

**To: All Media
For Immediate Release**

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South Africa Reiterates its Position on the Recognised Right to Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara

An article that was published online in '*mapnews.ma*', which translated into English is the '*Moroccan Press Agency*', has put out a misleading report on South Africa's and indeed the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) recent debate on the occupied territory in the Western Sahara.

The article in the online French language platform has since been picked up by the local media. This statement serves to correct the attempt to again, caricature South Africa's principled stance on anti-occupation and decolonisation issues. Also, and without disclosing the outcomes of a closed session of the UNSC, the statement will correct the attempt to portray South Africa's principled positions on these matters as being out of step with the majority of nations in the world. South Africa's stance resonates with most countries who have experienced colonialism and occupation. That being said, even if South Africa's principled position was indeed a minority view in some forums, which is not the case, our foreign policy in relation to occupation, decolonisation and human rights abuses will always be based on principle and not, expediency.

The United Nations Security Council held a closed video teleconferences to discuss the situation in the Western Sahara on 9 April 2020. The focus of the meeting was to consider recent developments in the Western Sahara as well receive a report on the work of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). MINURSO, which was created in 1991 to primarily monitor the ceasefire between the two sides, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO and organise and ensure a free and fair referendum in the territory.

As the meeting was closed, South Africa is not at liberty to disclose the details of the discussions. We regret that unlike the Security Council's recent practice of issuing elements to the press following video teleconferences in order to ensure transparency in its work, the Council was not able to agree to an outcome after the Western Sahara consultations. This is unfortunate, and we trust that the Council will deal with Western Sahara in an even-handed and transparent manner as has done with other meetings held through video-teleconferences.

South Africa particularly regrets that the Security Council has not been able to move the peace process forward. This is unfortunate as the people of Western Sahara continue to endure the occupation and their struggle for their right to self-determination is prolonged.

However, we hereby briefly outline South Africa's position on the matter which of course we articulated at this meeting.

The issue of Western Sahara has been on the agenda of the United Nations for decades as Western Sahara remains the last colony on the African continent, listed as a non-self-governing territory by the United Nations. It needs to be noted that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has made findings to the effect that the Western Sahara is an occupied territory and the Morocco is an occupying force in that territory.

As an elected member serving on the UN Security Council, South Africa utilised the opportunity to once again reiterate our established commitment to efforts to achieve a peaceful solution, which will provide for the long-established principle of self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. This is in line with the approach of the United Nations and the Africa Union.

South Africa unequivocally and strongly supports the work and mandate of MINURSO and urges the UN Security Council to take up its responsibility and ensure that through a neutral and balanced approach it assists the parties in moving towards a mutually acceptable negotiated settlement.

South Africa looks forward to the appointment of a new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and we trust that the political process would be advanced to ensure continued, direct, substantive negotiations between the two parties to the conflict, the Frente POLISARIO and the Kingdom of Morocco.

South Africa's approach on Western Sahara is guided by the position of the African Union, which has consistently supported the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, in line with the relevant AU decisions and UN Security Council resolutions. The African Union has also consistently appealed to the parties to the conflict to "urgently resume negotiations without pre-conditions and in good faith, under the auspices of the Secretary General of the United Nations, whose Security Council is seized of the matter".

In the context of the global crisis brought about by the novel COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa supports the call for a global ceasefire by António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General. Consequently, we therefore urge both the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO to strictly abide by the terms of the ceasefire agreements, such as Military Agreement No 1, to avoid violence that could lead to a rise in hostilities in the territory.

Furthermore, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and with many countries under lockdown, self-isolation or quarantine, South Africa calls on the international community to support efforts in the occupied territories and refugee camps, where the health care system is poor and medical supplies and equipment are limited.

In this regard, South Africa calls on the Kingdom of Morocco, to fulfil its responsibility as the occupying power by ensuring the necessary access, and unhindered passage of humanitarian and medical supplies, to the territories that it occupies.

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