

**Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara  
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**SECURITY COUNCIL CONSULTATIONS – BRIEFING  
New York, 16 October 2024**

Monsieur le Président,

1. Thank you for this opportunity to brief again members of the Security Council on Western Sahara. Three years into my term as Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, I believe that the time has come for a frank assessment. To help us in doing so, members of the Council have before them the latest report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Western Sahara. Allow me to draw on some of the elements reported and to provide some additional context for this assessment.

2. The backdrop provided by the situation on the ground and the security environment remains of the essence. In this regard, I want to salute the work by MINURSO, under the leadership of SRSG Ivanko, who will detail the efforts and achievements of his Mission in a moment. In my view, it is essential that the mandate of MINURSO be renewed, and the Mission continues to be allowed to operate and enjoy the freedom of movement it needs.

3. The security incidents, some of them serious, that occurred during the year and were covered in the latest report of the Secretary-General show that we cannot allow any complacency. They serve as a reminder of the potential dangers and cost of a further entrenchment of the conflict.

4. First, let's focus on the people of Western Sahara themselves. I just returned from my third visit to the refugee camps in Tindouf, where once again I was struck by the misery of the living conditions and the absence of a perspective for a better life. Recent torrential rains, and their catastrophic impact on some camps, have only worsened the situation. Our colleagues from the UN humanitarian agencies and international NGOs continue their work tirelessly to assist the refugee population — but they did confirm to me how the lack of adequate funding and of visibility of the situation impairs their efforts. I want to echo their plea.

5. Mister President, the level of despair and frustration among the civil society in the camps is hard to overemphasise. The absence of perspectives and a deep sense of loss of faith in a political process — and, I must say, in the United Nations as a result of the stalling of its peace efforts — were expressed in no uncertain terms by the youth representatives I met.

6. This is also the message I heard from groups of women, who furthermore insisted that their voice be heard in the political process and they be able, rightly, to participate fully in it. Furthermore, the persistence of the division of families between the camps, the Territory and other locations, and mutual accusations of human rights violations serve as a reminder of the human urgency for us to make progress.

7. Second, the stability of the entire region and the enhancement of its prosperity are, and remain, at stake. The nature of some of the incidents during the past year gives a sense of why we should not allow escalation between Frente POLISARIO and Morocco. I have reminded the parties of the call by the United Nations for a ceasefire to be reinstated, or at least a cessation of hostilities. While Morocco insists that the onus for a return of a ceasefire is on Frente POLISARIO, the latter continues to

blame Morocco for its collapse.

8. We also cannot forget the regional dimension. The current state of affairs between Algeria and Morocco, with severed diplomatic relations between the two and other manifestations of tension, is a source of continuing concern and does not help with the resolution of the Western Sahara issue. We need to get past that state of hostility if we are to enhance the integration of the region as whole — a factor that could both facilitate and benefit from progress on the file of Western Sahara. This is a priority I hear regularly among other places in Nouakchott, another regional capital where I remain assured of Mauritania’s “positive neutrality” on the file, and availability to help when the time comes.

9. So Mister President, this raises the question: when will the time come, to move decisively on the question of Western Sahara? Next year, we will witness the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the dispute. And as I approach the third anniversary of my own tenure, I believe the time is ripe to take stock together of the situation, in total transparency in the setting of these consultations. Let me refer to a couple of recent developments that have a bearing in this regard.

10. As the report of the Secretary-General noted, we have seen a number of bilateral initiatives in the recent period that are related to Western Sahara. Since then we have taken note of the words of King Mohamed VI of Morocco, in his speech to Parliament on 11 October, where he emphasised the support received by the autonomy plan from various countries. The letter by President Macron of France to King Mohamed VI of Morocco is a clear example of such bilateral initiatives — and of the Moroccan autonomy plan gaining traction with some international actors. It is to be noted that Frente POLISARIO condemned the announcement, and that Algeria recalled its ambassador in Paris after the letter was made public.

11. In a separate development, which was posterior to the issuance of the Secretary-General's report, on 4 October the European Court of Justice confirmed the annulment of the 2019 EU-Morocco trade agreements regarding fisheries and agricultural products, citing *inter alia* a “breach of the principles of self-determination”. As a UN Secretariat official, I am not in a position to comment on the substance of a legal decision concerning bilateral trade relationships. I would observe however that the mere fact such a decision was taken by the European Court of Justice is yet another reminder that the absence of a political resolution to the issue of Western Sahara in line with resolution 2703 (2023), is having implications. It is, in this connection, to be noted that Morocco issued a statement indicating that it considered itself in no way “concerned” by the EU Court of Justice ruling, and that the EU Commission leadership and Foreign Affairs Council both reiterated the “high value” that the European Union attaches to their Strategic Partnership with Morocco.

Mister President,

12. We need to advance constructively the political process and with urgency, for the reasons I reported to you when we last met in April — security and despair of the people. It is that same sense of urgency which I conveyed in all my diplomatic interactions since then. Many of those discussions were covered in the report of the Secretary-General that was issued last week, and I do not need to return to them. After the period covered by the report, I recently engaged all concerned — the Foreign Ministers of Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria, in that order, in New York at the end of September on the margins of the General Assembly, and the leadership of Frente POLISARIO in Tindouf on 3 October.

13. In our latest meeting, Foreign Minister Bourita of Morocco insisted once more that the 2007 autonomy initiative remains the “end game, not the starting point of the process”. In his view, this should be the topic of negotiations with the participation of Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania in addition to Morocco. I reminded him of this Council’s and my own call on all parties to expand on their positions and to avoid preconditions. In this connection, I respectfully but firmly reiterated to him that the time had come for Morocco to explain and expand on their 2007 autonomy proposal.

14. For his part, Secretary-General Ghali of Frente POLISARIO reaffirmed the well-known positions of POLISARIO that the provisions of the UN Charter and international law concerning self-determination needed to apply fully. In his view, this means the people of Western Sahara should be able to decide their own future and that of the Territory in a manner that no other stakeholder should preempt. To him as well, I recalled very clearly the Council’s message through its resolutions, including to engage in a spirit of realism and compromise.

15. Foreign Minister Attaf of Algeria continued to support the positions expressed by Frente POLISARIO, while he insisted that his country does not consider itself a party to the conflict. And as I noted already, Foreign Minister Merzoug of Mauritania reaffirmed his government’s stance of positive neutrality.

16. Mister President, these are positions that the members of this Council have heard me relay to them several times in the last three years. I note that despite your and my oft-repeated sense of urgency to make progress, some interlocutors have yet to show the creativity and/or the openness required to enable a spirit of constructive search for a mutually-agreed solution, as called for by the resolutions of the Council. Allow me therefore, in a spirit of total frankness, to be more

specific on some of the options I believe exist, that I have been working on in the past several months.

17. On the one hand, I have to inform you that I have discreetly revisited and expanded with all concerned on the concept of a partition of the Territory, which was already mentioned by my predecessor, James Baker III, more than 20 years ago. Such an option could be based on the limits of the portion of Western Sahara that was controlled by Mauritania, as part of an agreement with Morocco, between 1976 and 1979. More specifically, the border was then defined as a straight line from the intersection of the coastline and the 24th parallel north, through the intersection of the 23rd parallel north and the 13th meridian west, and continuing until the pre-existing borders of Mauritania.

18. Such an option could allow for the creation on the one hand of an independent state in the southern part, and on the other hand the integration of the rest of the Territory as part of Morocco, with its sovereignty over it internationally recognised. In the eventuality of such a compromise, this could be a way to accommodate both the claims for independence and the autonomy plan within Moroccan sovereignty, while enabling the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, who would in such case, enjoy the possibility of deciding where they want to live, and under which kind of political environment.

19. While in my consultations, some countries in the region and beyond have expressed some interest in this possibility of a division of the Territory, I must report that I have received so far no sign of willingness to consider exploring it further from either Morocco nor Frente POLISARIO. I regret it — to me this bridging idea seems worthy of being taken into account, in the context of a possible mutually-agreed solution, and I was ready to work on it. I must hence take note of the current negative stand of both Morocco and Frente

POLISARIO on such an option, while for the sake of transparency I feel the duty to inform the Council about it.

20. Therefore, we are left with the two documents that were issued in 2007. The one handed over by Frente POLISARIO remains very much reflected in the positions that Secretary-General Ghali recently repeated to me and that I just conveyed to you. As you know, Morocco refuses to take this document into consideration. However, the Security Council has taken note of it in its recent resolutions, and its provisions concerning self-determination are echoed in positions taken by a number of international actors.

21. As for the other document, we are all familiar with the general framework of the autonomy initiative that Morocco proposed in 2007. This Council has mentioned it in conjunction with a reference to Morocco's "serious and credible efforts", most recently in resolution 2703 (2023). It is also part of the evolution I mentioned earlier, whereby Morocco and a number of countries have issued bilateral statements of support for the initiative. And the fact that advanced and expanded autonomy could be a successful model has been exemplified in many situations around the world: the cases of Scotland, Greenland, Trentino-Alto Adige and many others, come to mind.

22. However, if the concept of autonomy has attracted interest, and the Moroccan three-page plan appears to be gaining bilateral traction, I believe this also creates an expectation, maybe even a right, to understand better what this plan entails. A right for the people concerned to understand better what is being proposed. A right for this Council and the United Nations Secretary-General and myself to assess the details of the possible way forward. And even a right for the countries that have expressed support for the initiative to know what it exactly provides for. It also remains to be explained how this option,

autonomy, would allow for the exercise of some credible and dignified form of self-determination by the people of Western Sahara, and under which modalities.

23. I still believe, without prejudice to the solution chosen for a settlement of the Western Sahara issue, that the time has come for me and all interlocutors to explore the modalities that Morocco concretely envisages. For this exploration to happen, it is therefore necessary that Morocco provide details of its vision. I feel comforted in this regard by my understanding, in my one-on-one consultation with Minister Bourita at the end of our meeting in New York last month, that he appreciates the urgent need to explain and expand on their original 2007 autonomy plan.

24. Mister President, this is the breadth of issues I am setting off to tackle in the next six months ahead of our next session of closed consultations on Western Sahara in April 2025, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of this conflict. It is my sincere hope that it should be possible to make progress during these six months, where we can envisage the achievement of a just, lasting and mutually agreed solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. That said, should it not be possible for me to report meaningful progress and clarifications to you in April 2025, I fear it might rightly raise questions as to the future modalities of the United Nations facilitation of the political process on Western Sahara, and could provide cause for me to suggest to the Secretary-General a reassessment of whether there is space and willingness for us to still be useful in such circumstances. Therefore, the next six months are a test for me, and for everyone else.

Je vous remercie, Monsieur le Président.