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Western Sahara

# Reducing this conflict to a rivalry between Algeria and Morocco aims to wipe the Sahrawi people off the map

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV595 - August 2024 -  
Publication date: Sunday 4 August 2024

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#### **What is the role of the Saharawi Youth Association of France?**

Our role as young people in France is to publicise our cause, to campaign and to help our compatriots in the refugee camps and in the territories occupied by the Moroccan regime. It was in this context that the association was created, with the aim of raising awareness of the Sahrawi struggle in French society. Unfortunately, French society is not sufficiently informed about the illegal occupation of Western Sahara and France's role in it.

#### **Since the end of the fighting in 1991, the issue has still not been resolved between Morocco, Algeria and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)?**

This subject is very important because it touches on an argument frequently used by the Moroccan regime's propaganda to make us invisible. Reducing this conflict to a rivalry between Algeria and Morocco aims to wipe the Sahrawi people off the map. Algeria is a fraternal country and a very important supporter of our struggle, but it must be understood that this conflict is not a rivalry between Morocco and Algeria. It is about an illegal occupation by Morocco, the systematic repression of Sahrawis in the occupied territories and the forced displacement of an entire people.

In reality, Algeria is not the only ally in the region. Mauritania, which initially tried to lay claim to the southern regions of Western Sahara during the illegal treaties of Madrid, finally recognised the SADR in 1984. But it is not the only country to support the SADR. Under Gaddafi's government, Libya was also a major supporter in the region. The SADR is not just a fantasy, it is a reality, a country recognised by more than 84 countries around the world and a founding member of the African Union. So the argument that 'these are just separatists financed by Algeria' makes no sense at all, and a quick search will tell you that.

#### **The Western Sahara is coveted. Does it have natural resources?**

Yes, indeed, the Western Sahara is a very rich region. In particular, it has the world's largest phosphate reserve, as well as the world's second largest fishing reserve. There is also gold, oil and other resources. This is why several foreign companies, including many French companies such as Azura, Total, BNP Paribas, Société Générale, Crédit Agricole, Axa Assurances, Transavia and UCPA, are contributing to this illegal occupation by exploiting its natural

resources.

## **What is the current situation of the Saharawi people?**

The situation is very complicated. Our people are divided in two: those who have been living in refugee camps for over fifty years, in one of the most uninhabitable places in the world, where they face a very precarious situation with extreme temperatures and sometimes limited access to drinking water and food; and those who live in the occupied territories, suffering daily aggression, arbitrary arrests and suffocating oppression by the Moroccan regime.

The armed struggle resumed after the Moroccan regime violated the ceasefire in November 2020, when the Moroccan army opened fire on Sahrawi civilians who were peacefully demonstrating against Morocco's illegal use of the Guerguerat crossing. At present, the Polisario Front is at war with the Moroccan occupying forces, a conflict that is largely ignored by the world due to heavy Moroccan propaganda supported by France, Israel and the United States.

## **Does France have a role to play? And why?**

France plays a very important role in this conflict. Historically, when Africa was decolonised by the UN, France was Morocco's main supporter of the illegal occupation of Western Sahara and the genocide of the Sahrawi people. It also supported Morocco with logistics and funding during the sixteen year war against the Polisario Front. Even today, military support for the Moroccan occupation continues, as the investigations by *Disclose* (an investigative journalism website) show, revealing images of planes and ships sold by French companies involved in the illegal occupation of Western Sahara.

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