

Western Sahara

Fifteen years after the creation of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the parties are no closer to a resolution of the dispute over self-determination in Western Sahara. With the mission's mandate due to expire in October 2006, the Secretary-General hinted at the possibility of the UN assuming a different role in the peace process. But on 31 October the Security Council (2006) renewed MINURSO's mandate—unchanged—until 30 April 2007.

After twenty-five years of war, MINURSO was established in 1991 on the basis of an agreement between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente Polisario) that called for a referendum on Western Sahara's future. After years of stalled progress, in 2003 the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, former

US secretary of state James Baker, presented the "Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara," a scheme for governance sharing that also allowed for the possibility of a referendum on independence. Frente Polisario accepted the plan in July 2003. However, the government of Morocco later stated it would not agree to any arrangement that could lead to an independent Western Sahara. Baker's "peace plan" has not been mentioned in any Security Council resolutions since, nor has the government of Morocco come under much pressure to alter its approach.

The security situation throughout 2006 remained relatively calm. In November 2005 the mission established a joint operations center and a joint mission analysis cell. These innovations improved data collection and information management capabilities, and enabled expanded cease-fire monitoring activities with an increased ground presence—while not increasing the number of troops. The restructuring, coupled with Frente Polisario's adoption of more permissive policies toward the mission's observation work, resulted in 4,852 ground patrols and 266 air patrols between March and October 2006. During that period, there were 50 percent fewer cease-fire violations. Despite the lack of overt violence, reports of human rights abuses have increased.

MINURSO continued to work with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on refugee repatriation throughout 2006. Following an eleven-month hiatus, the Moroccan government reinstated a program of family visits between the disputed territory and the refugee camps in the Tindouf area in November 2005. With logistical and security

UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)

• Authorization and start date	29 April 1991 (UNSC Res. 690)
• SRSG	To be appointed
• Force commander	Major-General Kurt Mosgaard (Denmark)
• Budget	\$45.9 million (1 July 2006–30 June 2007)
• Strength as of 30 September 2006	Troops: 28 Military observers: 190 Police: 4 International civilian staff: 103 Local civilian staff: 122 UN volunteers: 14

For detailed mission information see p. 206.

assistance from MINURSO, the UNHCR has facilitated visits with 610 persons since November 2005, and intends to expand operations to provide this program to more of the 17,000 candidates.

There were signs that some international actors were losing patience with the prolonged political stalemate over Western Sahara. Moreover, the current situation is fueling unrest among younger generations of Saharawis, who

are eager to gain independence. In January 2006, Personal Envoy Peter van Walsum stated that the only recourse would be direct negotiations between the parties, with the UN facilitating the talks. The Secretary-General recommended this in his October report, but the Security Council did not act on it, instead extending MINURSO's mandate through April 2007.