

SUBMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (FOURTH COMMITTEE)
NEW YORK, OCTOBER 2015

WESTERN SAHARA, MINURSO, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WESTERN SAHARA ACTION FORUM
WESTERN SAHARA RESOURCE WATCH

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies, and gentlemen,

On January 31st this year, a young man was walking past a furniture store in Laayoune in Western Sahara. While sitting outside the store, a group of men shouted insults at the passer by because he was Sahrawi. The young man reacted, prompting the owner of the store to throw a rock at him, knocking him to the ground. The storeowner and his four friends then assaulted him and one of the attackers stabbed the Sahrawi man in the neck. The young man's name was Mohamed Lamine Haidala and, following several days of staggering neglect by local authorities, he died.

His death could have been avoided if such wanton violence had higher costs. But the United Nations does not monitor human rights in Western Sahara, and if it wasn't for the work of the RFK Human Rights Center, the United Nations would not even know about the murder of Mohamed Lamine Haidala.

The United Nations is not to blame for his death but it can do something about such incidences. MINURSO is the only peacekeeping mission in the world without a human rights monitoring mechanism. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon himself has called for an independent and impartial understanding of the human rights situation in Western Sahara. The United Nations is *the* most appropriate institution for carrying out his wish. Human rights monitoring is only one step on an arduous journey. But it is a vitally important step that lays the foundations for this committee to help MINURSO to fulfill its mandate.

This petition is supported by Mark Williams MP, a member of the UK Parliament and the secretary for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Western Sahara. Having visited Laayoune as part of a parliamentary delegation, he adds: “We believe that it is in the spirit of the United Nations charter and international law for a human rights monitoring mechanism to be added to MINURSO’s mandate. This is in the interest of Moroccans, Sahrawis, and all who support equal human rights, no matter who, no matter where.”

I appear also before the Committee as a delegate of Western Sahara Resource Watch. You have received detailed submissions in past years from this independent NGO. The circumstances of Western Sahara's resources under occupation became graver in the past year. The export of phosphate mineral rock has continued, in clear violation of UN General Assembly Resolution 1803, and the *Fourth Geneva Convention*. Plunder is plunder, of course. And in Western Sahara, resource development activities are a pretext to normalize the occupation, to allow illegal settlers to be brought into employment in the territory, and to present a facade of seemingly normal economic activity.

Late 2014 brought the first drilling for oil in the seabed of Western Sahara. We need not look for guidance about this - the whole subject was addressed more than a decade ago by the then UN senior legal counsel, Hans Corell. Mr. Corell presented the most basic of legal principles, ones long ago accepted in the international community and indeed imposed by the General Assembly in the case of Namibia under *apartheid* occupation.

There has been one happy development, and Western Sahara Resource Watch urges the learned members of the Committee to note the communiqué of the African Union Peace and Security Council issued March 27th. Increasingly, the international community is expressing its concern over the plunder of Sahrawi resources.

With the 40th anniversary of Morocco’s occupation of Western Sahara fast approaching, it is worth remembering that international law, and the United Nations charter, state that it is for Sahrawis to decide their own future. For *they* are the masters of their fate. *They* are the captains of their souls. Thank you for your time.