

Origin of the Conflict



After the signing of the Tripartite Agreement of Madrid in 1975, Western Sahara, former Spanish colony, was handed over to Morocco and Mauritania in exchange for political and economic compensation. Shortly after, on February 27th, 1976 the independence of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was proclaimed in the town of Bir Lehlu, capital of the territory liberated by the Polisario Front. In 1989 the UN drew up a peace plan that implemented a referendum on self-determination of Western Sahara. This peace plan was accepted by the different parties involved in the conflict. In 1983 l'Associació Catalana d'Friends of Poble Sahrawi (ACAPS) was created with the intention to promote and coordinate the political and humanitarian support of Catalonia to the Saharawi people.

The UN Security Council received strong pressure from countries like USA, France, and Britain for the integration of Western Sahara to Morocco as autonomy. Meanwhile, the Spanish government showed a rather ambiguous position. In this regard, the Council failed to agree and adopt a strong position despite the fact that in February 2002 the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, posed an ultimatum to take a decision on the proposals that had already emerged: self-determination referendum, integration with Morocco as autonomy, partition of territory, or permanent abandonment of the area. In July 2002, unanimously, the UN Security Council adopted the resolution 1429 which was seen by many as "a victory for the Saharawi people and the international law."

In January 2003 Kofi Annan called on the international community again to work towards ending the tragedy of the Saharawi people and requested an extension of two months to the mandate of MINURSO in Western Sahara. At the end of March 2003 the Security Council adopted a new resolution, 1469, to extend the mandate of MINURSO for ten months and allow time for the different parties to study the proposal by James Baker, Kofi Annan's special envoy, of integration of Western Sahara as Moroccan territory. Once again any decision regarding the resolution of this conflict was postponed. The plan was never implemented and James Baker resigned shortly after.

In November 2010 the region was militarized by Moroccan troops after the worst scenes of violence in years were seen between the parties. The entrance of Moroccans to a protest camp on the outskirts of Laayoune, Western Sahara's capital, sparked a wave of protests and riots which death toll is impossible to confirm due to the absence of impartial observers. The riots coincided with a new round of negotiations in New York under the auspices of the United Nations between the government of Morocco, which claims the territory as an autonomous region, and the Polisario Front, an organization fighting for independence. However, the meeting ended with a single agreement: both parties rejected the proposal of the other, leaving the talks still stalled.

Internal Actors

External Actors

Polisario Front	UN
Saharawi People	Algeria
Kingdom of Morocco	Spain
UN Security Council (UNSC)	World Help Program (PAM)
Catalan Association of Friends of the Sahara (CAFS)	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ACNUR)

Current Situation



After the negotiations that took place in November 2010 in New York, a project was drafted in April 2011 to possibly solve the problem in the Sahara. The Polisario Front, which seeks the independence of Western Sahara, said that the draft UN resolution on the future of the former

Spanish colony "is not enough." The resolution, which is supported by the US, UK, Europe, and Russia, highlights "the importance of improving the situation of human rights" in Western Sahara, but does not indicate the mechanisms to do so. Since 1991 there is a ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario Front which is overseen by the UN. While the Moroccan government offered limited autonomy in the territory, the Polisario and neighboring Algeria want there to be a referendum on independence.

Now that Morocco is being swayed by the Arab spring protests, the situation in Western Sahara is even more uncertain. The king has just passed a constitutional amendment, satisfying many Moroccans who did not want the king to lie down from his throne, but were not the most satisfied with the political and economic situation the country is living. But who is there to defend the Saharawi people and to assert their rights as human beings? If the international community, whether the UN or any other international organization, does not take firm and concrete action to resolve the conflict soon, the Saharawi population will become extinct. Since the beginning of the 20th century the Saharawi people, as a strategy of the king to have legitimate rights to the land, are a minority against Moroccan people in Western Sahara.

UN's Position

For the UN, Western Sahara remains a territory awaiting decolonization. Morocco has never been recognized as the administering power of the territory. The International Tribunal in The Hague also spoke about the conflict and concluded that there is "no tie of territorial sovereignty between Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco."

More Information

<http://www.sahara-online.net/esp/HistoriadelSahara/HistoriadelconflictodelSahara.aspx>

<http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2011/04/24/97001-20110424FILWWW00154-le-polisario-accuse-paris.php>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/19/opinion/19kristof.html?scp=2&sq=morocco%20sahara&st=cse>

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