



Security Council

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Situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 October 2024 and requested me to submit a report on the situation in Western Sahara before the end of the mandate period. The report covers developments that occurred since the issuance of my previous report of 3 October 2023 ([S/2023/729](#)) and describes the situation on the ground, the status of the political process on Western Sahara, the implementation of resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#) and the existing challenges to the Mission's operations and steps taken to address them.

II. Recent developments

2. The situation in Western Sahara continued to be characterised by tensions and low-intensity hostilities between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO). Progress in the political process remained challenging despite the ongoing efforts of my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura.

A. Main developments

3. On 30 October 2023, in a statement welcoming the Security Council's adoption of resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#), the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates affirmed the Country's commitment to "supporting the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy aimed at relaunching the round-table process, with a view to reaching a political solution, based on the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative and in strict respect of the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the Kingdom".

4. In a statement on the same day, Frente POLISARIO reiterated its commitment to "the achievement of a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the decolonization of Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa, based on the free and democratic exercise by the Sahrawi people of their inalienable, non-negotiable and imprescriptible right to self-determination and independence".



5. On 6 November, King Mohammed VI of Morocco delivered a speech on the occasion of the forty-eighth anniversary of the Green March. In the speech, he shared his vision for the Atlantic coastline becoming a gateway for trade and economic integration with Africa and the Americas by facilitating access of the countries in the Sahel region to the Atlantic.
6. On 10 May, celebrations took place in the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, to commemorate the fifty-first anniversary of the founding of Frente POLISARIO. In a speech on 20 May to mark the anniversary, Brahim Ghali, Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO, referred to “the consequences of the expansionism and aggression” and called on the Frente POLISARIO armed forces to “escalate and advance the armed struggle”.
7. On 9 July, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, sent a letter to King Mohammed VI that was made public on 30 July, indicating that France considers that “autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the framework within which the issue [of Western Sahara] must be resolved ... [and that] for France, the [Moroccan autonomy proposal] now constitutes the only basis for achieving a just, lasting and negotiated political solution in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council”.
8. On 25 July, the Foreign Ministry of Algeria issued a communiqué indicating that it had been informed of the decision of France and expressing its “profound disapproval” of the “unexpected, inopportune and counterproductive” decision. On 30 July, the Foreign Ministry of Algeria issued another communiqué withdrawing its ambassador to France “with immediate effect” following the decision of France.
9. On 26 July, the Frente POLISARIO issued a statement condemning the French decision in the “strongest possible terms” and indicating that the letter put France “in the same place as the occupier” and “unwelcome”, “including its participation in MINURSO”.
10. On 14 August, Chad inaugurated a “consulate general” in Dakhla. On 15 August, Frente POLISARIO sent a letter to me condemning the inauguration and referring to it as “a serious breach of the international legal status of Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory”.
11. During the reporting period, Morocco continued to intensify the development of infrastructure, renewable energy projects and commercial activities west of the berm. On 29 July, a major new bridge, the Sakia El Hamra wadi bridge, was inaugurated to mark the twenty-fourth anniversary of King Mohammed VI’s ascension to the throne. In a letter to me dated 16 October 2023, Frente POLISARIO continued to reaffirm that it would not accept “the fait accompli” in the Territory.

B. Situation on the ground

12. MINURSO continued to receive reports of alleged shootings by Frente POLISARIO toward units of the Royal Moroccan Army at or near the berm and of strikes allegedly conducted by uncrewed aerial vehicles of the Army east of the berm. Most firing incidents reported to MINURSO by the parties continued to be concentrated in the northern region, near Mahbas, with additional incidents reported in the southeastern region, near Mijek. On some occasions, MINURSO was not able to confirm the number and location of the reported firing incidents, and their impact remained the subject of divergent claims by the parties.
13. At the request of the Royal Moroccan Army and with their escort, MINURSO continued to visit sites adjacent to the berm where incidents were alleged to have taken place, and in most cases observed traces of exploded mortar and artillery

ammunition. Most of the shots verified by MINURSO landed in remote areas causing no significant damage.

14. On 29 October 2023, a firing incident, allegedly by Frente POLISARIO, hit a civilian area in the town of Smara, approximately 2.5 kilometres from the MINURSO team site, killing one civilian and injuring three others, including a minor. A MINURSO investigation determined that four 122-millimetre high-explosive rockets had been launched from a distance of around 40 kilometres east of the berm.

15. The same day, my Special Representative and the MINURSO Force Commander contacted Frente POLISARIO to express their grave concerns about the incident, reiterating the call by MINURSO for a full cessation of hostilities and to avoid acts that contribute to exacerbating tensions. The Inspector General and Commander of the Southern Zone of the Royal Moroccan Army wrote to the Force Commander underlining that the incident “represents another step in the declared escalation” by Frente POLISARIO and represented an act of “indiscriminate targeting”. In its contacts with MINURSO, Frente POLISARIO neither confirmed nor denied responsibility for the incident.

16. On 5 November, another incident occurred in Smara, with two rockets fired, allegedly by Frente POLISARIO, landing in open areas 1.5 kilometres from the team site and 4 kilometres from the Smara airport. No casualties were reported. On the same day, my Special Representative and the Force Commander again contacted the Frente POLISARIO to reiterate their serious concerns regarding incidents close to the MINURSO team site and civilian areas.

17. From September to November 2023, ground patrols from the Mahbas team site observed four previously unidentified Royal Moroccan Army military camps near the berm and predominantly occupied by armoured vehicles.

18. On the evenings of 24 and 25 December, a total of seven rockets struck the ground at a distance between 990 metres and 2.7 kilometres from the Aousserd team site. On 25 and 26 December, the Royal Moroccan Army wrote to the Force Commander stating that these incidents demonstrate “the persistent bellicose intentions of the violating party”.

19. On 22 February 2024, the Royal Moroccan Army informed MINURSO about their decision to remove a section of approximately 1,250 metres of the berm located in the Amgala subsector, 40 kilometres south of the Smara team site. The Army claimed that the section constituted an obstacle to observation and affected the responsiveness of its units. MINURSO visited the area in question on 27 February and 15 April, observing that the removal would not open a breach at the rear embankment of the berm but would improve the Army’s observation east of the berm.

20. On 23 June, MINURSO observed two new military camps in the area of the Aousserd team site. The camps, which include armoured vehicles and artillery, are located at a distance of 19 kilometres north-east and 47 kilometres north of the team site, respectively, and within 5 kilometres of the berm. On 5 July, the MINURSO Force Commander wrote to the Royal Moroccan Army requesting additional information on the camps. On 17 July, the Army responded by stating that “[f]aced with the armed actions and threats posed by” Frente POLISARIO, “the [Royal Moroccan Army] is forced to take certain preventive and provisional measures deemed necessary ... to protect its units”.

21. On 13 May, 2 July and 6 July 2024, three firing incidents allegedly by Frente POLISARIO occurred with the impact located within 5 kilometres, 10 kilometres and 1.4 kilometres from the Mahbas team site, respectively. In a letter to the MINURSO Force Commander on 16 July, the Chief of Staff of the Frente POLISARIO Military Forces reiterated Frente POLISARIO’s “full commitment to [the] MINURSO

mandate” and the “utmost priority [given] to the safety and security of the personnel and property” of MINURSO.

22. MINURSO also continued to investigate alleged aerial strikes at locations east of the berm, in coordination with Frente POLISARIO liaison officers and through the expert assistance rendered by the Mine Action Service. Most of the investigated strikes caused human casualties and material damage. The most targeted area was near the Mijek team site.

23. On 31 December 2023, the Frente POLISARIO Liaison Officer reported three Royal Moroccan Army aerial strikes in the Mijek area which, according to local sources, resulted in four deaths and one wounded, as well as the destruction of three vehicles. On 1 January 2024, a MINURSO investigation team observed the remains of one individual and three destroyed vehicles. On the same day, the Frente POLISARIO Liaison Officer reported an additional strike. On 4 January, a MINURSO investigation team observed material damage. On 6 January, local media reported a further aerial strike in Bir Lahlou, in which three Frente Polisario military personnel were killed and two were injured, which MINURSO was unable to confirm because Frente POLISARIO did not grant it permission to visit the site.

24. On 8 February, the Frente POLISARIO Liaison Officer reported one aerial strike north-east of the Mijek team site, allegedly causing four deaths and injuring two among artisanal gold miners from Mali and Mauritania. On 10 February, MINURSO dispatched an investigation team to the incident site, located in a camping zone near an artisanal gold mine housing approximately 50 workers from different nationalities. The team identified the impact point in a tent which, according to two witnesses, had been occupied by the victims. However, the investigation team did not observe any evidence of casualties and could not interview those injured, who had reportedly left the scene.

25. In late February 2024, in an effort to reduce tensions on the ground, my Special Representative and the Force Commander wrote to both parties to propose a cessation of hostilities during the holy month of Ramadan. The Royal Moroccan Army responded on 26 February by reiterating its “commitment to the agreements reached” while underscoring its right to “legitimate defence”. In a response dated 13 March, Frente POLISARIO considered that, “calling for a ‘cessation of hostilities’ ... without effectively addressing the root causes of the breakdown of the 1991 ceasefire ... and in the absence of a genuine peace process ... is ignoring completely the current reality on the ground ...”.

26. Four firing incidents allegedly by the Frente POLISARIO took place during the holy month of Ramadan, on 14 and 17 March and on 4 and 5 April. During that period, the Royal Moroccan Army allegedly conducted three aerial strikes, the first one on 19 March in Bir Lahlou, allegedly killing two and injuring one, and the remaining two in Mijek on 1 and 5 April. MINURSO did not receive permission from Frente POLISARIO to visit the sites in Bir Lahlou, while investigation patrols in Mijek found evidence of one strike. Due to delays in receiving security assurance from Frente POLISARIO, the investigation team could not confirm any casualties.

27. In a letter to me dated 22 November 2023, the Frente POLISARIO Coordinator with MINURSO accused Morocco of using “all types of weapons, including unmanned aerial vehicles, to callously kill ... civilians”. In a letter to me dated 8 July 2024, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations in New York referred to the “modus operandi” allegedly adopted by Frente POLISARIO of using “unmarked vehicles” and “fighters disguised as civilians” with the aim “to mislead the international community and United Nations bodies and tarnish the image of the [Royal Moroccan Army]”. He also stated that Frente POLISARIO “continues to

impose unacceptable restrictions on the freedom of movement and supply” of MINURSO.

III. Update on the political process

28. On 31 August, I met with Brahim Ghali, Secretary-General of the Frente POLISARIO, in Dili, on the margins of the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the popular consultation in Timor-Leste. He emphasized that the Sahrawi people were “still waiting for the opportunity to experience democracy”, expressed concern over reports of land and property expropriation in the territory west of the berm, and reiterated the importance of MINURSO on the ground. On my part, I reaffirmed my commitment to pursuing all possible avenues to resolve the conflict in Western Sahara, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, and to ensure a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

29. During the reporting period, my Personal Envoy undertook broadened consultations on the issue of Western Sahara with Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria, Mauritania, members of the Security Council, members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara and other interested actors with a view to constructively advancing the political process on Western Sahara. Between February and April 2024, he conducted meetings with regional interlocutors. My Personal Envoy expressed his readiness to meet with all concerned again in September and October 2024, ahead of his upcoming briefing to the Security Council.

30. On 27 February 2024, my Personal Envoy met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, Ahmed Attaf, in Algiers, Algeria. On 16 April, he met again with Mr. Attaf on the margins of the Minister’s working visit to New York on Security Council matters. The Minister conveyed the continued focus of Algeria on “ensuring Western Sahara’s people the right to self-determination”, while insisting his country was not a party to the conflict.

31. On 2 April, my Personal Envoy visited Nouakchott for meetings with the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug. They expressed their support for my Personal Envoy’s efforts to find a solution to the conflict and regretted the conflict’s negative impact on Maghreb unity. They reiterated the principle of “positive neutrality” of Mauritania.

32. On 4 April, my Personal Envoy met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Nasser Bourita, in Rabat. The Minister noted that his country’s approach was based on garnering additional international support for its autonomy initiative, outside which framework he maintained there could be “no solution”. He also reaffirmed the position of Morocco that the only framework for a process was the round-table format, which should come at a later “appropriate time” when the context is ripe.

33. On 15 April, my Personal Envoy met with the Frente POLISARIO representative in New York, Sidi Omar, who reiterated that a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the question of Western Sahara could be found through the Sahrawi people’s exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination and highlighted that they should choose “freely and transparently”. He expressed his belief that Morocco lacked “any political will to move towards a just and lasting solution”.

34. The efforts of my Personal Envoy continued to take place against a background of persisting tensions in the region, including between Algeria and Morocco. He was encouraged by the renewed assurances from officials in Algiers and Rabat that no further escalation was being sought.

35. In the spirit of consultations with a broad range of international interlocutors, my Personal Envoy also met with the acting Deputy Secretary of State of the United States of America, Victoria Nuland, in Washington, D.C. on 20 October 2023; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain, José Manuel Albares Bueno, in Madrid on 18 December; the Minister for International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, Naledi Pandor, in Pretoria on 31 January 2024; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, in Moscow on 11 March; the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Tariq Ahmad, in London on 22 March; senior French officials in Paris on 27 March; and German State Secretary Susanne Baumann in Berlin on 12 August. In those meetings, my Personal Envoy highlighted that any settlement facilitated by the United Nations should rest on a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, in line with Security Council resolutions. He noted with appreciation the expressions of support by his interlocutors for the efforts of the United Nations to facilitate a political settlement to the situation in Western Sahara.

IV. Activities of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

A. Operational activities

36. As at 31 August 2024, the military component of MINURSO consisted of a total of 229 military personnel, of which 57 were women. MINURSO continued to pursue efforts to improve its gender balance, with women observers representing 25 per cent of the deployed strength, exceeding the target of 20 per cent for 2024 set in the uniformed gender parity strategy 2018–2028.

37. From 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024, MINURSO conducted ground patrols covering approximately 386,675 kilometres.

38. West of the berm, MINURSO conducted 9,049 visits to the Royal Moroccan Army headquarters, units, subunits, strong points and observation posts. For their safety and security, United Nations military observers continued to be advised by Morocco not to visit forward units without an Army escort. Patrolling continued in selected areas along the berm where no exchanges of fire were reported.

39. Between October 2023 and August 2024, the Mission conducted 140 aerial reconnaissance flights west of the berm. Owing to safety and security concerns, those flights continued to operate at initially no more than 15 kilometres and subsequently no more than 10 kilometres from the berm.

40. Between 1 September 2023 and 31 August 2024, the Royal Moroccan Army reported to MINURSO 164 incidents involving firing from a distance against its units at or near the berm, approximately 75 per cent of which were concentrated in Mahbas. Since September 2023, MINURSO had conducted 127 investigation patrols, visiting a total of 357 reported incident sites. On 14 occasions, the Army also reported observing flights over its units by small, uncrewed surveillance aircraft in the area of Oum Dreyga.

41. East of the berm, ground patrols resumed in December 2023, after being suspended in August 2022 due to strict fuel conservation measures resulting from constraints to freedom of movement. Initially approved for once per week, ground patrols were later increased to twice per week, accompanied by the Frente POLISARIO Liaison Officer. Since their resumption, MINURSO conducted a total of 1,392 patrols covering an area of 46,597 kilometres. However, Frente POLISARIO

continued to restrict MINURSO ground patrol movements to a 20-kilometre distance from each team site. Helicopter reconnaissance flights have not been permitted east of the berm since November 2020.

42. During the reporting period, MINURSO continued strengthening coordination and cooperation with the Royal Moroccan Army. It conducted three visits to the headquarters of the Southern Zone of the Army in Agadir in November 2023, February and May 2024. At the working level, seven meetings were conducted between the MINURSO military component and the Army, two in Laayoune in September 2023 and March 2024 respectively, three in Dakhla in October 2023, January and May 2024, respectively, and two in Guelmim in December 2023 and May 2024, respectively.

43. The MINURSO Force Commander remained unable to establish direct contact with the military leadership of the Frente POLISARIO and all communications continued to be conducted through written correspondence. At the level of team sites east of the berm and in Rabouni, near Tindouf, Algeria, in-person interactions continued to take place with the Frente POLISARIO Liaison Officers. In an encouraging development, for the first time since 2020, MINURSO team site commanders began to hold liaison meetings with the Frente POLISARIO Deputy Military Regional Commanders of Agwanit (July, September 2024), Bir Lahlou (May 2024), Mijek (August 2024), and Tifariti (May 2024) at respective team sites.

44. MINURSO received information from a variety of sources concerning 14 alleged aerial strikes conducted by uncrewed aerial vehicles of the Royal Moroccan Army east of the berm between 1 September 2023 and 31 August 2024. MINURSO also observed uncrewed Army aerial vehicles at the Smara airport. On each occasion, MINURSO liaised with the parties to receive additional information. On 12 occasions, after receiving security assurances from the Royal Moroccan Army and Frente POLISARIO, MINURSO was able to visit the sites of the reported incidents. On two occasions, Frente POLISARIO did not provide security assurances.

45. Between August and November 2023, a military and police capability study of MINURSO was conducted, led by the Department of Peace Operations. The study comprised a desktop review and a field visit to examine the existing capabilities of the Mission's military component against current and future tasks. The report recommended, inter alia, the deployment of staff officers with requisite skill sets in place of military observers at the Force Headquarters to ensure that dedicated functions could be staffed more suitably. The report also recommended an increase in the size of the Mission's Medical Unit to fully operationalize the aeromedical evacuation capability and better support military officers in isolated team sites.

B. Mine action

46. With the resumption of clearance by its teams in the Mijek area in January 2024, the Mine Action Service restarted full demining operations east of the berm for the first time since 11 September 2019 when, at the request of Frente POLISARIO, operations ceased in the area. Mine Action Service activities included emergency disposal of explosive ordnance, route verification and explosive ordnance risk education to MINURSO military observers and refugees from the Sahrawi camps near Tindouf, Algeria, as well as assistance to investigation patrols at sites of alleged aerial strikes and support to ground convoy movements, east of the berm.

47. The two Mine Action Service demining teams continued to ensure the safe movement of United Nations civilian and military personnel and logistical convoys. As at 31 August, the teams had assessed 14,032 kilometres of routes between various team sites east of the berm as free from visible landmine and explosive ordnance.

Mine Action Service also verified as free from explosive hazards the routes used by MINURSO investigation teams to visit the sites of alleged aerial strikes, as well as the surrounding areas. Mine Action Service also carried out battle area and minefield clearance alongside non-technical survey activities, and successfully cleared 3,466,915 m² of land. From 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024, Mine Action Service conducted 359 missions related to movements of personnel, logistical convoys, alleged aerial strike investigations and clearance and demolition of explosive ordnance.

48. As at 31 August, 23 out of 62 known minefields and 40 out of 539 recorded cluster strike areas had yet to be cleared from explosive ordnance hazards east of the berm. Since 1 September 2023, Mine Action Service had located and destroyed 21 anti-personnel mines, 3 anti-vehicle mines, 180 cluster munitions and 35 pieces of explosive ordnance.

49. From 1 September 2023 to 31 July 2024, the Royal Moroccan Army reported to MINURSO that it had cleared over 189.09 million square metres of land west of the berm of explosive ordnance hazards and had destroyed 35 anti-personnel mines, 15 anti-tank mines and 549 pieces of explosive ordnance.

50. The MINURSO mine action component maintained close coordination with Frente POLISARIO through the Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office.

51. The Mine Action Service delivered 42 explosive ordnance risk education briefings for 190 newly arrived MINURSO civilian and military personnel (140 men and 50 women). It also conducted 11 training sessions for 115 MINURSO military observers at team sites west and east of the berm on mine action duties, including reporting on newly found explosive ordnance, monitoring destruction and investigating explosive ordnance incidents.

52. The Royal Moroccan Army reported 13 explosive hazard accidents west of the berm, involving 18 civilians and military personnel.

C. Security

53. MINURSO continued to show resilience in implementing its mandated observation activities through ground patrols and aerial reconnaissance despite the ongoing low-intensity hostilities. The presence of unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war remains a serious concern and continues to be a possible threat to United Nations personnel and assets.

54. As a result of the firing incidents occurring in close proximity to the team sites in Smara in October and November 2023, Aousserd in December 2023 and Mahbas in July 2024, MINURSO decided to reevaluate and strengthen its security posture and protection measures west of the berm, including by installing safety bunkers at team sites reinforced with sandbags and pre-detonation overhead protection.

55. Morocco and Frente POLISARIO retained primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel, assets and resources west and east of the berm, respectively. MINURSO continued to have confidence in both parties' commitment and capability in that regard.

D. Substantive civilian activities

56. MINURSO continued to monitor, analyse and report on developments in and affecting Western Sahara. The Mission's liaison office in Tindouf followed developments in and around the Sahrawi refugee camps. MINURSO continued to use the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise database and the Comprehensive

Planning and Performance Assessment System to combine enhanced situational awareness and expand its ability to successfully complete its operational tasks.

57. In addition to regular meetings of the Moroccan Coordinator with MINURSO in Laayoune and Rabat, my Special Representative met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco on 28 February 2024 in Rabat. In October 2023, my Special Representative met with the Frente POLISARIO Coordinator in New York. In early December 2023, he visited Algiers, where he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, as well as senior ministry officials.

58. Representatives of Member States continued to visit MINURSO offices in Laayoune and Tindouf, as well as MINURSO team sites west of the berm. Two visits led by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to the MINURSO Liaison Office in Tindouf and the Sahrawi refugee camps took place in November 2023 and April 2024. My Special Representative also continued to provide regular briefings to Member States in Rabat and New York.

E. Challenges to the operations of the Mission

59. The Mission's observation activities were enhanced by better access to areas near the berm and some improvement in obtaining timely security assurances to move to sites of alleged firing incidents and aerial strikes. However, persisting challenges hampered the ability to obtain first-hand information and verify reported developments on the ground. My Special Representative and the MINURSO Force Commander remained unable to meet with Frente POLISARIO in Rabouni, in line with what had been previously established practice.

60. West of the berm, the Mission's operational and observation activities were at times subject to security and safety concerns in the areas close to the berm where frequent firing incidents occur.

61. East of the berm, challenges related to constraints on the MINURSO logistical supply and maintenance chain improved considerably, enabling the Mission to better sustain its field presences there. MINURSO was able to deploy, on average, one ground convoy per month. However, their deployment remained subject to prior authorization from Frente POLISARIO on a "provisional and exceptional" basis. Installation of a hybrid solar energy generation system was completed in Mijek and is under way in Bir Lahlou, east of the berm. Similar systems are also fully operational at the four team sites west of the berm, with a total of 400-kilowatt power generating capacity. As a result, the Mission's reliance on fossil fuel for electricity generation has decreased considerably.

62. MINURSO was also able to maintain a regular passenger and cargo flight schedule for team sites east of the berm. Combined with more regular ground convoys, these flights allowed MINURSO to sustainably resupply those team sites with essential life-support items such as food, bottled water and spare parts for infrastructure equipment.

63. The Mission's lack of access to local interlocutors west of the berm continued to severely limit its ability to collect reliable situational awareness information and to assess and report on developments across its area of responsibility.

64. The general perception among the population of the Mission's impartiality continued to be affected by the requirement of Morocco that MINURSO use Moroccan vehicle number plates west of the berm, in contravention of the status-of-mission agreement. This pending issue, together with the stamping of MINURSO passports by Morocco in Western Sahara, continued to be the subject of objections from Frente POLISARIO.

V. Humanitarian activities and human rights

A. Persons unaccounted for in the conflict

65. The question of persons who are still unaccounted for in relation to past hostilities continued to be a major humanitarian concern. The International Committee of the Red Cross remained ready to act as a neutral intermediary between the parties and play an advisory role on the issue.

B. Assistance for the protection of Western Saharan refugees

66. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), with support from the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees in the five camps near Tindouf, despite critical funding challenges.

67. The first consolidated plan of needs and activities in the camps, the Sahrawi Refugee Response Plan covering 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025, was launched in November 2023 and was funded at about 37 per cent of the \$110.5 million required for the first year. A donor mission to the camps in April 2024 acknowledged the scale of the ongoing needs despite the generous support provided by the Government of Algeria and other donors. United Nations agencies created a subgroup to support fundraising efforts for the Sahrawi Refugee Response Plan, which included outreach to new donors and new partnerships.

68. In partnership with the Algerian Red Crescent and UNHCR, WFP continued to provide food assistance to address crisis-level food insecurity among the Sahrawi population. The 2024 Food Security Assessment indicated worsening conditions in the camps, fuelled by a 30 per cent reduction in the dried food basket owing to the rise in food prices. According to the Food Security Assessment, over 80 per cent of the camp population relied on food assistance. Meanwhile, UNHCR supported refugees in five camps with the most basic services, including water, through drilling boreholes and distribution networks.

69. UNICEF and UNHCR continued to support a five-year education strategy for Sahrawi children (2021–2025) which benefited 40,000 children and teachers in the camps. UNICEF strengthened the emergency preparedness capacity of 200 Sahrawi health workers, civil society and volunteers, in collaboration with the Algerian Ministry of Health. WFP implemented a school-based programme that consisted of mid-morning snack distribution to 33,000 children in primary and intermediate schools integrated with social behaviour communication to promote good health and nutrition practices.

70. WHO continued to provide support for improving maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent healthcare and strengthened health coordination and epidemiological surveillance to protect against health threats in the camps.

C. Confidence-building measures

71. The confidence-building measures, pursuant to Security Council resolution [1282 \(1999\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, to allow family links between Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps and their communities of origin in Western Sahara, remained on hold. My Personal Envoy continued to take note that neither Morocco nor Frente POLISARIO has expressed immediate interest in further work on these issues.

D. Human rights

72. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was not able to visit Western Sahara for the ninth consecutive year despite multiple official requests and despite the Security Council, in its resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#), urging enhanced cooperation, including through facilitating such visits.

73. The lack of access to first-hand information and of independent, impartial, comprehensive and sustained monitoring of the human rights situation remained detrimental to a comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation in the region.

74. OHCHR continued to receive reports of hindrance, intimidation and harassment against Sahrawi activists advocating for the right to self-determination, pointing to an increasingly shrinking civic space. On 14 November 2023, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the Human Rights Council observed a violation of a Sahrawi journalist's right to a fair trial.¹ On 27 June 2024, a Moroccan court upheld a decision that had denied a Sahrawi human rights defender a licence to practice law due to his political opinions and affiliation with civil society organizations supporting the right to self-determination. Both instances raised concerns over freedom of expression and association, affecting the right to work and with a possible deterring effect on lawyers to freely represent clients, especially in politically sensitive cases.

75. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about the targeting, intimidation and surveillance faced by Sahrawi activists, human rights defenders, student movements and Sahrawi organizations.² It recommended measures to allow activists and organizations to operate without interference and called for thorough investigations into all cases of repression of assembly and redress.³

76. The dire conditions of detention of Sahrawi prisoners remained an issue of pressing concern. Reports received by OHCHR referred to overcrowding and inadequate access to healthcare, education and vocational training, in addition to repeated denials of transfer requests by prisoners to facilities closer to their hometowns. Members of the Gdeim Izik group continued to be dispersed and held in prisons outside of Western Sahara while serving lengthy prison sentences. The continued isolation, irregular contact with family members and discriminatory treatment by the prison administration have reportedly had adverse impacts on the prisoners' physical and mental health. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention considered that the imprisonment of 18 members of the Group constitutes arbitrary detention. It further expressed grave concern about the number of suspected cases of arbitrary detention in Western Sahara, calling for the immediate release of the detainees and appropriate redress and reparations.⁴

77. There were reports of exploitation of natural resources in Western Sahara without meaningful consultations and participation by affected communities. Reports described investments as frequently prioritizing interests that do not address the needs of the local Sahrawi population, exacerbating economic disparity and hindering equitable development for all Sahrawis.

78. In notes verbale sent on 1 July, 3 July, 8 July and 26 July 2024 to OHCHR and to my office, Morocco provided information relating to its cooperation with human rights mechanisms, with an emphasis on maintaining and updating its reporting obligations to those mechanisms. Morocco also highlighted its New Development Model, reportedly focused on sustainable development and generating employment

¹ [A/HRC/WGAD/2023/67](#), para. 101.

² [CERD/C/MAR/CO/19-21](#), para. 19.

³ *Ibid.*, para. 20.

⁴ See [A/HRC/WGAD/2023/23](#).

opportunities by leveraging natural resources exploitation and local participation.⁵ Morocco also reported on alleged human rights violations in the Tindouf camps relating to severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including freedom of movement, assembly, opinion and trade, and absence of access to justice and accountability for human rights violations, among others. Morocco also refuted allegations related to the poor conditions of detention of Gdeim Izik prisoners.

79. On 2 July 2024, the National Human Rights Council of Morocco provided OHCHR with information concerning Western Sahara, including on the Council's capacity-building activities, complaints handling, referral and mediation of cases. The Council reported on its detention facility visits and their role in addressing complaints that reportedly resulted in improvements in conditions of detention for prisoners.

80. On 23 July 2024, I received a letter from Frente POLISARIO sharing information on alleged cases of restrictions on civic space, in particular restrictions on the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of association, as well as intimidation and surveillance, and other restrictions to fundamental freedoms against human rights defenders and protestors, and cases of arbitrary detention and harsh sentencings against Sahrawi civilians in the Territory west of the berm.

81. On 20 August and 30 August, I received two letters from Frente POLISARIO alleging expropriation of land and property belonging to Sahrawi civilians, demolition of homes and the denial of the rights to peacefully protest against these actions in the Territory west of the berm by Morocco.

VI. Financial aspects

82. The General Assembly, by its resolution [78/307](#) of 30 June 2024, appropriated the amount of \$69.3 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, inclusive of the voluntary contribution in kind in the amount of \$0.5 million.

83. As at 3 September 2024, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for MINURSO amounted to \$54.2 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,861.5 million.

84. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 March 2024 and contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 December 2023.

85. The financial situation is increasingly affecting the ability of the Mission to sustain mandate implementation, as well as its presence throughout the Territory.

VII. Observations and recommendations

86. I remain deeply concerned by developments in Western Sahara. The continued entrenchment of a deteriorated state of affairs, combined with unprecedented incidents, is alarming and unsustainable and calls for an urgent reversal with a view to avoiding any further escalation. I renew my call on all concerned to work towards changing course without delay, with the facilitation of the United Nations and the support of the broader international community, towards a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution.

87. The lack of a full ceasefire in effect between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO remains a major setback in the pursuit of a political solution to this longstanding

⁵ See www.csmd.ma/documents/CSMD_Report_EN.pdf.

dispute and further threatens the stability of the region, with an increasing risk of escalation the longer hostilities persist. While MINURSO has not detected any signs of such an escalation in the immediate term, intermittent firing across the berm and aerial strikes east of the berm continue to take place. In this context, it is critical for all hostilities to cease immediately and for a ceasefire to be fully re-established.

88. As the fiftieth anniversary of the conflict is approaching, this challenging context continues to make it more urgent than ever to reach a political solution to the question of Western Sahara. I maintain my belief that it is possible to find a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in accordance with Security Council resolutions [2440 \(2018\)](#), [2468 \(2019\)](#), [2494 \(2019\)](#), [2548 \(2020\)](#), [2602 \(2021\)](#), [2654 \(2022\)](#) and [2703 \(2023\)](#).

89. This requires, however, that all concerned engage in good faith and with an open mind, that they desist from preconditions and that they expand on their positions with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution. The United Nations remains available to convene them in a joint effort to advance the search for a peaceful solution to the issue of Western Sahara, with the full and meaningful participation of women. Regrettably, ongoing unilateral assertive actions, symbolic gestures and reports of violence in the Territory continue to be a worrying source of enduring tension and have a negative impact on the situation. I encourage again the parties to focus on the interests they have in common, to refrain from escalating the situation further through rhetoric and actions and to overcome the lack of trust between them. Furthermore, I urge all concerned to seize the opportunity provided by my Personal Envoy's facilitation and efforts. Strong political will and continued support from the international community also remain essential.

90. In guiding present and future approaches, due consideration should be given to the precedents set by previous Personal Envoys on Western Sahara in the framework of existing Security Council resolutions. I also recall the constructive holding of informal bilateral consultations with Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria, Mauritania and the members of the Group of Friends under the auspices of my Personal Envoy in New York in March 2023, an additional framework on which to build and which the Security Council strongly welcomed in its resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#).

91. In view of the crucial role of neighbouring States in the achievement of a solution to the question of Western Sahara, I regret that there has been no concrete improvement in the relations between Algeria and Morocco. I encourage them to re-establish dialogue to mend their relations and renew efforts aimed at regional cooperation, including with a view to establishing an environment conducive to peace and security.

92. I welcome the continued expansion of the operational activities of MINURSO through increased ground patrols to areas adjacent to the berm, as well as the resumption of helicopter reconnaissance flights west of the berm after the Mission restored its helicopter fleet, which further increased the Mission's ability to independently assess the reported firing incidents and developments on the ground. I reiterate my call urging Morocco to refrain from building further military infrastructure west of the berm. It is also vital that the Royal Moroccan Army refrain from conducting military activities that have an impact on civilians and directly or indirectly affect MINURSO operations east of the berm.

93. I also welcome the improved ability of MINURSO to operate its logistics, resupply and maintenance chain to team sites east of the berm. However, a permanent solution, in line with the request by the Security Council in resolution [2703 \(2023\)](#), remains to be found. I further welcome the limited improvement in the freedom of movement of MINURSO east of the berm and urge the Frente POLISARIO to remove

all the remaining restrictions on the free movement of MINURSO, including helicopter reconnaissance flights, and to resume regular, in-person contacts with the MINURSO leadership, both civilian and military, in Rabouni, in line with previously established practice.

94. I am encouraged by the full resumption of humanitarian demining activities. The Mine Action Service demining teams in MINURSO continue to play a critical role in facilitating the Mission's operations by enabling safe passage for MINURSO military observers to monitor developments in the Territory safely and securely. I am grateful to the parties for their continued cooperation with MINURSO in this regard.

95. I remain concerned about the humanitarian situation in the refugee camps near Tindouf. The effects of rising food prices continue to be severe. Combined with extreme environmental conditions and limited economic opportunities, this situation leaves many Sahrawis malnourished and highly vulnerable. While we are grateful for the assistance already provided, I join UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO in urgently calling for increased efforts and additional support to address the needs of Saharawi refugees in this protracted crisis.

96. I remain concerned about the continued lack of OHCHR access to the Territory. I again call on the parties to respect, protect and promote the human rights of all people in Western Sahara, including by addressing outstanding human rights issues, ensuring access to justice and accountability for human rights violations and increasing their cooperation with OHCHR and the United Nations human rights mechanisms, and to facilitate their monitoring missions. Independent, impartial, comprehensive and sustained monitoring of the human rights situation is necessary to ensure the protection of all people in Western Sahara.

97. I would like to express my appreciation to the Mission's troop-contributing countries for their support to efforts by MINURSO to achieve full gender balance among its military observers, in line with the objectives of the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative. I remain convinced that the increased participation of women in peacekeeping improves the performance of United Nations peace operations and strengthens their effectiveness.

98. MINURSO remains the main and often sole source of impartial information and advice to me, the Security Council, the Member States and the Secretariat concerning developments in and related to the Territory. It continues to fulfil that role despite the significant challenges it faces. It also continues to provide a stabilizing presence, including by creating a conducive environment for the advancement of the political process led by my Personal Envoy. MINURSO represents the commitment of the United Nations and the international community towards achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the conflict in Western Sahara in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. I therefore recommend that the Council extend the mandate of MINURSO for another year, until 31 October 2025.

99. I commend my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, for his continuing efforts. I also thank my Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, Alexander Ivanko, as well as the MINURSO Force Commander, Major General Md Fakhrul Ahsan, for their dedicated leadership of MINURSO. Finally, I thank the women and men of MINURSO for their continued commitment, under difficult and challenging circumstances, to fulfilling the Mission's mandate.

Annex I

United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara military and police strength as at 30 August 2024

Country	Military component			Total	Police component	
	Experts on Mission	Staff	Troops		Formed police units	Individual police officer
Argentina	3	0	0	3		
Austria	5	0	0	5		
Bangladesh	10	0	20	30		0
Bhutan	2	0	0	2		
Brazil	10	0	0	10		0
Chad	4	0	0	4		
China	6	0	0	6	0	0
Colombia	2	0	0	2		
Côte d'Ivoire	1	0	0	1		0
Croatia	5	0	0	5		
Djibouti	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	3	0	0	3		
Egypt	20	0	0	20	0	0
El Salvador	0	0	0	0		
France	2	0	0	2		
Germany	4	0	0	4		0
Ghana	7	7	0	14		0
Guinea	5	0	0	5		0
Honduras	12	0	0	12		
Hungary	7	0	0	7		
India	3	0	0	3		
Indonesia	3	0	0	3	0	0
Ireland	0	0	0	0		
Italy	2	0	0	2		
Jordan	0	0	0	0		0
Kazakhstan	6	0	0	6		
Kyrgyzstan	1	0	0	1		
Malaysia	9	0	0	9		
Malawi	4	0	0	4		0
Mexico	5	0	0	5		
Mongolia	4	0	0	4		
Montenegro	1	0	0	1		
Nepal	5	0	0	5		
Nigeria	10	0	0	10		0
Pakistan	12	0	0	13		
Poland	1	0	0	1		
Republic of Korea	3	0	0	4		0
Russian Federation	12	0	0	12		
Sierra Leone	1	0	0	1		

<i>Country</i>	<i>Military component</i>				<i>Police component</i>	
	<i>Experts on Mission</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Troops</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Formed police units</i>	<i>Individual police officer</i>
Sri Lanka	2	0	0	2		
Sweden	0	0	0	0		0
Switzerland	2	0	0	2		
Togo	3	0	0	3		0
United States of America	1	0	0	1		
Total	200	7	20	227	0	0

Annex II

Map

