

Geneva Support Group for Western Sahara^()*

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Press Release

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Systematic and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in occupied Western Sahara should be investigated and documented

The Geneva Support Group for Western Sahara expresses its deep concern at the breakdown of the ceasefire in force since 1991 in the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Western Sahara that followed the intervention of the Moroccan occupation army in the demilitarized zone near Guerguerat (south-east of the Territory), on 13 November 2020.

The Geneva Support Group for Western Sahara expresses its understanding of the plight of the Saharawi people who have been waiting for the organisation of a referendum on self-determination since 1966, when the former colonial power – the Kingdom of Spain - received a mandate from the UN General Assembly (res. 2229 – XXI) to determine the modalities for the organisation of such a referendum.

In accepting the Settlement Plan presented jointly by the President of the Organisation for African Unity and the Secretary General of the United Nations in late '80, the Saharawi people genuinely believed that the international community would provide them with the opportunity to freely exercise their right to self-determination and independence in accordance with the Principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the terms of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

Thirty years later, with the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) having failed to organize the referendum for self-determination, the occupying Power has illegally annexed the larger portion of the Non-Self-Governing Territory it has occupied since the '70s.

Throughout the 16 years of conflict and 45 years of illegal military occupation, there have been a wide range of serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the occupying Power, which have a systematic character, inherent to the Territory's illegal occupation.

The Geneva Support Group for Western Sahara, noting that those serious and systematic violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law have been largely undocumented and exposed by the UN human rights mechanisms, and in light of the resumed conflict in the Non-Self-Governing Territory,

- Calls upon the International Committee of the Red Cross to monitor the sustained violations of the Geneva Conventions in occupied Western Sahara; to pursue the situation of the Sahrawi “war prisoners” or “prisoners of conscience”, including those arrested in the occupied territory after the breakdown of the ceasefire; and to give due consideration to setting up humanitarian zones and corridors as and when required;
- Calls upon the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to dispatch an observation mission to the occupied Territory and to present a report at the 46th session of the Human Rights Council; and to recommend that the Security Council expand the mandate of MINURSO to include the monitoring of human rights in the occupied territory;
- Calls upon the Human Rights Council to give special attention to the violations of human rights, especially the right to self-determination, resulting from the Moroccan military occupation of Western Sahara, in accordance with operative paragraph 5 of UNGA resolution 74/140;
- Calls upon all relevant Special Procedures to pay special attention to serious human rights violations in the occupied Western Sahara that may occur in the context of the renewed conflict in Western Sahara.

The Geneva Support Group for Western Sahara, noting the successive failures of the Secretary-General's Personal Envoys to enable MINURSO to fulfil its mandate, and stressing that the perpetuation of the status quo only strengthens the position of the occupying Power,

- Urges the UN Secretary-General to increase his involvement with the unfolding situation in Western Sahara and appoint at the earliest time a new Personal Envoy to revitalise the political process that must lead to the organisation and holding of a referendum on self-determination for the Saharawi people, in compliance with the Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;
- Urges the UN Security Council to bring its attention on the situation that has arisen as a result of the renewed conflict in Western Sahara, in particular in relation to the situation prevailing in the Sahel region.

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