

**Forum:** General Assembly-2 Political Committee

**Issue:** Advancing the decolonization process in Western Sahara to ensure regional security and stability

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**Position:** President Chair

## Introduction

Western Sahara has long held a strategic and economic significance in Africa. Rich in natural resources and valuable land, the region has attracted the interest of various local and foreign powers throughout history. Empires such as the Mali Empire, famous for its wealth in gold, had a profound influence on regional trade and development. In later centuries, colonial powers like the British Empire sought to exert control over parts of North and West Africa, interacting with local rulers and reshaping regional dynamics during and after Africa's classical period.

Between the 12th and 17th centuries, the development of Trans-Saharan trade routes by European and Arab powers facilitated the movement of goods such as gold, spices, and raw materials, as well as the tragic expansion of the slave trade. These routes gained even more importance following European exploration of the Americas, which created a demand for labour and contributed to further instability in African regions.

Today, Western Sahara remains at the heart of a critical geopolitical issue. In the modern context of decolonisation, the region's importance has only grown, driven by Africa's increasing population, frequent civil unrest, and rising demand for humanitarian aid. Western Sahara plays a key role in regional security, international cooperation, and economic development. However, the enduring conflict and lack of a political resolution continue to hinder progress, making the advancement of the decolonisation process essential for ensuring long-term peace and stability in the region.



## Definition of Key Terms

### CIVILIAN UNREST:

'Civil unrest' is an umbrella term particularly to describe violent and non-violent group acts.

*"Civil Unrest Definition." UNDRR, 7 June 2023, [www.undrr.org/understanding-disaster-risk/terminology/hips/so0003](http://www.undrr.org/understanding-disaster-risk/terminology/hips/so0003).*

### Decolonization:

Decolonization refers to the work to reverse colonialism and its effects.

### Economic marginalization:

Economic marginalization refers to disparities in amassing wealth or getting a job.

*"What Is Marginalization? Types, Causes, and Effects - 2025." MasterClass, [#](http://www.masterclass.com/articles/marginalization-explained#).*

### Colonial Legacy:

Characteristics and culture that stick to a nation even after colonial rule ceases to exist.

*NSEAD, Colonial Legacy |. "Colonial Legacy." NSEAD, [www.nsead.org/resources/anti-racist-art-education/curriculum-checklist/colonial-legacy/](http://www.nsead.org/resources/anti-racist-art-education/curriculum-checklist/colonial-legacy/).*

## Background Information

The issue of decolonization in Western Sahara remains one of the longest unresolved territorial disputes in history. At first colonized by Spain, the territory was designated by the United Nations to be a "Non-Self-Governing Territory" in 1963. When Spain withdrew later in the year 1975, leaving behind a colonial legacy, the territory was claimed by both Morocco and the Polisario Front. The latter declared the creation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). This dispute led to decades of conflict, a ceasefire in 1991, and a promised referendum on independence that has yet to be held. Overall, the region has a history of colonial legacy, violence, unrest, and most importantly, promises that aren't kept.



## United Nations Involvement

Post-war in Europe was undeniably harsh, realistic, and, needless to say, unempathetic to other regions around the world as they were healing as well. This laid the ground for a Spanish colonial legacy to settle in every 1884. The advancement of the decolonisation process in Western Sahara is a vital step toward ensuring regional security and stability, which was deemed unsafe and unstable by the Spanish government of Franco. As the situation remains unresolved, it continues to create tensions not only within the territory but also among neighbouring countries, which is why the United Nations classifies Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory, after years of conflict that had Morocco and the Polisario rival each other, a cease-fire was brokered in 1991, with the promise of a referendum, which still has not happened. Since then, Morocco has maintained control of most of the regions with tactical help from the United States of America and France. However, the African Union (AU) has been much more significant and diligent with this issue, as the United Nations hasn't taken many measures to minimise the damage.

## Competing Claims of Rule over the Region

The region, rich, vast, and valuable, has two contenders who have been fighting against each other formally until a ceasefire was brokered; the war is a proxy war these days—the Kingdom of Morocco against the Polisario Front, representing the self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. Since the withdrawal of Spain from the region in 1975, the Kingdom of Morocco has had more control over the area as it has an orderly and formal military, recognised by the United Nations as a country, while the Polisario Front is rather an effort. Morocco had proposed an autonomy plan under Moroccan rule as a political compromise to ease the conflict, which has been supported by some international actors but rejected by the Polisario. Polisario Front demands complete independence with no capitulations or compromises to give. Backed by Algeria, it was established 2 years before the



Spanish retreat from the area. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) has been recognised by over 40 countries, mainly in the south; however, even though the United Nations charter does not recognise it as a country, the African Union does so and has made it a full member. The reasons above explain why the region is in a deadlock with no hope for the future unless things dramatically change for the better.

### **Humanitarian and Socioeconomic Impacts**

As it continues, the conflict takes a harsher and more significant impact on human lives and nature. The conflict has had severe socio-economic implications in the region, especially on the Sahrawi people. However, one of the most significant issues the area is currently facing is the tens of thousands of civilians who have been displaced and forced to migrate to refugee camps around and outside the country. These camps, originally built to last a few months to a few years at most, have now been housing refugees for more than 45 years, as findings suggest. As the archives and records are unreliable in this region, it is unclear how long this has been going on, but it is clear that it has been going on for a very long time. The harsh conditions of weather, desert, and region are merciless against the refugees and victims of war. However, the situation isn't any different in the more urban parts of the country, where Moroccan rule has invested resources into rebuilding and designing infrastructure, education, and job opportunities. Reports from journalists indicate that severe discrimination, limitation of the right to freedom of speech, and other human rights violations take place. Yet since there are no better alternatives, locals bend the knee.



## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

**Spain:** Spain's influence over the region, while significant, is complex. It is one of the key nations that can be influential in resolving this decade-long crisis. The region, with its unique culture, lives under the shadow of the colonial legacy and norms that the Spanish have left behind, leaving the region divided. After almost 94 years of ruling and having autonomy over the area, it would've been for the best had they selected or left a succeeding government or established a referendum. Nevertheless, Spain's influence, which is a mix of historical, political, and cultural factors, makes it one of the most influential actors in resolving this crisis.

**United States of America:** The United States of America is currently one of the most involved countries, as the region is essential for Humanitarian causes and International trade agreements. The fact that the area has been war-torn and divided for decades now also significantly impacts American corporations and multinational economic dealings. The region's instability poses a potential threat to American trade, as the region is essential for trade and resources, which American companies import.

**Morocco:** Morocco, a key player in the Western Sahara conflict, holds a significant position as it is officially recognized by the United Nations. Morocco also has legitimate claims and currently controls and administers more than half of Western Sahara. However, it is their cooperation with the United Nations and other actors in this crisis that is vital to resolving the decades-long crisis.

**Polisario:** A political and military organisation, the Sahrawi organization, was founded in 1973 by Sahrawi ultra-nationalists with the goal of independence for Western Sahara from Spain, later on Morocco. When Spain left the region in 1975, it declared the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and began fighting against Moroccan rule. The group's strength is bolstered by the support of a few other Arab countries,



notably Algeria, demonstrating the strength of their alliances. The leading advocacy of the group is self-determination, meaning no ground given and no capitulation released. However,, after a brief cease-fire in 1991, the group has followed a more peaceful and U.N.-oriented referendum approach. However, at times, this peaceful resistance turns into an armed one.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Event
1884	Spain claims Western Sahara
1963	The United Nations lists Western Sahara as an NSGT
1973	Polisario is formed
1975	Madrid Accords, Spain hands out administrative control of the region to Morocco and Mauritania without informing the local population
1975	The Green March, Over 300,000 Moroccans march to Western Sahara and assert their claims over the region, challenging Sahrawi locals.
1976	The Polisario declares the establishment of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, challenging Moroccan rule and authority.
1991	The United Nations established a cease-fire that will last until 2020.
2007	Morocco proposes an autonomy plan



<b>2020</b>	<b>In 1991, the U.N. established a cease-fire that broke down</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>The United States of America recognizes Morocco's claim.</b>

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Other Documents

- [UN Security Council Resolution 690 \(1991\)](#)

- Established the mission for a referendum and brokered a cease-fire. The most prominent temporary resolution to the issue.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Previously, neither the United Nations nor Morocco recognized Polisario and its "established" Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, and there are no official treaties other than a cease-fire brokered by the United Nations in 1991 during the height of the conflict. Spain previously had the Madrid Accords, leaving their claims behind as well as the land to Mauritania and Morocco, although today, only Morocco has control and claims left.

## Possible Solutions

Democracy and self-determination policy would solve this issue, and not even a possibility. It is clear. Yet, as Morocco has claimed the region, the idea of a referendum that was promised decades ago in return for Polisario signing the cease-fire still has not been a reality.



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*\*\*If you have any questions regarding the report or the conference in general, feel free to contact the SG, PGA, and the DSGs at any time.*

