

Facts about Western Sahara

Saharawi
April 2005

Area: 266,000 sq km (a good UK), from which 180,000 (68%) is occupied by Morocco and 86,000 (32%) is controlled by SADR, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. In the eighties Morocco divided the territory with a 1,800 km wall or berm made of sand, stone, landmines and barbed wire. The wall is watched over by radars, artillery, air force

and protected by 160,000 armed soldiers. Additional 920 km walls were built inside the occupied area.

Population: In the occupied area both total population numbers and the size of the Saharawi population is unclear. Moroccan sources say totally about 300,000. There are probably more Moroccans than



Saharawis. In the SADR-area a few nomads. 170,000 Saharawis are living in the camps of Tindouf region in Algeria.

History: Original population nomad tribes from Yemen, Berbers and Africans. Spanish colony along the coast from 1884. Franco-Spanish agreements decided the borders 1912. French and Spanish troops tried to defeat the Saharawis. The colony was incorporated in Spain 1958. The UN applies for decolonization 1965. The liberation movement Polisario Front was established 1973 to take up the armed struggle. Spain withdrew 1975 after secret agreement with Morocco and Mauritania to share the territory opposing international law and King Hassan organized "the green march" – 350,000 poor Moroccans crossing the border. A minority of them became well-supported settlers. A majority of the Saharawis escaped to the Tindouf area in Algeria. Polisario had to fight against two enemies and Mauritania gave up in 1979. UN-mediated ceasefire 1991 and a promised referendum still not held. From that time UN has had a mission, MINURSO, with now 240 observers in the territories. A new UN-plan proposed by James Baker was accepted by the Security Council and Polisario 2003. This plan, based upon the right of self-determination, offers the Saharawis four years autonomy followed by a referendum. Till now Morocco has refused. The Saharawis in the occupied territory are living under strenuous oppression by the Moroccans.

Government type: Republic (SADR) based in the camps and the non-occupied area. Recognised by 77 states, recently South Africa. Each of the four camps (wilayas) is divided into dairas and districts with a developed democratic system of self-government. Western Sahara is the last colony of Africa, but looked upon by Morocco as its "Southern provinces".

Head of the state: President Mohamed Abdelaziz, elected by the congress of the liberation movement Polisario Front (Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro).

Capital: El-Aaiún/La `Youn in the occupied area (about 200,000 inhabitants). The Government of SADR is situated in Bir Lehlou and in the camps.

International organizations: SADR is a full member of the African Union, AU.

Religions: Muslim (Sunni)

Languages: Hassaniya Arabic and some Spanish.

Education: Compulsory primary school and total literacy in the camps. University training for Saharawis in Algeria, Spain, Libya and Cuba. Moroccan schooling in the occupied area.

Media: There are one national and four regional radio broadcast stations and a fortnightly newspa-

per in the camps. They are developing television broadcasting as well. In the occupied area Moroccan media dominates.

Health care: In the camps there are one central hospital, one regional hospital in every wilaya and health centres in the dairas. Morocco is erecting EU-supported health care in the occupied area.

Nature: Mostly low, flat desert with areas of rocky or sandy surfaces rising to small mountains in south and northeast. Animals few and vegetation sparse. 0.02% is arable land.

Climate: Hot, dry desert. Rain is rare. Cold nights and harsh winds in the winter.

Natural resources: Phosphates, iron ore, sand and probably oil/gas, uranium, titanium. Extensive fishing along the vast Atlantic coastline. Sparse subterranean water.

Economy: Pastoral nomadism. The territories and the camps lack sufficient rainfall for sustainable agricultural production and most of the food for the urban population must be imported or delivered by international support from UN and EU. Fishing, mining, trade and other economic activities in the occupied territory are controlled by the Moroccan authorities.

Roads & rail: One paved road along the coast. No railways.

Ports: 3.

Airports: 3 paved.

Flag: Black-white-green with a red triangle and Muslim half-moon and star.



Sources: UN, CIA-The world factbook 2004, The Statesman Yearbook 2005, Toby Shelley: Endgame in the Western Sahara, the Swedish National Encyclopedia, the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Arso www.arso.org

Publisher: The Swedish Western Sahara Committee c/o Jan Strömdahl, Mälarvarvsbacken 5, 117 33 Stockholm, Sweden, mobile +4670 438 88 41, jan.stromdahl@politik.sll.se