

# The History of the Western Sahara

## A Timeline

The sovereignty of the Western Sahara remains the subject of a dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front, a separatist group based in southern Algeria. Morocco reasserted its sovereignty over the territory after Spain withdrew its colonial interests from the area in 1975. The Polisario Front has challenged Morocco's control over the Western Sahara.

The Moroccan Government has undertaken a sizable economic development program in the Western Sahara to provide economic, political and social infrastructure for the region's residents. Today, international efforts are underway to encourage a political settlement between Morocco, the Polisario Front, and Algeria that would resolve sovereignty over the Western Sahara through autonomy.

**1578 to 1727** Moroccan Kings rule over the territory currently known as the Western Sahara

**1884** Spanish colonization begins

**1956** Morocco claims independence from France  
Morocco reclaims the Western Sahara at the UN for the first time

**1958** King Mohammed V formally lays claim to the Sahara

**1963** The UN includes the Western Sahara on the list of non self-governing territories

**1965** The UN General Assembly adopts its first resolution calling on Spain to decolonize the Sahara

**1973** The Polisario Front is founded and stages its first attack

**1974** Algeria begins to oppose Moroccan policy on the Sahara and trains Polisario guerillas

**1975** The Green March takes place in which 350,000 unarmed Moroccans march South into the desert to reassert the sovereignty of the Sahara from the Spanish

Morocco signs Madrid Agreement which seeks to transfer control of the Sahara to a three party administration divided between Morocco, Spain and Mauritania

Spain officially terminates its administration of the Sahara

**1976** The Polisario declares the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and raises the flag of "Western Sahara"

**1977** Spanish-Moroccan fishing agreement is signed; the Polisario begins attacks on Spanish fishing vessels

**1990** Morocco and the Polisario accept a UN peace plan, in which a referendum will be held.

**1991** UN Security Council approves the establishment of Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Organisation d'un Référendum au Sahara (MINURSO)

"[Morocco's compromise autonomy initiative] originated in the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed in the Bush Administration and it remains the policy of the United States in the Obama Administration. [...] And I don't want anyone in the region or elsewhere to have any doubt about our policy, which remains the same."

-U.S. Sec. of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, November 3, 2009



"[T]he Kingdom [of Morocco] has proposed a serious and credible autonomy plan as a basis of negotiation [...] and it constitutes a new proposal element after years of stalemate."

-French President Nicolas Sarkozy , October 23, 2007

"My conclusion that an independent Western Sahara is not an attainable goal is relevant today because it lies at the root of the current negotiation process.."

- UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara Peter Van Walsum , April 21, 2008

Cease-fire declared in the disputed Western Sahara region

Former US Sec. of State James Baker III appointed as UN Special Envoy in the Sahara region

Houston Accord is signed between Morocco and Polisario establishing the implementation of a referendum to decide the future of the Western Sahara

UN Sec. Gen. Kofi Annan presents the Security Council with four options to break the impasse in the Western Sahara: referendum, autonomy, partition, or complete withdrawal

UN Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 1541, urging the parties to the Western Sahara conflict to "to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution."

Dutch ambassador Peter Van Walsum is confirmed as the new UN Sec. Gen. Special Envoy to the Western Sahara

Morocco releases autonomy under sovereignty plan for the Western Sahara which is endorsed by the United States, Spain and France

Morocco and the Polisario Front conduct first two rounds of negotiations

The Polisario Front threatens a return to armed conflict with Morocco

Third round of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front takes place in January; a fourth round resumes in March

UN Sec. Gen. Special Envoy Van Walsum calls for realism and deems independence an unattainable option. Parties to the negotiations agree to a fifth round of negotiations to take place at a later date.

UN Sec. Gen. appoints seasoned US Diplomat Christopher Ross as the new Special Envoy for the Western Sahara.

U.S. Sec. of State Hillary Rodham Clinton reaffirms U.S. policy in support of Morocco's autonomy initiative.

This information has been produced by the Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP). MACP is a registered agent of the Government of Morocco. Additional information is available at the Justice Department in Washington, D.C.