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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International
Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: commitments and actions for
decolonization in the Non-Self-Governing Territories**

**Managua, Nicaragua
31 May to 2 June 2016**

STATEMENT BY

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Seminar of Decolonization.

30 of May to 2 of June, 2016

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Mr President, Distinguished Delegates, and participants in the seminar,

My first words are to express gratitude to the esteemed Government of the Republic of Nicaragua for its demonstration of generosity and cooperation with the United Nations decolonisation efforts by hosting this seminar for the second time in Managua, in the homeland of Sandino.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Mr Rafael Ramirez, on his brilliant election as President of the Special Committee of 24. We also congratulate the Bureau that will support him in the noble task of advancing the objectives assigned to the Committee of 24 by the international community.

Mr President,

On this occasion, as on all the previous ones, the delegation of the Frente POLISARIO, as the legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara, by virtue of the facts derived from its long struggle for national liberation and international legality, as stipulated in resolution 34/37 (1979) of the General Assembly, and subsequent resolutions, participates in this seminar with the aim of informing the Special Committee about the situation concerning Western Sahara. At the same time, we would like to convey a message of confidence in the Committee for the role that it must continue to play toward achieving the effective decolonisation of Western Sahara, the last African Non-Self-Governing Territory on the agenda of the Special Committee.

As is known, Mr President, we were a Spanish colony from 1884 to 1975, made such by the colonial partition enacted at the Berlin Conference of 1885 where European powers divided our continent, as they did, the Latin American continent, in a deal signed in Tordesillas four centuries before. The peoples of the two continents, through a long struggle for freedom, managed to break free from the colonial yoke, and together inspired the drafting of the famous resolution 1514 of December 1960, considered the Magna Carta for Decolonisation, which gave life to this Committee.

The Sahrawi people were not, and could not, be the exception to decolonization, and so began their legitimate struggle for national independence, first using peaceful means, and then, from 1973 by the only means available to them, the armed struggle under the leadership of the Frente POLISARIO. We had hoped that the colonial and administering power of Western Sahara, Spain, would fulfil its obligations toward decolonisation, as it had voluntarily assumed. These obligations had been defined through numerous resolutions of the UN General Assembly, as well as the opinion of the International Court of Justice of 16 October 1975, and by the report of the visiting mission sent by this Committee to Western Sahara in May 1975.

Spain did not comply with its obligations. Instead, it offered our country and our people to two neighbouring countries, Morocco and Mauritania, who invaded, partitioned, and occupied our country under the so-called Madrid Accords of 14 November 1975. Nevertheless, in its letter of 26 February 1975, to the UN Secretary General, the Spanish Government considered that the "decolonisation of Western Sahara will not be valid until the Sahrawi people express their will in a valid way".

The two invading countries had signed, three years earlier, independently of the UN and behind the Sahrawi people's back, a top-secret agreement in June 1972 to divide the Territory, as revealed by the former President of Mauritania, Mokhtar Ould Daddah, in his recent book "La Mauritanie contre vents et marées" (Mauritania against winds and tides). The Spanish abandonment, and the Mauritanian-Moroccan joint invasion, sparked a brutal war against an unarmed people who were surprised by the events and the weak response of the United Nations. However, the determination of the Sahrawi people and the solidarity of our African continent and many nations, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, foiled the plans of the two invading countries. Mauritania withdrew from the war by virtue of the peace agreement signed with the Frente POLISARIO in August 1979, and in February 1984, formally recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, now a full member of the African Union.

After 16 years of bloody war, Morocco accepted the verdict of the facts, and the clear message of the international community contained in resolution 34/37 of the UN General Assembly and resolution 104 (XIX) of the 19th Summit of the Organisation of African Unity. It accepted the peace plan drawn up jointly in 1988 by the UN and the OAU, now the AU, based on the recognition of the right of the Sahrawi people to choose freely their future through a referendum of self-determination. The UN Security Council endorsed the plan in its resolutions 658 (1990) and 680 (1991), and established a UN mission, MINURSO, with the explicit mandate of holding a self-determination referendum to enable the people of Western Sahara to choose between independence and integration into the occupying power, as described by resolution 34/37 of the UN General Assembly.

A hope of peace was born for the last African colony on the agenda of this Committee. The referendum should have been held six months after the entry into force of the ceasefire between the two warring parties on 6 September 1991.

The referendum has not yet been held. Why? The answer is simple. Morocco, the occupying power, reneged on all its commitments made in conjunction with its acceptance of the peace plan, and did so at the same time as the UN completed the costly operation of voter identification. In a letter addressed to the UN Secretary General in April 2004, Morocco announced that it was unilaterally declaring its sovereignty over Western Sahara, considering that, and I quote "a referendum that would include the option of independence puts into question the sovereignty of Morocco over the Sahara" (unquote).

Obviously, the argument is not a serious one, because, as stressed by the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in his report of October 2004, and I quote "Morocco had already accepted the option of independence" (unquote) in the referendum that MINURSO was going to hold.

Since that volte-face, Morocco has been bent on undermining the decolonisation efforts of the United Nations. Subsequently, all efforts deployed by the international community, and by mediators of such calibre as James Baker and his successors, who were acting within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions, have clashed with the attitude of intransigence and obstructionism of the occupying power, whose actions continue to place us on a dangerous course toward the worst case scenario.

A clear demonstration of this is found in the address of the King of Morocco to his nation on 6 November 2015, on the 40th anniversary of their invasion of Western Sahara, when he said, and I quote: "The Sahara will remain in Morocco and Morocco in the Sahara until the end of time" (unquote).

Evidently, stronger powers had said more or less the same about their colonies. France said it about Algeria. Portugal said it about Angola and Mozambique. And Spain said it about Equatorial Guinea and Western Sahara. These are testimonies that go against the logic of history. And, today in the 21st century, such statements represent an unfortunate and futile challenge to the international community, and to the principles and resolutions of the UN that consider as non-negotiable, the principle of self-determination of peoples under colonisation or foreign occupation. It is true, and equally unfortunate that the Security Council, guarantor of the integrity of the Peace Plan of 1991, which gave MINURSO its *raison d'être*, continues to evade its responsibility under the Peace Plan and the UN Charter, and all the more, given that recent developments indicate that the danger may reach a point of no return.

In this room, there are several permanent and non-permanent members of the Council. We witnessed, as did the African continent, and the entire international community, the enormous efforts made by some members of the Council to prevent us from reaching that point of no return. These efforts were reflected in their votes and explanation of votes on the recent Security Council resolution 2285. Our thanks go to them.

As is known, Mr President, last March, Morocco impeded the visit of the UN Secretary General to La Aaiún where the MINURSO headquarters are located. Nevertheless, Ban Ki-moon conducted the other phases of his visit to the region. He

saw with his own eyes the situation of the Sahrawi people both in refugee camps and in the liberated zones, and stated publicly that that situation had touched him deeply.

It is the situation of a people expelled from their land by the force of arms of an army of occupation, forced to live in harsh conditions while their country's resources is being plundered, and while its population in the occupied territories, remain victims of a policy of brutal repression, as documented by the UN and international human rights organisations. The situation is bound to touch the conscience of every democratic peace-loving government.

During the Secretary General's visit to the region, he used the term occupation to describe the situation of the Sahrawi people. This is not a surprise. The UN General Assembly in its resolutions 34/37 and 35/19 explicitly considers the case to be a "military occupation of Western Sahara". Moreover, the two resolutions called on Morocco, and I quote "to end its occupation of Western Sahara" (unquote). These are facts. These are UN resolutions. No one is inventing anything new. 'Occupation' was not a new concept, yet Morocco used it as a pretext to trigger a denigrating campaign against the institution of the UN Secretary-General, and to justify the final rupture of the political process so that "Morocco remains in the Sahara until the end of time". The phrase "until the end of time" is not an invention of a stray or hostile press. These are the very words of the King of Morocco himself.

What is more serious is that the campaign against the Secretary-General was followed a week later, on 14 March, by the expulsion of MINURSO's civilian and political component from the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Western Sahara. After slandering the Secretary-General, and declaring his Personal Envoy, Ambassador Ross, persona non grata, Morocco chose to challenge the Security Council. In its resolution 2285 (2016), the Council set a deadline of 90 days for the expelled MINURSO personnel to return to Western Sahara. Until now, Morocco has refused, and continues to turn its back on the unanimous will of the Council.

These are the facts summarised, Mr President. These are the facts; they are not mere speculations or fictions. You were witnesses to all of this. My statement is complemented by an enclosed background.

Allow me to say, in conclusion, that we are faced with a possible failure of the international community, and particularly that of the Security Council, to protect the process of decolonisation of the last African colony on the agenda of this Committee. If the Security Council chooses to apply the policy of Pontius Pilate, the General Assembly, and in particular this Committee, must continue to assume its responsibilities toward decolonisation.

Furthermore, we should be clearly aware of the implications of a possible failure of the political process in a region that is subject to long and actual security threats. The likely collapse of the political process, in which the Sahrawi people have placed all their trust, will lead only to a scenario of war, a return to the very starting point of 1975. This would mean the return of an open conflict, the prolonging of the

suffering of an innocent people, and the aggravation of tension in a region already stricken by multiple challenges arising from the Sahel conflict zone.

The Frente POLISARIO does not want the return of armed conflict. We know from experience, and from the experience of other peoples, that war is the last option to resolve a conflict, especially one that can and should be resolved by the civilised means of frank and transparent negotiations, consistent with UN principles and resolutions related to decolonisation. The Frente POLISARIO considers that there is still a room for the UN to intensify its efforts to spare the region from a spiral of confrontation. If however, confrontation becomes inevitable because those who are able and who should deploy all efforts to prevent such a scenario, decide not to do so, then, in that case, we will assume our obligations to defend the right of our people to independence.

In the face of this situation, we call on the Special Committee now more than ever, to assume its responsibility. Silence is not an option. We are at the crossroads, either towards a just and lasting peace to be negotiated under the auspices of the UN, or towards the unknown.

In our view, the Committee has been created to ensure decolonisation. Thus, the Committee must not be intimidated by threats, whether actively or passively, or neutralised by the strategy of those wanting to create noise and confusion to deviate from the noble responsibility that this Committee has undertaken with regard to the last African colony on its agenda.

Concerning the specific issue of Western Sahara, the position is clear. It is a decolonisation issue that must be resolved through the implementation of the principle of self-determination as defined by resolution 1514 (XIX) that gave life and rationale to the Settlement Plan, which led to the deployment of MINURSO. This position should be maintained and reiterated.

Moreover, the Committee sent a mission to Western Sahara in May 1975. This was more than 40 years ago. It is thus difficult to comprehend that the Committee has not sent another such mission up to now, and even more difficult to comprehend that its reports and working papers on Western Sahara are limited to second-hand, colourless, summaries of the reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council. It is time, Mr President and honourable members of the Committee, to put an end to this anomaly. It is time to go back to Western Sahara, and undertake a first-hand account of the situation.

Finally, the Frente POLISARIO would kindly request that the Committee hold a special session dedicated to Western Sahara.

I thank you very much.