



# General Assembly

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## Seventy-ninth session

Item 57 of the provisional agenda\*

### Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

## Question of Western Sahara

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, covering the period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/85](#).

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\* [A/79/150](#).



1. On 11 December 2023, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution [78/85](#) on the question of Western Sahara. The present report, covering the period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, is submitted in accordance with paragraph 7 of that resolution.
2. The Security Council addresses Western Sahara as a matter of peace and security, calling in successive resolutions for a “just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara”. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples address Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory and an issue of decolonization.
3. Pursuant to Security Council resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#), I submitted a report to the Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara ([S/2023/729](#)) on 3 October 2023. The report describes the situation on the ground; the status of the political negotiations on Western Sahara; the implementation of resolution [2654 \(2022\)](#); and the existing challenges to the operations of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), as well as steps taken to address them. On 30 October 2023, the Security Council adopted resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#), renewing the mandate of MINURSO until 31 October 2024 and requesting me to provide a report on the situation in Western Sahara well before the end of the mandate period. A separate report will be prepared and submitted as requested.
4. During the reporting period, the situation in Western Sahara continued to be characterized by low-intensity hostilities between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) and some of the enduring challenges to the operational environment of MINURSO.
5. Most firing incidents across the berm reported to MINURSO by the parties were concentrated in the north of the Territory, near Mahbas. During the reporting period, MINURSO, accompanied by the Royal Moroccan Army, visited sites adjacent to the berm where such incidents were alleged to have taken place, and in several cases observed traces of exploded mortar ammunition. However, owing to security concerns, these visits often took place several days after the alleged event, making reaching conclusive findings challenging. A MINURSO investigation determined that, in an incident on 29 October, high-explosive rockets launched from an easterly direction hit an area inhabited by civilians in Smara, reportedly killing one person and injuring three others. MINURSO continued to note reports of strikes conducted by Royal Moroccan Army unmanned aerial vehicles east of the berm and was able to conduct investigations at the alleged sites on various occasions. In some instances, media reports indicated that civilian casualties had occurred as a result of these aerial strikes. On several occasions, MINURSO observed that casualties had occurred.
6. In late February 2024, in an effort to reduce tensions on the ground, my Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO and the Force Commander wrote to both parties to propose a cessation of hostilities during the Holy Month of Ramadan. The Royal Moroccan Army responded on 26 February 2024 by reiterating its commitment to the 1991 ceasefire while underscoring its right to respond to incidents by Frente POLISARIO. In a letter to my Special Representative dated 13 March 2024, Frente POLISARIO considered that, without addressing the root causes of the breakdown of the 1991 ceasefire, a cessation of hostilities was tantamount to ignoring the current reality on the ground.
7. The impact of previously reported constraints on the MINURSO logistical supply and maintenance chain to team sites east of the berm became less acute following a letter from Frente POLISARIO to my Special Representative on 29 March

2023 to inform him that, as a “gesture of goodwill to help overcome some of the logistic challenges” that MINURSO was facing, Frente POLISARIO was “willing to provide safe passage, on an exceptional and provisional basis, to the Mission to conduct a logistical ground convoy to resupply its team sites” east of the berm. From then, MINURSO was able to sustain its team sites more regularly and reliably. Between September 2023 and June 2024, MINURSO was able to conduct on average one ground convoy per month to its team sites east of the berm.

8. On 11 September 2023, in New York, I met the Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO, Brahim Ghali. We discussed prospects for advancing the political process led by my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura. We also discussed the importance of ensuring the sustainability of the presence of MINURSO throughout the Territory.

9. During the reporting period, my Personal Envoy undertook consultations on the issue of Western Sahara with Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania, members of the Security Council, members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara and other interested actors with a view to constructively advancing the political process on Western Sahara.

10. In 2023, my Personal Envoy travelled to various locations for meetings with regional actors. On 2 July 2023, my Personal Envoy met with the recently appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, Ahmed Attaf, in Algiers. He visited Laayoune on 5 and 6 September and Dakhla on 7 September. On 8 September, he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Nasser Bourita, in Rabat. On 11 September, he met in New York with the Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO. My Personal Envoy then travelled to Algiers on 13 September for meetings with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, followed by Nouakchott on 14 and 15 September for meetings with the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, and its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug.

11. In 2024, my Personal Envoy undertook another round of regional visits. He travelled to Algiers on 27 February 2024 for a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria; Nouakchott on 2 April 2024 for meetings with the President and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mauritania; and Rabat on 4 April 2024 for a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco. He also met the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria again in New York on 16 April 2024.

12. Beyond actors in the region, my Personal Envoy also met with the acting Deputy Secretary of State of the United States, Victoria Nuland, in Washington, D.C., on 20 October 2023; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation of Spain, José Manuel Albares Bueno, in Madrid on 18 December 2023; the Minister for International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, in Pretoria on 31 January 2024; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, in Moscow on 11 March 2024; the Minister of State (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Lord Tariq Ahmad, in London on 22 March 2024; and senior French officials in Paris on 27 March 2024. In these meetings and interactions, my Personal Envoy noted with appreciation the expressions of support by his interlocutors for the efforts of the United Nations to facilitate a political settlement to the situation in Western Sahara.

13. In accordance with Security Council resolutions [2654 \(2022\)](#) and [2703 \(2023\)](#), my Personal Envoy gave briefings to the Council on 16 October 2023 and 16 April 2024 in closed consultations. On both occasions, he received broad support from members of the Council for his efforts. While in New York, my Personal Envoy met with senior United Nations officials, representatives of Morocco, Frente POLISARIO,

Algeria and Mauritania, Security Council members and members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara.

14. During the reporting period, MINURSO continued its mine action activities to provide emergency disposal of explosive ordnance, assistance to investigations at sites of alleged aerial strikes east of the berm, support for ground convoy movements, route verification and combined explosive ordnance risk education. In January 2024, for the first time since 2019, MINURSO resumed land release activities in the Mijek area, following their resumption in Tifariti in May 2023. In the period up to 30 June 2024, 3,532,000 square metres of land were released and 295 items of explosive ordnance were found and destroyed.

15. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, with support from the Resident Coordinator Office, continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees in the five camps located near Tindouf, Algeria, despite critical funding challenges. The first consolidated plan of needs and activities in the camps, the Sahrawi Refugee Response Plan 2024–2025, was launched in November 2023. At the time of writing, only 29 per cent of the \$110.5 million required to fund the budget of the Plan in 2024 had been received. United Nations agencies created a subgroup to support fundraising efforts for the Sahrawi Refugee Response Plan, which includes reaching out to non-traditional donors and creating new partnerships. A donor mission to the camps in April 2024 acknowledged the scale of the ongoing needs despite the generous support provided by the Algerian Government and other donors.

16. The confidence-building measures, pursuant to Security Council resolution [1282 \(1999\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, to allow family links between Sahrawi refugees and their communities of origin in the Territory, remained on hold.

17. Despite official requests made by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for a technical visit to Western Sahara, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [78/85](#), and despite the Security Council, in its resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#), urging the enhancement of cooperation with OHCHR, including by facilitating such visits, OHCHR has not been granted access to the Territory since 2015.

18. The lack of access to first-hand information and of independent, impartial, comprehensive and sustained monitoring of the human rights situation was detrimental to a comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation in the region. During the reporting period, OHCHR continued to receive allegations relating to human rights violations, including intimidation, surveillance and discrimination against Sahrawi individuals particularly when advocating for self-determination. In November 2023, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reviewed the combined nineteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of Morocco and expressed similar concerns in its concluding observations ([CERD/C/MAR/CO/19-21](#), para. 19).

19. The well-being and conditions of detention of Sahrawi prisoners, in particular those belonging to the Gdeim Izik group, who are held outside Western Sahara, remains a pressing issue. Similarly, information was received on the humanitarian conditions in the Tindouf refugee camps and the need to ensure the protection of human rights inside the camps.

20. The Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples considered the question of Western Sahara at the 5th and 6th meetings of its 2024 session, held on 11 June 2024.

21. I remain deeply concerned by the developments in Western Sahara. The deteriorated state of affairs has become entrenched and must urgently be reversed, including to avoid any further escalation. The continued hostilities and lack of a ceasefire between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO remain a major setback to the achievement of a political solution to this long-standing dispute. The conduct of aerial strikes and firing across the berm continue to contribute to increasing tensions. In this context, it is critical for a ceasefire to be re-established.

22. This challenging context makes negotiating a political solution to the question of Western Sahara more urgent than ever, almost five decades into the conflict. The United Nations remains available to convene all those concerned with the issue of Western Sahara in a joint effort to advance the search for a peaceful solution. I urge them to approach the political process with an open mind, to desist from preconditions and to seize the opportunity provided by my Personal Envoy's facilitation and efforts. Provided that all concerned engage in good faith and there is strong political will and continued support from the international community, I continue to believe that it is possible to find a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in accordance with Security Council resolutions [2440 \(2018\)](#), [2468 \(2019\)](#), [2494 \(2019\)](#), [2548 \(2020\)](#), [2602 \(2021\)](#), [2654 \(2022\)](#) and [2703 \(2023\)](#).

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