



**MINURSO** UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR  
**THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA** 1991 to today



**Western Sahara is a desert land on the western coast of Africa. Its status is at the core of a conflict that has lasted 30 years... including 16 years of war.**

**In 1963, the UN declared Western Sahara a “non-self-governing Territory” because at the time, it was a colony.**

**UN Resolution 1514 (XV) states that “all peoples have the right to self-determination.”**

**The UN’s position on Western Sahara is based on this landmark resolution, approved in 1960, which deals with the granting of independence to colonial countries & peoples.**



**Western Sahara is a former Spanish colony – below are the remains of the Spanish fort at Dcheira, some 25km east of Laayoune. Children play in its ruins today.**

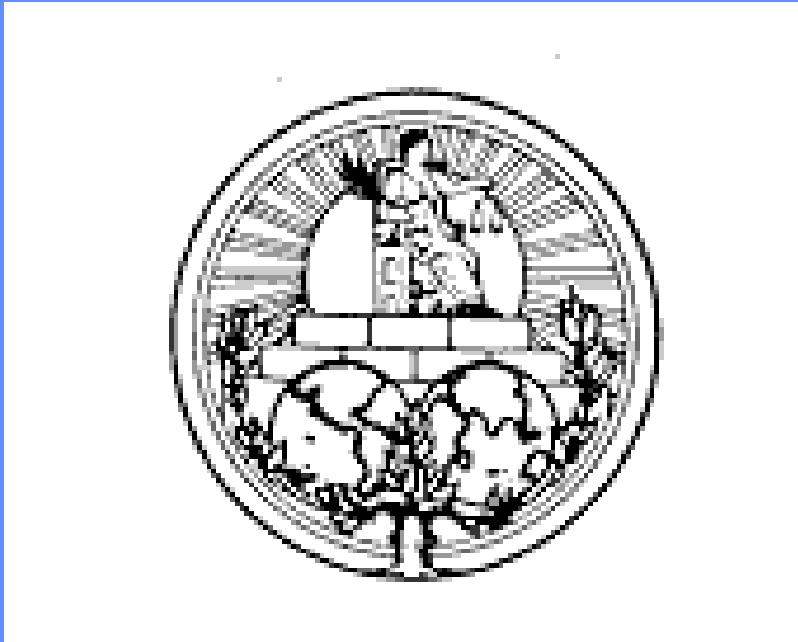
**The UN called on Spain to decolonize in 1966. By 1974, Spain was ready to organize a referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.**



**Instead, in 1974 the United Nations asked the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the status of the Territory known up to then as the Spanish Sahara.**



# The International Court of Justice, and Western Sahara



- In 1974, the **General Assembly** asked the Court for an advisory opinion on the status of Western Sahara.
- This was done at the request of Morocco, supported by Mauritania; both defended their territorial claims over Western Sahara.
- Spain was asked to halt its own preparations for a referendum and wait for the Court's opinion.



# The Court deemed that neither side could claim sovereignty over Western Sahara

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“The Court's conclusion was that the materials and information presented to it did not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity.”

16 Oct 1975

**Once the International Court of Justice's opinion (16 Oct 1975) was made public, two crucial things happened:**

**Morocco launches a symbolic 'Green March' some 10km into Western Sahara. (6 Nov 1975)**

**Days later, Spain signs over Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania via the 'Madrid Accords'. (14 Nov 1975)**

**Spain left the Territory altogether, three months later. (SADR)**

**War began.**





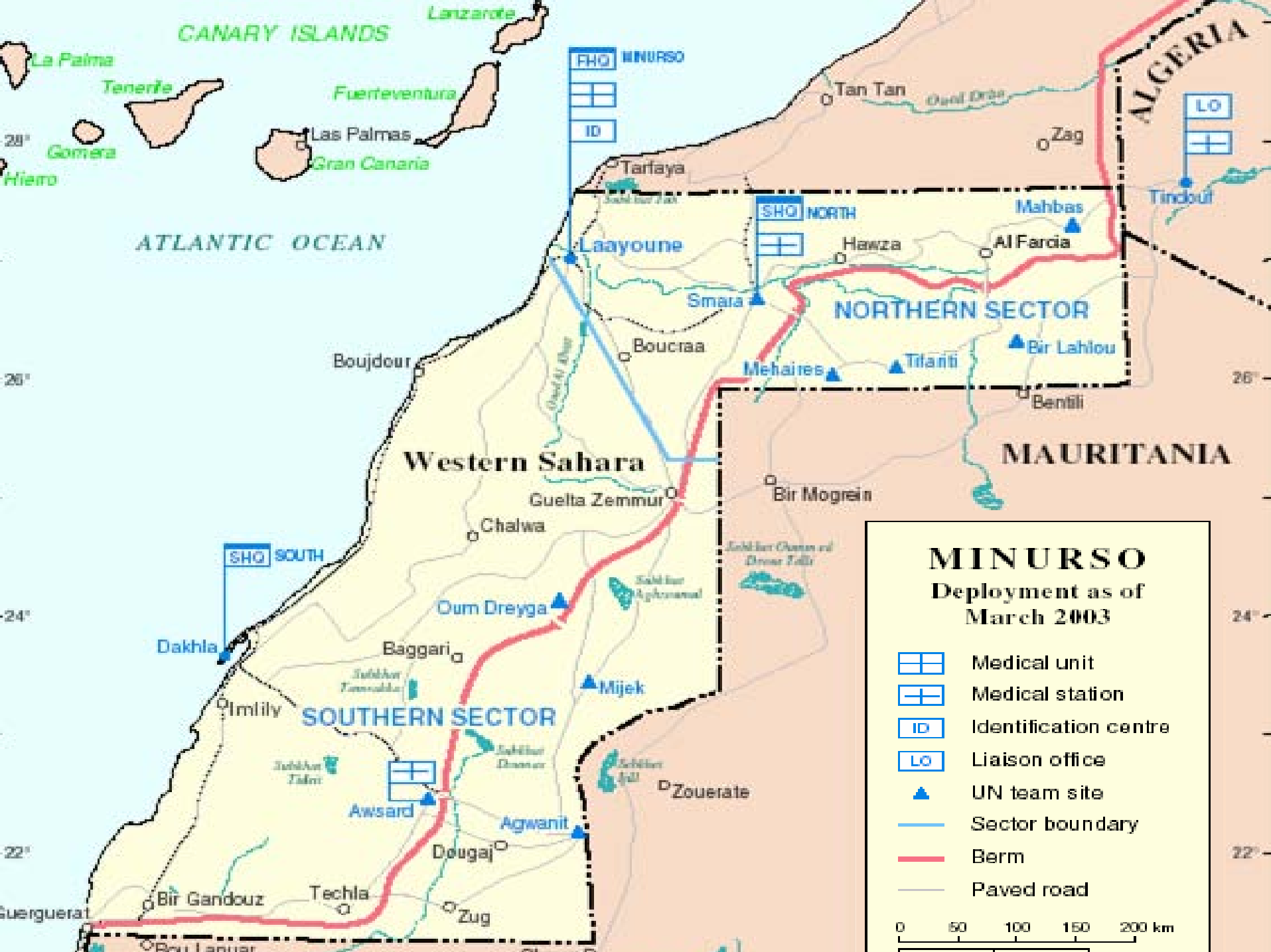
**MINURSO** was created in  
**1991.**

Thirty years later...

The war lasted 16 years. In 1991, a **ceasefire** came into effect.

**Morocco**, which now occupies most of the Territory, is recognized by the UN as one of the parties to the conflict.

The **Frente POLISARIO** is the other, as the representative of the people of Western Sahara.



CANARY ISLANDS

Lanzarote

La Palma

Tenerife

Fuerteventura

Las Palmas

Gran Canaria

Gomera

Hierro

ATLANTIC OCEAN

ALGERIA

FHQ MINURSO

ID

LO

SHQ NORTH

NORTHERN SECTOR

MAURITANIA

Western Sahara

SHQ SOUTH

SOUTHERN SECTOR

**MINURSO**  
Deployment as of  
March 2003

- Medical unit
- Medical station
- Identification centre
- Liaison office
- UN team site
- Sector boundary
- Berm
- Paved road

0 50 100 150 200 km

Laayoune

Smara

Hawza

Mahbas

Al Farcia

Bir Lahlou

Bentili

Boujdour

Guelta Zemmur

Chalwa

Bir Mogrein

Oum Dreyga

Mijek

Baggari

Zouerate

Awsard

Agwanit

Dougaj

Bir Gandouz

Techla

Zug

Bouguerat

Bou Lanouar

Sahel Bir Oueden el Dreyer Telli

Sahel Bir Agghoumat

Sahel Bir Tamoukha

Sahel Bir Tidrit

Sahel Bir Dmanar

Sahel Bir Bil

Tan Tan

Zag

Tarfaya

Tindouf

28°

20°

24°

22°

26°

24°

22°

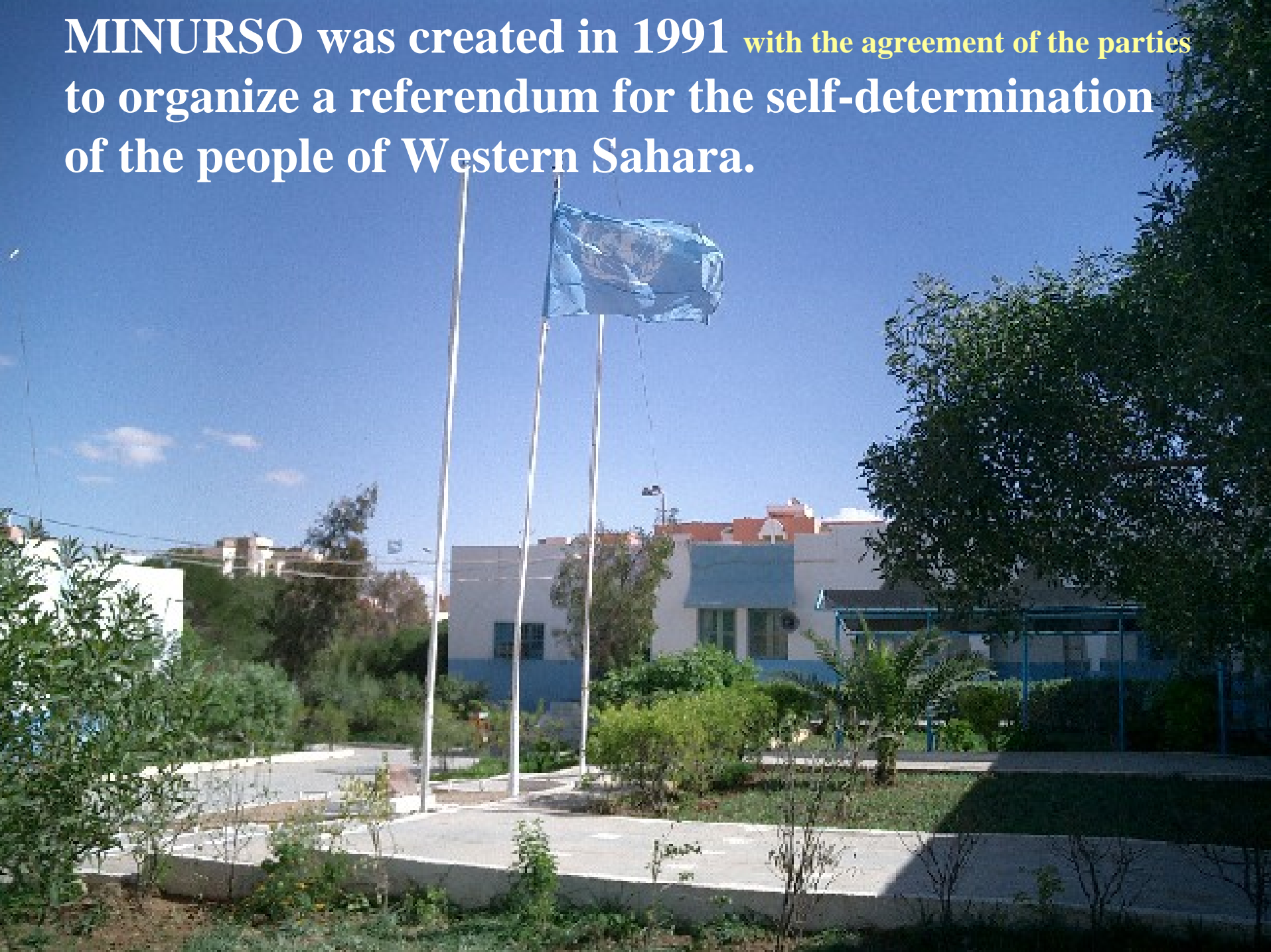
An aerial photograph of a vast, flat desert landscape. A long, narrow, dark line, the berm, runs vertically through the center of the image. The berm is a raised sand wall, and its shadow is cast to the right. In the middle of the berm, there is a small, circular, slightly raised area. The surrounding desert floor is a uniform light brown color with some faint, irregular patterns.

**During the war over Western Sahara, Morocco built the ‘berm’, a sand wall 2000 kms long. Today it is still there.**

**Morocco has some  
120,000 (?) of its troops  
permanently stationed  
west of the berm**

**The Frente POLISARIO has some  
12,000 (?) troops east of the berm.**

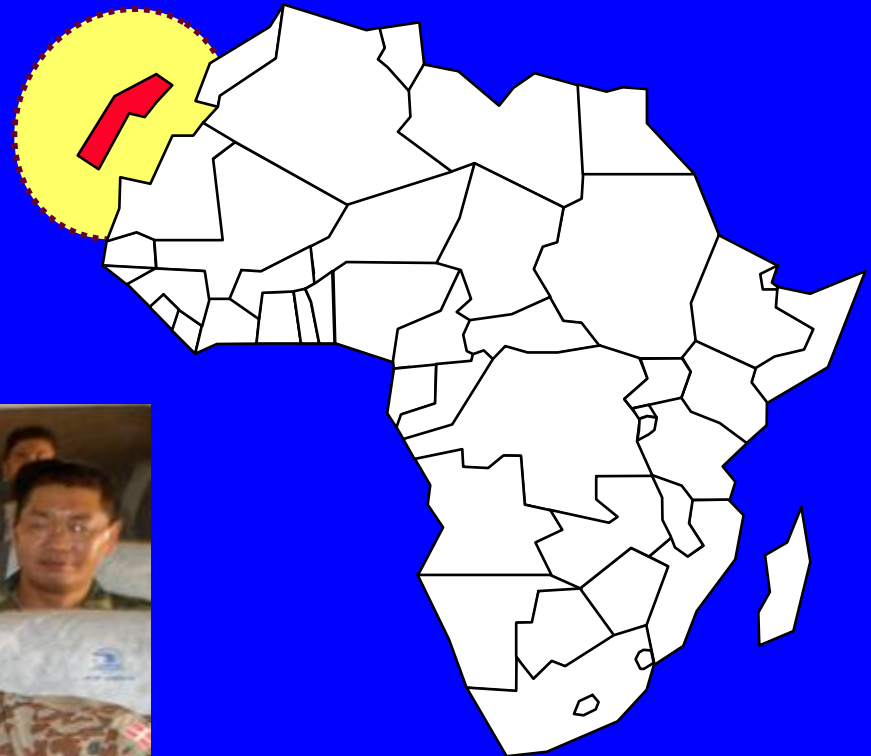
**MINURSO** was created in **1991** with the agreement of the parties to organize a referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.






# MINURSO

**SRSG and Head of Mission:  
Francesco Bastagli  
Force Commander:  
Maj.Gen. Kurt Mosgaard  
230 Military Observers  
International and local staff**



**The Office of the SRSG monitors the political situation for trends and developments that could lead to a solution of the conflict. We also have a LO office in Tindouf.**

An aerial photograph taken from the perspective of someone inside a military aircraft. The view is looking out over a vast, flat, sandy desert landscape. In the foreground, the white metal structure of the aircraft's window frame is visible on the left side. The terrain is mostly flat with some low, rounded mounds of earth or sand. In the distance, a long, low ridge or berm stretches across the horizon. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall scene depicts a military observation post monitoring a conflict zone.

**MINURSO's 231 military observers  
monitor the ceasefire between the  
parties, through team sites located on  
both sides of the berm.**

A large, gnarled tree with a thick trunk and a wide, spreading canopy of thin branches stands in a dry, open landscape. The ground is sandy and sparsely covered with small, scrubby bushes. The sky is bright with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is arid and desolate.

# Searching for peace: 1991 to today

**The Settlement Plan was a classic decolonization programme. Ten years were spent on it.**

**The Framework Agreement was rejected by one of the parties immediately.**

**The 'Baker Plan', which combined a bit of both, was finally rejected by the other.**



**Both parties had agreed in principle to the ‘Settlement Plan’ which was a classic decolonization programme.**

**Today, Morocco regards Western Sahara as part of its national territory, discards a referendum and proposes a wide ‘autonomy’ within the Kingdom.**

**The Frente POLISARIO, based in the refugee camps, says the people of Western Sahara must exercise their right to self-determination and choose their own destiny.**



A dramatic sunset or sunrise over a dark sea with a cloudy sky. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by dark, heavy clouds. The sky is filled with intricate cloud patterns, some catching the light from the sun, creating a mix of dark blues, greys, and bright yellows. The sea below is dark and calm, reflecting the light from the sun and clouds.

**James Baker was appointed in 1997 to find a way out of a deadlock. He persevered for seven years.**

**Peter van Walsum is the new Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara.**

**He will try to find a way out in a conflict where the parties share no common ground.**

**So, who are the people of Western Sahara ?**



**They speak Hassaniya, and the older ones still remember the Spanish learned under Spanish rule.**

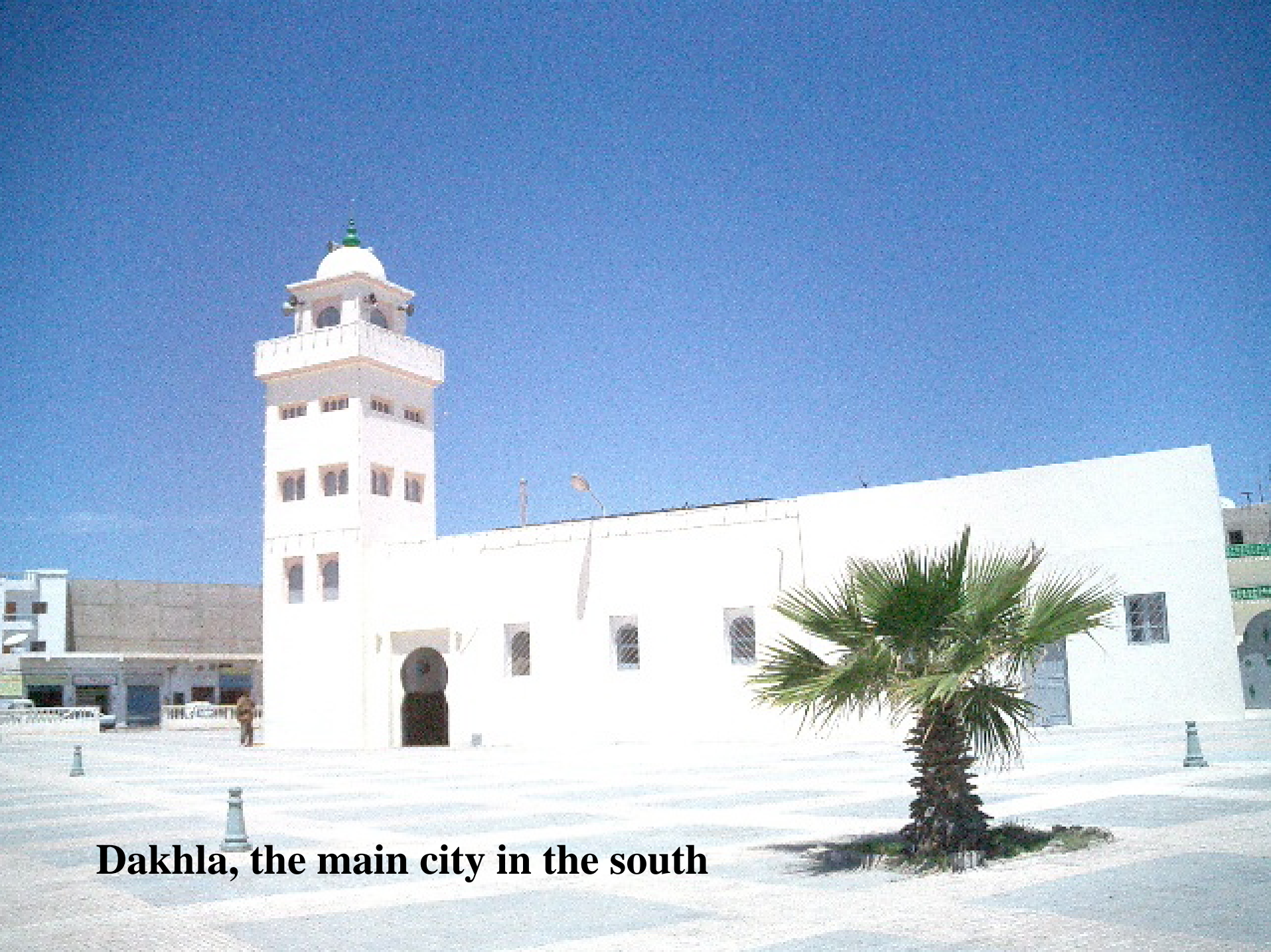


**These Saharan children are third-generation refugees.  
Their family fled to Tindouf, Algeria, in the seventies.  
Algeria is the host country to these refugee camps.**





**Laayoune today**



**Dakhla, the main city in the south**

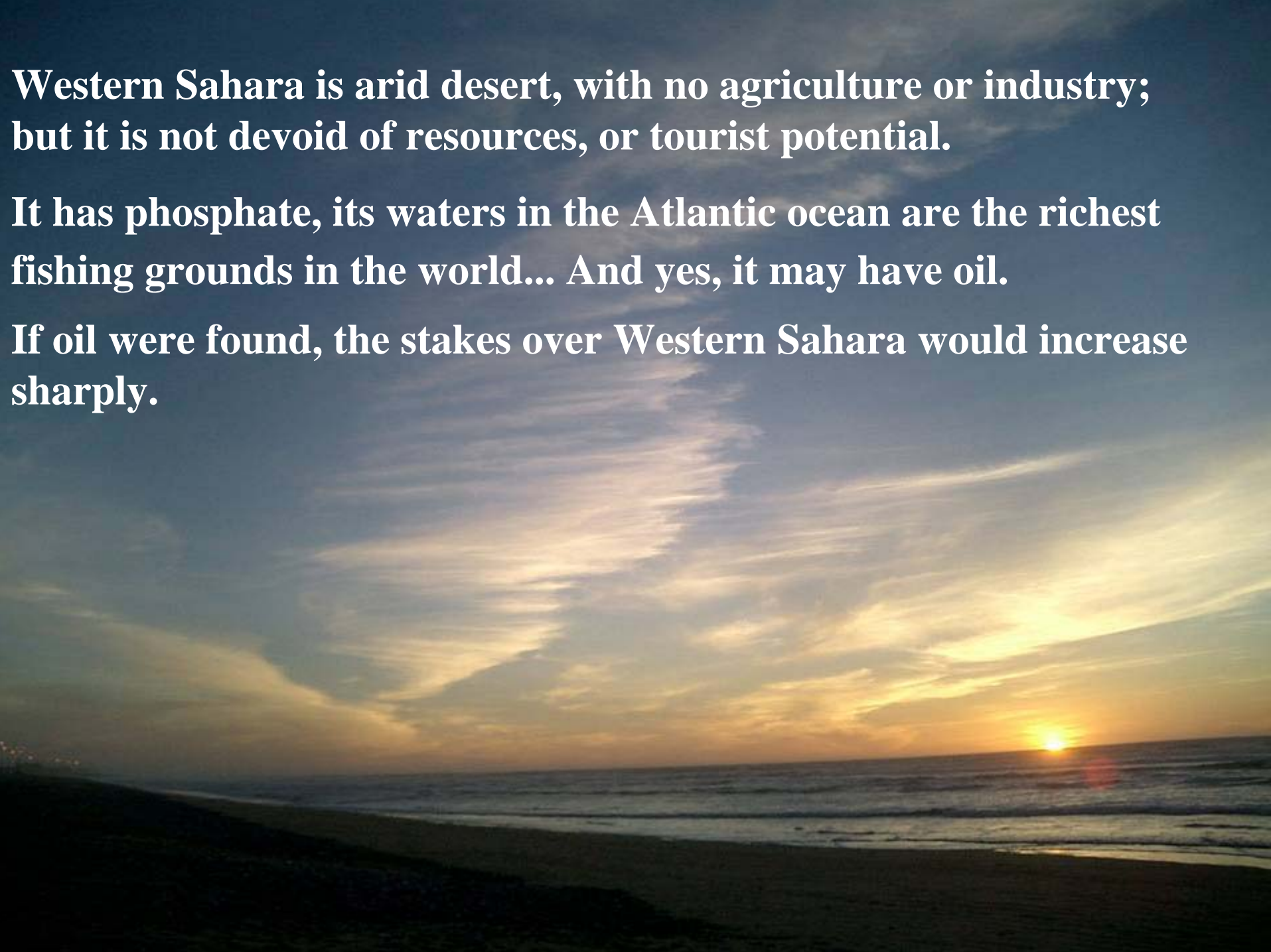


Laayoune's port is home to dozens of fishing boats. The waters facing Dakhla, in the South, are even more bountiful.

**Western Sahara is arid desert, with no agriculture or industry; but it is not devoid of resources, or tourist potential.**

**It has phosphate, its waters in the Atlantic ocean are the richest fishing grounds in the world... And yes, it may have oil.**

**If oil were found, the stakes over Western Sahara would increase sharply.**





**What lies ahead for Western Sahara?**





**Personal Envoy van Walsum began work last October.**

An aerial photograph of the Western Sahara desert. The landscape is dominated by rolling sand dunes and a network of winding tracks. In the middle ground, several large, conical mounds of sand, known as pyramids, are visible. The sky is a clear, pale blue, and the overall scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of late afternoon or early morning.

**End of briefing on Western Sahara and MNURSO  
Thank you for your interest**