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Your Excellency

France's support of Morocco's Autonomy proposal for Western Sahara

The Australia Western Sahara Association (AWSA) writes to express its deep concern and disappointment about France's reported decision to recognise Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.

A statement about France's changed position on Western Sahara was issued on 25 July 2004 by Algeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad. Shortly afterwards AWSA learnt that President Emmanuel Macron had written to King Mohammed VI of Morocco, affirming France's support for Morocco's autonomy plan and stating that "the present and future of Western Sahara are part of Moroccan sovereignty."

Western Sahara is a non-self-governing territory with its de-colonisation yet to be completed through a process of self-determination. Under international law, Western Sahara is not part of Morocco and Morocco's military occupation is illegal. Not only is France's recognising of 'sovereignty' by Morocco contrary to international law, it goes against many resolutions of the United Nations, which seek a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Western Sahara based on self-determination. Importantly, it contradicts decisions of the Security Council, of which France is a permanent member. For these

reasons, AWSA condemns the new position communicated by the French president, which does not encourage the outcome sought by the majority of nations in the UN.

AWSA has noted France's long-standing support of Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara. This reflects a lack of care about the repression and human rights abuses suffered by the indigenous Saharawi, particularly by those who seek to exercise their right to self-determination and independence. France's decision to abandon the UN's efforts to complete the decolonisation process demonstrates unfounded hostility towards the Saharawi and is extremely disappointing on this count.

This hostility has been clear in previous years with France consistently voting in the Security Council against MINURSO having a human rights monitoring role in the occupied territory. AWSA has been asking how a country that proudly proclaims 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' could oppose this benign development. Now we ask why France wants to close-down the hope of self-determination and freedom from occupation for the indigenous people of Western Sahara.

As a founding member of the United Nations, France should take its commitment to human rights seriously and support that body's continuing efforts to find a just and peaceful outcome for the people of Western Sahara. As a country that champions freedom and democracy, France should stand firmly behind the Sahrawi's people's right to decide their own destiny. France's reported support for Morocco's autonomy plan goes against both the founding principles of the UN and of its own republic.

AWSA would appreciate your response to our concerns and looks forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Osborne

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