



REGERINGSKANSLIET

**Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Sweden**

Ambassador Fredrik Florén

Summary of review of Sweden's Western Sahara policy

At the request of the Director-General for Administrative Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, I have been conducting an internal review of Sweden's Western Sahara policy since April, alongside my duties as Sweden's Ambassador in Tunisia and Libya. The last review of this issue at the Ministry took place in 2005.

Within the framework of the review, visits have been made to Rabat, Algiers, Tindouf, New York and Madrid for contact with representatives of Polisario, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, Spain, Tunisia, the EEAS and the UN. Talks have also been held in Tunis and Stockholm.

Over 40 years of conflict and almost 25 years of ceasefire have passed. The Western Sahara issue is largely blocking regional cooperation in the Maghreb and thus economic growth. The conflict has also given rise to a protracted refugee situation involving considerable human suffering. The parties, together with the UN Security Council and the Secretary-General, bear the heavy responsibility of finding a fair, sustainable and mutually acceptable solution that satisfies the right of the Western Saharan (Sahrawi) people to self-determination.

This review has coincided with a noticeable deterioration of the situation in the refugee camps in Tindouf. The international food aid that the refugees are dependent upon has been cut back over the past year due to lack of resources. Sweden should quickly seek, in dialogue with the WFP and UNHCR, to provide extra funding and urge other donors to do likewise. The forms of Swedish humanitarian aid to refugees could be

reviewed. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs could have a closer dialogue with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) on the issue.

Western Sahara is a decolonisation issue at the UN. The International Court of Justice adopted an advisory opinion on the status of the area in 1975. This means that the international community does not recognise Morocco's claims to sovereignty of the territory.

Sweden should continue to assert the right of the Western Saharan people to self-determination. It is essential that we continue to support the UN's efforts aimed at facilitating a negotiated solution in which this right is satisfied and that we do not move ahead of these efforts with bilateral decisions.

An assessment under international law indicates that Western Sahara is under occupation. With regard to the issue of natural resources use, the results of the Court of Justice of the European Union's ongoing processes concerning the EU's agricultural and fisheries trade agreements and fisheries partnerships will be of major importance. The criteria for recognising the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)/Western Sahara are not met. It can be noted that there is a territory that is largely controlled by Morocco. A smaller part is controlled by Polisario/SADR. There is a population living in the parts of Western Sahara controlled by Morocco, in refugee camps in Algeria and a small number living in the area controlled by Polisario/SADR. SADR cannot at present be said to exercise effective control over the main part of the territory or the population living there. Polisario and the SADR government have their headquarters in Algeria. In this context, it can be noted that an inventory has shown that just under 40 States have stated that they recognise SADR, as some governments have withdrawn previous recognitions.

The increasing instability in North Africa and the Sahel, combined with the protracted refugee situation, underlines the need for greater efforts by the UN and the parties. We welcome the fact that the UN Secretary-General is now taking new initiatives. The status quo is not considered to be a sustainable option. The unresolved conflict risks further fuelling instability in the long term.

Swedish support to the UN MINURSO mission could be considered, as could support for the work of UNMAS on mine clearance.

Sweden should continue to carefully monitor the human rights situation in Western Sahara and Tindouf. The issue has received greater international attention in recent years. Certain progress has been noted, but serious abuses are occurring. OHCHR is carrying out important work.

Assistance to organisations seeking to bring together actors from both sides of the conflict and to produce a basis for conflict resolution to support the parties is also proposed.

Fredrik Florén