western Sahara, enabling it to become a State Member of the United Nations.

16. On 13 November 2020, Morocco had violated the ceasefire and occupied additional parts of Western Sahara, in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. The failure to hold it to account had undermined the security of the region and the aspirations of its peoples.

17. **Mr. Sassi** (SKC) said that the international community could not continue to abdicate its historic, political, legal and moral responsibility towards the people of Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa. It has thus far adopted a strategy of silence and avoidance. The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) still did not have a human rights component, something that enabled Morocco to intensify its human rights violations, which included torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and persecution. Western Sahara had been listed as a Non-Self-Governing Territory since 1963, and the inalienable right of its people to self-determination was explicitly recognized in General Assembly resolution 2229 (XXI), adopted in 1966; yet no progress whatsoever had been made towards holding a referendum on self-determination. Two States bore particular responsibility: France, which had used its permanent membership of the Security Council to support Morocco, and Spain, which had failed to honour its commitments. A human rights mechanism must be established in Western Sahara. The illegitimate Moroccan occupation must be brought to an end, so that Western Sahara could take its place among the free and independent nations of the world.

18. **Ms. Hakoyama** (Friends of Western Sahara Japan) said that she had visited the Sahrawi refugee camps for the first time in 2023. She had been impressed with the determination of the Sahrawi people, at all levels and in all generations, to continue their struggle for liberation. Having worked as a United Nations staff member in the area of education and as an academic at a Japanese university, she knew all too well that the denial of identity and of a future caused unbearable pain. Every act of colonialism created a rebellious youth, which would persist until victory.

19. Her own country, Japan, had links to the occupation of Western Sahara. Japanese companies were importing phosphates from the Territory, and Western Saharan octopus described as Moroccan produce was sold in Japanese supermarkets. Japanese tuna longliners were fishing in the Western Saharan waters, paying a licence fee to the Moroccan Government. A Japanese company was participating in a renewable energy project in the Territory. Her organization was committed to rectifying that injustice. For that purpose, it had organized more than 40 lectures and webinars in 24

cities across Japan in 2023. The United Nations, for its part, must uphold the principles of decolonization and bring about a solution to the question of Western Sahara without delay.

20. **Mr. Helali** (Party of Communists USA) said that he had travelled twice to the Tindouf camps and witnessed the struggles and hardships of the Sahrawi people after nearly half a century of war, military occupation, colonization, ethnic cleansing, torture, the plundering of their natural resources, and other violations of international law. Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa, was divided by a 2,700 km berm lined with landmines that continued to kill innocent civilians. The resumption of the armed struggle against the occupying Power, Morocco, was a result of the failure of diplomacy and the inability of the United Nations to hold the long-promised referendum. Adding insult to injury, the United States of America had recognized the sovereignty of Morocco over Western Sahara. However, international law was clear on the subject of Western Sahara: in its advisory opinion of 16 October 1975, the International Court of Justice had not found legal ties with Morocco or Mauritania of such a nature as might affect the application of resolution 1514 (XV).

21. In view of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, it was difficult not to see a parallel between the situations in Western Sahara and in Palestine. The two occupying States, Morocco and Israel, continued to deepen their bilateral diplomatic, political, economic, and military ties with one another. At the same time, they enacted settler-colonialist policies aimed at displacing the indigenous population and plundering natural resources. The struggle of the Sahrawi people was thus part of the larger historical struggle for decolonization, self-determination, and national liberation.

22. **The Chair** called on petitioners to avoid straying from the item under consideration.

23. **Mr. Salem** (Sahrawi activist – civil society) said that, because the statements delivered before the Committee would eventually be archived and forgotten about, he had brought with him something tangible: a piece of a traditional garment, or *melhfa*, that had been worn by the Sahrawi activist Sultana Khaya when she was tortured by the Moroccan occupation forces. That item was a testament to the suffering and resilience of the entire Sahrawi nation, and the shame and inaction of the international community. The people of Western Sahara continued to suffer owing to the betrayals of successive Governments of Spain. Its territory remained under brutal occupation, and its natural resources were being plundered. Many of its people were refugees, and many activists remained imprisoned. The United

Nations had offered only empty words; it was, effectively, an instrument in the hands of imperialist powers. It remained indifferent while Palestine bled, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was occupied, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was burning, and Libya was in ruins. However, imperialism was losing its effectiveness and the resistance would inevitably prevail in Western Sahara and elsewhere.

24. **The Chair** called on petitioners to refrain from displaying emblems or filming the proceedings; a video of the meeting would be made available on the UN Web TV website.

25. **Mr. Radoui**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Moroccan invasion of Western Sahara in 1975 had merely been an extension of Spanish colonialism. Anyone who resisted the new occupation was displaced, expelled or eliminated, while everyone else was subject to psychological and physical torture, suppression of their native culture, show trials, and all sorts of other punishments for any criticism of the expansionist, colonial, occupying regime. The situation could provoke a regional war in North Africa. The methods used by Morocco to exacerbate the conflict were well known. It was pointless for the Committee to keep making recommendations and the United Nations to keep issuing resolutions if they were not going to be implemented. On behalf of the Moroccan Republicans, he emphasized his solidarity with political prisoners.

26. **Mr. Kadiri** (Observer for Morocco), speaking on a point of order, said that the Chair had begun the meeting by insisting that speakers limit themselves to items on the agenda. The renegade who just had just spewed his falsehoods had no business addressing the Committee. He and his fellow hirelings had already been removed from the Fourth Committee. They should not be allowed to use the Special Committee as a vehicle to attack a Member State.

27. **The Chair** reminded all speakers to avoid straying from the item under consideration.

28. **Mr. Arkoukou** (Sahrawi Association in USA) said that his association was fed up with the inaction and hypocrisy of the United Nations in allowing the occupying Power, Morocco, to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity by bombarding Sahrawi camps using weapons and airplanes from the United States and France. The United Nations was effectively helping Morocco occupy Western Sahara, suppress opposition and impose demographic change. MINURSO had failed to report on the thousands of Moroccan settlers brought into the occupied territory and the systematic human rights violations being committed. On the Mission's watch, Morocco had annexed more territory and

violated the 1991 ceasefire. It was unclear what purpose the Mission served when Morocco had openly declared it would not accept any referendum. The United States had no credibility as penholder. It ostensibly supported a political solution while using a proxy to undermine the sovereignty of the occupied territory, just as it did in Palestine.

29. **The Chair** reminded all speakers to avoid straying from the item under consideration.

30. **Mr. Ahmed Fanan**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the crimes of Morocco were widespread, systematic and heinous. Sahrawis were being buried in mass graves, thrown out of planes alive into the ocean, and bombarded with napalm and white phosphorus. Those crimes had been documented, inter alia, by a European Parliament fact-finding mission, OHCHR, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Frontline Defenders, the Moroccan Association for Human Rights and the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights. The accusation that members of the Sahrawi resistance were foreign agents was a false allegation that Morocco also employed against its own internal opposition. Members of both the Sahrawi resistance and the Moroccan opposition were subject to abduction, forced disappearances and show trials that handed down excessive sentences.

31. **Mr. Hassan Fanan**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that Morocco was continuing its campaign of arrests of Sahrawi students who raised awareness about the occupation. Two students had recently been arrested for advocating Sahrawi rights at Moroccan universities and drawing attention to the plight of Sahrawi political prisoners. New data showed that in 2022, Morocco had buried some 1 million tons of European waste in Western Sahara, posing a host of health risks to the inhabitants. Morocco had previously buried nuclear waste from Italy in the city of Dakhla, and had signed several other deals to take in waste from Europe. Both Sahrawi activists and the Moroccan democratic opposition were calling for an end to the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara.

32. **Mr. Kadiri** (Observer for Morocco), speaking on a point of order, said that a third renegade had now attacked his country. Patriotic Moroccans had no time for those three hirelings. He hoped that the Chair would remind speakers to address the specific agenda item under consideration and observe decorum so that he could continue speaking without being interrupted.

33. **The Chair** reminded all petitioners to observe decorum and avoid straying from the item under consideration.

34. **Mr. Bennani**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that he wished to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Tindouf camps. People had been confined to those camps against their wills for half a century. Humanitarian aid was systematically misappropriated to enrich the Polisario and Algeria, as had been amply documented by official reports UNHCR, OLAF and WFP. The camps were located in areas infested by terrorism, cross-border crime and armed military groups. The Polisario had links to terrorist groups in the Sahel. The camps were fertile ground for both untraceable funding for terrorism and child recruitment. Algeria had refused to conduct a census for half a century, despite United Nations requests. The population of the camps was being exploited by Algeria for politics and by the Polisario for profit.

35. **Ms. Hmyene** (Association pour la liberté des femmes séquestrées dans les camps de Tindouf) said that women, young people and children in the Tindouf camps continued to be subjected to the worst forms of physical and psychological violence. The imprisoned population suffered human rights abuses with the full complicity of the host country, Algeria. In May 2024, the Algerian army had killed Sahrawi goldminers outside the Tindouf camps. Numerous international reports had documented the violations to which women in the camps were subjected, including abuse, rape, torture, slavery, and forced marriage and childbirth. Algeria had ceded sovereignty over the camps to the Polisario, which had well-known ties to terrorist groups in the Sahel and recruited child soldiers as young as 10. The international community needed to hold accountable the perpetrators of those crimes, as well as the Algerian officials who allowed them to happen.

36. **Mr. Tate** (African Centre for Peace Studies) said that he wondered, with a heavy heart, how many meetings it would take to free the people of Western Sahara. The region was closed to international observers. The right to protest and establish associations was brutally suppressed. Numerous international human rights bodies had documented the many violations occurring in Western Sahara. The Security Council had failed to carry out its responsibility to implement a referendum, or to mandate human rights reporting as it did in other places around the world. Morocco, much like Israel, was able to evade accountability and defy international resolutions. He was ashamed of the international community's failure to act. The Moroccan representative evidently even felt empowered to interrupt speakers before their time had expired.

37. **The Chair** said that the speaker was welcome to continue but should avoid straying from the item under consideration.

38. **Mr. Tate** (African Centre for Peace Studies) said that he was disappointed at the regular interruptions, but had nevertheless been grateful for the opportunity to speak.

39. **Mr. Souvi** (Western Sahara Student Union) said that any infrastructure Morocco claimed to have built in Western Sahara had been solely for the purpose of further plundering its resources. Such subsidies as it provided the inhabitants were designed to encourage them to vote on the side of the colonizers in any potential referendum. Colonization had been so successful that native Sahrawis now accounted for only 30 per cent of the population. According to the 2023 annual report of Western Sahara Resource Watch, Morocco had exported 1.6 million tons of phosphates from Western Sahara. Fish stocks on the Western Saharan coastline were being depleted by Moroccan fishing fleets and those of other countries that fished there by arrangement with Morocco. Cultivation of fruits and vegetables in the desert was using up non-renewable water reserves that had been relied on by local Bedouins for millennia. Dozens of Sahrawis and Mauritians had been killed by Moroccan drones while driving in supposedly safe areas. He hoped that the world would come together to condemn Morocco and create a path for the Sahrawi people to live with dignity in their own country like other peoples of the world.

40. **Mr. Ahmed**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that although separated by geography, Sahrawis and Palestinians shared the demand for justice, dignity and freedom. Despite countless United Nations resolutions, Western Saharans continued to endure human rights abuses, food insecurity, and restrictions on movement. The scale of the destruction and loss of life was nothing short of genocide. As in Palestine, it seemed as if the United Nations only protected the strong. He called for a ceasefire in Gaza. The peoples of Western Sahara and Palestine both looked to the United Nations for hope. To fail to take action was to be on the wrong side of history. It was hypocritical for the United States and other Western countries to supply weapons to countries such as Israel and Morocco that used them to kill refugees. Palestine and Western Sahara should both be free.

41. **The Chair** reminded all speakers to avoid straying from the item under consideration and observe decorum by refraining from filming the proceedings.

42. **Mr. Drury** (International Academic Observatory on Western Sahara) said that while conducting anthropological research in Laayoune, he had witnessed first-hand how people who had been happy to talk to him in private were afraid to be seen talking to him in public. There was an extensive network of Moroccan soldiers,

uniformed police, plainclothes intelligence, and civilian informants in every neighbourhood to repress any public sign of support for Sahrawi nationalism. Even so, he had managed to meet and talk with human rights activists, some of whom who had suffered broken bones, rape and the removal of their fingernails. It did not take an anthropologist to identify the conditions in Western Sahara as those of colonialism, which was the very phenomenon that the Committee was mandated to end.

43. **Mr. Aomar**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that he wished to talk about the violations taking place in the last remaining colony in Africa. The Sahrawi people had been split in two. One part was undergoing imprisonment, death, displacement, deprivation of freedoms, plundering of resources, and demographic change; most recently, land in Western Sahara had been seized and sold to a foreign investment fund and companies belonging to cronies of politicians. The other part of the Sahrawi people was languishing in camps in Algeria, where the Polisario was doing what it could to allow them to live a life of dignity. An immediate end should be brought to colonialism in Western Sahara, which should be opened to independent observers. Morocco should be compelled to implement international resolutions and allow MINURSO to organize a referendum. Political prisoners should be released and Sahrawis should be allowed to exercise their rights. One might well ask how long it would take for the United Nations to intervene to stop the genocide. One way or another, every inch of Sahrawi territory would be liberated.

44. **Mr. Cheikh**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that the Sahrawi people under Moroccan occupation were dispossessed and impoverished. In an effort to change the demographic composition of the Territory, the Moroccan occupation was expropriating Sahrawi land and handing it over to investment funds, while repressing protest movements. In other examples of its genocidal policies, the Moroccan occupier had dismantled encampments along the coast and carried out mining activities. Since 1963, the Sahrawi people had been waiting for international law to be enforced. The United Nations must guarantee the protection of Sahrawi lives and rights, and must not allow Morocco to change the facts on the ground. Lastly, it was essential for international observers to gain access to Western Sahara.

45. **Mr. Taulumru**, speaking in his personal capacity as a member of the United States branch of the Collective of Defenders Sahrawi of Human Rights in Western Sahara (CODESA), said that Western Sahara had been recognized as a Non-Self-Governing Territory since 1963, and its people thus had a right to self-

determination in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). In its advisory opinion of 16 October 1975, the International Court of Justice had found that the Territory was not *terra nullius* and that question had nothing to do with the restoration of the territorial integrity of Morocco. The courts of the European Union had similarly found that Western Sahara was not a part of Morocco and that the European Union had no right to benefit from its resources without consulting with the Sahrawi people, represented by Frente POLISARIO.

46. Emboldened by the silence of the Security Council, the Moroccan occupation authorities were subjecting the Sahrawi people to systematic hardship, degrading treatment, expropriations and arbitrary detention. Sahrawi civilians east of the berm had recently been killed in drone attacks. In view of the deteriorating situation, the United Nations must intervene urgently to bring an end to the suffering of the Sahrawi people and enable them to exercise the right to self-determination.

47. **Mr. Bendriss** (Association de soutien à l'Initiative Marocaine d'Autonomie) said that the autonomy proposal put forward by Morocco in 2007 offered inhabitants of the Moroccan Sahara the opportunity to manage their own affairs in a democratic manner within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty. The proposal respected the cultural specificities of the region, provided for inclusion and non-discrimination, promoted reconciliation, and offered a chance to advance the goals of the Arab Maghreb Union. The proposal was in line with the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and had been endorsed by more than 100 States around the world. The numerous consulates that had been opened in Laayoune and Dakhla were a clear indication that Moroccan sovereignty in the Sahara was irreversible. The Moroccan proposal offered the best chance of a political resolution.

48. **Mr. Elaissaoui** (Organisation pour la fin des violations des droits de l'Homme dans les camps de Tindouf) said that the Sahara and the whole Sahel region had been living with instability and terrorism for years. The Polisario had repeatedly been shown to be involved in terrorism in the Sahel. The late Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui, who had been included on the United Nations Security Council Consolidated List, had been a member of the Polisario before founding his own terrorist group; but even at that stage, he had regularly visited the Tindouf camps to receive treatment and support, before being killed in an international counter-terrorist operation in 2021. There were confirmed links between the Polisario and the Da'esh organization. The

lack of prospects for young people in the camps was leading some of them to join armed groups. The international community should realize that the Polisario was responsible for that situation. It should also take note that Mokhtar Said Mediouini, a former Algerian army officer who had incited terrorist attacks in Morocco that had led to the deaths of Moroccan citizens, had recently been rewarded by being appointed director of the Algiers airport. The United Nations should use all the tools at its disposal to examine those links between various parties and terrorism.

49. **Mr. Baghdadi** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country urged all parties concerned to engage in negotiations with a view to reaching a just and durable political solution in line with General Assembly resolutions [1514 \(XV\)](#) and [1541 \(XV\)](#) and restoring the ceasefire that had been in force prior to 13 November 2020.

50. **Mr. Aaron** (Dominica) said that although Non-Self-Governing Territories were subject to all sorts of threats to their economies, environments and cultures, the line of diplomacy should never be compromised. In the case of Western Sahara, his delegation commended the efforts of the Secretary-General for a practicable solution in line with Security Council resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#). Along with more than 100 other countries, Dominica endorsed the Moroccan autonomy initiative. His delegation called for continued engagement by Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario in the round-table talks, and welcomed the commitment of Morocco to respect the ceasefire. His delegation also commended Moroccan development efforts, which had improved the quality of life of the inhabitants of the southern provinces.

51. **Mr. Moriko** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that his country reiterated its full support for the political process under the auspices of the Secretary-General. The Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Moroccan Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, should resume the round-table discussions held in Geneva on 5 and 6 December 2018 and on 21 and 22 March 2019. Côte d'Ivoire commended the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which was in line with the Charter and the relevant resolutions. It welcomed the participation of elected representatives of the Moroccan Sahara in the Committee's proceedings. The local population had benefitted from investments and development projects implemented as part of the development initiative launched by Morocco in 2015. Security Council resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#) welcomed the role played by the National Council on Human Rights Commissions operating in Dakhla and Laayoune, and the interaction of Morocco with special procedures of the United Nations Human Rights

Council. Nevertheless, his delegation remained concerned about human rights conditions, and called for compliance with that same resolution's request for a refugee registration in the Tindouf refugee camps. Côte d'Ivoire commended the commitment of Morocco to the ceasefire and its cooperation with MINURSO.

52. **Mr. Sowa** (Sierra Leone) said that his country supported the ongoing political process under the auspices of the United Nations and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura. Ways must be found to overcome the current impasse. Sierra Leone endorsed the Moroccan autonomy proposal. Socioeconomic and infrastructure improvements in Western Sahara had been reflected in the region's development indexes. Morocco had made progress in strengthening cooperation and communication with MINURSO, which was helping to maintain stability and facilitate negotiations. Any renunciation of the ceasefire agreement was a violation of Security Council resolutions. The safety and security of civilians and United Nations personnel was non-negotiable, and the human rights of all should be protected. Security Council resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#) welcomed steps and initiatives taken by Morocco, and the role played by the National Council on Human Rights Commissions operating in Dakhla and Laayoune, and the interaction of Morocco with Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council. That same resolution also strongly reiterated its request for a refugee registration in the Tindouf refugee camps.

53. **Mr. Henry** (Saint Lucia) said that his delegation supported the ongoing political process under the auspices of the Secretary General and welcomed the efforts by his Personal Envoy. The round-table discussions should be resumed in line with Security Council resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#). Saint Lucia supported the Moroccan autonomy initiative, which had been recognized by more than 100 countries and was in line with the Charter and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

54. **Mr. Pary Rodríguez** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that international case law, including the advisory opinion handed down by the International Court of Justice on 16 October 1975, made it absolutely clear that Western Sahara had been occupied, and that General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#) should be fully implemented in relation to the Territory. Moreover, the Court had found that Western Sahara had no ties of sovereignty with Morocco or Mauritania. His country therefore firmly supported the Sahrawi people in its quest for self-determination and independence. The holding of a free and fair referendum for that purpose was not a concession but a right under international law.

The other party to the dispute, as a full member of the United Nations, should fulfil its obligations, including those enshrined in the settlement plan for Western Sahara. The Committee also had an important role to play in that process. The previous administering Power should contribute more constructively towards the realization of the internationally recognized goal, namely, the independence of Western Sahara. The 1991 ceasefire should be respected; any risk of the return to violence must be resisted; and third parties should refrain from any actions that could revive the wounds of the colonial past. His delegation firmly supported the mandate of MINURSO, namely, to oversee a referendum on self-determination.

55. **Ms. Fernández Palacios** (Cuba) said that the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination had been asserted in numerous resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the African Union. Her delegation supported efforts to find a lasting solution to the question of Western Sahara that would enable its people to exercise that right, in line with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The Sahrawi people needed the backing of the international community. For its part, Cuba had supported the Sahrawi people since 1976. More than 2,000 Sahrawi students had graduated from Cuban educational institutions, and more than 55 others were currently enrolled. A medical brigade and a basic education brigade were providing services to the population of the Tindouf camps.

56. **Mr. Ghelich** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the United Nations had a responsibility to enable the people of Western Sahara to exercise the right to self-determination in accordance with the relevant resolutions. In view of the plight of the Sahrawi people, the international community should commit to realizing their rights and ensuring their independence. All parties should show a serious and respectful commitment, in good faith and without preconditions, to the resolutions of the United Nations. All parties and neighbouring States should continue constructive dialogue and should cooperate with one another and with the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy.

57. **Mr. Dopeke** (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation welcomed the constructive engagement shown by all relevant stakeholders, particularly the delegations of Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania and the “*polisario*”. The search for a lasting political settlement should be guided by the practical realities of the situation and a spirit of good faith and negotiated compromise. The Moroccan autonomy initiative was consistent with that spirit; it provided a sound basis for progress and was based on the Charter and the relevant

resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly resolutions. That credible compromise solution was gathering momentum and now had the support of more than 100 States.

58. His delegation supported the political process conducted under the auspices of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara with a view to finding a mutually acceptable, negotiated and durable political solution to the question of Western Sahara. In particular, it welcomed his visits to Rabat, Algiers and Nouakchott. It hoped for the resumption of the round-table process with the same format and including the key stakeholders, namely Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the “*polisario*”, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2703 (2023).

59. His delegation welcomed the efforts that had been made to foster peace, stability and security in Western Sahara. In particular, it recognized that Morocco had fully respected the ceasefire and continued to cooperate fully with MINURSO. His delegation urged “*Polisario*” and other relevant parties to follow suit. Morocco had also worked commendably to strengthen sustainable development through infrastructure and socio-economic investment in the Western Sahara region, something that was improving the lives of the people of Western Sahara. That trend had encouraged a growing number of States to establish consulates in Laayoune and Dakhla.

60. While welcoming efforts to strengthen human rights in the region, his delegation remained concerned at the situation in the Tindouf camps, where reports of human rights violations, particularly affecting women and children, continued to be reported. Such violations must be addressed swiftly. UNHCR should be allowed to register and provide support for the population of the camps

61. **Mr. Alves** (Timor-Leste) said that his Government was ready to host the 2024 Pacific regional seminar in Dili. That occasion would coincide with the 25th anniversary of the referendum in Timor-Leste. The event would thus provide a beacon of hope for peoples that were still fighting for their rights.

62. Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa, had been on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories since 1963. In view of the experience of Timor-Leste, his delegation believed that the Committee had the potential to assist the people of Western Sahara in realizing their inalienable, non-negotiable and imprescriptible right to self-determination. A solution should be found that respected the sovereign will of the Sahrawi people by including a free and fair referendum on self-determination. It was essential to implement the mandate of MINURSO by enabling the people of

Western Sahara to exercise freely and democratically their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. The Committee must actively support efforts, including those made by the African Union, to facilitate a peaceful solution to the conflict between the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and Morocco. The United Nations must take concrete actions to safeguard the fundamental rights of the Sahrawi people, including sovereignty over their natural resources. In order to ensure accountability and progress, regular reports should be made to the relevant United Nations bodies. The Committee should conduct a visiting mission to Western Sahara, and all parties must uphold the United Nations-led peace process in Western Sahara.

63. **Mr. Egas Benavides** (Ecuador) said that it was essential to foster cooperation between administering Powers and the Territories under their administration. International instruments aimed at advancing independence processes should be implemented efficiently and effectively, based on a case-by-case analysis of the Territories and taking into account the principles of territorial integrity and self-determination. The Administering Powers should continue to contribute to that endeavour.

64. Further efforts were needed with a view to finding a viable, lasting and mutually acceptable solution that would provide for the people of Western Sahara to exercise self-determination in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council. As a member of the Security Council, Ecuador supported the mandate of MINURSO and the work of the Personal Envoy.

65. **Mr. Pérez Ayestarán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had long been a champion of the struggle of the Sahrawi people to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination, in line with international law, the Charter and the resolutions of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the African Union. It was regrettable that the Sahrawi people had not yet been able to realize their legitimate aspirations and that MINURSO had not yet been able to fulfil its mandate. His Government rejected all attempts to portray the question as anything other than a decolonization issue. There was a pressing need to revive negotiations between Frente POLISARIO and Morocco, under the auspices of the United Nations.

66. His delegation supported all efforts that could pave the way towards a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the question. His Government

would continue to support the Sahrawi people at the political and diplomatic levels and through cooperation and capacity-building. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 78/84, it would continue providing professional training to young Sahrawi people. The Committee should take urgent action to support diplomatic efforts to bring the parties together and move towards the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Sahrawi people, including self-determination.

67. **Ms. Pichardo Urbina** (Nicaragua) said that, since the victory of the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua, the foreign policy of the Sandinista National Liberation Front had been focused on supporting just causes, including decolonization and the struggle against colonial occupation. Accordingly, Nicaragua reaffirmed its solidarity with the peoples in the Non-Self-Governing Territories and other territories struggling to exercise their inalienable rights.

68. His delegation congratulated the Sahrawi people and Government on the on the forty-eighth anniversary of the declaration of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and the fifty-first anniversary of the foundation of Frente POLISARIO. It was grateful to the petitioners for their moving testimony.

69. A political solution to the question of Western Sahara, consistent with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), must urgently be found. Negotiations without preconditions and in good faith should resume promptly with a view to enabling the Sahrawi people to exercise their inalienable right to freedom, self-determination and independence.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.