



**Janelle Saffin MP**  
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR PAGE



# **MEDIA RELEASE**

## Federal Parliament shows solidarity for Western Sahara

FEDERAL Labor Member for Page Janelle Saffin has been elected Chair of the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Western Sahara Group, relaunched when Saharawi human rights activist Aicha Dahane visited Canberra last week as part of her national speaking tour.

In welcoming bipartisan support from Labor, the Liberal-Nationals Coalition, the Australian Greens and Independents, Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Group, South Australian Liberal Senator Simon Birmingham, praised Ms Saffin for taking the lead on the issue of Western Sahara's struggle for self-determination.

The group's new secretary is Labor Member for Fremantle Melissa Parke.

Ms Saffin said it was an honour to host Ms Dahane, who lives in political exile in the United Kingdom and who is in Australia to raise awareness about Morocco's 36-year-old occupation of Western Sahara territory and the illegal exploitation of its natural resources.

"It is absolutely appalling that in this day and age, Western Sahara remains as Africa's last colony, and that thousands of Saharawi are forced to live in the occupied territories under continual intimidation and harassment by the Moroccan regime, while 165,000 lives in refugee camps in hostile conditions," Ms Saffin said.

"Saharawi protests for democracy last year marked the start of the wider political uprising in North Africa, ahead of Tunisia, Egypt and Lybia.

"The United Nations since 1991 has agreed to a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara, but Morocco has done everything in its power to block the decolonisation process."

The Parliamentary Group calls on the UN to do its utmost to organise a free and fair referendum of self-determination in Western Sahara to enable its people to exercise their inalienable right of self-determination as soon as possible.

The Group urges the UN to extend the mandate of its mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to include human rights monitoring as this is an essential part of the Confidence Building Measures process.

Western Sahara's Sydney-based representative in Australia, Mr Kamal Fadel, welcomed the renewed show of solidarity by the Parliamentary Group, ambassadors from several African and South American nations, and the Australian Western Sahara Association (AWSA).

"Ours is a just cause and even though Western Sahara may seem a long way away from Australia, there are Australian companies importing phosphates plundered illegally in Western Sahara," Mr Fadel said.

“We have been calling on these companies to reconsider these immoral and unethical practices.

“Australia can do a lot on this issue because the situation in Western Sahara is similar to that which existed in East Timor under Indonesian occupation. Australia stands up for a fair go – basic human rights, peace and stability. A referendum on self-determination could achieve these noble goals.”

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