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WSC Newsletter January 2018



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From the Chair

In my home the Christmas cards are starting to arrive. They bring greetings from friends and family across the globe. Many bear a message wishing peace and goodwill to all.

Every year I get a few cards from Saharawi friends in diplomatic missions around the world. Friends I have made during 30 years of campaigning for self-determination through the Western Sahara Campaign. The Saharawi diplomats who represent the POLISARIO Front and the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic are men and women of great dignity and fortitude. They have had to be. For decades they have left their families behind to survive in refugee camps in the desert. They live in foreign lands where most governments would prefer to ignore their just cause in the interests of political expediency. They put forward their case with persistence and charm. They are courteous and patient – the model of diplomacy.

The messages in their cards usually thank me for my help and solidarity and wish me and my family well. Usually I put a message of hope in the cards I send them. I reaffirm my solidarity. I state my belief that the international community will fulfil its legal obligations. I apologise that we have not succeeded in our campaign to secure their right to self-determination. I wish that those living under occupation know peace and that those living in exile in the desert can soon return home.

Maybe finally it will be this year that my wish will come true - with the appointment of Horst Kohler as a new personal envoy of the UN Secretary General and Colin Stewart recently appointed as special representative and Head of MINURSO there is hope for renewed vigour at the United Nations but in the meantime we have to gird our loins for another year of struggle.

We are still to receive the judgement from the European Court of Justice confirming the illegality of including Western Sahara in trade agreements between Morocco and the European Union. We expect it early in the New Year. We would be astounded if we don't win the case as it is plainly illegal that occupation of a territory is rewarded by preferential trading agreements.

In 2018 we will once again be campaigning to include human rights monitoring in MINURSO's mandate. The impunity with which Morocco abuses human rights in a territory over which they have no jurisdiction under international law is astounding. The fact that the continuing barbarity of repression continues under the noses of UN forces is unforgivable.

I wish I had a different message to write in my card to the new representative in London – Hamdi Bueha and his deputy Sidi Breika - this year. But what I will do is reaffirm my solidarity and repledge myself to supporting their struggle for justice over the coming year. I hope I can rely on you to continue to stand beside me. In the meantime please read our newsletter and accept our best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The articles that follow highlight the continuing human rights abuses and the continuing theft of the Saharawi's natural resources while Saharawi refugees struggle to survive in the harsh desert refugee camps.

In January **Western Sahara Action Forum** will be launching an international campaign to get the United Nations Security Council to include human rights monitoring and to address the pillage of Western Sahara's resources when the mandate of their peace keeping mission, MINURSO, is renewed in April 2018.

ADALA UK Calls For An Independent Investigation Into The Death Of 'Minatu' in Dakhla

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WESTERN SAHARA CAMPAIGN UK
The Western Sahara Campaign works in solidarity with the Saharawi people to generate political support in order to advance their right to self-determination and to promote their human rights. Our role is to lobby the UK Government and the EU. You can help us to ensure the UK does not ignore the voice of the Saharawi people.



Follow the news about EU's illegal fisheries in Western Sahara



The EU pays Morocco to fish in occupied Western Sahara.

According to information provided by her family, the Moroccan Occupation Authorities are not going to investigating the death of Minatu Ahl Shikh, a young woman who was murdered in Occupied Dakhla during the night of Saturday 14th October 2017. Her family and other witnesses have explained that Minatu Ahl Shikh went missing that evening having left home to buy a few things in a local shop. When she didn't return, her family began looking for her and, having found no trace of her reported her disappearance to the Occupation Authorities.

The next morning Aminatou's body was found on the beach on the outskirts of the city. She was naked and her head and face had been badly beaten. Her clothes had been hidden under rocks. "Her body showed signs of being brutally beaten. She was covered in bruises and serious wounds. It was obvious that those who kidnapped her had done this and caused her death. She was likely raped as well", one witness told Adala UK.

The Moroccan Occupation Authorities, headed up by the King's Attorney General in the Occupied city of Dakhla, informed the family that the body of the murdered young woman was taken to the hospital in the Moroccan city of Agadir where they would conduct an autopsy. However, the Moroccan police are treating this as the suicide of a person suffering mental ill health.

Minatu's mother has responded - "I'm the mother of a murdered daughter. I can testify that it is disgraceful what the Moroccan authorities are saying about my daughter. How can they say she had mental health problems? It's a total disgrace that they say officially that they have spoken to me and that I told them my daughter had mental health problems. That is a lie. I won't stop until I know the truth about who murdered my daughter. I won't stop till I know the truth about what happened to my daughter, for she is part of me."

Whilst awaiting the results of the autopsy on the Sunday morning, the young woman's body was buried on the outskirts of Dakhla, without the consent of her family. "The Moroccan authorities have buried my daughter's body without informing us and without our consent. They didn't even allow one family member to go and say their last goodbye. They didn't tell me that they took her to Agadir and they haven't told me the results of the autopsy" commented Minatu's mother (**See video for her full testimony**).

It is speculated that the crime was motivated by racism and is related to the frequent attacks of Moroccan settlers against Saharawi citizens. "The attacks by settlers are increasing and causing harm to more and more Saharawi. But not one Moroccan citizen has died at the hands of a Saharawi because we don't launch such attacks, even though these people are occupying our country. These increasing settler attacks are never investigated by Moroccan police...they just hand impunity to the attackers", one activist told us.

Other cases that never investigated include:

Adnan Rahali Following his disappearance, the Moroccan authorities contacted his family to say that his body had been found in a university residence in Agadir in the Kingdom of Morocco. His family were forced to bury him in silence (**read more**).

Mohamed Fadel Uld Jatri Uld Ahnan murdered on 16 August 2016 by a Moroccan settler in Dakhla. The settler threw acid in Mohamed's face and then stabbed him with a knife. Mohamed died later in the city's hospital. Saharawi began a protest outside the hospital; this was violently suppressed by the Moroccan occupation forces.

Mohamed Lamine Haidala, a young Saharawi. On 22 February 2015, his body was buried by the Moroccan Occupation Authorities without an autopsy, without an enquiry and without notifying his family. He died following an attack by Moroccan settlers.

Said Dambar, a 26 year old Saharawi died after being hit by a police bullet. His family have waited two years for an investigation and his body has been buried without their consent. (**Read more**).

These acts of murder are deliberate and continuous and attacks against Saharawi by Moroccan settlers are increasing. This is the result of 42 years of illegal occupation by Morocco. Activists and members of Saharawi NGOs have spent years highlighting the cases of racially motivated attacks by settlers. Yet still the Occupation Authorities have done nothing to prevent this hostility from increasing. Without measures in place to bring perpetrators to justice, a culture of impunity thrives which leads to further attacks.

Adala UK reiterates its call to the Moroccan Authorities to take urgent and concrete steps to prevent settler attacks on the Saharawi population and launch independent investigations whenever such an attack takes place and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

More information is available at www.adalauk.org

EU Fish Support to Morocco Builds Western Sahara Fishing Industry

For the third consecutive year, Morocco has spent most of the EU's fisheries sectoral support on further developing the fishing industry in occupied Western Sahara – with the explicit approval of the Union

As part of the Fisheries Protocol between the European Union and Morocco, the EU grants Morocco an annual €14 million as support for developing its fishing sector. But the Moroccan government spends the lion's share of that support on expanding the fishing industry in the part of Western Sahara that it has held under military occupation since 1975.

In December 2016, **the Court of Justice of the European Union already ruled that since Western Sahara has a "separate and distinct" status to Morocco, no EU Trade or Association Agreement with Morocco can be applied to the territory.** The only way for any such agreement to lawfully affect Western Sahara, is through obtaining the explicit consent of the people of the territory. But the EU is now turning a blind eye to that legal requirement, and has embarked on negotiations with Morocco to modify the trade deal so that it will incorporate Western Sahara.

The inclusion of Western Sahara's waters in the EU's fish agreement with Morocco, is precisely what landed the deal on the agenda of the Court of Justice of the EU. The Court's Advocate General is expected to present an Opinion on the WSC case pertaining to the Fisheries Protocol in mid-January.

In response to the Judgment of the Court of Justice of the EU of December 2016, the EU Commission issued notice to the EU Member States' customs authorities, instructing them to no longer apply preferential treatment granted through the Morocco trade arrangement to products from Western Sahara. This mainly bears upon agricultural products, but also processed fisheries products – products coming from an industry that the EU is knowingly funding in occupied Western Sahara through a deal with Morocco.

UK Company Building Wind Farm in Occupied Western Sahara

Morocco and Siemens press on with their plans to generate energy in the human rights black-spot that is Western Sahara: the first controversial wind farm near Boujdour is expected to be operational in December 2018, built by a UK company.

In a **press release** of 5 October 2017, Windhoist, a turbine erection company based in the UK, states it is "delighted to be returning to Morocco". "On this occasion, Windhoist will be erecting 56 Siemens 3.6-130 x 100mhh wind turbines at the Aftissat Wind Farm which is 45km South of Boujdour in the Western Sahara", the press release continues. "The \$391m wind farm is being developed for Société Energie Eolienne du Maroc (EEM) who will use the impressive 201.6MW of energy to supply industrial companies in Morocco".

The release does not mention that the location is actually not in Morocco at all. The part of Western Sahara where the UK company is constructing the turbines is under illegal occupation by Morocco. The release also does not mention that their partner EEM is controlled by the Moroccan royal family.

The 200 MW Aftissat wind farm is expected to be fully functioning in December 2018.

The Court of Justice of the EU on 21 December 2016 stated that Western Sahara is a "separate and distinct" territory from Morocco, and judged that trade deals with Morocco cannot cover Western Sahara unless the representatives of the territory have consented to it. **The UN Human Rights Council has also highlighted the need for consent of the Saharawi people**. Siemens is ignoring the conclusions of the UN and the CJEU, and **systematically rejects** answering questions relating to the seeking of consent of the people of Western Sahara.

Further details of both the wind farm and the fishing industry can be seen on www.wsrw.org

The Saharawi Caper in South Africa, Explained - Jeffrey Smith

Lawyers like to say "when you've got the law on your side, use it." Nothing better explains the decision – and success – of the Saharawi government's interception of a cargo of phosphate rock from occupied Western Sahara last May. 55,000 tonnes of the commodity, valued at \$5.5 million, was detained aboard the bulk carrier NM Cherry Blossom during a refuelling stop in a South African port. This most recent use of the law by the Saharawi people's elected government – which partly relied on the case brought in the United Kingdom by Western Sahara Campaign U.K. (WSCUK) – is a milestone. The result is that more law is available to the Saharawi in their struggle for self-determination.

The basic facts of the South Africa case are now in public view. The NM Cherry Blossom, which sailed from Western Sahara on April 13, was thought to be bound for Australia's remaining importer. (Those who follow the phosphate trade know that Australian Western Sahara Association (AWSA) is active in the fight against imports to that country, and can claim success for having two other importing companies withdraw from the trade.)

However, the cargo aboard the NM Cherry Blossom was for one of New Zealand's two importers. That was no impediment to the use of South Africa's civil courts to pursue a claim of ownership to the phosphate rock. What was a surprise is that the shipment detained on May 1 was fully one-eighth of New Zealand's needed phosphate imports to produce fertilizer for that country's important agricultural sector. Another surprise was the decision of the Saharawi authorities to detain (or 'arrest' as it is called in commercial maritime law) a second ship, this one on May 17 passing through the Panama Canal en route to Canada. The combination of the cases shut down exports from occupied Western Sahara until mid-July. It was then that the two Moroccan companies responsible for phosphate mining and export angrily denounced the South African court and walked away from defending the case in that country. The Panama case, meanwhile, is under appeal.

This has meant that companies bringing Saharawi phosphate to New Zealand and Canada – about 12 shipments annually – do not risk using the canal. For the Canadian company, which imports to the west coast port of Vancouver, this has forced ships to take a longer, six week journey around South America.

We can now understand why the two cases would be successful. A first element in the design of the cases was the Saharawi assertion of ownership of natural resources over the years. The curtain is occasionally pulled back on this, with Saharawi letters of protest to importing government and companies made public. An example is a 2014 exchange of letters between the Saharawi government and the New Zealand government that led to the intervention of Morocco's embassy in Australia. A second element was the success of WSCUK's case in the United Kingdom, and the Saharawi (i.e. Polisario Front) free trade case in the European Court of Justice (now the CJEU). The 2015 decision of the UK High Court in the WSCUK case was cited extensively by the South African court. The UK High Court decision, in turn, had unequivocally adopted the original statement about the Saharawi people's right to self-determination, the 1975 Western Sahara Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. (The ICJ case also confirmed that Morocco had no territorial claim to Western Sahara, an important matter in the Saharawi claim to resources exported from the territory.)

A third element of success appears to have been the capacity of Saharawi authorities to track shipments of phosphate rock from Western Sahara. Exports have ranged in recent years between 36 and 42 for an ever smaller number of companies. There is a suggestion that Colombia's small-scale importer and possibly Australia's have now withdrawn, leaving only companies in Canada, New Zealand, the USA, India and perhaps Venezuela involved in the trade.

It was the fourth element in the two cases that guaranteed success: An innovative use of the law. The state-to-state recognition extended years ago by Panama and South Africa of the Saharawi Republic (the SADR) ensured the right to bring a civil suit in the two countries. In South Africa the court accepted that both the SADR as a state and the Polisario Front as a national liberation movement had "standing" (i.e. the legal right to appear in the court).

(The Polisario Front's case in the CJEU may have been persuasive on the issue.) A second aspect was to apply the law in independent courts capable of deciding complex claims. A third aspect, noticeable in the South Africa case, were arguments made about the application of international law (sovereignty to resources, self-determination, and occupation). (The reasons for the South African court's June 15 decision are worth reading. See Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic and Another v Owner and Charterers of the MV 'NM Cherry Blossom' and Others [2017] ZAECPEHC 31 at the website of the **Southern Africa Legal Information Institute**.)

The passing of time since May allows us to better understand why both cases were a success. The Saharawi authorities again showed their readiness to use peaceful legal means

to address the plundering of Western Sahara. The number of phosphate purchasing companies – and volume of exports – seems to have fallen. In addition, the Saharawi government recovered the cargo aboard the NM Cherry Blossom after Morocco abandoned its defence of the South Africa case. (At time of publication the cargo was reportedly being sold.) The most significant result, however, was a steady building of law toward decolonization and an end to the occupation of Western Sahara. Consider these findings of the South African court:

“The essence of the case for the SADR and the PF is that the phosphate aboard the MV ‘NM Cherry Blossom’ is part of the national resources of Western Sahara and belongs to its people; and that OCP and Phosboucraa misappropriated the phosphate and sold it, having no right to do so ...” [Paragraph 13]

OCP and Phosboucraa, on the other hand, state that Phosboucraa was entitled to mine the phosphate and to sell it. Its rights to do both are derived from the law of Morocco. It also claimed to have mined and sold the phosphate in accordance with international law ... [Paragraph 15]

The ICJ’s [1975] judgment is clear: Morocco has no claim to sovereignty over Western Sahara. Its claim to sovereignty as a result of its occupation of the territory is incompatible with the status of Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory. Furthermore, it acquired control of the territory by force. This, as a means of acquiring sovereignty, is contrary to customary international law ... [Paragraph 40]

The 20th century American human rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. observed that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Few people other than the Saharawi have waited so long for the basic right of self-determination to be made available. In the Panama and South Africa cases they continued to build for themselves a unique legal road to achieving such justice.

Amnesty International - Morocco/Western Sahara 2016/2017

The authorities restricted rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, prosecuting journalists and forcibly dispersing protests. Women faced discrimination in law and in practice. Courts imposed death sentences; there were no executions.

Background

In March, the government forced the UN to close a Military Liaison Office of MINURSO and withdraw civilian staff after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon referred to Morocco’s “occupation” of Western Sahara. MINURSO had not returned to its previous capacity by the end of the year 1.

Repression of dissent – Sahrawi activists

The authorities continued to stifle peaceful dissent in Western Sahara, dispersing peaceful protests and prosecuting and restricting Sahrawi activists who advocated self-determination or reported human rights violations. The authorities interrogated some human rights defenders when they returned from foreign travel, and continued to block the legal registration of the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA) and other Sahrawi rights groups.

In July the Court of Cassation ruled that 23 Sahrawi protesters and activists imprisoned following deadly clashes in 2010 in Gdeim Izik should be re-tried before a civilian court. Most had been sentenced in 2013 to long prison terms after an unfair trial before a military court based on “confessions” that they alleged were obtained through torture. The new civilian trial opened in late December but was adjourned until January 2017. Twenty-one of the 23 remained in prison at the end of the year 5.

Freedoms of association and assembly

The authorities continued to expel from or bar entry to Western Sahara for foreign journalists and activists as well as human rights activists. In April, they expelled Spanish, Belgian and French jurists and a Spanish judge who had travelled to Rabat to make representations on behalf of the Gdeim Izik prisoners.

The authorities continued to block the legal registration of several human rights organizations, including branches of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights, Freedom Now and the Maghreb Co-ordination of Human Rights Organizations.

They also prevented human rights groups and other associations from holding public and other meetings and assemblies, and continued to expel or deny entry to foreign journalists, activists and human rights defenders. In June, the International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT), a Spanish NGO, closed its Morocco office after the authorities denied entry to two of its staff. Amnesty International remained in dialogue with the authorities to lift remaining restrictions on its own fact-finding activities in Morocco and Western Sahara.

Report From Boujdour Refugee Camp - Beccy Allen

I’ve been a Western Sahara activist for six years, following a trip to the Occupied Territories which opened my eyes to the harsh realities of everyday life living under Moroccan occupation. Now I’ve made it my full-time job, taking a sabbatical from my work in London to embark on six months of volunteering in the Saharawi Refugee Camps.

I’m here working with **Sandblast** to deliver English classes for children in one of the primary schools, Lal Andala. Sandblast supports a project providing music and English lessons to groups of children aged 7-11. It has been a pleasure to see the children flourish in their music and English learning. I believe we are offering a really creative programme that provides a different way of learning for many children who need a programme like this to ignite their imaginations and support their regular school education. I’m also supporting one of Sandblast’s other projects: the **Saharawi Activism Fund** which funds year-long projects aimed at improving aspects of life in individual camps.

As I approach the end of the first of my two three-month stints here, I can reflect on the day-to-day challenges of living out in the Desert. For me as an outsider, it has of course been tough. But I am only here for three months at a time; off home after each trip, back to my life of luxury to recharge my batteries and my immune system. The realities faced by a people who have been forgotten by the majority of the international community, waiting for their right to return home, are much more difficult.

As I wander around Boujdour, there are still signs of the floods of autumn 2015, houses that were washed away and have yet to be rebuilt. People have told me stories of children who drowned in the waters; of losing everything and having nowhere to live, with their possessions washing away down the road. But at the same time, the infrastructure is improving. Houses have electricity; this means people have fridge-freezers, air conditioning,

TVs and some even have washing machines, all helping to make life just that little bit easier.

My Saharawi family have welcomed me into their home as if I were another addition to their already large family. My Saharawi mum came to the Camps when she was seven and remains committed to activism and is regularly protesting and at meetings related to the cause. I find her continued commitment over so many years inspiring but it brings me to tears that she has seen so little progress in her lifetime and may not see the freedom of which she has dreamed for so long. But when I attend protests with her and the other matriarchs and young women of the Camps, I am encouraged by their determination and lasting hope. It is indicative of the strong and determined mindset of the Saharawi.

I estimate that about half of the people I have met are activists in some way, working for institutions or informal groups which are trying to bring change to daily life in the Camps and create a better future for all. People's commitment to being hopeful and faithful coupled with a culture of not discussing emotions means it has been hard to understand people's frustrations and their anger or resignation during my time here. But I have spoken with some young people about their continued commitment to non-violent resistance who respond to the anger of some of the disaffected youth with a plea to not take up arms and to continue to believe in peaceful, political methods. People have also told me that they feel they have an easier life here in the Camps than that of their families living in the Occupied Territories.

As I'm approaching week 12 of my time here, I can honestly say that most of my dreams are about food. We are so spoilt at home with, quite frankly, too much choice in the supermarkets. The other night we spoke about the supplies they get from the UN which had arrived that day. A small allocation of lentils accompanied the usual supplies of soya and corn flour (which we mix with powdered milk and sugar for our breakfast 'porridge'), rice, sugar and cooking oil. Boxes of sanitary towels, washing powder and shampoo had also arrived for each of the women in the household. I found out that lentils are only delivered every so often and from their explanations I understood that in general, supplies have been decreasing. Apart from onions, they are only able to add vegetables to what they are eating when someone like me is staying with them, contributing to the weekly budget. So while I'm dreaming of going home to richer and more varied foods, my family will be worse off during the few weeks I am away.

As I get ready to leave for a few weeks, I think about the children with whom I am working and I am inspired by them. They are strong and confident young people. Though suffering many of the difficulties of a refugee childhood (ill-fitting shoes, malnutrition, breathing problems and a lack of educational resources, and more), they dream of being teachers and doctors. They want to continue to be part of the growing and professionalising society here and they want to contribute to help one another. They set a very good example.

You can read more from Beccy's blog about her experiences in the Camps [here](#).

Interview with Jytte Guteland: 1 of 5 MEPs evicted from Western Sahara

"I think this incident should alert people about these EU-Morocco trade negotiations on products from Western Sahara: they are not transparent at all", says Jytte Guteland, socialist Euro-parliamentarian from Sweden

On 27th October, five Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were denied entry to El Aaiun, Western Sahara, by the Moroccan authorities. The MEPs were not allowed to leave the plane, and were subsequently flown back to Europe.

In a tragic irony, **the European Parliament had approved the EU-Morocco aviation agreement** – which covers the territory of Western Sahara – the previous day.

All five deported MEPs are members of the European Parliament's Intergroup for Western Sahara. The program for their visit included meetings with civil society representatives in El Aaiun, in order to assess the situation on the ground and the EU's influence on the conflict dynamics.

WSRW: Could you please tell us what happened?

MEP Guteland: When we landed in El Aaiun, someone entered the plane with the list of the passengers, and pointed at some names. Some people were allowed to disembark, then other people left and in the end, we were the only people left on the plane: 5 MEPs and 1 other person of our team.

The authorities told us "we were not welcome to leave the plane". The Moroccan authorities do not want politicians, journalists, etc. in Western Sahara. We got new boarding passes and we left. I thought their behaviour was very impolite and somehow embarrassing.

I think it is very natural for us, as MEPs, to visit Western Sahara, since we will take a position on the amendment to include Western Sahara in the EU-Morocco Association Agreement and on the ongoing negotiations between the two parties.

We need information and it was very weird that we could not leave the plane. We went there to find out more about organisations, civil society, etc. We need information if we are to vote on the proposed amendment to the Agreement!

I have invited the Moroccan authorities in Brussels to share their views with us. And now, I think it is time to meet the Saharawi people. It is important for European authorities to understand what they think, also because there is not enough information and data about this proposed modification of the agreement, its effects and the amount of trade concerned.

WSRW: Why do you think Moroccan authorities refused to allow you in?

MEP Guteland: I wonder about that myself: if you do not have anything to hide, why don't you allow MEPs to enter? It should be in their interest to let us in and to be more polite with us. They are not there in their right; it's not a Moroccan territory. We went there to find information and we have been rejected.

WSRW: Do you think this incident will affect the ongoing negotiations or not?

MEP Guteland: I think this incident should alert people about these EU-Morocco trade negotiations on products from Western Sahara: they are not transparent at all. I think what happened last weekend will help to make all of us aware of these negotiations, which are not open. We have to comply with the CJEU ruling of 21.12.2016, it is necessary to respect the EU law.

WSRW: Do you think the EU is afraid of disappointing Morocco? We are all aware of the major role played by the kingdom in terms of counterterrorism, anti-migration, stability, etc. Nonetheless, what just happened is surprising: how can the EU accept to have its MEPs stopped by the authorities of a friendly country?

MEP Guteland: My view is that the EU has to respect the ruling of the court. If not, I wonder why. I must believe that the EU will respect the ruling and I must put pressure in order for this to happen. I think it will be a failure for the EU not to do act in line with what the Court has dictated, but I am nevertheless expecting the EU to comply with the CJEU ruling.

WSRW: The CJEU ruling refers to the need to seek the consent of the "people" of Western Sahara, i.e. the Saharawi and not that of the "(local) population", which includes a much larger number of Moroccan settlers. However, according to some rumors, the Commission would be seeking the consent of the local population, not of the people.

MEP Guteland: The Intergroup is aware that the Commission is trying to circumvent the ruling. For many of the members of the EP, it is crucial that we will have the people of WS represented in the negotiations. It is not acceptable for me that the Commission is at present negotiating with just Morocco. We have been very clear that we want to fully respect the judgment. If this would not happen, it will only prolong the conflict and the uncertainty, and will increase the legal risks.

EUCOCO 2017 – “Coordination and commitment”

More than 300 people participated in the 42nd European Coordinating Conference of Support to the Saharawi People in Virty sur Seine, near Paris on the 21st and 22nd of October. From as far afield from Sweden to Spain and Venezuela to Algeria, the participants discussed ways of improving coordination amongst themselves as well as the best course of action to improve political and legal impact on the 4 main topics: politics, natural resources, Human rights and Saharawi in exile.

The conference followed a day of round-table debate at La Sorbonne University in the centre of Paris. There the participants had discussed previous and ongoing Human Rights violations in the occupied territories with the presence of Me Joseph Breham, one of the French lawyers to the Gdeim Izik political prisoners. The day was marred by the surprised intrusion of students from the University, faces covered, protesting against the holding of the conference in la Sorbonne. Security staff reacted promptly enough and due to the state of emergency in place in France, the protesters left the building handcuffed in police vehicles.

This year marked the first EUCOCO conference after the CJEU ruling on Saharawi tomatoes imported from the occupied territories and traded with EU Member States (December 21, 2016). Consequently, the workshop dedicated to the natural resources issue was all the more important in order to give life to the ruling within each country represented in the conference. Indeed, it is of prime relevance to ensure the implementation of the highest ruling court in Europe and to ensure each State comprehends its full legal responsibility at this level. This was the main message conveyed by Maitre Devers, the French lawyer representing Polisario at the CJEU. He loudly condemned the Member States' attitude regarding the ruling and their unwillingness to implement it at national level. He also informed all the participants during the preliminary session about the likelihood of liability claims against any European State purposely ignoring the Court's decision.

The workshops around the four areas already mentioned constituted the core reflection work of this 42nd conference. The watchwords were: action, coordination and commitment. It is regularly the case that action plans are poorly followed up or monitored and this leaves the conference with low impact on the ground throughout the year. Consequently, the WSCUK has taken the initiative to lead – in conjunction with other support groups from Spain and Italy – a follow-up committee on natural resources. The main purpose of this committee is to share information regarding companies importing/producing goods and products from the occupied territories, any relevant tips to identify them and possible actions to be taken. Supermarkets like Tesco (UK) and Carrefour City (France) have been identified as selling tomatoes from Western Sahara labelled as produce of "Morocco" and more investigation is being undertaken as to what is being done to remedy this issue.

For the 42nd year in a row, the conference has called for more action and more communication. It is now a matter of time till we see the results.

New Special Representative for Western Sahara Appointed

Colin Stewart, a Canadian diplomat has been appointed as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO.

Most recently Mr. Stewart has served as Deputy Head and Chief of Staff of the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU) in Addis Ababa. He has held appointments in a number of UN missions, including as Acting Chief of Staff and Chief of Political Affairs at the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) (2007-2009). From 1999 to 2004, he served successively with the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) and the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET). From 2004 to 2006, he represented The Carter Center in the West Bank and Gaza.

"No settlement of the Sahara affair is possible outside the framework of the full sovereignty of Morocco over its Sahara and the autonomy initiative, whose seriousness and credibility the international community has recognised," the king said in a televised address.

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