

Motion

50 years of resistance, occupation and human rights violations in Western Sahara

signed by: National Youth Council of Catalonia (CNJC), Spanish Youth Council (CJE)

co-signed by: National Youth Council of Malta (KNZ), National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS), Portuguese National Youth Council (CNJ)

As the 50th anniversary of the Sahara Issue approaches, UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, emphasized in his 2024 report that “this challenging context continues to make it more urgent than ever to reach a political solution to the question of Western Sahara.” A fair, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution can only be achieved on the basis of international law; otherwise, the solution risks being neither fair nor enduring.

Despite the significant evolution of international law over the past decades in relation to the Sahara issue, recent developments have not accounted for these advancements. This includes a decision by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) recognising the Polisario Front as the legitimate national liberation movement representing the Sahrawi people and a briefing by the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, during a closed UN Security Council meeting.

The fight for self-determination is an ageing conflict. Older generations are the ones still maintaining the cause and it is relevant to see how efforts can be renewed to elevate social demands, raise awareness and involve the younger generations - in Western Sahara and the rest of the world - in the resolution of the conflict. This process of ageing, nonetheless, does not impede this conflict from being one of the most active and impactful ones, affecting hugely European geopolitics.

2025 marks 50 years of the illegal Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. In this half a century, the general situation of the territory and the Saharawi people has only worsened, with the voice of justice being weakened in favour of an enemy that continues to strengthen its belligerent cause. This situation of oppression has been exacerbated by the events of the last five years:

- The breaking of the ceasefire signed in 1991 and the resumption of the armed conflict as of 2020.
- Completion of the dividing wall built by Morocco with anti-personnel mines to control the occupied territory in 2020.
- Declaration by the President of the United States of the Moroccan ownership of Western Sahara in 2020.

- Declaration by the President of Spain of the acceptance of the Moroccan government's proposal for Western Sahara in 2022.
- The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)'s blockage to the EU's inclusion of Western Sahara in its trade and fishery agreements with Morocco in October 2024.
- The financing of trips for influencers, financed by the Moroccan National Tourism Office (ONTM), as part of a strategy to position Dakhla as an attractive tourist destination and to dissociate it from the colonial conflict in Western Sahara.
- The rise of airlines such as Ryanair, Royal Air Maroc (RAM), Binter Canarias and Transavia, operating in Dakhla and other occupied territories.
- According to the Sahara Press Service, as of 2025, more than 307 foreign observers, journalists, legal professionals, or human rights activists have been denied access or expelled by Morocco from occupied Western Sahara since 2014.

Historical context

Western Sahara became a Spanish colony in 1958. After decades of protests against the Spanish occupation, the Sahrawi people finally achieved international recognition of their demands and claimed their right to self-determination. In 1975, Morocco, Mauritania and Spain signed the “Tripartite Agreement” according to which Spain transferred the administration of Western Sahara to the other two countries. The “Green March” in 1975 meant the invasion of Western Sahara by Morocco, an occupation that still continues today. Part of the Western Sahara population remained in the occupied territories, and others had to abandon their country and subsist in refugee camps in the Algerian desert. Since then, multiple generations of young people have been born and raised in the desert and have never been to their home country. The year 2020 marked 45 years of the conflict. When Sahrawi people travel abroad, their nationality is marked as “stateless” by governments and public administrations.

The peace plan in Western Sahara was approved by resolutions 658¹ and 690² of the Security Council of the United Nations which also prompted the creation of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in order to organise a free and fair referendum without any administrative or military pressure.

Since then, there have been several relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) concerning the Western Saharan situation. Through the unanimous adoption of UNSCR resolution 1495³ in 2003, the UN Security Council expressed its continued strong support for the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, for their Peace Plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara as an “optimum political solution” on the basis of agreement between the two parties. The last resolution was adopted in October 2020, calling for “a realistic, practicable and enduring political solution to the question of Western

Sahara based on compromise and the importance of aligning the strategic focus of MINURSO and orienting the resources of the United Nations to this end”.⁴

The European Parliament has adopted several resolutions calling on EU Member States to work for the protection of the Sahrawi population, and for the respect for their fundamental rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of movement. The European Parliament has also expressed its support for a just and lasting solution to the conflict in Western Sahara, based on the rule of law and international law. However, after decades of negotiations and resolutions, the Sahrawi people have not been able to exert their rights of self-determination in a fair and free referendum. The violation of the human rights of the people in a Western Sahara occupied by Morocco is also known and denounced by public opinion, international mass media and NGOs.

The importance of YFJ and Member Organisations’ role in the resolution of the conflict

The European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations, conscious of the important role that young people should play with institutions and national and international organisations in defence of human rights, have always been sensitive to any violation of young peoples’ rights in Europe and in other parts of the world. Mandated by its Member Organisations, the European Youth Forum works for the development of a better understanding and solidarity between young people and for the protection of human rights throughout the world.

Moreover, the European Youth Goal #4 calls for information and constructive dialogue. The Sustainable Development Goal #16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security⁵ reflects our role and responsibilities to build peace and preserve human rights.

1 United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/658 (1990), available from <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/658>

2 United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/690 (2015), available from <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/690>

3 United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/1495 (2003), available from <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1495>

4 United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2548 (2020), available from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3889420?ln=es&v=pdf>

5 United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2250 (2015), available from [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2250(2015))

The Western Sahara conflict needs to be resolved, and therefore it needs our renewed efforts of support. The European Youth Forum (YFJ) has voiced its concerns about the Western Sahara conflict several times, as it remains one of the last cases of decolonisation yet to be resolved, and the last one in Africa. Different resolutions have previously been adopted by YFJ in 1998, 2005, 2011 and 2021⁶.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum reaffirms:

- Its solidarity with the Sahrawi people that have decided to protest in a non-violent way to condemn the abandonment they suffer from the International Community, the UN, and the MINURSO.
- Its support for the rights of the Sahrawi people to self-determination and self-control over the natural resources in the area, as stated by the General Assembly of the United Nations.
- The importance of its member organisations and other youth organisations joining the national and international solidarity movement with the Sahrawi People, denouncing the systematic human-rights violations that Sahrawi People suffer from the Kingdom of Morocco and supporting their struggle for protecting their rights.

And thus, calls for:

1. Member Organisations to:

- strengthen ties with Sahrawi youth organisations and jointly promote awareness-raising campaigns,
- denounce the systematic human-rights violations that Sahrawi People suffer from the Kingdom of Morocco and support their struggle for protecting their rights and
- collaborate on international initiatives calling for a just and lasting solution to the Western Sahara conflict.

2. Support for the establishment of a working group to be run by CNJC and CJE, together with

Sahrawi youth organisations such as UJSARIO, to advance Sahrawi youth participation in the peacebuilding process, to advocate for human rights to be guaranteed in Western Sahara and to cooperate and share good practices with Member Organisations.

3. European youth organisations to develop, enhance and strengthen bonds of friendship and cooperation with Saharawi youth organisations.
4. An immediate ceasefire, and for the Kingdom of Morocco to stop violating human rights in occupied Western Sahara by fulfilling the peace agreement reached in 1991 between the two parties.
5. A search for a just solution to the conflict through the holding of a fair and free referendum in accordance with the UN resolutions and in particular the Security Council resolution 1495.
6. The respect of international law and human rights in the occupied territories of Western Sahara, in particular the right to freedom of expression, movement and association.
7. The Kingdom of Spain to intervene in the conflict, exercising its role responsibly and fulfilling its obligations as an administering power of Western Sahara, as stated in international law.
8. An explanation from the Spanish government, as well as from other European governments, on the drastic turnaround on the Sahara issue by abandoning its responsibility as administrator of the last territory pending decolonization in Africa, legitimising Moroccan occupation.
9. Increased international aid and closer coordination of this aid with UNHCR to ensure sufficient access to food, healthcare, and education in the refugee camps.
10. The empowerment of the MINURSO mission so that it ceases to be the only UN peacekeeping mission without tasks to monitor the respect of human rights.

⁶ Available from <https://www.youthforum.org/policy-library>

11. European institutions to take responsibility and advocate in the United Nations for the urgent appointment of a representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to ensure the immediate holding of a referendum on self-determination under the auspices of the United Nations.
12. All European stakeholders to invest in vocational training, scholarships, and youth-leadership programs for Sahrawi youth, both in the diaspora and in refugee camps, recognizing the pivotal role of the younger generation in conflict resolution.
13. For the expansion of temporary reception and cultural exchange programs for Sahrawi youth.
14. The creation of an interest group or network in the European Parliament which discusses how to strengthen collaboration with Saharawi youth organisations and civil society.
15. Transparency from European companies involved in the exploitation of Saharawi natural resources without their consent so that consumers can act accordingly.



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