

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	104
Land:	Marokko
Kilde:	Minority Rights Group International
Titel:	State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010 – Western Sahara.
Udgivet:	1. juli 2010
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	14. april 2011

Title State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010 - Western Sahara
Publisher [Minority Rights Group International](#)
Country [Western Sahara Territory](#) | [Morocco](#)
Publication Date 1 July 2010
Cite as Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010 - Western Sahara*, 1 July 2010, available at:
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c3330ff37.html> [accessed 6 April 2011]

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010 - Western Sahara

The struggle for self-determination of Western Sahara continued in 2009 despite Morocco's hardening position. In 2007, the UN attempt to break the deadlock over Western Sahara brought Polisario and Moroccan authorities together for the first time in ten years. But two years on, this spirit of open dialogue seems to have dissipated. UN Security Council Resolution 1754 in April 2007 called for the two parties to hold unconditional talks to achieve 'a mutually acceptable political solution providing for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara'. However, Security Council Resolution 1871 of April 2009 effectively downgraded the previous resolution and urged the parties 'to hold small, informal talks in preparation for a fifth round of negotiations'.

The apathy of the international community towards Western Saharan demands appears unchanged, particularly after the European Union (EU), in May 2009, launched fresh negotiations with Morocco, reviving agreements which had previously been cancelled. These focused on the fisheries sector; while Moroccan waters are relatively rich in fishery resources, the most abundant fisheries are found off the coast of Western Sahara. The Representative for Europe of Western Sahara's Polisario exiled government claimed in a letter in to the EU Commissioner on Fisheries and Maritime Affairs in May 2009 that, 'Morocco's key tactic to illegally maintain its occupation of Western Sahara is to include the Western Sahara waters within its fishing areas under Moroccan control in order to involve European interests in its military illegal occupation and the permanent violation of international law.'

A European-wide coalition of pro-Sahrawi activists, united in the 'Fish elsewhere campaign' under the leadership of AI, has underlined that the EU-Morocco fisheries deal in its current form is contrary to international law and the UN peace process.

In order to clamp down on civil society demands for self-determination, Morocco has had recourse to its nationality law. Aminatou Haidar, a vocal human rights defender was in 2009 refused the right of entry into Western Sahara by Moroccan authorities. Following a hunger strike of 34 days, she was allowed to return.

Topics: Ethnic minorities, Minorities, Right to self-determination, Peace talks, Saharawis,

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