



MINURSO

UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA



LOCATION: Western Sahara

HEADQUARTERS: Laayoune

DURATION: April 1991 to present

CURRENT MANDATE

By its resolution 1495 of 31 July 2003, the Security Council extended MINURSO's mandate until 31 October 2003

PERSONAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

James A. Baker III (United States) (March 1997 to present)

SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

To be appointed

Past Special Representatives:

William Lacy Swing (United States) (12/01 to 6/03)
William Eagleton (United States) (5/99 to 12/01)
Robin Kinlock (United Kingdom), Acting (4/99 to 5/99)
Charles Dunbar (United States) (2/98 to 3/99)

Erik Jensen (Malaysia), Acting (8/95 to 2/98)
Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan (Pakistan) (3/92 to 8/95)
Johannes Manz (Switzerland) (1/90 to 3/92)
Hector Gros Espiell (Uruguay) (10/88 to 1/90)

FORCE COMMANDER

Major-General Gyorgy Szaraz (Hungary) (August 2002 to present)

Past Force Commanders:

B/Gen. Claude Buze (Belgium) (11/99 to 08/02)
M/Gen. Bernd Lubenik (Austria) (8/97 to 10/99)
M/Gen. J. Barroso de Moura (Portugal) (11/96 to 7/97)
M/Gen. J. E. Garcia Leandro (Portugal) (3/96 to 11/96)

B/Gen. Andre Van Baelen (Belgium) (10/92 to 3/96)
B/Gen. Luis Block Urban (Peru), Acting (4/92 to 10/92)
M/Gen. Armand Roy (Canada) (6/91 to 4/92)

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Inspector General Om Prakash Rathor (India) (November 1999 to present)

Past Police Commissioners:

Ass't Com. Sunil Roy (India), Acting (11/98 to 11/99)
Chief Sup. Peter Miller (Canada) (11/97 to 11/98)
Lt Col Jan H. Kleven (Norway), Acting (7/96 to 5/97)
Brig Gen Walter Fallmann (Austria) (1/96 to 7/96)

Lt Col Jan Walmann (Norway), Acting (8/95 to 1/96)
Col Wolf-Dieter Krampe (Germany) (3/95 to 7/95)
Col Jurgen Friedrich Reimann (Germany) (6/93 to 3/95)

CURRENT STRENGTH (30 June 2003)

239 total uniformed personnel, including the Force Commander, comprising 187 military observers, 27 troops and 25 civilian police; supported by some 168 international civilian personnel and 111 local staff

CONTRIBUTORS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL

Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, China, Croatia, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Uruguay

CONTRIBUTORS OF CIVILIAN POLICE PERSONNEL

Ghana, India, Jordan, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Senegal, Sweden

FATALITIES

5 military personnel
1 civilian police
1 military observers
2 international civilian personnel
1 local civilian personnel
10 Total

FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Method of financing: Assessments in respect of a Special Account
Approved budget 1 July 2003 – 30 June 2004: \$43.4 million (gross)

FUNCTION

The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established by Security Council resolution 690 (1991) of 29 April 1991, in accordance with "the settlement proposals", as accepted on 30 August 1988 by Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO). The Secretary-General's implementation plan, approved by the Security Council, provided for a transitional period during which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General would have sole and exclusive responsibility over all matters relating to a referendum in which the people of Western Sahara would choose between independence and integration with Morocco. The Special Representative would be assisted in his tasks by a deputy special representative and by an integrated group of United Nations civilian, military and civilian police personnel, to be known as the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara.

MINURSO has been mandated to:

- Monitor the ceasefire;
- Verify the reduction of Moroccan troops in the Territory;
- Monitor the confinement of Moroccan and Frente POLISARIO troops to designated locations;
- Take steps with the parties to ensure the release of all Western Saharan political prisoners or detainees;
- Oversee the exchange of prisoners of war (International Committee of the Red Cross);
- Implement the repatriation programme (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees);
- Identify and register qualified voters;
- Organize and ensure a free and fair referendum and proclaim the results.

BACKGROUND

Western Sahara, a Territory on the north-west coast of Africa bordered by Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria, was administered by Spain until 1976. Both Morocco and Mauritania affirmed their claim to the territory, a claim opposed by the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO).

The United Nations has been seeking a settlement in Western Sahara since the withdrawal of Spain in 1976 and the ensuing fighting between Morocco, which had "reintegrated" the Territory, and the

Frente POLISARIO, supported by Algeria. (Mauritania renounced all claims to Western Sahara in 1979.) In 1979, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) also became active in seeking a peaceful solution of the conflict.

Establishment of MINURSO

In 1985, the United Nations Secretary-General, in cooperation with the OAU, initiated a mission of good offices leading to "the settlement proposals", which were accepted on 30 August 1988 by Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO. In 1990, the Security Council approved the Secretary-General's report containing the full text of the settlement proposals and the outline of the Secretary-General's Plan for implementing them. On 29 April 1991, the Security Council, in its resolution 690 (1991), decided to establish the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in accordance with the Secretary-General's report which further detailed the implementation plan.

The Plan provided for a transitional period during which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General would have sole and exclusive responsibility over all matters relating to a referendum in which the people of Western Sahara would choose between independence and integration with Morocco. The Special Representative would be assisted in his tasks by an integrated group of United Nations civilian, military and civilian police personnel, to be known as MINURSO. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would carry out a repatriation programme for eligible Western Saharan voters living outside the Territory. The transitional period was to begin with the coming into effect of the ceasefire and end with the proclamation of the results of the referendum.

It was originally envisaged that the civilian component of MINURSO would range in size from about 800 to 1,000 personnel depending on the requirements of the various phases of the transitional period. At full strength, the military component would consist of approximately 1,700 personnel, and the security unit of about 300 police officers.

According to the settlement plan, the referendum in Western Sahara should have taken place in January 1992. However, it was not possible to proceed in conformity with the original timetable.

Ceasefire

On 24 May 1991, the Secretary-General proposed that the ceasefire should enter into effect on 6 September. Both parties accepted that date. During the following three months, however, it became clear that it would not be possible to complete before 6 September a number of tasks that were to be completed before the ceasefire. It also became clear that, notwithstanding the parties' earlier acceptance of the settlement plan, substantial areas of difference between them remained. One party, therefore, was not able to agree that the transition period should begin on 6 September 1991.

Meanwhile, hostilities had broken out in the Territory, interrupting an informal ceasefire that had been in effect for over two years. In these circumstances, the Secretary-General decided that the formal ceasefire should come into effect on 6 September as initially agreed, on the understanding that the transition period would begin as soon as the outstanding tasks had been completed. The Security Council supported his proposal that, during this delay, 100 military observers should be deployed in the Territory to verify the ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities in certain areas. The

number of military observers was subsequently increased to 228, and certain logistics and administrative support staff were also sent to the field.

The primary function of MINURSO at that time was restricted to verifying the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. The headquarters of the Mission was established in Laayoune, with regional headquarters in the northern and southern sectors of the Territory. A liaison office was also established in Tindouf to maintain contact with the Algerian authorities and the Frente POLISARIO.

Differences remain

Since the deployment of MINURSO in September 1991, the ceasefire has generally held. The transitional period, however, has not begun, given the parties' divergent views on some key elements of the Plan, in particular with regard to the criteria for eligibility to vote. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the parties have repeatedly stated their commitment to implementing the Plan, and MINURSO has carried out its functions in so far as conditions have allowed. For his part, the Secretary-General and his Special Representatives have continued efforts to find compromise solutions acceptable to both parties. This process has required a number of revisions to the Plan and the timetable.

MINURSO's Identification Commission was established in May 1993. In August 1994, after completing the necessary groundwork, including securing the cooperation of the parties, MINURSO began the process of identifying potential voters. Procedural and operational difficulties, however, allowed only slow progress, and efforts to resolve differences between the parties were not successful. In May 1996, the Secretary-General suspended the identification process and most MINURSO civilian staff were withdrawn, including the civilian police component which provided security and assistance to the Identification Commission. The military component remained to monitor and verify the ceasefire, as it has done throughout its deployment.

In early 1997, the Secretary-General intensified the examination of the main contentious issues, including in a series of direct talks between the parties, held under the auspices of the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy. By September, with the successful completion of the last round, the Secretary-General reported that all the agreements reached during the talks had taken effect.

In December 1997, the Secretary-General restarted the identification process. Despite a number of difficulties, identification of all applicants from tribes other than three contested groupings drew to a close on 3 September 1998. However, the parties remained unable to arrive at a consensus on how to deal with applicants from the three groups.

In an effort to move the process forward, the Secretary-General, in October 1998, presented a package of measures to the parties, which included a protocol on identification of those remaining applicants from the three tribal groupings and a protocol on the appeals process. Frente POLISARIO accepted the package the following month, and the Government of Morocco, after seeking clarification, accepted in principle in March 1999.

Accordingly, identification of the remaining individuals from the three tribal groups resumed on 15 June 1999. As for individuals identified in 1994 and 1995 and from December 1997 to September 1998, the appeals process got underway on 15 July when the first part of the provisional list was published. That list included 84,251 names of applicants found eligible to vote out of 147,249 identified. During the six-week appeals period for the 94-95/97-98 group, the Identification Com-

mission received 79,000 appeals. Identification of applicants from the three tribal groupings was completed at the end of December 1999. Of 51,220 individuals who presented themselves, 2,130 were found eligible to vote. The appeals period for individuals on the second part of the provisional list began on 15 January for a six-week period.

Although the identification process has been completed, the parties continue to hold widely divergent views regarding the appeals process, the repatriation of refugees and other crucial aspects of the Plan. The Secretary-General has instructed his Special Representative to continue consultations with the parties to seek a reconciliation of these views.

*Prepared by the Peace and Security Section, Department of Public Information
For information only—not an official document of the United Nations*