

AMMAN ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

United Nations General Assembly (GA)



**Reassessing the Role of MINURSO in Maintaining the
Ceasefire in Western Sahara**

Dear Delegates,

Regarding the use of ChatGPT in AAMUN'25, we will allow its usage as a **research engine only**. Please be aware that it was last updated in **August 2026**. Therefore, there is a high probability that it will provide you with incorrect information about the topic. If used, we encourage you to fact check the information to prevent any issues throughout the debate.

-Committee-

The General Assembly has remained involved in the question of Western Sahara as part of the United Nations' wider efforts to promote a peaceful and lasting settlement to the conflict. Alongside its role in reviewing and financing UN peacekeeping operations, the General Assembly continues to consider Western Sahara through its work on decolonization and the right to self-determination. MINURSO remains an important part of these efforts, providing a UN presence on the ground, monitoring developments, and helping prevent further escalation between Morocco and the Polisario Front.

More than three decades after MINURSO was established in 1991, however, the political dispute remains unresolved, and the referendum originally planned under the mission has never taken place. Renewed hostilities since 2020 have also raised further questions about the mission's ability to maintain stability under its existing mandate. The committee must therefore consider whether MINURSO continues to effectively serve its purpose, what changes could strengthen its role, and how the international community can support both regional stability and

progress toward a lasting political solution for Western Sahara.

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-Introduction-

The Western Sahara conflict remains one of the longest unresolved territorial disputes on the United Nations agenda. As in 1991, the UN established the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, also known as (MINURSO) to monitor a ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario Front. The mission aimed to supervise the ceasefire and organize a referendum to allow the Sahrawi people to determine the territory's future. But now, three decades later, the referendum still has not taken place, and the dispute remains unsolved.

Although the ceasefire prevented a large-scale dispute for almost thirty years, tensions rose in November 2020 following clashes in the Guerguerat buffer zone, which then led to the Polisario front declaring it no longer considered itself bound by the agreed ceasefire, escalating tensions and stability in the region.

The international community remains divided over the way forward. As Morocco supports an autonomy plan for the Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty, in contrast to that, the Polisario Front and Algeria support self-determination through a referendum. Leaving the UN to face a difficult question: **should MINURSO focus on preventing further dispute, or should its role be**

strengthened in hopes of achieving a long-lasting solution while protecting the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination?

-Major Parties involved-

Morocco: Morocco controls most of the Western Sahara and considers the territory to be a part of Morocco. Supporting an autonomy plan giving the Western Sahara a degree of self-government while remaining under Moroccan sovereignty. Morocco argues that the proposal offers a realistic political solution for this long-lasting conflict.

Polisario Front: They are the main movement seeking self-determination and independence for the Sahrawi people. Supporting a referendum that would allow the people of Western Sahara to decide the territory's political future, with independence being an option. The Polisario Front's position remains strongly opposed to Morocco's autonomy proposal.

Algeria: Algeria strongly supports the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination as well as supports the Polisario Front's position on the dispute. Also hosting Sahrawi refugees in camps near Tindouf. It continues to support a political solution through the UN, which guarantees the Sahrawi people the right to determine their own future.

-Timeline-

1975-1976: Spanish withdrawal and beginning of the dispute:

Western Sahara had been colonized by Spain until 1976. During the process of decolonization, Morocco and Mauritania claimed the territory, while the Polisario Front opposed these claims and sought independence for Western Sahara. Spain withdrew from the territory in 1976, and fighting continued between the Polisario Front and the forces of Morocco and Mauritania.

1979: Mauritania withdraws from the conflict:

Mauritania gave up its territorial claims to Western Sahara and withdrew from the conflict. Morocco later expanded its control over much of the territory previously claimed by Mauritania. Fighting between Morocco and the Polisario Front continued, leaving the political status of Western Sahara unresolved.

1988: Morocco and the Polisario Front accept settlement proposals:

After years of conflict, Morocco and the Polisario Front accepted settlement proposals developed by the United Nations in cooperation with the Organization of African

Unity. proposals that aimed to create a peaceful process through which the people of Western Sahara could determine the future of their own territory.

In 1991, MINURSO is established, and the ceasefire begins:

The UN Security Council established MINURSO through Resolution 690 on 29 April 1991. created to monitor a ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario Front and prepare for a referendum in which the people of Western Sahara would have the option to choose between independence and integration with Morocco. The ceasefire officially came into effect on 6 September 1991.

1992: Planned referendum fails to take place:

The referendum was expected to take place in January 1992. However, disagreements between Morocco and the Polisario Front, especially over who would be eligible to vote, prevented the referendum from going forward. The referendum has still not been held, becoming one of the main issues surrounding MINURSO's effectiveness.

1994-1996: Disagreements over voter eligibility:

MINURSO began identifying potential voters for the planned referendum in 1994. However, more disagreements between the parties and difficulties in determining voter eligibility slowed the process. In May 1996, the UN Secretary General suspended the

identification process while keeping military personnel in Western Sahara to continue monitoring the ceasefire.

1997-1999: UN attempts to restart the referendum process:

The UN increased efforts to resolve disagreements between Morocco and the Polisario Front, allowing the voter eligibility process to restart in December 1997. By the end of 1999, the voter eligibility process had largely been completed. However, major disagreements once again remained over voter appeals and other parts of the settlement plan, preventing the referendum from taking place.

2007-2010: New negotiations fail to achieve a political solution:

In 2007, Morocco and the Polisario Front each submitted proposals for resolving the Western Sahara dispute. The United Nations then brought the parties together for several rounds of negotiations, with Algeria and Mauritania also participating. Despite renewed dialogue, the negotiations failed to produce an agreement on the main political issues.

2020: Breakdown of the long standing ceasefire:

In November 2020, tensions increased in the Guerguerat buffer zone after almost three decades in which the ceasefire had generally held. The Polisario Front

announced its withdrawal from the ceasefire and declared the resumption of armed struggle. This created a new challenge for MINURSO and raised concerns about its ability to maintain stability in Western Sahara.

2020-Present: MINURSO continues amid unresolved tensions:

Despite the return of hostilities, MINURSO has remained active in Western Sahara. The mission continues to supervise military developments, work to reduce tensions, support mine action operations, and assist the wider UN political process. However, a final political settlement has not been reached and the referendum originally planned under MINURSO has never taken place.

-Previous efforts-

The 1991 Settlement Plan and Ceasefire

The UN and the Organization of African Unity brokered a settlement plan in 1988, accepted by both Morocco and the Polisario Front, which led to Security Council Resolution 690 and the deployment of MINURSO in September 1991. The ceasefire it monitored held for nearly thirty years, making it one of the longer-standing peacekeeping arrangements in Africa, even as its companion objective, the referendum, was never realized.

Referendum and Voter Identification Efforts

Throughout the 1990s, the UN attempted to prepare for a referendum by identifying eligible Sahrawi voters, a process that repeatedly stalled over disputes between Morocco and the Polisario Front about who should be allowed to vote. These disagreements proved impossible to resolve and effectively froze the referendum process indefinitely.

The 1975 ICJ Advisory Opinion

Prior to Spain's withdrawal, the International Court of Justice ruled that no ties of territorial sovereignty existed between Western Sahara and Morocco or Mauritania sufficient to override the territory's right to self-determination. This opinion remains the primary legal foundation cited by the Polisario Front and its supporters in UN debates.

The Baker Plans (2000-2003)

Personal Envoy James Baker proposed two successive frameworks: Baker I (2000), offering autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty, which Morocco accepted but the Polisario Front rejected; and Baker II (2003), proposing a referendum following an autonomy period, which the Polisario Front accepted as a basis for talks but Morocco rejected. Neither secured an agreement from both parties.

Morocco's 2007 Autonomy Proposal and the Manhasset Talks:

Morocco submitted a formal autonomy plan to the

Security Council in 2007, offering Sahrawi self-governance under continued Moroccan sovereignty. This led to four rounds of direct UN-sponsored negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front in Manhasset, New York, during 2007-2008, the first direct talks between the parties in seven years, though they ended without a breakthrough. The autonomy plan has since gained increasing diplomatic traction, culminating in Security Council Resolution 2797 (2025), which explicitly named it "the most feasible" basis for a political solution.

Annual Mandate Renewals and the 2020 Ceasefire Breakdown

The Security Council has renewed MINURSO's mandate every year since 1991, most recently through Resolution 2797, extending it to October 2026. Since the Polisario Front declared an end to the ceasefire in November 2020 following a Moroccan military operation in the Guerguerat buffer zone, MINURSO has continued monitoring on both sides of the berm despite the resumption of low-level hostilities, functioning less as a referendum-preparation mission and more as a conflict-observation and de-escalation mechanism.

-Glossary-

MINURSO: The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, established by Security Council Resolution 690 in 1991 to monitor the ceasefire

between Morocco and the Polisario Front and to organize a referendum on the territory's status.

Ceasefire: A formal agreement to stop fighting. The Morocco-Polisario ceasefire took effect in September 1991 and generally held for nearly three decades before breaking down in November 2020.

Referendum: A direct vote in which the people of a territory decide a specific political question. MINURSO's original mandate was to organize a referendum allowing the Sahrawi people to choose between independence and integration with Morocco, a vote that has never taken place.

Self-Determination: The principle that a people have the right to freely decide their own political status. It is central to the Polisario Front's position and to UN Charter principles on decolonization.

Frente POLISARIO (Polisario Front): The Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro, a Sahrawi national liberation movement that has fought for Western Sahara's independence since the 1970s and represents Sahrawi self-determination claims at the UN.

Sahrawi: The indigenous people of Western Sahara, whose right to self-determination is the central subject of the dispute.

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR): The government-in-exile proclaimed by the Polisario Front in 1976, recognized by a number of UN member states and a full member of the African Union.

Autonomy Proposal (2007): A plan submitted by Morocco to the UN Security Council offering Western Sahara self-governance under Moroccan sovereignty, rather than a referendum with independence as an option. It is now formally described in Security Council Resolution 2797 as a basis for negotiation.

Advisory Opinion (ICJ, 1975): A ruling by the International Court of Justice finding no legal ties of sovereignty between Western Sahara and either Morocco or Mauritania strong enough to override the Sahrawi right to self-determination, frequently cited by the Polisario Front and its supporters as the core legal basis for their position.

Baker Plan: Two successive peace frameworks drafted by UN Personal Envoy James Baker. Baker I (2000) proposed a five-year autonomy period under Moroccan sovereignty and was accepted by Morocco but rejected by the Polisario Front; Baker II (2003) proposed a referendum after autonomy, which Morocco rejected but the Polisario Front accepted as a basis for talks. Neither was adopted.

Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General: A senior diplomat appointed by the UN Secretary-General to

mediate negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front. Staffan de Mistura currently holds this role.

Berm (Sand Wall): A roughly 2,700-kilometer defensive wall built by Morocco, dividing Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara from the Polisario-administered areas to the east; it is heavily mined and patrolled.

Settlement Plan: The 1988 UN/OAU-brokered framework, accepted by both Morocco and the Polisario Front, that established the terms for a ceasefire and referendum and led directly to MINURSO's creation.

Non-Self-Governing Territory: The UN classification under which Western Sahara has been listed since 1963, meaning it is recognized as a territory whose decolonization process remains incomplete.

Peacekeeping Mandate: The set of tasks authorized by the UN Security Council for a mission like MINURSO; it must be renewed periodically, and the scope of MINURSO's mandate has been debated as its referendum objective has stalled.

Resumption of Hostilities (November 2020): The Polisario Front's declared end of its 1991 ceasefire commitment after Moroccan forces moved into the Guerguerat buffer zone, restarting low-level armed conflict alongside continued MINURSO deployment.

-HELPFUL LINKS-

<https://minurso.unmissions.org/en>

<https://minurso.unmissions.org/en/timeline>

<https://minurso.unmissions.org/en/background>

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/factsheet/minurso>

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statements/2020-11-13/state-ment-attributable-the-spokesperson-for-the-secretary-general-western-sahara>

<https://minurso.unmissions.org/en/history>

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