

## Western Sahara

The stalemated dispute over Western Sahara continued in 2012 between the government of Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (POLISARIO) independence movement, as no progress was achieved on the fundamental points of contention. POLISARIO operates in exile from the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria and has proclaimed an independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in Western Sahara, while Morocco controls the majority of the territory and advocates incorporating an autonomous Western Sahara under its sovereignty.

The UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was founded in 1991 with a mandate centered on registering voters and conducting a self-determination referendum originally scheduled for 1992. Due to fundamental disputes between the parties, no progress has been made toward its execution in over a decade. While the two sides appear no closer to an agreement on the future of Western Sahara, MINURSO focuses on other activities, such as the monitoring of the cease-fire and the provision of support to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-led confidence building measures. MINURSO is the only UN peacekeeping mission established since 1978 without a human rights role in its mandate, but the 2012 Security Council mandate renewal resolution was the first to explicitly call on the parties to respect human rights. In June 2012 Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber was appointed as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara.

In addition to MINURSO, the Personal Envoy to the Secretary-General for Western Sahara and an African Union liaison office deal with aspects of the dispute within their respective mandates.

MINURSO monitors the cease-fire, tracks personnel movement around the

sand berm separating Moroccan- and POLISARIO-controlled territory, receives complaints from both sides, reports cease-fire violations, and acts as the means of communication between Moroccan and POLISARIO armed forces. During the 2011–2012 reporting period, MINURSO performed 8,335 ground patrols and 530 aerial patrols, recording twenty-five violations by Moroccan forces and seven by POLISARIO forces.<sup>1</sup>

The territory of Western Sahara is one of the most heavily mined areas in the world.<sup>2</sup> MINURSO continues to support removal of landmines and unexploded

ordnance in POLISARIO-controlled territory. In 2012, MINURSO received a new de-mining system that enhanced the speed of these activities.

MINURSO supports UNHCR assistance programs for displaced and separated Sahrawi families, temporarily reuniting families split between Algeria and Western Sahara. UNHCR recently chartered a larger aircraft for this purpose, greatly enhancing the program's capacity.

Both Morocco and POLISARIO maintain restrictions on MINURSO operations, including limitations on its access

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

• Authorization Date	29 April 1991 (UNSC Res. 690)
• Start Date	6 September 1991
• SRS	Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber (Germany)
• Force Commander	Major-General Abdul Hafiz (Bangladesh)
• Budget	\$61.3 million (1 July 2012–30 June 2013)
• Strength as of 31 October 2012	Troops: 27 Military Observers: 197 Police: 6 International Civilian Staff: 95 National Civilian Staff: 165 UN Volunteers: 15

*For detailed mission information see p. 252*

### Personal Envoy for Western Sahara

• Authorization Date	19 March 1997 (UNSC Pres. Statement S/PRST/1997/16)
• PESG	Christopher Ross (United States)
• Budget	\$0.7 million (1 January 2012–31 December 2012)
• Strength as of 31 October 2012	International Civilian Staff: 2

*For detailed mission information see p. 280*

## Western Sahara (continued)

to military positions and units. This has been detrimental to the mission's ability to achieve its mandated tasks and in some instances—such as the display of Moroccan license plates on its vehicles or the presence of Moroccan flags around its compound—have negatively affected perceptions of its neutrality. MINURSO believes that its communication with New York may have been monitored by Morocco on at least one occasion.

Christopher Ross has served as the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara since 2009. He conducts meetings between the parties, but neither side has made any substantive concessions and neither, in Ross's view, has entered "into a genuine negotiating process."<sup>3</sup> The parties still disagree on the very purpose of negotiations. In May 2012, Morocco withdrew confidence in Ross, citing a perceived

### AU Liaison Office in Western Sahara

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|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Authorization Date | August 1994                         |
| • Head of Office     | Ambassador Yilma Tadesse (Ethiopia) |

anti-Morocco bias and blaming him for the lack of progress toward a resolution. The Secretary-General rejected these demands and maintained Ross at his post.

The AU Liaison Office in Western Sahara holds weekly meetings with representatives of MINURSO, Morocco, and POLISARIO, and provides humanitarian assistance for refugees in Algeria. The AU fully recognizes the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, limiting its role as a mediator in the conflict.

In April 2012 the UN Secretary-General stated that the environment surrounding the conflict is "changing on many levels" and could eventually alter the positions of the two parties.<sup>4</sup> While MINURSO serves a valuable role in monitoring the cease-fire and providing independent information on conditions on the ground, its ultimate goal of conducting a referendum on the future of the territory does not seem likely in the near future.

*Notes:* 1. Reporting period covers 16 March 2011 to 15 March 2012. See United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara*, UN Doc. S/2102/197, 5 April 2012.

2. African Press Organization, "MINURSO Marked the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action," 10 April 2012.

3. United Nations, Department of Political Affairs, "Interview with Christopher Ross," February 2012, [http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/newsletter/news0212\\_ross](http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/newsletter/news0212_ross).

4. United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2102/197.