



Moroccan Sahara

Understand the roots and dynamics of
the regional dispute





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Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in South Africa



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Foreword

In diplomacy, as in other fields, accuracy and clear-sightedness are often lost when positions and convictions break away from what is factual and draw their inspirations from myths and ideologies. The dispute over the Moroccan Sahara is unfortunately not immune to these ideological digressions.

It is well known that the human mind does not tolerate emptiness and has the tendency to create facts and stories out of the blue if lacking knowledge or understanding on a specific matter or issue.

As a result, it may happen that our assessments tend to lose track to a point where we hardly distinguish between right and wrong, factual and fantasies, myths and realities. For these reasons, one should always be open to challenge these beliefs especially if they are ones we have come to accept.

During my entire career as a diplomat, I have been called upon to interact with different people from different backgrounds in different countries. If I have learned anything, it is that assumptions are too often far from the truth.

For a while I hesitated to entitle this publication The ‘Frontier of an ideology’, judging that it was a relevant way of translating the spirit, meaning and purpose of the message I wish to convey through this booklet. The Frontier is what divides, limits and separates, just as the ideology, is that which by nature distorts, blinds and corrupts. In its geographical understanding, the artificial border that would dissociate Morocco from its Sahara has no existence outside of the minds of those who advocate for separation and division. Paradoxically, the same minds fueled by ideology refuse to acknowledge the existence of the real border, one that dissociates them from coherence and consigns them to isolation.

Morocco’s sovereignty over its Sahara is that of a historical fact, a legal legitimacy and a nation’s will fully reflected by Morocco in all its human, social, political, cultural, and economic components.

For all these reasons, I thought it would be useful to share this publication on the Sahara issue as it happens that many assumptions and misconceptions persist regarding this regional dispute. Outdated ideologies, political manipulations and irrelevant concepts have often misled public opinions. These messages need to be tackled and addressed seriously, since their first intention is to enshrine false allegations and blatant untruths.

One has to understand, that for Morocco, the Sahara issue is not a mere item on the agenda of the UN Security Council but rather represents a historical injustice done to Morocco in the recovery of its territorial integrity. It is indeed a matter linked to the dignity and sovereignty of the Moroccan people.

The Vision, Leadership and Guidance of His Majesty the King, Mohammed VI, cements the unity of a Nation, inspires action and outlines the future.

Internally, as well as internationally, the Royal Strategy is one that links legitimacy to coherence, words to action and commitment to responsibility. Prosperity and development are at the heart of a patriotic and inclusive agenda carried at the highest level of State for the benefit of all Moroccan citizens.

On the sole basis of fact and proven arguments, I will answer throughout this publication to some of the frequently asked questions regarding the Sahara issue so that you get a clearer understanding of this regional dispute. As many make judgments without knowledge of the facts, I have deeply considered that the facts must come out. This book is that fact sheet.

Youssef Amrani

Ambassador of Morocco to South Africa



Is the Sahara the last colony in Africa?

The assumption that the Sahara is the last colony in Africa is without substance and derives from ignorance. This misconception lacks legal, historical, and political foundation. It is completely at odds with the reality as established at the United Nations that exclusively deals with this regional dispute.

From a legal perspective, there are around 70 resolutions of the UN Security Council and 120 reports of the UN Secretary General on the dispute. None of them ever referred to Morocco as an occupying power, nor do they refer to the Sahara as a colony or an occupied territory. The systematic reference to the so-called occupation is absolutely inaccurate and represents a political and ideological opinion with no legal basis.

Often in a desperate attempt to mislead public opinion, some parties (the Polisario and its relays) like to refer themselves to General Assembly resolutions 34/37 and 35/39 adopted on 1979 and 1980. In doing so, they pretend to forget that the last 42 years that have followed the adoption of this isolated resolution (adopted in the context of the cold war) are those of a UN corpus that confirms, comforts and strengthens the Kingdom of Morocco in its positions and in its legitimacy.

From a historical perspective, prior to the colonial era, the Sahara has always been part of Morocco. Several bilateral treaties signed in the 18th and 19th centuries, attest to this reality. The International Court of Justice recognized unanimously, on October 1975, the existence of bonds of allegiance, between the Kings of Morocco and the tribes living in the territory. For more than 12 centuries, Morocco was a fully sovereign and independent Nation prior to its occupation by different European powers namely France (Center), Spain (North and South) and Tangiers, which was an international zone.

The decolonization process of the Kingdom was exceptional and achieved gradually through negotiations that led to the independence of the central part of Morocco in 1956.

Since then, Morocco was fully committed in its struggle to recover the whole of its national territory, which in the south, was still under Spanish control. In June 1962, Morocco addressed an official request to the UN decolonization committee calling on Spain to start peaceful negotiations over the remaining territories of Sidi Ifni and “Western Sahara”. **No other country objected to the Moroccan claim and this was way before the creation of the separatist armed group Polisario.**

As a matter of fact, Morocco was finally able to recover Sidi Ifni in 1969 and subsequently the Sahara in 1975 through the Madrid agreements, registered in the UN.

The retrocession of these territories to Morocco was the result of negotiations with Spain that are well documented and that fully dismiss the myth of the “last colony of Africa”.

Since 1975 the regional dispute over the Sahara can, in no way, shape or form be referred to as a decolonization issue. **You cannot decolonize what is not a colony anymore.** It is indeed an issue related to the territorial integrity of Morocco.

Those who falsely claim that Morocco is a “colonizer” are also attempting to rewrite history. One has to consider that Morocco played a leading role in the fight against colonialism and apartheid in Africa.

It is Morocco that hosted, in 1960, the famous “Conference of Casablanca”, attended by leaders of the liberation movements, such as King Mohamed V and the Presidents Nkrumah of Ghana, Modibo Keita of Mali and Ahmed Sekou Touré of Guinea, the founding fathers of the OAU. Morocco was the one that hosted in April 1961 the Conference of Support to the Liberation Movements of the territories under Portuguese colonization, it was also from Morocco that a huge solidarity movement was launched to support Algeria’s struggle for independence. Last but not least, it is Morocco, among other countries that provided Nelson

Mandela with assistance, training, funds and weapons to support the ANC's armed struggle against the apartheid regime.



Is Morocco looting natural resources in the Sahara?

Morocco has a just cause and a legitimate ambition. In its Saharan provinces, as elsewhere throughout its national territory, the Kingdom has never ceased to promote the interests of its citizens.

Never has Morocco looted natural resources in the Sahara. Facts and figures speak to the contrary, for every 1\$ extracted from the region, the central government of Morocco has reinvested 7\$.

By creating added value and massively investing in the future of the region, Morocco has created a momentum for prosperity and development in its southern provinces.

In no way can the exploitation of natural resources in the Sahara be referred to as a self-interested approach, as it is the result of a concerted ambition established and implemented with the local populations and for their own benefits.

Today modernization, industrialization and economic integration are the driving forces of the outstanding development process unfolding in the Southern region. Indeed, Morocco has made tireless and unconditional efforts, in recent decades, to promote the local economy, consolidate social cohesion and fight against poverty. The aim of this sovereign and democratic approach is to achieve effective prosperity throughout the national territory and for the benefit of all Moroccan citizens from Tangier to Lagouira.

For the past decades, the economic and social development of the Sahara has been a priority for Morocco.

The resulting benefits of this approach are outstanding. The region has

experienced real economic progress. Elected bodies, in the southern provinces of the Moroccan Sahara have the total capacity and ability to manage and budget democratically their respective affairs. In this regard, increased powers were granted, through our Constitution and national laws, to the regions, especially in the management of local natural resources and investment projects aiming to achieving prosperity and equitable benefit.

The main objective of the policy conducted in the region is to provide direct and substantial benefits to the local population. In line with this policy, the European Union, one of our main partners, approved in 2019 the revision of two EU-Moroccan trade agreements relating to agriculture and fisheries extending them to the Saharan provinces of Morocco.

In the same perspective and at the heart of this approach is the New Development Model for the southern provinces, which is deeply rooted in the respect and promotion of Human Rights. The participatory and inclusive nature of this development model is all the more fundamental as civil society; various elected officials and local stakeholders have been invited to shape and guide this process through collaboration, dialogue and several consultations.

Numerous new initiatives and mega projects have emerged in the region, always with the same perspective of promoting modernity and local development. Today, the landscape of the southern provinces has been turned upside down thanks to, among other things, the establishment of roads, electrification units, the construction of airports, new housing structures, the expansion of educational networks and the building of a seawater desalination unit.

With a participation rates in regional elections that outshine even the oldest of democracies, the southern provinces thrive within their cherished, honored and endlessly claimed Moroccan identity.



Is the referendum still a valid option to solve this longstanding conflict?

Those who strive to make the referendum the milestone of their position on the Sahara issue are still keeping alive, without any sense of coherence and reason, a bygone past of an obsolete concept. Indeed the page of the referendum has been irrevocably turned by the international community and legality which are focalized exclusively on the prospects of a political solution.

The attachment to the referendum option is unjustified and void, not constituting, **for almost two decades**, a conceivable or even an achievable alternative. It cannot, in this regard, be presented as a proposal brought to the negotiating table, as it constitutes an empty shell, devoid of any relevance and imbued by an outdated logic.

The referendum has never been a principle of international law as some may like to imply. The concepts of Law have a definition, a framework, requirements and even a history.

For its part, the referendum mechanism is neither mentioned in any fundamental UN text on self-determination, nor is it referred to in the UN charter.

Furthermore, the referendum is by no means an obligatory or even an exclusive way to achieve self-determination. Since 1945, the UN has only resolved three cases by referendum out of 64 regarding territorial disputes, while the rest have been resolved through political negotiations. Nowadays, the eminently false rumors that some parties would like to spread are that Morocco rejects by principle the referendum option. This is obviously a blatant untruth that omits the fact that Morocco was the first to propose the referendum option in 1981 at the 18th Summit of the

Organization of African Unity in Nairobi.

The Resolution AHG / RES.103 (XVIII), adopted on this occasion, expressly welcomed the proposal of late King Hassan II and decided to create an Implementation Committee, composed of seven Heads of State, to which the Summit attributed a mandate consisting in undertaking, alongside the United Nations, all the necessary measures to guarantee the exercise of a general and regular referendum of self-determination.

Algeria was taken aback by the African Summit's decision, as it had already decided, in its own mind, about the future of the populations by recognizing a so called Sahrawi republic.

On February 27, 1981, the former Secretary General of the Polisario front, Mohamed Abdul-Aziz made the following declaration to the Algerian press agency: "for our part, the idea of referendum is outdated and we invite the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to come and see it on the ground".

Moreover, the implementation of this referendum was hampered and blocked the following year, when the Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity prejudged the results of the referendum option by illegally admitting an entity devoid of any attribute of sovereignty, violating thus the Charter of the Organization which stipulates, explicitly in its Articles 4 and 28, being "an African, independent and sovereign State" as conditions of membership in the Organization.

Despite this flagrant violation of law, Morocco maintained during the first years the referendum option, this time turning towards the United Nations. In the conduct of this process initiated and supported by the Kingdom, the United Nations negotiated a ceasefire in 1991 and set up a peacekeeping mission, MINURSO, whose mandate was, at that time, to monitor the ceasefire and organize a referendum on the future of the region.

For over a decade, the United Nations attempted to organize this referendum, and failed. This was confirmed by its then Secretary

General, late Kofi Annan who declared in the year 2000, explicitly and unequivocally **that the referendum was inapplicable.**

This evaluation clearly and irrevocably ousted the referendum option. The wording used by the UN Secretary General left no room for any possible interpretation: "With the exception of the monitoring of the ceasefire in force since September 6, 1991, none of the main provisions of the settlement plan have been fully implemented since the establishment of MINURSO, because of fundamental differences between the parties over its interpretation".

The main difficulty, that could not be overcome, during that period, was the identification of the eligible electoral base for the referendum.

This deadlock turns down any hope to see one day the referendum implemented. **Since then, no UN Security Council resolution has called for a referendum in the last 20 years.**

Moreover, it is the Security Council itself which, while being confronted with the difficulties of drawing up electoral lists, recommended to the Secretary General, in its resolution of February 29, 2000 (S / RES / 1292), "to ask his Personal Envoy to consult the parties and, (...) explore the means of achieving an early, durable and agreed resolution of this conflict".

Since February 2000, the UN Secretary General proceeded to a negotiated political settlement, requesting his Special Envoy, Mr. James Baker to work towards achieving a political solution to this regional dispute.

Thus, the option of a "third path", going completely beyond the referendum logic, was introduced to overcome the deadlock. To this end, the agreement drawn up by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary General, Mr. James Baker, and supported by the Security Council in its June 2001 resolution 1359, provided a basis for negotiations towards autonomy under the unwavering sovereignty of the Moroccan State.

In conformity with constructive compromise, this plan was accepted by

Morocco but rejected by Algeria and the Polisario, always faithful to their tireless efforts to hinder the relevance and coherence of a realistic and pragmatic political process.

In addition to making constant obstacles in this process, Algeria went even further by proposing, at that time, the partition of the territory, shedding lights therefore, through this diplomatic clumsiness, not only on its role as a party to the dispute but also on its real aspirations and dishonest personal interests in the management of this issue.

On November 2, 2001, James Baker received the Algerian President at that time, Abdelaziz Bouteflika in his Institute in Houston. The Secretary General of the United Nations refers to this visit in his report of February 20, 2002 (S / 2002/178):

“On 24 and 25 January 2002, my Personal Envoy, James A. Baker III, visited Morocco, where he was received twice by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and high-level government officials. The purpose of the visit of my Personal Envoy was to inform the Moroccan authorities of the rejection by Algeria and the front Polisario of the draft framework agreement, as had been reiterated to him by the President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, during his visit to the James Baker Institute in Houston, Texas, on November 2, 2001, and that, in the view of my Personal Envoy, Algeria and the front Polisario would be prepared to discuss or negotiate a division of the Territory as a political solution to the dispute over Western Sahara”.

In fact, by supporting the idea of partition or division, Algeria betrays the principle of the right to self-determination, by indicating its willingness to engage in bargaining to divide lands and populations. This has led the international community to believe that the Sahara issue is rooted in a failure to respect the right to self-determination; whilst this is complete and utter misinformation. It is indeed a regional dispute fueled and kept alive by some parties for mere geopolitical purposes far from any consideration of justice, fairness, humanism or humanity.

Subsequently, the second plan called Baker II presented by the UNSG personal envoy in 2002 did not meet, for its part, the requirements of

a process that was moving forward as it proceeded from a return to a settlement plan which proved its inapplicability.

In June 2004 and following these failed “Baker” dynamics, Mr. Alvaro De Soto appointed by the United Nations Secretary General to carry on the process of political mediation proposed to initiate negotiations on autonomy.

Algeria and the Polisario have once again, refused this prospect in an approach dictated by inoperative positions, substantially deviating from the international legality.

Categorically refusing these ideological stances, the Security Council has repeatedly called on the parties to deploy efforts in order to emerge from the crisis and to reach a political solution. **Notably and most significantly, all of the 34 resolutions adopted by the Security Council since 2001 do not mention or refer at any moment or in any way to the referendum.**

For its part, the General Assembly abandoned the referendum option more than 18 years ago and no report by the Secretary General has referred to this mechanism since the recognition of its inapplicability two decades ago.

The way forward shaped by international legality is clear and unequivocal. The supporter of the referendum are not only on the fringes of the law but are in flagrant contradiction of a process initiated, wanted and supported by an international community, explicitly devoted to the search for a political solution to the dispute



What is the way forward for a final settlement of this regional dispute?

Following the recognition of the inapplicability of the referendum option by the SGNU Kofi Annan, 20 years ago, the UN Security Council called upon the parties to find a political solution to this regional dispute. This perspective disavows any other alternative pattern that would not be consistent with UN calls.

On the same line, the AU, in accordance with decision 693 of the Nouakchott Summit held in July 2018, reaffirmed and strongly confirmed the exclusivity of the UN process, thus preventing the emergence of any parallel or alternative path likely to harm the political process engaged within the Security Council.

Today, sole the parameters explicitly and exclusively set by the Security Council condition, support and steer the research for a definitive solution to the Sahara issue.

In this sense, the UN Security Council has defined clear and unequivocal parameters for the way forward. The United Nations wording, and therefore that of international legality, advocates a realistic, pragmatic and lasting political solution, based on compromise.

Without deviating from this perspective, Morocco has, with all responsibility, demonstrated a constructive approach in tune with UN requirements.

It is this same spirit, fueled by the Kingdom's unwavering attachment to its territorial integrity and by a pragmatism widely praised by the international community that Morocco presented in 2007, the Moroccan

initiative for the negotiation of an autonomy statute for the Sahara region. This autonomy plan is a “win-win” solution that represents a realistic and pragmatic way to put an end to this dispute in full consistency with the guidelines of the Security Council, the only body mandated to deal with the issue.

Indeed, the autonomy plan brings hope for a better future for the people of the region, puts an end to separation and promotes reconciliation. It is in conformity with international law and the Charter of the United Nations while fully respecting the right to self-determination and the resolutions of the Security Council on this issue. In fact, the Autonomy Status of the Moroccan Sahara region will be negotiated and submitted to the concerned populations for consultation, as stated in the article 27 of the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative.

Moreover, this plan is the result of an extensive consultation process conducted at the national, regional and international levels.

As a third way between pure integration and independence, it is the only solution that satisfies the parameters laid out in Security Council resolution 2548: A realistic, practicable, and enduring political solution that rests on compromise.

The relevance of this autonomy plan is such that it has been supported by an overwhelming majority of African countries as well as countries from other continents. It remains the only proposal on the table. **Since 2007, the 16 resolutions of the UN Security Council have all supported the Moroccan approach by emphasizing the preeminence of its initiative, its seriousness and its credibility.**

It should be recalled that in line with this dynamic fueled by the Moroccan proposal, in 2008 Mr. Peter Van Walsum, the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General and facilitator for the first four rounds of UN negotiations, explicitly stated, **“That an independent Sahara is not an achievable objective”**. He urged the Security Council to pursue the only achievable political compromise solution, namely autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.

The Council and the international community have called upon all parties, namely Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the separatist movement of the Polisario, to continue talks in the framework of the round tables in Geneva in order to reach a political solution that meets the parameters defined by the Security Council.



What are the achievements in terms of human rights and freedoms in the Sahara?

Human dignity is not a mere ambition, a slogan, nor a pious wish. It is indeed a constant and unwavering commitment of the Kingdom of Morocco that reflects on every component of its public policy.

At a time when some would like to point out Morocco for obvious political purposes, the Kingdom continues with confidence, serenity and responsibility to move forward in its path of democracy and development. Morocco has a highly positive record in the region in terms of human rights. The reforms undertaken by the Kingdom throughout its national territory and for the benefit of all Moroccan citizens are widely praised by the international community as they are recognized, as consistent with the rule of law, democracy and freedom.

Morocco has raised, in a sovereign decision, the human dimension at the heart of its priorities with the sole ambition to meet and fulfill the will of its people.

Civil liberties, including freedom of speech, press, gathering, association, and gender equality are fully enshrined in Morocco's Constitution.

In all political, economic, social and cultural fields, respect for liberties is not only guaranteed and protected, but rather further developed and reinforced.

For many years, important measures, actions and reforms have been undertaken in this direction. In 2019, the United Nations Human Rights Committee ranked Morocco among the top five countries that have successfully implemented the United Nations recommendations on the

protection of human rights.

It is therefore totally unfounded that Morocco is abusing human rights whether in the southern provinces or elsewhere. The Kingdom is at the forefront of international standards, continuously and relentlessly consolidating the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and civil liberties, throughout its territory without any exception.

In this sense, Morocco has extended an open invitation to all the special procedures of OHCHR to visit the Kingdom and its Saharan provinces. We have hosted 12 of such special procedures without restriction, which were attended by journalists, experts, activists and other relevant stakeholders.

Morocco has nothing to hide and has no complexes, taboos or lessons to be taught regarding human rights issues. We have strengthened our national instruments through the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) with extended powers of investigation and control. It is common knowledge that the CNDH is in full compliance with the Paris principles and the international standards adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. Furthermore, the UN Security Council has welcomed the role of the Regional Commissions of the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) in Laâyoune and Dakhla as well as Morocco's interaction with the mechanisms of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The unfounded allegations of a so-called violation of Human Rights by Morocco engage and question the integrity, the seriousness and the responsibility of a fallacious stance disconnected from the realities on the ground.



Is the human rights situation in Tindouf a source of concern?

The human rights violations by the Polisario in the Tindouf camps in Algeria have been ongoing since the first camps were set up more than 40 years ago, and systematically abuses have increased.

The people living in the so called “refugee camps” at Tindouf, in Algeria are held against their will for more than 46 years. They live in a dire humanitarian situation with multiple human rights abuses and violations, with no choice of leaving the camps. This should be of the utmost concern to the international community.

Failing to its responsibilities and violating its obligations of international law, Algeria, as a host country of the “refugee” camps, has helped, in maintaining these populations sequestered for more than four decades in complete violation of their basic and elementary human rights.

Indeed, Human rights violations and systematic abuses of this population by polisario in the Tindouf camps have multiplied since the establishment of those camps, obliging Sahraouis of the camps to live in total deprivation of their most basic rights such as right of expression, of assembly, of movement, or of work.

The disastrous Humanitarian situation in “Tindouf” camps is atypical if it is to be compared to all existing refugee camps in the world. Indeed, it is the only “refugee” camp that is:

- Keeping Sahraouis in captivity, for more than four decades without a right to leave the camps,

- Seeking to perpetuate the refugee situation which initially was supposed to be temporary, by opposing any durable solution as per international law;
- Militarized to threaten or kill any Sahraouis who want to leave the camps and return to their motherland, Morocco;
- Opposed to the UNHCR census of the population in the camps.

The humanitarian situation is more critical when human rights violations of Sahraouis people in Tindouf camps occur daily, depriving them of their basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. In fact, the absence of an international legal framework makes the situation even worse and unacceptable.

Algeria's responsibility in the deplorable humanitarian situation of these populations is undeniable. Indeed Algeria has consistently hampered the organization of a census and denied these populations their own right to choose between the voluntary return to their motherland, their integration in the host country or their reinstallation elsewhere.

By opposing the registration of the population in the Tindouf camps, Algeria is seeking to dissimulate the origin of persons residing in these camps, who are often brought from neighboring sub-Saharan countries to outnumber the real number of Sahraouis in the camps.

To the precarious and dangerous situation that prevails in the camps, one should add the opacity that characterizes it. Indeed the "polisario", who is an armed separatist group, known for its despotic ruling in the camps and links to terrorist groups in the Sahel-Saharan region, continues to refuse, with the support of Algeria, any access to international human rights and humanitarian organizations to the camps.

The few visits that were allowed into the camps were permitted under strict requirements and monitoring by polisario and Algeria. UNHCR and World Food Program, for instance, can only have access to the camps if they abide by those requirements, and that explains why the UNHCR to this day could not implement any of the main components of its mandate, that is the registration and census of the refugee population.

This opacity serves to hide more outrageous realities, that fortunately were unveiled by the international humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR and the World Food Program, that have denounced humanitarian aid embezzlement, following a joint inspection mission in 2005 instigated by the EU Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid.

The latter had decided to halve its humanitarian aid to the Tindouf camps populations after having noted embezzlement practices in the camps. In 2007, it was the European Anti-Fraud Office's turn (OLAF) who voiced the same concern over the embezzlement of humanitarian aid by the "Polisario". Since then, embezzlement continues at the same pace, at the expense of the health of the civilian population of the Tindouf camps. One should recall the European parliament resolution that was adopted, in 29 April 2015, urging the commission of the European Union to ensure that Algerians and Saharouis individuals incriminated in the OLAF report are denied access to the aid financed by the European tax payer.

No later than June 9, 2020, NGO Light and Justice launched an appeal to the European Union for ending the illicit enrichment of "Polisario" members through humanitarian aid embezzlement. The NGO underlined that, due to the sale of most humanitarian aid in some neighboring countries, which is now a well-documented phenomenon, hunger and thirst haunts the inhabitants of the Tindouf camps.

The systematic embezzlement of humanitarian aid, with total impunity, is only made possible by the persistent refusal of Algeria to allow a census of the Tindouf camps populations to be conducted, in defiance of all resolutions adopted by the Security Council since 2011.

On the other hand, by devolving to "Polisario" the authority on a part of its territory, Algeria, as a host country is in blatant violation of the 1951 Convention on the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as all conclusions of the Executive Committee of the UN Commissioner for Refugees.

This situation is indeed exceptional in regard of international humanitarian law, because it allows "Polisario" to perpetrate systematic human

rights violations in the Tindouf camps in order to crush any challenge to its legitimacy. Thus, arbitrary detention, kidnappings, and torture perpetrated with the active complicity of Algeria are part of everyday life for the civilian population.

As the host country, Algeria is the holder of specific obligations to prevent, investigate, and punish violations of the rights of the persons on its territory, while ensuring legal compensation. The UN Human Rights Council and Human Right Committee have expressed, respectively in 2018 and 2020, its concerns over “the de facto devolution of authority to polisario, especially jurisdictional authority”.

Today the international community cannot remain silent in the face of the distress of these populations. It has the obligation to save them from the horrors of “Polisario” and give them the right to choose their return to their motherland, Morocco, or to be integrated to the host country, or to relocation elsewhere.

The international community must also grant them a fundamental right to a headcount that will guarantee them international protection, as recognized by humanitarian international law, UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and by the UNHCR Executive committee. Indeed, the registration of these populations is by no means a political operation, but a humanitarian requirement and a statutory obligation which is long overdue, and which should be implemented as soon as possible. It is all about respecting the most basic rights of these populations held captive in inhumane conditions for more than 45 years. It is therefore important to stress on the following measures that need to be implemented to protect the Tindouf camps population:

- The refugees' registration is a prerequisite for the implementation of HCR three mandates: international protection, providing assistance, and search of sustainable solutions;
- The responsibility and obligation of host countries in facilitating the HCR mandate allowing the protection of the refugee population on their soil by allowing the census and the registration of these populations without a precondition;
- Any credible and objective strategy to help refugees should be based on certain prerequisites: accurate census of refugees, setting up viable structures of humanitarian aid distribution, control and follow up mechanisms of assistance, guaranteeing freedom of access to the camps by the host countries;
- The host country should preserve the civilian and humanitarian character of the refugee camps.
- The voluntary returns as a sustainable solution to refugee's longstanding deplorable situation. The HCR should explore and implement the other solutions, namely, local integration, reinstallation in their country when voluntary repatriation is not possible.
- The voluntary repatriation should not be politically motivated in order to not compromise the freewill return of refugees.



What are the motivations for Morocco's return to the African Union?

The Moroccan approach towards the African continent draws substance and ambition from an African affiliation of responsibility, altruism and solidarity.

Morocco is one of the founding fathers of the OAU. Its African identity is not only induced by its geographical position but more importantly results from a strong belief that Africa is first and foremost a shared history and a common destiny

From the Casablanca conference in 1960 to the reintegration of the Kingdom back to the African Union in 2017, the same spirit of unity and fraternity prevails in Morocco's foreign policy guidelines.

The return of the Kingdom to the African Union, its institutional family, testifies to Morocco's unwavering will to initiate a dynamic of global and sustainable development throughout the continent.

African unity is not a mere slogan for Morocco but rather a great responsibility and a heart-felt commitment. We believe that it is our duty to act with resolve and responsibility on the path to this future of peace, stability and prosperity, which must materialize while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States

It is up to us, Africans, to always look towards the future of this continental emergence which federates identities and mobilizes the forces of Africa, a Continent with enormous and unmatched potential.

The Kingdom of Morocco will continue to place this ambition at the heart of its priorities. His Majesty King Mohammed VI's leadership has made the emergence of Africa a perspective not only desired but more

so drawn as part of a global vision, an inclusive action and a united, responsible and ambitious approach.

The Kingdom has continuously joined efforts with his African brethren to hoist Africa to the level of active forces on regional and international levels.

Morocco's action within the African Union (AU) draws its substance from this same perspective, as underlined by His Majesty King Mohammed VI at the AU 29th Summit, held January 31, 2017 in Addis-Ababa.

“This is the path to solidarity, peace and union chosen by my country. We reaffirm our commitment to the development and prosperity of African citizens. We, peoples of Africa, have the means and the genius; together, we can fulfill the aspirations of our peoples. ”

The AU must provide the space that unites ambitions and pulls strategies. Its role is crucial to express a continental vision that breaks with past approaches. The AU must be the locomotive of an Africa that moves forward, an Africa that trusts itself and an Africa that evolves.

Morocco deeply believes that Africa's future must rely on common ownership and dialogue. The course of history is that of a close and unequivocal support for the priorities of an African youth in search of prosperity and opportunities.

Mobilizing African resources, trusting our skills and straightening out our economies are indisputable prerequisites for a Continent that places economic development, promotion of growth and creation of wealth at the core of its priorities.

His Majesty King Mohamed VI already recalled, in His speech in Abidjan in February 2014, ***“A vibrant, developed Africa is not merely a dream for tomorrow; it can be a reality today, provided we take action. Therefore, now is the time to act or to make a start. Indeed, it is essential to act because that is what makes political action credible; that is what makes it possible to achieve the desired objectives.”***

The Kingdom's return to the African Union, its institutional family, is therefore that of a deep and unequivocal desire to bring strength and contribution to the building of an emancipated Africa, detached from its constraints and open to its promising destinies. The Kingdom of Morocco has never ceased to place this ambition at the heart of its priorities.

The effort of our action within the Pan-African institution falls within the framework of clearly defined priorities: building strong economies, fighting against inequalities and social disparities, promoting regional integration and inclusive growth.

Therefore, to those who continue to wonder why Morocco left the OAU in 1984, it might be worth noting that by leaving the institution, Morocco has never left the continent.

Morocco left the OAU in November 1984 because the Charter of the institution had been violated by accepting an entity which lacks attributes of sovereignty and this is in full denial of international legality

In any case, African construction cannot suffer from half measures. The Kingdom is fully committed alongside its brothers and sisters to establish the frameworks and contexts for a continental emergence that brings prosperity, peace, and stability.

The Kingdom's core conviction is that Africa's future will be shaped by African hands for African nations. This vision, carried to the highest level by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, puts the human dimension as the cornerstone of any ambition for a renewed Pan-Africanism.



What makes the Maghreb the least integrated region in Africa?

Today, the Maghreb region is the least integrated region in Africa. This sad reality is a consequence of the lack of ambition, the lack of leadership and the lack of commitment to build-up a coherent regional scheme. The non-Maghreb is an **economic mess, a political handicap and historical aberration**. It becomes today more than ever necessary to overcome the existing deadlocks.

The non-Maghreb is no longer affordable, economically, politically, or socially. The facts and figures indicate it clearly. The delay in the Maghreb integration process costs each country in the region at **least 2.8 %** of its annual growth rate.

It is therefore clear that in the context of current uncertainties and instabilities, the achievement of the Maghreb Union is not a simple option, but an absolute necessity.

More than ever it is necessary to overcome existing deadlocks in order to perceive the future through the prism of an ever more global coherence, an ever more structured unity and an ever more concerted approach. Morocco remains committed to the Maghreb project and its revival as quickly as possible, for the benefit of the stability and prosperity of the five countries of the region.

The Kingdom of Morocco has consistently advocated for a strong and active Maghreb Union that ranks among the other regional players. In this sense, the Maghreb project remains a “must” for a sustainable and united development of the peoples of the Maghreb and their neighborhood.

Exchanges, cooperation and dialogue are the imperatives of any partnership that is in tune with the challenges facing the region. It is a shared responsibility to establish the frameworks and contexts of this prosperous and efficient Maghreb union.

The Maghreb region is called upon to be a driving force both for itself and for the Euro-Mediterranean area. The southern Mediterranean countries must define themselves as true partners able to participate in the decision-making process and develop, in collaboration with European countries, the elements of a common project and language. It is obvious that the Maghreb has vocation to be more than a mere sub-region of a Mediterranean area struggling to find its political cohesion.

In other words, the future lies in the construction of an innovative Maghreb model, transcending political obstacles and fully in line with the new geopolitical and socio-economic realities. The future is that of a North African region that honors the shared will and aspirations of those, young and old, who make up today's Maghreb.

The Maghreb of tomorrow will be democratic or it will not be. Tomorrow's Maghreb will be based on new modes of governance, on respect for individual freedoms and Human Rights, and on genuine political representation ensuring the necessary proximity to the population and its concerns.

This is why today, beyond the political reluctance of some countries, we must work together, Moroccans, convinced Maghrebians, to promote new modes of operation through support for civil society, the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding through the development of human exchanges and the promotion of interconnections.

The key question is now, how do we transform our shared aspiration into a concrete regional dynamic, leading to economic integration, sustainable stability and security, as well as shared prosperity?

Political dialogue between our countries, as well as economic integration, free trade, interconnectivity of networks in the Maghreb would not only contribute to the stability of the Sahel-Saharan region, but also to the

north, along the Mediterranean, faced with deep challenges such as migration, terrorism, climate change...

Today, the Maghreb Union represents a strategic necessity and a political ambition for all the Maghreb countries. More over this integration process reflects an economic prerequisite that will allow the creation of a common market and a strong competitive pole of one hundred million people.

Overall, we countries of the Maghreb have to turn the pages of ideological positions and work together to overcome our differences and build-up a common future based on shared prosperity and values. The result will be outstanding not only for the Maghreb but for the entire region.



Is the US recognition of Morocco's Sovereignty over its Sahara an isolated move?

History always defeats those who distort it. The international recognitions of the Moroccaness of the Saharan provinces of Morocco reflects the exponential and irreversible progress of a dynamic of law, coherence and fairness which condemns the marketers of division into profound isolation and penumbra

Through His active leadership, His strategic vision and His proactive action, His Majesty the King, Mohammed VI has set the course for a Moroccan diplomacy resolutely turned towards a future that fully honours the past of 12 centuries of history and ancient identity.

Fairness, coherence, solidarity and cooperation are undivided features of the Kingdom's doctrine in Foreign Policy, established, at the highest level of the State, by His Majesty the King and implemented in all manners by the country's diplomatic representations.

Nowadays, thanks to this lucidity in the procedures and this farsightedness of visions, our diplomacy witnesses a great success in terms of the preservation and consolidation of the territorial integrity of the Kingdom with statistics showing that 163 countries, representing 85% of the UN member states, do not recognize the fictitious entity.

In this respect, the American proclamation recognizing the full and entire sovereignty of Morocco on its Saharan provinces does not only represent a historic achievement but equally a diplomatic synergy emphasizing the legitimacies of the protection and preservation of a united and federated Morocco at the international level.

The international community's bell resounds every time louder to echo the undeniable and incontestable realities of the full and entire sovereignty of Morocco on its Sahara. More than a formal, unambiguous and explicit recognition, the American proclamation comes, in its essence, to confirm the international tendency expressing, in a proactive manner, the unwavering support given to the pre-eminence of the Moroccan approach which has never deviated from the principles of the international legality.

The United States and Morocco enjoy an interlaced relation of friendship, trust and cooperation. The strategic character of this partnership between the two countries was the prelude of this eminent American decision, as for many years, the different US administrations have always shown a political positive empathy and support towards Morocco and its autonomy plan presented in 2007. The American proclamation is thus, the natural extension of this exceptional bond, linking Rabat to Washington since far back in time. In other words, there is nothing cyclical about this American decision, as it is the result of a dialogue and a partnership that has reached an unmatched degree of maturity.

The American proclamation comes to crown the strong and structural diplomatic convergence between the two countries within the framework of mutual understanding and strict respect of the international legality. It goes, in its implications, beyond the exclusively bilateral framework. The United States, as a great power, permanent member of the UN Security Council and Penholder of the UN Resolutions on the Moroccan Sahara, has a determinant role at the international level.

The fresh impetus and precise orientations of this historic turning point, will mark the actions of the diplomatic corridors converging within the Security Council, the only organ to deal exclusively with the regional conflict created around the Moroccan Sahara. The formal recognition by the United States of Morocco's Sovereignty over its Sahara is a source of extra satisfaction, particularly for the Moroccan diplomacy as well as for the entire nation.

Furthermore, a number of brotherly countries opened their Consulates General in the cities of Laayoune and Dakhla, recognizing therefore, in a clear manner, the Moroccaness of the Sahara.

In the same vein, the opening of an American Consulate General in Dakhla conjugates to political support the exceptional economic prospects for both countries, making of mutual beneficial cooperation the basis of their ambitions for prosperity.

The Autonomy Plan presented by Morocco constitutes the only valid and relevant option for reaching a final solution to this regional dispute. All the parameters defined by the Security Council are fully reflected in this plan, which constitutes the archetype of a realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based political solution.

At a recent high-level ministerial conference in support of Morocco's autonomy initiative, a plethora of foreign ministers and senior government officials representing more than 40 countries expressed strong support for the Moroccan proposal, explicitly emphasizing that it constitutes the one and only prospect for a final solution to this regional dispute.

The importance of the U.S. presidential proclamation is therefore not limited to the recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over its Sahara as it establishes, above all, a clear and firm perspective for a final settlement of the dispute: autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.

The semantics used by some parties does only reflect an outdated and obsolete ideology which is not only in contradiction with history and international law but also with the security requirements of a world where failed States definitely do have neither place nor any relevance.

Coherence is necessary to face the security threat as it is in the void that terrorism thrives and in this same void, Africa takes the risk of hampering its march towards emergence and prosperity.

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Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in South Africa