

# *France recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over occupied Western Sahara*

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Paris, August 1 (RHC)-- The government of France has formally recognized Morocco's claims of sovereignty over the northwest African territory of Western Sahara.

The decision announced by French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday is a major victory for Moroccan King Mohammed VI and a setback to Western Sahara's Indigenous people, the Sahrawi, who've fought for decades to organize a U.N.-backed referendum on independence.

Morocco has occupied Western Sahara since 1975 in defiance of the United Nations and international law.

Over the past four decades, thousands of Sahrawi activists have been tortured, imprisoned, killed and disappeared while resisting the Moroccan occupation.

## HISTORY OF THE STRUGGLE / POLISARIO FRONT

In the middle of the Sahara desert, half a million people resist and fight for their liberation. Under the slogan "intensify the armed struggle to expel the invader and achieve sovereignty," the Polisario Front, the political organization that leads the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), is holding its 16th Congress in Dajla – one of five Sahrawi refugee camps in the town of Tindouf, Algeria. After 30 years of ceasefire, this is the first Congress to be held again in the context of armed confrontation with Morocco.

"All the human, financial, and material resources are sent to support the combat on the armed front. Before they were directed to other areas that will continue, but we must focus on the battlefield," SADR's Prime Minister Bucharaya Beyun declared.

The Sahrawi Republic was founded in 1975, after gaining its independence from Spain. After expelling the Spanish, the Sahrawi people began to fight against the invasion of Morocco, which sought to annex their territory of about 266,000 km<sup>2</sup> in North Africa, rich in phosphate and with a vast coastline facing the Atlantic.

Defeated in the war, in 1991, Morocco signed a ceasefire agreement with the Sahrawis, foreseeing the holding of a popular referendum, mediated by the United Nations (UN), which would seal Western Sahara's independence. At the time, 2,500 Moroccan soldiers who had been captured by the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army (SPLA) were handed over. In return, the kingdom of Rabat was supposed to release about 600 Sahrawi prisoners, but only handed over 200 people.

Since then, the Polisario Front leaders have opted for diplomatic means to regain control of their territory. In addition to putting the brakes on a decades-long promised referendum on the territory's independence, in November 2020, Morocco violated the ceasefire and bombed the Sahrawi people in the region known as the "Guerguerat rift," a gateway between the Sahara desert and the Atlantic.

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