The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) underwent a moderate restructuring in the course of 2005, in the context of deteriorating compliance with agreements reached by Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Polisario). Meanwhile, the political stalemate over the future of Western Sahara continued. In October 2005, the Secretary-General appointed Peter Van Walsum as his Personal Envoy in a new effort to break the deadlock.

MINURSO was established in 1991 in accordance with “settlement proposals” that called for a cease-fire and the holding of a referendum on self-determination. In 1988, both the government of Morocco and the Polisario agreed to the plan in principle. In March 1997, following numerous failed efforts to implement the referendum proposal, the Secretary-General appointed former US secretary of state James Baker as his Personal Envoy. Baker was asked to work with the parties to the conflict to assess whether the settlement plan could be implemented in its existing form, or whether adjustments could be made to make it acceptable to both Morocco and Polisario.

Following a number of initiatives aimed at breaking the deadlock, Baker presented in January 2003 the “Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara.” The Plan provided for a five-year interim period during which governance responsibilities would be shared between Morocco and Polisario, followed by a choice of integration, autonomy, or independence. Both parties initially rejected the proposal, but Polisario accepted it in July 2003. Morocco rejected essential aspects of the plan, indicating that any solution would have to be within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty. Polisario, for its part, was unwilling to discuss implementation of the Baker Plan unless independence remained on the table. Seventeen years have passed since the settlement proposals, but MINURSO’s mandate to hold a referendum remains unfulfilled. Baker resigned in June 2004 after seven years as Personal Envoy and was replaced by Van Walsum in October 2005.

Despite the political stalemate during the year in review, MINURSO continued to monitor the cease-fire, foster overall security in the region, and help build confidence between the two parties. The mission worked with a number of other actors, including the International

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**UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)**

- Resolution passage and start date: 29 April 1991 (UNSC Res. 690)
- SRSG: Francesco Bastagli (Italy)
- Force commander: Brigadier-General Kurt Mosgaard (Denmark)
- Strength as of 31 October 2005:
  - Troops: 47
  - Military observers: 202
  - Civilian police: 6
  - International civilian staff: 131
  - Local civilian staff: 97
Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the exchange of prisoners of war, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the implementation of confidence-building measures, including the exchange of family visits between the territory and refugee camps. After being suspended for a period, the family visits resumed in November. Long-standing tensions over the status of prisoners of war (POWs) were alleviated on 18 August 2005, when the Polisario released all of the remaining 404 Moroccan POWs. MINURSO welcomed this development and urged continued cooperation between the parties and with the ICRC to account for those that are still missing in relation to the conflict.

At the same time, both parties continued to accuse each other of violations. Since May, violent demonstrations in the territory, coupled with allegations of human rights abuses, were indications that the situation could be deteriorating. In March 2005, MINURSO completed an assessment of the state of compliance with Military Agreement Number 1, and found a deterioration had been taking place progressively, including installation and upgrading of radar and surveillance capabilities as well as restrictions on the movement of both civilian and military UN personnel.

In the summer of 2005 the UN conducted a review of MINURSO’s military, administrative, and civilian components. Aimed at strengthening the mission’s capacity to monitor the cease-fire and military agreements, the review resulted in the launch of a restructuring exercise, which entailed the closure of sector headquarters to enable MINURSO to deploy more observers to the nine military observer team sites, and the establishment of a civilian–military joint mission analysis cell. In October, a new concept of operations reflecting these changes was approved. A further adjustment of the mission’s administrative and civilian component—a net reduction of thirty-nine posts while creating twenty-four UN volunteer positions—was recommended. If approved, it will be implemented in a phased manner through mid-2006.