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FOURTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: charting a dynamic course for decolonization in commencing the Fourth International Decade and in the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, through commitment to mandate, collaboration, pragmatism and agility

**Parish of St. John, Dominica
25 to 27 August 2021**

STATEMENT BY

MS. GHALLA BAHYA

(WESTERN SAHARA)

Regional Seminar of the Committee of 24

25-27 August 2021

Elements of M. Ghalla Bahiya's intervention, Vice-President of the Dakhla Oued-Eddahab region

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Excellency, on your outstanding presidency of the Committee of 24 as well as of this regional seminar. I wish you every success in the duties you are undertaking. I would like to also thank you for the invitation addressed to me and to my colleague, Mr. M'hamed Abba, Vice President of the Laayoune Sakia El Hamra region, for the third time, to address this Committee.

Allow to also express our sincere thanks and gratitude to the Government and People of the Commonwealth of Dominica for hosting this seminar and for their generous hospitality.

I am speaking today, as it was the case in 2019, in my capacity as Vice President of the Dakhla Oued-Eddahab region, a position I have been holding since 2015, when the first regional elections were held in the Kingdom of Morocco. Like the rest of Moroccan citizens, the inhabitants of the Moroccan Sahara voted to elect democratically their regional bodies and their representatives therein.

Morocco, my Country, is preparing to hold the next legislative, local and regional elections on September 8, 2021. Communal elections are scheduled for September 21. On October 5, the elections for the House of Councilors will be held. All these elections are important milestones to further strengthening democracy and political participation in the Moroccan Sahara.

As a powerful symbol of the commitment of the population of the Moroccan Sahara to participate in the political life of Morocco, the Sahara registered the highest voter turnout in the country during the first regional elections held in Morocco in 2015. I have no doubt whatsoever, that the Moroccan Sahara region will again witness a tremendous and overwhelming participation in all these coming elections, because of the attachment and conviction of the local population of their Moroccanity as well as their will to contribute to the political and socio-economic development of the Moroccan Nation as a whole.

My presence here today is a testament to the active participation of women and youth in the political life of the Kingdom of Morocco and more particularly at the local governance level.

As a young Moroccan woman leader from the Sahara, I am part of the 30% of women and 20% of young people out of the total 33 elected members of the Regional Council of Dakhla Oued-Eddahab. The effective political participation of Moroccan women, especially in the Moroccan Sahara, is today a tangible reality, as evidenced by the access of many women to elective mandates at the local, provincial, regional and national levels.

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to focus my statement on the economic and social situation prevailing in the Moroccan Sahara in light of the latest developments on the national and international scene. Like all parts of the world, the Moroccan Sahara has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Morocco, under the Leadership of His Majesty The King, Mohammed VI, May God Assist Him, has deployed, in order to fight the pandemic, an anticipatory and proactive approach aiming also at facing the resulting social and economic impact of this pandemic.

Likewise, the free vaccination campaign launched by Morocco, since the first quarter of 2021, is making great strides and has gone through several phases in all regions of Morocco, including its Southern Provinces. Morocco is now among the highest vaccinated countries in the world, and is number one in Africa in terms of the number of the population vaccinated.

The Moroccan Sahara has benefited of the exemplary efforts of the Kingdom to fight against the spread of Covid-19, in particular through the prevention and early detection of the virus as well as social distancing measures and a very large vaccination campaign, that has now reached kids as young as 13 years old.

Thus, in the region of Dakhla Oued Ed Dahab:

- These are 35,129 people who received the first dose of vaccination and 22,411 people who received the second dose in the Province of Oued Ed Dahab;
- 6,773 people received medical care;
- 157,377 detection tests were performed.

On the social level:

Aid and donations were granted by the Municipalities:

- 37,890 baskets of food products were distributed for the benefit of families in the Dakhla Province as well as fishermen,
- 02 equipped ambulances and supplies of medical equipment were made available to the hospital of Dakhla,
- Drinking water is distributed for the benefit of families living in the desert,
- purchases worth \$ 158,500 of disinfectant, housekeeping and hygiene products were made for the benefit of hospitals and the association of fishermen in Dakhla and acquisitions of a vehicle and technical equipment worth \$ 310,298.50 were also made.

Within the framework of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), actions have been carried out for families working in the informal sector, in particular by:

- The organization of medical and awareness caravans for the benefit of rural populations and nomads;

- The establishment of a device for the supply of drugs to the rural world and the distribution of masks;
- Support for people quarantined at the "Al Kassam" reception center;
- Support from associations helping people in a precarious situation or homeless;
- Accommodation and care for foreigners stranded in the city of Dakhla.

Regarding the Province of Aousserd:

- In terms of health, 3,245 people were vaccinated (1,805 for the 1st dose and 1,440 for the 2nd dose);
- 4,431 detection tests were carried out;
- 29 people were treated medically.

On the social level, 10,938 donations have been granted to vulnerable people since March 24, 2020, by local authorities and associations.

Regarding the Laayoune Sakia El Hamra region, the tremendous efforts made by Morocco include:

In the Province of Laayoune:

- In terms of health, 77,010 people were vaccinated, 118,321 screening tests were carried out, 8,254 people were treated medically, including 246 people hospitalized, 50,000 units of masks, visors and hydroalcoholic gels were distributed in public places (markets, supermarkets, administrations).
- On the social level, 67,002 food kits worth \$ 30 per unit were granted to vulnerable families and people with disabilities. The Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity also distributed kits to people of sub-Saharan origin living in the Province of Laayoune.

At the level of the Province of Es Smara:

- In terms of health, 22,465 people were vaccinated, 10,698 detection tests were carried out, 350 positive cases were medically treated at the Es Smara Hospital Center and the traditional educational establishment " Imam Ouarch " has been fitted out to accommodate new cases of Covid-19.
- On the social level, 16,000 people, among vulnerable citizens of this Province, have benefited from these actions and families working in the informal sector and affected by the pandemic have received donations in kind and in cash, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentleman,

The New Development Model for the Southern Provinces, launched in 2015 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, is the cornerstone of development policies in the Moroccan Sahara.

It is based in particular on the principle of participation of the local population in the preparation and implementation of their development plans and policies, in the context of advanced regionalization. This principle, enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco, gives the regions broad prerogatives in the planning and implementation of territorial development projects.

This development model, which has been implemented for 6 years, is the result of broad consultations with the populations of the Moroccan Sahara regions and their representatives, including myself. It aims to double the overall local output and create 120,000 jobs.

Within this framework, structuring projects mobilizing large-scale investment are implemented, for a total amount of 8.8 billion U.S. dollars, in the areas of infrastructure, health, training, industry, agriculture, renewable energy and maritime fishing.

The rate of progress of projects launched under the Southern Provinces Development Program (2016-2021) exceeded 70%. To date, some projects completed include: the Tiznit-Dakhla express road of more than 1000 km, the port of Dakhla Atlantic, the University Hospital of Laayoune and the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, which will be operational next September.

Thanks to the New Development Model for the Southern Provinces, the Southern Provinces are set to become a regional economic hub, a transit point between the North and the South, from the Kingdom of Morocco towards the rest of the Continent and an impulse center for the South-South cooperation in the region.

In recognition of the tremendous economic and social development achieved in the Sahara, as well as in confirmation of the recognition of the Marocanity of the Sahara, 23 countries from Africa, the Arab world, America and the Caribbean region, have opened Consulates General in the cities of Laayoune and Dakhla. More countries have expressed their will to open their consulates in the Sahara region in the near future.

The Consulates General are meant to serve, indeed, the strengthening of the socio-economic and cultural cooperation between Morocco and these countries.

The US decision, on last December, to recognize the sovereignty of the Kingdom over the Sahara responds to our aspirations as Sahrawi Moroccan citizens as it is a recognition of our immemorial belonging to the Moroccan national community. We further more welcome and encourage the US decision to upscale its investments in the region.

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentleman,

The economic and social progress in the Sahara region, within the framework of advanced regionalization, paves the way for the implementation of the Autonomy Initiative submitted by the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations, which is qualified as serious and credible by the United Nations Security Council, since 2007, and supported by the largest majority of UN Member States. Let me be loud and clear, we the population of the Moroccan Sahara are proud of our Marocanity and there will be no solution to this regional dispute other than the Autonomy Initiative within Morocco's National sovereignty and territorial integrity. We in the

Sahara region fully enjoy our civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and our Hassani culture, that are an integral part of Morocco's identity.

The population of the Sahara region thus actively participates in the implementation of policies dealing with the management and development of the region's resources, through its democratically elected representatives.

Similarly, economic operators in the Sahara region are actively involved in the development of the Moroccan Sahara. Private investment in the Moroccan Sahara is thus mainly made by local actors (60-65%).

The development dynamic that the Moroccan Sahara region is experiencing is irreversible. The social and economic development underway is solely beneficial to the population. It aims to anchor the Sahara region as a regional economic hub.

These projects also aim to prepare the ground for the return to the motherland: Morocco of the Sahrawi brothers and sisters, currently sequestered in the Tindouf camps. Their return is expected and will be done in dignity and in the respect of their rights, that of a decent life of democracy, prosperity, and social and economic emancipation.

We as elected representatives of the Moroccan Sahara are proud and honored by the action taken by the Moroccan authorities to ensure, once and for all, the free movement of persons and goods in the Guergarate cross border point between Morocco and Mauritania after it was blocked by armed militia of Polisario for more than three weeks. This peaceful civil engineering action by the Moroccan authorities was supported by a very large number of UN Member States and regional organizations. Contrary to the fallacious campaign regarding a so-called armed conflict in the Sahara, I can assure you as someone who lives there continuously, that these are pure and groundless lies that aim at serving a political agenda and misleading the international community. MINURSO who is present in the ground clearly attests and confirms daily that there is no armed conflict whatsoever.

I cannot finish my statement without raising the disastrous human rights and humanitarian situations in the Tindouf Camps where the host country continues to deny the fundamental right of the population to be registered by UNHCR.

I urge the international community to bring to an end this situation to allow the population in the camps to return to their motherland, Morocco, and to enjoy the full range of rights and to contribute to the development dynamic in the Moroccan Sahara region.

Finally, I would like to tell the Committee that the population of the Moroccan Sahara has fully enjoyed its right to self-determination thanks to the recovery by Morocco of its Sahara through the Madrid Agreement in 1975. This is why, it is inconceivable that the Moroccan Sahara issue is still on the agenda of this Committee. May I remind all the participants that the Moroccan Sahara issue is on the Agenda of the Security Council, with the aim to finding a realistic, practicable, enduring and compromise political solution to this regional dispute.

Thank you.