

## Western Sahara

After almost a decade of political deadlock, the situation in Western Sahara witnessed modest progress during 2007. In the second half of the year, the parties to the conflict entered Security Council–mandated negotiations toward a resolution of the dispute over self-determination. Meanwhile, the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) continued to maintain general stability on the ground and to provide conditions favorable for negotiations. While this year’s negotiations are only the beginning of what will most likely be a long process, the parties have overcome a considerable impasse, which speaks to both the enduring efforts of MINURSO and the necessity of continued international engagement.

MINURSO was established after two years of war in 1991 on the basis of an agreement between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de

Oro (POLISARIO) calling 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. POLISARIO accepted the plan in July 2003; however, the government of Morocco stated it would not agree to any arrangement that could lead to an independent Western Sahara. The parties to the conflict remained at this impasse until 2007, without any mention by the Security Council of Baker’s peace plan or any pressure placed on the government of Morocco to alter its approach.

Recognizing the political deadlock between POLISARIO and Morocco, in January 2006 the Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy, Peter van Walsum, stated that the only recourse was through direct negotiations between the parties, facilitated by the UN. Then–Secretary-General Kofi Annan reiterated this recommendation in his October 2006 report to the Security Council, but no movement was made. Only following another recommendation for talks by new Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in his April 2007 report on Western Sahara did the Security Council act, issuing Resolution 1754 and calling on the parties to enter into negotiations. Since then, the parties have convened on two occasions—June and August 2007—in the presence of the Personal Envoy and Mauritania and Algeria.

Western Sahara was generally calm throughout 2007. MINURSO conducted 4,246 ground patrols and 289 air patrols between October 2006 and April 2007, far surpassing the amount

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

• Authorization and Start Date	29 April 1991 (UNSC Res. 690)
• SRSG and Head of Mission	Julian Harston (United Kingdom)
• Force Commander	Major-General Zhao Jingmin (China)
• Budget	\$47.6 million (1 July 2007–30 June 2008)
• Strength as of 31 October 2007	Troops: 29 Military Observers: 185 Police: 6 International Civilian Staff: 95 Local Civilian Staff: 145 UN Volunteers: 24

*For detailed mission information see p. 204.*

of patrols conducted in the previous year during the same period. The increase in patrols is attributed to the development of a joint operation center and a joint mission analysis cell in late 2005. These innovations allowed the mission to improve operational efficiency, augmenting its ability to monitor the cease-fire without additional personnel. Despite these increases, both POLISARIO and Morocco maintained stringent restrictions on MINURSO, especially access to military positions and within units. As a consequence, the mission is only partially

able to achieve its mandated tasks. Despite a lack of violence in the region during the year, there were regular reports of human rights abuses.

While the parties remain at odds on a variety of issues, in particular the definition of self-determination, both agree that maintaining the status quo is unacceptable. Negotiations are planned to begin in January 2008, thereby emphasizing the need for the continued engagement of MINURSO and the international community.