

**Statement on Western Sahara
to the Special Political and Decolonization
Committee**



**by
the Netherlands Foundation for Self-determination in Western Sahara**

New York, October 2004

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

The Netherlands Foundation for Self-determination in Western Sahara is campaigning for the undeniable right of the people of Western Sahara to choose its own political future. Self-determination is a basic right for every people and withholding this right is a grave violation of international law. Our foundation wishes to express its deepest concern about the territorial and economical integrity of Western Sahara. Not only does the Kingdom of Morocco deny the Sahrawi people its right of self-determination, the occupier also exploits the natural resources of Western Sahara without taking the interests of the Sahrawi people, and its sole legal representative, the Polisario Front, at heart.

For almost thirty years now, the Kingdom of Morocco is occupying a large part of Western Sahara. From 1991 on, a cease fire is in place between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario Front. While the Polisario Front actively supports the UN-led peace process and has accepted the second peace plan presented by the former Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Western Sahara, Mr. James Baker, the Moroccan occupier refuses to accept the undeniable right of self-determination of the Sahrawi people and even openly rejects it. Furthermore, the Kingdom of Morocco uses the acquired time due to the cease fire to strengthen its grip on Western Sahara. This is a serious offence on behalf of the occupier and clearly violates the spirit of the UN-sponsored peace process.

Mr. Chairman,

The mineral wealth of Western Sahara is being seized by the Kingdom of Morocco for its own benefit, while the rightful owner – the Sahrawi people as a whole - does not profit in any way. The phosphate deposits in the mines at Bou Craa are being extracted by the occupier in such a way that depletion threatens in the near future. The occupier also takes advantage of the rich fishing grounds within the territorial waters of Western Sahara. The Kingdom of Morocco grants fishing licenses to states and companies to extract large quantities of fish in Western Sahara's territorial waters. The Dutch-based 'Pelagic Freezer-trawler Association' (PFA), which represents eight European fishing companies from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France and Germany, is one of these licensees. The Kingdom of Morocco is committing a grave international offence by distributing fishing licenses for a territory over which it has no jurisdiction. And again, the occupier does not take durability of these natural riches into consideration. This threatens the continuation of a healthy fishing industry for future Sahrawi generations.

The latest chapter in the plundering of Western Sahara's natural resources is Morocco's search for oil in its territorial waters. In spite of the special status of the territory, the Dutch company FUGRO NV, amongst other companies, agreed to carry out a seismic survey on behalf of the Oklahoma-based company Kerr-McGee, which had acquired – together with the French company Total-Fina-Elf – a license from the Kingdom of Morocco in October 2001. A survey vessel of a British subsidiary of FUGRO NV, Svitzer, carried out the actual survey in the Sahrawi territorial waters. Despite pressure of the International Coalition for the Protection of Natural Resources of Western Sahara, in which our foundation participates, FUGRO NV refused to stop its activities within Western Sahara's territorial waters and completed the survey in the end of June 2004. In addition, Kerr-McGee has been given the opportunity to continue its explorations after the current license expires.

Our foundation has to conclude that both the Pelagic Freezer-trawler Association and FUGRO NV are accomplices to the illegal occupation of Western Sahara by the Kingdom of Morocco. The activities of both companies in the occupied territory of Western Sahara are an encouragement to the Kingdom of Morocco to continue its illegal occupation of Western Sahara because of the financial stimuli such activities generate. Any involvement of Moroccan and foreign companies in the exploitation or future exploitation of the natural resources of the territory must not only be condemned but this also needs to be prevented. This is even more urgent, as the government of Morocco has recently declared its intention to start the exploitation of oil at short notice.

Mr. Chairman,

The Moroccan policy of economical annexation of Western Sahara constitutes a clear violation of the Sahrawi right of self-determination. In doing so, the occupier not only rejects but mortgages the latest peace plan unanimously adopted by the Security Council. The Kingdom of Morocco is trying to create a *fait accompli* by plundering Western Sahara's natural riches. In this way, the occupier confirms its unwillingness to end the illegal occupation of the country and expresses its opposition to the Sahrawi people exercising its right of self-determination.

The unique representative of the Sahrawi people, the Polisario Front, is the one to be consulted on any exploitation and future exploitation of the natural wealth of Western Sahara. It should decide how and under which circumstances exploitation of the country's natural riches is allowed. The occupational forces are clearly mortgaging the future of Western Sahara, which is a flagrant violation of the right of self-determination. It cannot be allowed that the Kingdom of Morocco is jeopardizing the future of an entire people.

If patience is a virtue, the Sahrawi people are very virtuous indeed. For more than thirty years, they have been waiting for their rights to be respected and for the referendum for self-determination to be organized. The Sahrawi people have waited long enough. This 'waiting game', in which the Moroccan occupier is trying everything to stall for time and plundering the territory's natural wealth, must be stopped. It is imperative that the United Nations take urgent action to ensure that a fair and free referendum for self-determination can be carried out. In the meantime, the United Nations have the legal and moral obligation to take the necessary measures to protect Western Sahara's natural resources.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman