

SITUATION OF SAHARAWI WORKERS IN THE MOROCCAN-OCCUPIED SAHARAWI TERRITORIES

INTRODUCTION

Western Sahara possesses vast natural and fishing resources that are systematically plundered by Morocco, in clear contravention of international covenants and decisions concerning Non-Self-Governing Territories pending the exercise of the right to self-determination.

The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the exploitation and plundering of the natural resources of the Non-Self-Governing Territories threatened the lands of the latter, the security and prosperity of their inhabitants and hindered efforts to eliminate colonialism and racial discrimination, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and all relevant United Nations resolutions.

In 2002, the then Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and Legal Adviser to the President of the Security Council, Hans Corell, stated in an advisory opinion that the authorities administering the Non-Self-Governing Territories must meet two basic conditions for compliance with international law if they wish to exploit the natural resources of the latter:

First, the resources must be used for the benefit of the region's indigenous peoples and, second, the use of these resources must happen with the consent of the legitimate representatives of these peoples.

In 2015, the African Union issued an opinion on the natural resources of Western Sahara, in which it stated that the Moroccan State violated international law in this area and continued to exploit the natural resources of Western Sahara without the consent of the Saharan people, the legitimate owners of the sovereignty of Western Sahara, which was further divided into two parts by the Moroccan wall, constituting a major obstacle to the people's access to their own wealth.

With its plundering of Saharan resources, Morocco was constantly disobeying the demands of the United Nations General Assembly, which insisted that all economic activities carried out in non-self-governing territories should be aimed at helping the peoples of those regions to exercise their right to self-determination.

In particular, Morocco continued to exploit the phosphate mines in Bukharaa, which it exported to several countries without knowing for sure to what extent the Saharan population in the western part of the wall benefited from the income, in the absence of reliable statistics on the subject.

The same was true of fishing, where, through agreements with the European Union, Morocco was plundering the Saharan cauldrons to an excessive extent and was also encouraging the construction of dozens of fishing villages to be occupied by Moroccan settlers. On the other hand, it hinders the small-scale fishing that is the livelihood of many Saharan families.

Oil is also continually being depleted by Morocco, which has granted licences to several international corporations to explore for oil in the Saharan subsoil and sea. The most recent case is that of the American company COSMOS which has deployed an oil platform in waters near the town of Boujdour, even though the French company TOTAL had suspended its search operations in the area, specifically in BIR ENZARAN.

THE EXPLOITATION OF LAND FOR AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES

For over 30 years, the Moroccan state has continued to waste underground water resources for the cultivation of tomatoes and other products that are then exported to various countries under the label of "Moroccan products". This practice, besides obviously occurring without the prior consent of the legitimate representative of the Saharawi people, the Polisario Front, also implies a threat to the ecosystem of the area.

The Court of Justice of the European Union decided, in an unprecedented decision, to cancel the agricultural agreement between Morocco and the European Union because of the conflict in Western Sahara. The Court also annulled, in 2015 and for the same reason, the decision of the Council of the Union of 8 March 2012 on the conclusion of the EU-Morocco agricultural association and liberalisation agreement.

In 2018, a delegation from the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade (INTA) visited occupied Western Sahara where it was able to observe, on the ground, the deterioration in the human rights situation and how Saharawi citizens are denied the right to benefit from the natural resources of their own territory. In this context, Mrs Heidi Hautala, Vice-President of the European Parliament and member of the delegation, spoke, in a statement to the media, of the state of deprivation to which the Saharawis are subjected. The same was said by some human rights defenders who, during their meeting with the committee, demanded that international law should take precedence over economic and commercial interests.

Parallel to the continued illegal plundering of the territory's natural resources by the Moroccan State, in collusion with international companies, workers and the entire Saharan civilian population continued to be deprived of their economic, social and cultural rights, since Western Sahara was a territory with sufficient resources, the Saharans found it very difficult to find employment, and the number of unemployed, particularly among university graduates and other graduates, was constantly increasing because of the discrimination and deprivation to which they were subjected.

This indecent practice includes, among other abusive measures, arbitrary dismissals and the suspension of jobs and salaries, and is mainly aimed at those who are known for their political activism and their defence of human rights. It also includes the non-implementation of the recommendations regarding the settlement of the administrative and financial situation of the victims of disappearances and political detentions, given by the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, a body created by the Moroccan authorities to disguise their image to the outside world, after committing serious violations of human rights and war crimes and crimes against humanity, especially against Saharawi civilians.

Saharawi pensioners and former workers have also seen their rights affected, especially those of the phosphate mines of Bukraa, where, during the last few years, the income granted to them by the Spanish state was the object of continual withholding and appropriation by the Moroccan authorities.

The Moroccan state also encourages the policy of voluntary unemployment by granting a social aid card, which it uses as a form of pressure on the Saharawis, suspending from it those who take part in demonstrations for the right to self-determination or who demand improvements in employment. On many occasions, employers and the State itself, subject Saharawi employees to shameful working conditions, with low wages and no social and health coverage, which has resulted in the deterioration of their economic and social situation.

EDUCATION

Education in the occupied part of Western Sahara, apart from being totally incompatible with the cultural and social identity of the Saharan population to which Moroccan history and values are forcibly inculcated, also suffers from serious problems such as the low level of education or the deterioration of facilities in many educational institutions which, moreover, are constantly monitored by police officers who do not hesitate to use physical and verbal violence against Saharan students.

The lack of university study centres in Western Sahara meant that many students were losing the opportunity to continue their studies because they were forced to leave their families, which, combined with the lack of financial resources, had a major impact on school dropouts.

Schools have also become the focus of many negative behaviours that are alien to our society, such as drug use, theft and corruption.

HEALTH

The right to health is constantly violated in the occupied cities of Western Sahara where Saharan civilians are abused, and the sick have become a mere means of illicit enrichment by many private clinics and laboratories that profit at the expense of their need for health care. Furthermore, the Moroccan authorities extorted health personnel not to provide health care or hospitalization to Saharans who were injured following the demonstrations, in order to blackmail them into giving up their participation in the protests, even in serious cases requiring hospitalization. Nor was it permitted to hand over medical records to victims of police violence so as not to leave any evidence, which, coupled with the fear of reprisals if they went to hospital and the negligence of the doctors themselves, forced many Saharans to resort to alternative methods such as traditional medicine.

JOB LAYOFFS AND SALARY CUTS

Arbitrary dismissals and the policy of suspending salaries and economic aid are the methods used by the Moroccan authorities to discourage human rights defenders and anyone who takes a stand in favour of the Saharawi people's right to self-determination and independence, thus exposing many families to poverty and social and economic defencelessness and exclusion. Among these cases we can cite as examples:

- **The dismissal of the Saharawi human rights defender, Mina Aba Aali, from her job as a civil servant in one of the offices of the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior in the occupied city of El Aaiun. At the time of her dismissal, Mina Aba Aali was a beneficiary of the programme of "social insertion" of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, since she is a victim of serious human rights abuses committed by the Moroccan state.**
- **In February 2019, the former political prisoner, Mohamed Manolo, (father of a family of 6 members) is suspended from his right to social assistance, after visiting the Saharawi refugee camps with a group of human rights defenders.**
- **The unfair dismissal of the human rights defender, Mohamed Elhaiba Mayara, after three years of work as a teacher of secondary education in a school in El Ayoun, where he was benefiting from the job on the recommendation of the Moroccan Commission of Equity and Reconciliation**
- **The unfair dismissal of the human rights defender, Ali Salem Tamek , from his job in the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior in the town of Asa, because of his political activism.**
- **The exclusion of Idriss Dambar from a call for direct employment, presenting the results of the required medical examination. The reason for his exclusion is due to the position held by his family on the death of his brother, Said Dambar, killed by the Moroccan police in the occupied city of El-Ayoun, where the father of the victim refuses to receive the body without first carrying out an autopsy and other expert tests.**
- **The deprivation of the right to work of the human rights defender, Brahim Briaz, who since 2014 has been unable to have a job because of his record as a political prisoner.**

At present, the deterioration of the situation of Saharawi workers in the occupied areas of Western Sahara is getting worse and worse, so we urgently appeal to all international trade unions to join us in these special circumstances, marked by the COVID 19 pandemic, to condemn the violations

perpetrated by the Moroccan regime against the rights of Saharawi workers in the occupied part of Western Sahara

We also call for pressure on Morocco to abide by international law and to cease its plundering of the wealth of our people and its repression of the Saharawi population in the occupied cities of Western Sahara.

Accompanying us in these circumstances encourages us to continue defending our legitimate rights, recognized internationally, so your organization is called to defend Saharawi civilians in the occupied part of Western Sahara, and advocate for the implementation of the Charter of the United Nations concerning the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

We, the Saharawi workers, also demand that the International Community assume its responsibility towards Western Sahara, in the search for a solution that guarantees the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination, through the organization of a fair and free referendum, since the serious human rights violations that the Moroccan State commits against the Saharawi population are directly related to the non-exercise by the Saharawi people of their right to self-determination.

We also demand that the creation of an international mechanism for the monitoring of human rights in Western Sahara be accelerated, and that the United Nations Mission for the Organization of the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) include within its mandate the monitoring of human rights and the control and protection of the natural resources of the territory.

**GENERAL UNION OF SAHARAWI WORKERS
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