

Agenda Report

"The question of the affiliation or independence of Western Sahara."

Geographic and demographic introduction

This question deals with the disputed territory located in the Maghreb region of northern Africa. With regards of borders, the territory is adjacent to the Kingdom Morocco in the north, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania in the east and south, People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the northeast and, lastly, the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The territory of Western Sahara itself covers an area of, in total, 103,000 mi² (266,000 km²). Due to the majority of the area consisting of desert flatland, the population has been estimated at just above 540,000, of which about 40% lives in the largest city in Western Sahara, El Aaiún (also known by the name Laáyoune).

Historical background

The dispute of Western Sahara can be traced all the way back to the 19th century and the time of the European colonization of Africa. In 1884, the Spanish government initiates a colonization of Western Sahara by agreeing with three representatives of the Oulad Bou Sbaa tribe on a treaty, which specified the legalization of Spain's conquest of the Sahara. From 1900 until 1912, the Spanish and French governments negotiated a convention, which were to define the borders between Spanish Sahara and the French colonies such as Mauritania, with gradual progression until the final convention being agreed upon in 1912. During the period stretching from 1912 until 1934, the Spanish colonists encounter growing Saharawi resistance, due to which Spain enforces a greater colonial control, but the general development of the territory remains modest. However, in 1947-48, the Spanish government discovers rich phosphate deposits, and, therefore, takes greater interest in developing the colony with the aim of economic exploitation. In 1956, the former French and partly Spanish colony of Morocco regains its independence, and, hereafter, lays claim to Western Sahara, which initiates revolutionary attempts to overthrow the remaining French and Spanish governments in the area among numerous conflicts between particularly Morocco, Mauritania, and an unspecified amount of independency/nationalistic movements. In 1965, the UN calls for a decolonization of Western Sahara, which Spain completely complies with in 1976.

The following dispute of Western Sahara

After Spain's withdrawal from Western Sahara, numerous disagreements and conflicts have been based on the affiliation of the territory. In 1975, however, the International Court of Justice in Hague rules in favor of Saharawi rights to self-determination and hereby neglects the claims of the two neighboring nations, Morocco and Mauritania. Hereafter, Mauritania chooses to abandon its claim, while Morocco continuously attempted to illegally and violently annex the territory with moderate success through bombings of civilians and a general undermining of human rights in spite of the resistance of the liberation movement, Polisario. In 1991, however, the UN enters Western Sahara with a peacekeeping force and initiates a ceasefire, which the Moroccan forces attempts to derail through bombings of key sites prior to the ceasefire. Morocco continues to reject every option of independency and continues to disrupt peace-negotiations. Consequently, thousands of refugees have fled to Algeria among other nations, and the remaining civilian population is struggling with a totalitarian undermining of their rights along with hunger and disease. The present armed conflict in Western Sahara mainly consists of the dispute between Polisario and the Moroccan military.

Some of the operative issues on this matter would be:

- Is it any of the nations' right to claim the territory of Western Sahara?
- Should the population of the area vote for their own affiliation?
- Should the UN interfere? And if so; with which means and what purpose?
- What does the future vision of Western Sahara consist of?

