



UN Envoy calls for compromise and realism in the Sahara negotiations; Polisario calls for a return to war

Washington, DC (April 23, 2008) - This week, in a report and statement to the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara, Peter Van Walsum, made a brave call for compromise and realism to move towards more substantive negotiations to peacefully resolve the Western Sahara conflict.

"My conclusion that an independent Western Sahara is not an attainable goal is relevant today because it lies at the root of the current negotiation process," declared Van Walsum, who was appointed as the Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara in 2005 and has mediated four rounds of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front. "What matters is how political reality and international legality interact to enable us to take the best decisions in real life."

Specifically, Van Walsum recommended that the Security Council urge the parties to negotiate "without preconditions on the temporary assumption that there will not be a referendum with independence as an option." This recommendation would open the door for a truly realistic "compromise political solution" as called for in numerous UN Security Council resolutions, and by many in the international community, including the United States, France and Morocco.

Immediately following Van Walsum's recommendation to the Security Council, self-proclaimed Polisario leader, Mohammed Abdelaziz, publicly declared that the Polisario "will never give up independence and will return to armed conflict if necessary." Persistent incendiary threats by high-ranking Polisario officials, in an attempt to intimidate the international community, have heightened the tensions in a region already susceptible to threats of terrorism. This has deeply frustrated the efforts of the Personal Envoy to facilitate direct negotiations between the parties without preconditions.

Van Walsum also underscored that a compromise solution is imperative to relieve the suffering of the tens of thousands of Sahrawi refugees currently held by the Polisario Front in Tindouf, southern Algeria.

"The main reason why I find the status quo intolerable is that it is too readily accepted [. . .] by deeply involved supporters of the Frente Polisario, who do not live in the camps themselves but are convinced that those who do would rather stay there indefinitely than settle for any negotiated solution that falls short of full independence," said Van Walsum in his report.

The Security Council is expected to issue a resolution based on the recommendations of the UN Secretary General and his Personal Envoy before April 30th.

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The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials and an interested public in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East.