



## MEDIA RELEASE

### POLISARIO CONDEMNS MOROCCAN ATTEMPT TO SHUT DOWN U.N. PRESENCE IN WESTERN SAHARA; CALLS ON SECURITY COUNCIL TO REASSERT ITS AUTHORITY

New York, 20 March 2016 – The UN representative of Western Sahara’s government, the Frente POLISARIO, has condemned Morocco’s expulsion on Sunday of UN peacekeepers from Western Sahara, calling it a “slap in the face to the Security Council, and a dangerous provocation that could lead to war.”

The UN reported on Sunday 20 March that it had decided to move its civilian personnel in the Moroccan-occupied part of Western Sahara to temporary accommodation in Las Palmas in the Canary Islands following threats from Morocco that UN personnel that remained at the mission’s headquarters in La’ayoune would do so at their own risk. The Security Council will meet at 8:30am on Monday morning to discuss the new crisis, and will have before it a new letter from POLISARIO Secretary-General Mohamed Abdelaziz to Ban Ki-moon.

Morocco’s threats follow [its hysterical response](#) to Ban Ki-moon’s visit on 5 March to Bir Lehlou in Western Sahara, and the nearby camps in Tindouf, where he met some of the more than 100,000 Saharawi (indigenous Western Saharan) people who have waited since 1991 for the UN to hold a referendum on independence as part of a ceasefire deal endorsed by the Security Council.

In a briefing to the Security Council last Thursday, the UN’s peacekeeping department said Morocco’s demand that UN civilian officers leave Western Sahara was “tantamount to forcing the United Nations to shut down its peacekeeping operation in the Territory.” The following day, the [African Union](#) called Morocco’s decision “a very dangerous precedent that challenges the mandate of the UN Security Council in maintaining international peace and security.”

In response to Sunday’s expulsions, the POLISARIO’s New York envoy, Ahmed Boukhari, said: “Despite Morocco’s refusal to cooperate, we very much welcomed Mr Ban’s visit to the camps, where he saw for himself the tragedy of a generation of Saharawis forced to live in exile, while the [illegal occupier](#) persecutes its brothers and sisters in the best part of their homeland. This international disgrace has gone on too long.”

“Morocco’s actions are an unprecedented challenge to the authority of the Security Council, and a brazen attempt to shut down MINURSO (the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara). Morocco’s move violates the UN Charter and the mandate given to MINURSO by the world’s highest diplomatic body. If the Security Council fails to respond, it would not only threaten peace and security in the Maghreb region, but undermine and endanger many UN peacekeeping missions around the world.”

“The Security Council must order Morocco to immediately correct its misstep, and take the opportunity to get the parties back to the table to negotiate the details for holding the referendum,” added Boukhari.

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