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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: the United Nations at 70: taking stock of the decolonization agenda

**Managua, Nicaragua
19 to 21 May 2015**

STATEMENT BY

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**Statement of the Frente POLISARIO of Western Sahara before the Caribbean
Regional Seminar
delivered by Mohamed Beisat
Managua, Nicaragua, 19-21 May 2015**

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to take the floor, on behalf of the Frente POLISARIO, to brief you on the latest development concerning Western Sahara. I would like on behalf of the people of my country to thank you all Mr. Chairman for this opportunity, also I want to commend you on the brilliant manner of which you conduct the business of the meeting. This Committee and your efforts are the source of hope and aspirations for many people around the world. They look at you and wait that can give them justice through the scrupulous respect of their inalienable right enshrined in the UN Charter. Colonialism in all its forms and its opprobrium is a black stain of the consciousness of 21st century.

The venue and time of this seminar have actually given it a great importance. The land of August Sandino and Comandante Daniel Ortega in Latin America is deeply and strongly linked to us by bonds of culture and history and common struggle for freedom and dignity.

Today 20th of May is the birth date of Frente POLISARIO when it was founded in 1973 as a culmination and coronation of long history of struggle and resistance of the people of Western Sahara that date back centuries against colonialism and foreign invasions. I think this was a great coincidence that must have happened for a reason.

As you are aware, Western Sahara is still registered on the agenda of the Special Committee of 24 as the last Non-Self-Governing Territory to be decolonized in Africa through the sovereign and free expression of the will of the people of the Territory.

You are also aware of the tremendous efforts that were deployed by the United Nations and the Organization of African Union (now the African Union) to accomplish the decolonization of Western Sahara, culminating in the Settlement Plan that was accepted by the two parties to the conflict, Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO, on 30 August 1988.

The Plan, which was subsequently adopted by Security Council resolutions 658 (1990) and 690 (1991), provided for a ceasefire to be followed by the holding of a referendum to enable the people of Western Sahara, in the exercise of their right to self-determination, to choose between independence and integration with Morocco. The UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was entrusted with the holding and supervision of the referendum and monitoring the ceasefire that entered into force on 6 September 1991.

Nonetheless, no sooner had the implementation of the Settlement Plan started than Morocco began putting all kinds of hurdles in its way and, in 2002, it declared openly its unwillingness to go forward with the Settlement Plan (para. 48; S/2002/178). Despite the efforts deployed by the UN, including the mediation efforts undertaken by former US Secretary of State, James Baker III, Morocco's obstructionism continued unabated. In 2004, Morocco even went so far as to declare its official rejection of any solution that

would not legitimize, from the outset, its illegal occupation of Western Sahara.

Since 2007, the Security Council has repeatedly called upon the two parties to the conflict, Frente POLISARIO and Morocco, to enter into direct negotiations without preconditions in good faith with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. In doing so, the Security Council has very clearly placed the right of self-determination of the Sahrawi people at the heart of any solution to the conflict, thus establishing it as the condition, the foundation and the purpose of the solution itself.

Four rounds of formal negotiations and nine rounds of informal talks have so far been held between the two parties to the conflict under the UN auspices. However, the negotiations have not achieved any substantive progress due to Morocco's unrelenting rejection of the democratic solution based on the genuine and free exercise by the Sahrawi people of their inalienable right to self-determination as called for in the Security Council and General Assembly relevant resolutions. In this regard and want to take you as witnesses to the beliquent speech of the distinguished delegate of Morocco yesterday when he has denied the existence of my country denying by that manner the countless resolutions of UN General Assembly, Security Council and the opinion of International Court of Justice. This was dangerous declaration that endangers peace and stability in North Africa.

The Frente POLISARIO has engaged in the negotiations in good faith and has been doing its utmost to facilitate the mission of the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Ambassador Christopher Ross. We remain strongly committed to the UN-sponsored negotiation process of which ultimate objective is to enable our people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. Meanwhile, in addition to its obstruction to the mediation efforts undertaken by Mr Ross, Morocco persists in its attempts aimed at undermining the credibility and the *raison d'être* of the UN Mission in the Territory, MINURSO, namely the holding of a free and fair referendum on self-determination.

Morocco also continues to perpetrate massive violations of human rights of Sahrawi civilians in the occupied territories of Western Sahara, which have been well documented by many international and African human rights organizations and highlighted by the UN Secretary-General in his latest reports on Western Sahara. Many international respected human rights NGO's have documented these violations like: Amnesty, HRW, RFK. Those human rights abuses involve disappearance of Sahrawi human rights activists, torture of prisoners of conscience, arbitrary detention, police brutality, intimidation and extrajudicial executions. The entire occupied Territory is put under a military siege and media blackout, where international observers and media are banned from entering it.

As you may be aware, MINURSO is the only UN peacekeeping mission established since 1978 to be operating without the capacity to monitor human rights. For this reason, the Frente POLISARIO has consistently urged the Security Council to establish a human rights component within the mandate of MINURSO with a view to protecting, monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation of the Sahrawi people as long as the conflict remains unresolved. A host of international and national human rights organizations have made similar demands on several occasions. However, due to the objections of France, the Security Council has not regrettably been able to adopt any concrete measures to improve transparency and ensure that it is better informed of the human rights situation on the ground in Western Sahara.

Morocco moreover continues the plunder, theft and illegal and massive exploitation of

the natural resources of Western Sahara including fisheries, phosphates and other minerals often with the complicity of foreign entities and in violation of the permanent sovereignty of the Sahrawi people over their natural resources. Morocco still maintains its 2700 km long military wall in Western Sahara, which is infested with more than 7 million anti-personnel mines and large quantities of explosive remnants of war. The land mines buried along the military wall, which divides the Territory and its people in two halves, have taken a heavy toll on Sahrawi civilians on both sides of the berm and caused many losses in their animal stocks.

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an expression of the deep concern of the African Union policy organs about the delay in the decolonization of Western Sahara, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) took a decision on Western Sahara on 27 March 2015. The decision reaffirmed the AU's commitment to engaging proactively in the search of a speedy and just solution to the conflict, as a guarantor of the UN-OAU Settlement Plan and in line with its responsibilities in the promotion of peace and security on the continent in accordance with the UN Charter. To this end, it proposed practical steps including the reactivation of the *ad hoc* Committee of Heads of State and Government on Western Sahara, the establishment of an International Contact Group for Western Sahara and the regular review of the situation in Western Sahara. It also called on the Council to provide MINURSO with a human rights mandate and to address the issue of the illegal exploitation of the Territory's natural resources.

Forty years have elapsed since the Special Committee undertook its first visiting mission to Western Sahara in May 1975. Major and drastic developments have taken place ever since, and we formally invite the Committee to visit the territory of Western Sahara to update its data on the situation prevailing in the Territory and to report its findings to the General Assembly.

Three successive UN Secretaries-General have visited Western Sahara since 1991. A Security Council mission paid a visit to the Territory in June 1995. The UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Ambassador Ross, has also visited the Territory. It is therefore very timely that the Special Committee pay a visit to the last African colonial case on its agenda.

We also think that it falls under the competences of this Committee and its practice to convene a special session on Western Sahara and to invite UN and AU Member States as well as experts of recognized standing to share their views on the matter. Such an initiative will definitely enhance the authority and credibility of the Committee which as has been said here repeatedly remains the only and last resort for the colonized peoples.

For five decades, the Sahrawi people have looked, with great hope, to the United Nations to fulfill its promises, undertaken since the mid-sixties, and to assume its responsibility in bringing to a speedy and unconditional end the colonial and foreign presence in their Territory.

Today more than ever, the United Nations is urgently required to give the Sahrawi people more practical reasons to believe that their hope has not been in vain. The only way for the UN to do so is clearly to set a date for the holding of the referendum

whereby the Sahrawi people could exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence in a free, fair, democratic and internationally supervised referendum.

After all, enabling the people of a Non-Self-Governing Territory to decide their destiny freely and democratically will definitely be a fitting and great achievement to mark the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism and the United Nations 70th anniversary.

Thank you very much!

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DECOLONIZATION



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October 1980

THE QUESTION OF WESTERN SAHARA AT THE UNITED NATIONS*

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* The political evolution of Western Sahara since the days of Spanish colonization will be published at a later date.

IV. The Report of the United Nations Visiting Mission

Following the adoption of resolution 3292 (XXIX) and at the Spanish Government's invitation, the Special Committee on Decolonization decided that a three-member mission, composed of the representatives of Cuba, Iran and Ivory Coast, would visit the Spanish Sahara in May 1975. The Committee also decided that the Chairman of the Mission should be the Permanent Representative of the Ivory Coast to the United Nations. The Mission's mandate was to assist the Special Committee in the discharge of its tasks by securing first-hand information on the situation prevailing in the Territory, including information on political, economic, social, cultural and educational conditions, as well as on the wishes and aspirations of the people. To that end the Mission decided that it should a) hold consultations with the Government of Spain and the authorities in the Sahara in order to ascertain its policies concerning the Territory and the measures it proposed to take to ensure its decolonization; b) have access to all towns and localities in the Spanish Sahara which it considered necessary to visit for the accomplishment of its task and c) make direct contacts with the largest possible number of indigenous inhabitants of the Territory, including those currently living outside it.

The Mission spent one week extensively touring the Territory and visited Madrid for consultations with the Spanish Government, as well as Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria for discussions with the Governments and to make contact with the Saharan population living in those countries as either residents or refugees.

Concerning the political situation in the Western Sahara, the Mission in its unanimous report 77/ stated that it had been able to visit virtually all the main population centers and to ascertain the views of the overwhelming majority of their inhabitants. "At every place visited, the Mission was met by mass political demonstrations and had numerous meetings with representatives of every section of the Saharan community. 78/ From all of them it became evident to the Mission that there was an overwhelming consensus among Saharans within the Territory in favour of independence and opposing integration with any neighbouring country". 79/ The report went on to express the Mission's belief, "in the light of what

77/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirtieth Session, Supplement No. 23. (A/10023/Rev.1), Vol. III, Chapter XIII, Annex.

78/ These meetings included interviews with groups and individuals representing differing shades of opinion held in private in the absence of any Spanish representatives (Ibid., para. 230).

79/ Ibid., para. 202.

it witnessed in the Territory, especially the mass demonstrations of support for one movement, the Frente POLISARIO ..., that its visit served as a catalyst to bring into the open political forces and pressures which had previously been largely submerged. It was all the more significant to the Mission that this came as a surprise to the Spanish authorities who, until then had only been partly aware of the profound political awakening of the population". 80/

The Mission identified two main political groups in the Territory; the "Partido de la Unión Nacional Saharoui" (PUNS) and the "Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia El Hamra y Río de Oro" (Frente POLISARIO). The Mission found that PUNS derived its support from the traditional elements of Saharan society and that most members of the Permanent Commission of the Yema'a identified themselves with the party. Having taken note of the accusation by the opponents of the PUNS that the Party was a creation of the Spanish authorities, the report noted that it had not witnessed in the northern region, which the Mission visited first, any public demonstrations in support of the PUNS "in marked contrast" to the "mass public demonstrations" in support of the Frente POLISARIO which clearly came as a surprise to the Spanish authorities in the Territory. In the southern region where demonstrations both in support of POLISARIO and of PUNS took place, "though the preponderance was clearly in favour of the Frente POLISARIO", the Mission noted that the adherents of PUNS were always placed close to the residence or meeting place of the Mission "where they would be more visible". 81/ The impact which the PUNS made on the Mission was not strengthened when its Secretary-General, whom the Mission met at its arrival in the Territory, proceeded to leave the Sahara for Morocco where he proclaimed his loyalty to King Hassan II, an act which was disowned by his party as an act of treachery. 82/ The Mission found, on the other hand, that the Frente POLISARIO, which had operated as a clandestine movement until that time, "had considerable support among all sections of the population and especially among women who, together with the young people and workers, are its most active adherents". 83/

Apart from the larger number of public demonstrations which the POLISARIO succeeded in mobilizing, the Mission noted that supporters of that movement constituted approximately two-thirds of those inter-

80/ Ibid., para. 203.

81/ Ibid., paras. 210, 211, 220 and 237.

82/ Ibid., para. 213.

83/ Ibid., para. 219.

viewed by the Mission 84/ and that, on the eve of its arrival, two separate patrols of "Tropas Nómadas" 85/ mutinied and joined the Frente POLISARIO with their weapons and equipment. 86/

In its conclusions the Mission stated that "within the Territory the population, or at least almost all those persons encountered by the Mission, was categorically for independence and against the territorial claims of Morocco and Mauritania", and that the Frente POLISARIO, "although considered a clandestine movement before the Mission's arrival, appeared as a dominant political force in the Territory". 87/ The Mission added that all Saharan political refugees in Morocco called for annexation of the Territory by Morocco, that those in Algeria expressed themselves categorically in favour of independence and that in Mauritania some persons appeared in favour of integration with Mauritania, others wanted independence but hoped the new State would freely join Mauritania, while a third group supported the POLISARIO and independence for the Spanish Sahara. 88/

The Mission, after reporting the different views of the Governments of Spain, Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco concerning the Western Sahara, concluded that "the General Assembly should take steps to enable those population groups (within and outside the Territory) to decide their own future in complete freedom and in an atmosphere of peace and security in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1514 (XV) and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly concerning the question". 89/ To this end, the Mission

84/ Ibid., para. 240.

85/ Indigenous forces led by Spanish officers.

86/ Ibid., para. 261.

87/ Ibid., Chapter XIII, Section B, para. 11 (18) and (21).

88/ Ibid., para. 11 (23) - (25).

89/ Ibid., para. 11 (43).

recommended that the Secretary-General should appoint, "in close consultation with the administering Power and the other concerned and interested parties", 90/ a new visiting mission to define the procedures for such consultation "which should take place under United Nations auspices". 91/ The report of the Visiting Mission was adopted on 7 November 1975 by the Special Committee on decolonization which also endorsed the observations and conclusions contained therein. 92/

90/ The term "concerned parties" was a term frequently used at the United Nations and other international fora in the context of the Sahara question to refer to Morocco and Mauritania, whereas the expression "interested parties" was understood to refer to Algeria.

91/ Ibid., para. 11 (44).

92/ Ibid., para. 8.