



# 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 [2602 \(2021\)](#), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 October 2022 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 1 October 2021 ([S/2021/843](#)) and describes the situation on the ground, the status of political negotiations on Western Sahara, the implementation of resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#) and the existing challenges to the Mission's operations and steps taken to address them.

#### II. Recent developments

2. In my previous report to the Security Council on the situation concerning Western Sahara, I noted with concern a significant deterioration of the situation in Western Sahara. During the reporting period, the situation was characterized by low-intensity hostilities between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) and enduring challenges to the operational environment of MINURSO, including related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and regional tensions.

3. Most firing incidents across the berm reported to MINURSO by the parties were concentrated in the north of the Territory, near Mahbas. According to MINURSO calculations based on the reported incidents, the incidents of firing reported by the parties have steadily decreased since January 2021. While MINURSO was not able to independently confirm the number and location of the reported firing incidents, their impact remained the subject of divergent claims.

4. MINURSO continued to note reports of strikes conducted by Royal Moroccan Army unmanned aerial vehicles east of the berm. In some instances, media reports indicated that civilian casualties had occurred as a result of the aerial strikes. Owing to the time needed to receive authorization from the parties to visit these sites, MINURSO was only able to independently confirm that casualties had occurred on one occasion, on 16 November 2021 in the Mijek area. In addition, MINURSO observed traces of human remains at four other sites.



5. Two aerial strikes in November 2021 and April 2022 reportedly involved nationals of neighbouring countries. On 2 November, MINURSO noted media reports suggesting that an aerial strike had taken place in Bir Lahlou, involving two Algerian trucks, which reportedly resulted in the deaths of three Algerian civilians. On 3 and 4 November, MINURSO sent ground patrols to the site, the second one accompanied by an expert from the MINURSO mine action component. The Mission observed two trucks with Algerian licence plates parked parallel to each other, which had suffered extensive damage and charring. Shrapnel was found in the truck that appeared to have been hit. Observation by MINURSO suggested that the trucks were transporting fuel and that the damage was caused by the explosion of an air-to-ground projectile and the resulting fire. The Frente POLISARIO local interlocutor informed the MINURSO patrol that three dead bodies had been found at the site on 1 November. MINURSO could not independently verify that information.

6. On 3 November, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria wrote to me asserting that these “provocations confirm Morocco’s aim to sow and maintain tensions in the region”. On 5 November, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations wrote to me indicating that “there is no reason to justify the presence of civilians or Algerian nationals, or of other nationalities, in this area”. He further indicated that “Morocco has never targeted, and will never target civilians, nor Algerian nationals or other nationalities”.

7. On 10 April 2022, near the border with Mauritania, an incident reportedly resulted in civilian casualties, including one of Algerian and two of Mauritanian nationality. On 11 April, in a letter to the Acting Force Commander, the Chief of Staff of the Southern Command of the Royal Moroccan Army indicated that, on 10 April, Royal Moroccan Army surveillance activities had located and “neutralized a dozen combat and logistic vehicles used by the [Frente POLISARIO] armed militia.” The letter further accused Frente POLISARIO of “pretending to be civilian victims” and asserted that the Royal Moroccan Army reserved the “right to retaliate, if necessary, to adverse transgressions”.

8. On 11 April 2022, a communiqué by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad of Algeria stated that “Algeria strongly condemns the targeted assassinations of innocent civilians from three separate countries in the region committed by the Kingdom of Morocco using sophisticated weapons outside its recognized international borders”.

9. On 12 April 2022, MINURSO received authorization to visit the site from Frente POLISARIO and on 13 April the Mission reported the likelihood that three separate incidents had taken place, at three separate sites within two kilometres of each other. In total, MINURSO saw two trucks and one light vehicle that appeared to have been hit by air-to-ground munitions. MINURSO could not independently confirm if casualties had occurred at any of those three sites.

10. Legislative, regional-level and commune-level elections were held in Morocco and in the part of Western Sahara under Moroccan control on 8 September 2021. In a letter addressed to me on 13 September, the Permanent Representative of Morocco referred to the reported rates of participation by voters in Western Sahara as “a new confirmation, through the ballot box, of the unwavering commitment of citizens of the southern provinces to their Moroccaness”. On 19 September, the Frente POLISARIO representative in New York and coordinator with MINURSO, in a letter addressed to me, stated that the elections “cannot have any effect on the legal status of Western Sahara”.

11. On 30 October 2021, the same day as the Security Council adopted resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#), Frente POLISARIO issued a press release asserting that “faced with Security Council’s repeated inaction”, the Sahrawi people “are left with no choice but

to continue and intensify their legitimate armed struggle to defend the sovereignty of their country and to ensure the exercise of their inalienable and non-negotiable right to self-determination and independence”.

12. On 6 November 2021, King Mohammed VI of Morocco delivered a speech on the occasion of the forty-sixth anniversary of the Green March, in which he stated that “the Moroccanness of the Sahara is an immutable and indisputable fact” and added that “Morocco is not negotiating over its Sahara”. The King further affirmed Morocco’s “commitment to a peaceful solution” and full support for my efforts “to reactivate the political process as soon as possible”.

13. In a letter addressed to King Mohammed VI on 14 March 2022, the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, stated that “Spain considers the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007, as the most serious, credible and realistic basis for resolving the dispute”. On 21 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain met at his request with my Personal Envoy. My Personal Envoy took good note of the Minister’s support for a United Nations-facilitated process on Western Sahara aimed at a mutually acceptable solution, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions.

14. On 19 March 2022, Frente POLISARIO issued a statement stating that Spain’s position was “absolutely in contradiction with international legality.” On 22 March, in a letter addressed to me, the Frente POLISARIO representative in New York and coordinator with MINURSO considered that the position declared by Spain would “undermine the prospect for relaunching the long-stalled UN peace process”. On 10 April, Frente POLISARIO issued a statement announcing its decision to “suspend its contacts with the current Spanish Government”.

15. On 19 March 2022, Algeria recalled its ambassador to Spain for consultations, over Spain’s comments on Western Sahara. Subsequently, on 8 June, the Algerian presidency announced that it was suspending its Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Spain, signed in 2002. The announcement referred to the Spanish authorities as “engaged in a campaign to justify its position on Western Sahara”.

16. On 30 July 2022, in a speech on the twenty-third anniversary of his ascension to the throne, King Mohammed VI assured Algerians that “Morocco and the Moroccans will always be on their side” and indicated that Moroccans were “keen to find a way out of the current situation and to promote closer ties, interaction and understanding between the two peoples”. The King further “look[ed] forward to cooperating with the Algerian presidency so that Morocco and Algeria may work hand in hand and enjoy normal relations”.

17. On 20 August, in a speech celebrating the sixty-ninth anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, King Mohammed VI stated that Western Sahara “is the clear, simple benchmark whereby my country measures the sincerity of friendships and the efficiency of partnerships”. In a statement on 21 August, Frente POLISARIO asserted that the speech put “a new stumbling block in the way of international efforts aimed at completing the decolonization of the last colony in Africa”.

18. During the reporting period, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Suriname, Togo and Cabo Verde inaugurated “Consulates General” in Dakhla. In letters addressed to me on 31 March, 26 May, 21 July and 1 September 2022, the Frente POLISARIO called these diplomatic representations a “violation of international law and ... breach of the international legal status of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory”.

19. West of the berm, Morocco continued investing in infrastructure development. On 23 June 2022, the Moroccan authorities announced the signature of four agreements related to a seawater desalination project for the city of Dakhla, which is expected to have a capacity of 37 million cubic meters of water per year. Frente POLISARIO continued to protest that such investments are in violation of international law.

### **III. Political activities**

20. My new Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, took up his functions on 1 November 2021 and has held consultations with all concerned.

21. From 13 to 20 January 2022, my Personal Envoy completed an initial tour of the region, visiting successively Rabat, Tindouf/Rabouni, Nouakchott and Algiers. The purpose of this first visit was to hear the views of all concerned on how to make progress towards a constructive resumption of the political process on Western Sahara.

22. In Rabat, my Personal Envoy had in-depth discussions with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Nasser Bourita, during which he was briefed in detail about the 2007 Moroccan autonomy proposal. The Minister expressed interest in seeing the political process relaunched.

23. On 16 January, in Rabouni, my Personal Envoy met with the Secretary-General of the Frente POLISARIO, Brahim Ghali. Frente POLISARIO interlocutors reiterated their position concerning the need to achieve the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, and that there was currently a “situation of war”, with daily casualties on both sides. In their view, the “lack of attention” by the international community to the issue of Western Sahara, in addition to facts on the ground, made the return to hostilities their “only option”. Their “commitment to the ceasefire had ended”. Several Frente POLISARIO interlocutors, however, expressed hope for a renewed process and confidence-building measures that could make a positive impact on the situation on the ground.

24. In Nouakchott, on 17 January, the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, and the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, expressed to my Personal Envoy the support of Mauritania for the United Nations-facilitated political process and indicated their country’s availability to assist within a context of “positive neutrality”.

25. Receiving my Personal Envoy in Algiers on 19 January, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, Ramtane Lamamra, and Algeria’s Special Envoy for Western Sahara, Amar Belani, reiterated the Algerian position that the issue was one related to decolonization. Algerian interlocutors furthermore reaffirmed that Algeria should be considered along with Mauritania as a “concerned neighbour” and expressed doubts on the round-table process and any effort they might see as aiming to reframe the situation as a “regional conflict”.

26. In the third quarter of 2022, my Personal Envoy completed a second set of visits to all concerned actors in the region. During a visit to Rabat from 2 to 7 July, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco further shared his sense that the time had not come for his Government to elaborate on their proposal. The Minister suggested that my Personal Envoy should first reconvene round tables with the participation of Morocco, Frente POLISARIO, Algeria and Mauritania, for a discussion to be based exclusively on the Moroccan proposal and in the context of Morocco’s “national sovereignty and territorial integrity”.

27. Before that visit, my Personal Envoy had communicated to the Moroccan authorities his intention to visit Western Sahara. He also flagged this intention publicly ahead of his trip, noting that he would be guided by the format of the visits undertaken by his predecessors. In the course of consultations with the Moroccan authorities about the planning of his proposed visit to Western Sahara, my Personal Envoy was informed of the position of the Government of Morocco that it would not be possible for him to meet with civil society representatives and women's organizations on the occasion of this first visit. In light of United Nations principles, in particular the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and also considering the importance of engaging with civil society organizations, my Personal Envoy decided not to proceed with a visit to Western Sahara during the trip, but stated that he looked forward to doing so during his next visits to the region.

28. On 3 and 4 September, my Personal Envoy travelled again to Rabouni to meet with the leadership of Frente POLISARIO. With reference to the 2007 proposal by Frente POLISARIO, and in light of the current political and security environment, he engaged with his interlocutors concerning their approach to the next steps. The Secretary-General of Frente POLISARIO and other senior officials repeated the emphasis they placed on the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara through a referendum and how the political impasse had led them to the "resumption of armed conflict". My Personal Envoy expressed the hope that a resumption of the ceasefire could be pursued, in an effort to reduce tensions and build an environment more conducive to the political process. In the course of the visit, my Personal Envoy met with local women's organizations and civil society groups, including youth representatives, to hear their perspectives on the general situation and the political process. His interlocutors expressed their frustration at the lack of a political solution. They also emphasized their concern about the further reduction in humanitarian aid in the refugee camps and the negative impact of that unsustainable situation on the population.

29. In Algiers, on 5 September, my Personal Envoy met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Special Envoy for Western Sahara, who discussed the issue of Western Sahara at length and reiterated the full support of Algeria for his efforts and for the political process, emphasizing that it should lead to the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara and noting the need for a direct dialogue between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO. My Personal Envoy visited Nouakchott on 12 and 13 September, where he was received by the President of Mauritania and the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, who reiterated the principle of their country's "positive neutrality", while signalling readiness to assist his efforts when circumstances would be conducive to progress.

30. The visits of my Personal Envoy took place against the backdrop of regional tensions. He stressed to his interlocutors in the region the deep concern he had noted among members of the international community at the state of relations between Algeria and Morocco and appealed for de-escalation. He noted with relief the assurances received from his interlocutors, particularly in Algiers and Rabat, that there was no intention for a military escalation.

31. My Personal Envoy also undertook consultations on the issue of Western Sahara with members of the Security Council, members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara and other interested actors. Among others, he met with New York-based interlocutors during his visits to United Nations Headquarters in November 2021 and February and April 2022; the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, and senior Italian government officials in Rome in December 2021; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain, José Manuel Albares Bueno, also in Rome on 3 December 2021, in Madrid on 21 January

and in Brussels on 21 March 2022; senior French Government officials in Paris on 27 January 2022; the United States Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, in Washington, D.C., on 3 February 2022; various senior international officials on the margins of the Munich Security Conference in February 2022; senior government officials of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in London on 28 March 2022; senior officials in the Government of Sweden in Stockholm on 9 May 2022; and senior officials in the Government of Germany in Berlin on 10 May 2022. He furthermore spoke by telephone with senior government officials of the Russian Federation. In these meetings and interactions, my Personal Envoy noted with appreciation the expressions of support by his interlocutors for the efforts by the United Nations to facilitate a political settlement of the situation in Western Sahara.

32. In line with paragraph 10 of Security Council resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#), my Personal Envoy briefed the Council on 20 April 2022 on his mission and plans for the way forward and received broad support from the members of the Council for his efforts.

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

### **A. Operational activities**

33. The overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on MINURSO operational activities remained moderate. The Mission operated in partial lockdown from 24 January to 22 February 2022, with only essential staff working at the MINURSO premises. Following a general improvement in the COVID-19 situation in the Territory, my Special Representative gradually shifted towards a return to normal working arrangements from 1 April. The period between 23 February and 13 June saw no new cases of COVID-19 in the Mission. Starting from 14 June, however, the Mission experienced a new outbreak of COVID-19, which coincided with an overall increase in COVID-19 cases in the Territory. Immediate measures were taken to contain the spread of the virus, including requiring a negative COVID-19 test for all land and air travel to the MINURSO team sites. On 28 June, the Mission returned to a “reduced footprint” model at its headquarters in Laayoune and returned to normal working arrangements on 8 August.

34. The Government of Morocco, Frente POLISARIO and the Government of Algeria continued to cooperate fully with MINURSO on COVID-19-related matters. MINURSO military and civilian staff continued to receive vaccinations provided in the Territory west of the berm by the Royal Moroccan Army and the Ministry of Health of Morocco, and in Tindouf by the health authorities of Algeria. As at 31 August 2022, at least 95 per cent of all international civilian and 30 per cent of national civilian staff had received two doses of the vaccine, and all military staff had received two doses of the vaccine, with 79 per cent having also received a third, booster dose.

35. As at 31 August, the military component of MINURSO consisted of 227 personnel, 74 of them women. MINURSO continued to strengthen its efforts to improve its gender balance. As a result, the percentage of women observers increased to 33 per cent of the deployed strength, which is the highest representation in the field missions and exceeds the target of 19 per cent for 2022 set in the uniformed gender parity strategy 2018–2028.

36. From 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022, MINURSO conducted approximately 397,859 km of ground patrols and 938 hours of air patrols. West of the berm, MINURSO continued to exercise its freedom of movement. Owing to security

and safety concerns, helicopter reconnaissance flights were able to operate only at a safe distance of 15 km away from the berm. With regard to ground patrols, areas along the berm where no exchanges of fire were reported were identified to enable the conduct of patrolling in those areas. During the reporting period, MINURSO was able to conduct 6,167 visits to Royal Moroccan Army headquarters, units, subunits, strong points and observation posts west of the berm. Cooperation and communications at the strategic level between MINURSO and the Command of the Royal Moroccan Army in the southern sector remained unaltered.

37. East of the berm, ground operations continued to be conducted along 20 km corridors from each team site. Ground patrols were not allowed inside the units and headquarters of Frente POLISARIO and were required to remain at least 200 m away from them. MINURSO ground patrols attempted to conduct a total of 2,407 visits to Frente POLISARIO units and headquarters but were denied access. Helicopter resupply flights to team sites east of the berm were allowed at relatively regular intervals, approximately twice a month, subject to prior approval by Frente POLISARIO. No logistical and maintenance ground convoys have been permitted since 13 November 2020. In a letter to the Acting Force Commander on 18 July, the Frente POLISARIO coordinator with MINURSO reiterated that the Frente POLISARIO “assessment regarding the high risks associated with the ground convoys remains unchanged”.

38. The Acting Force Commander has been unable to establish direct contact with the leadership of the Frente POLISARIO military forces, and all communications were conducted only by way of written correspondence. The Frente POLISARIO military forces also declined requests to increase the frequency of MINURSO logistic flights and investigation aerial or ground patrols east of the berm, allowing ground patrols only on occasion to the sites of suspected aerial strikes, especially in case of reported civilian casualties. As a result of these continued limitations, MINURSO was unable to directly observe exchanges of fire across the berm or verify the specific details of individual incidents. Instead, the Mission continued to rely on information reported daily by the parties, which it could not independently verify.

39. Between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2022, the Royal Moroccan Army reported to MINURSO 691 incidents involving firing from a distance against its units at or near the berm, 64 per cent of which were concentrated in Mahbas. On-the-ground verification by MINURSO could not be conducted owing to the security situation.

40. During the same period, Frente POLISARIO issued regular media reports regarding the alleged targeting of and attacks on Royal Moroccan Army positions along the berm. The Frente POLISARIO military forces announced they had conducted 1,001 firing incidents against the Royal Moroccan Army.

41. MINURSO has documented 18 reported strikes conducted by Royal Moroccan Army unmanned aerial vehicles east of the berm since 1 September 2021, including one on 26 July 2022 reportedly leading to the death of the Chief of Staff of the Frente POLISARIO Fourth Military Region. On each occasion, MINURSO immediately liaised with the parties to receive additional information. On 12 occasions, and in coordination with Frente POLISARIO, MINURSO was able to visit the sites of the reported incidents that occurred east of the berm, while on six occasions authorization to visit the suspected sites was denied on grounds that they were located in areas of restricted military operations. In eight instances, investigations conducted by MINURSO military observers assisted by experts from the mine action component were able to confirm that some form of aerial strike had taken place.

42. The MINURSO Force Commander conducted three visits to the headquarters of the Royal Moroccan Army Southern Zone in Agadir in November 2021 and January and February 2022, as well as to relevant Royal Moroccan Army sector headquarters.

He also visited the Guerguerat area in September 2021, where he observed new commercial developments, infrastructure and facilities, and Dakhmar in February 2022. In June and August 2022, the MINURSO Acting Force Commander visited the headquarters of the Royal Moroccan Army Southern Zone in Agadir as part of the quarterly liaison meetings.

## **B. Mine action**

43. During the reporting period, mine action activities were limited to emergency disposal of explosive ordnance, route verification and combined explosive ordnance risk education and COVID-19 prevention messaging for civilians. Owing to the suspension of operations, no land release activities could be conducted.

44. MINURSO continued to work to re-secure permission from the parties to resume demining activities. On 31 October 2021, Frente POLISARIO informed MINURSO that survey and clearance activities east of the berm, scheduled to resume on 1 November, would have to be postponed. Frente POLISARIO later stated their request, in a letter dated 23 November 2021, for written guarantees from MINURSO regarding the safety of Mine Action Service implementing partner personnel. The Royal Moroccan Army informed MINURSO on 30 October that it would cooperate in the planned resumption of demining activities, but requested guarantees from Frente POLISARIO that areas released would not be used for any aggressive actions against their installations or positions. The same position was reiterated in a letter dated 8 August 2022. On 25 August, Frente POLISARIO wrote to the MINURSO Acting Force Commander confirming its provisional agreement to the resumption of mine action operations east of the berm, subject to “developments on the ground”.

45. The two MINURSO demining teams in Tifariti and Mijek continued to ensure the safety of United Nations personnel, logistical convoys and property. As at 31 August 2022, the mine action component had assessed 8,772 km of routes between various team sites east of the berm as free from visible explosive hazards. The mine action component also ensured the safety of MINURSO investigative teams by verifying the routes and immediate areas around alleged aerial strikes as free from explosive hazards and conducting battle area clearance on 130,518 m<sup>2</sup> of land.

46. MINURSO assessed that there was a renewed threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war in the Territory, including in areas previously deemed safe since 2020. As at 31 August 2022, 24 of 61 known minefields and 42 of 527 known cluster strike areas remained to be released east of the berm. MINURSO advocated that the parties share detailed information on where renewed fighting had taken place and the types of munitions used so as to update the MINURSO mine action database.

47. The MINURSO mine action component, through its cooperation east of the berm with the Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office, remained in contact with Frente POLISARIO on matters related to mine action while continuing to provide the Office with technical assistance. In addition, the component continued to enhance the capacities of the all-female Sahrawi Mine Action Women’s Team and the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Landmines through mentoring sessions delivered by MINURSO mine action personnel.

48. Between 1 September 2021 and 31 July 2022, the Royal Moroccan Army reported that it had released over 134 million m<sup>2</sup> of land west of the berm and destroyed 52 anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, as well as 770 items of explosive remnants of war.

49. The MINURSO mine action component delivered 38 explosive awareness briefings for 176 newly arrived MINURSO civilian and military personnel (113 men

and 63 women). Combined explosive ordnance risk education and COVID-19 prevention messaging was also delivered for 939 men, women, boys and girls east of the berm in Sahrawi refugee camps and at border crossings between the Territory and Algeria.

50. Despite these efforts, the Royal Moroccan Army reported 17 explosive remnants of war incidents west of the berm involving 23 civilians and military personnel. East of the berm, two incidents were reported by the Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office involving five civilians.

### **C. Security**

51. Low-intensity hostilities in the Mission area between the Royal Moroccan Army and Frente POLISARIO continued throughout the reporting period and continued to affect MINURSO aerial and ground activities. The presence of unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war also constituted a potential threat to United Nations personnel, assets and resources.

52. The Mission introduced preventive measures to address security concerns. Ground patrols and helicopter reconnaissance flights west of the berm maintained a safe distance from the live-fire areas. East of the berm, existing restrictions on ground patrols and helicopter reconnaissance flights also contributed to a lower security risk. Flights that did occur were carefully coordinated with both sides. The assessed residual risk to United Nations personnel, operations and assets was considered medium in Laayoune and Tindouf, but high in the areas west and east of the berm outside of Laayoune.

53. The presence of drug smugglers and other criminal elements in the Territory, as well as the risk of possible terrorist attacks, remained of concern.

54. 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, and MINURSO continued to have confidence in the commitment and capability of both parties.

55. During the reporting period, seven road traffic accidents involving Mission personnel were recorded, with an accident near Laayoune on 7 July 2022 resulting in one fatality and several injuries among Mission personnel. In Tindouf, the situation remained stable with one incident of harassment against United Nations staff reported.

### **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. The Mission began to operationalize an integrated Joint Mission Analysis Cell and worked with United Nations Headquarters to introduce the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise database.

57. Representatives of Member States resumed visits to MINURSO offices in Laayoune and Tindouf. Two visits led by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to the Tindouf office and the Sahrawi refugee camps took place in October 2021 and May 2022. My Special Representative continued to regularly brief Member States in Rabat and New York by videoconference and in person when feasible.

58. During the reporting period, in line with the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and its implementation strategy (Action for Peacekeeping Plus), MINURSO continued implementation of the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System. MINURSO has continued to use the system to assess the changed context, its performance in delivering mandated tasks and its impact in the area of responsibility.

59. MINURSO also shared and explained its activities on digital media channels, expanding its social media presence and launching sustained internal communications. Through character-driven, photographic stories portraying its peacekeepers, MINURSO aimed to enhance the information available in troop-contributing countries and the wider international community and played a role in promoting cross-cutting strategic United Nations priorities, such as the women and peace and security agenda and gender parity.

## **E. Challenges to the operations of the Mission**

60. Lack of access to areas near the berm continued to pose significant challenges to MINURSO observation activities and the Mission's ability to obtain first-hand information and verify reported developments on the ground. My Special Representative remained unable to meet with Frente POLISARIO representatives in Rabouni, in line with established practice.

61. MINURSO continued to experience constraints in its ability to execute its operational tasks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 29 November 2021 and 7 February 2022, Morocco suspended all international flights owing to the increase in COVID-19 infections, affecting the rotation of MINURSO military observers. In cooperation with the Governments of Algeria and Morocco, my Special Representative was able to re-establish regular weekly operational flights between Laayoune and Tindouf in early February 2022, after they had been suspended since March 2020.

62. Constraints on the MINURSO logistical supply and maintenance chain to team sites east of the berm continued to have increasingly serious consequences for the Mission's ability to sustain its field presences in the austere and difficult conditions of the Territory. This negatively affected the delivery of fuel, the repair and maintenance of rapidly degrading critical equipment, installations and accommodations and the rotation of vehicles and transportation of heavy equipment that cannot be airlifted. It curtailed the Mission's efforts to implement the environmental sustainability strategy and also significantly affected life support resupply, including food, bulk water and fuel.

63. In early August 2022, MINURSO faced an interruption in the resupply of fuel to its team sites east of the berm following an incident on 2 August during which a Frente POLISARIO water truck used to supply bulk water to MINURSO was destroyed by a reported aerial strike in the vicinity of the MINURSO team site in Agwanit. MINURSO mine action experts visited the site of the incident on 4 August and observed one water truck with damage consistent with the use of air-to-ground munition. On 4 August, the Frente POLISARIO coordinator with MINURSO wrote to my Special Representative stating that "the Frente POLISARIO [had] no other option but to reconsider the existing arrangements with MINURSO including the assurances given to the Mission to carry out its regular passenger and logistic flights and other operations". As a result, deliveries of fuel to all the team sites east of the berm were interrupted. Without resupply, fuel reserves in at least two team sites east of the berm were estimated by MINURSO to reach critically low levels by early September. High-level interventions by MINURSO and the Secretariat with both

parties were initiated, alongside efforts to find alternative options to enable the continued operation of the team sites. On 24 August, the Royal Moroccan Army wrote to MINURSO conveying its assurances, “exceptionally” for “one-time only”, for the refuelling of all five team sites east of the berm.

64. The regular flight schedule with two flights per week to team sites east of the berm also remained suspended. MINURSO was permitted to operate only two flights per month for resupply of essential life support items, such as food, bottled water and spare parts for infrastructure equipment. This negatively affected the serviceability and life cycle of degrading equipment and the morale and health of MINURSO personnel at the team sites east of the berm because of the limited availability of fresh food items and the timeliness of emergency flights when required. A request by the Acting Force Commander on 6 June 2022 to increase the frequency of flights to once a week was rejected by Frente POLISARIO on 15 June, citing “no changes to the operational situation since 13 November 2020”.

65. In this context, MINURSO continued actively to consider possible alternatives while pursuing temporary options to increase sustainability at its team sites east of the berm. In March and April 2022, MINURSO started utilizing helicopter underbelly sling operations as an interim measure to transport four new power generators to team sites east of the berm. The Mission also prioritized grey water reclamation and installation of water purification plants at team sites to reduce reliance on bulk water deliveries. The scope of such operations remains limited, however, and did not allow for the transportation of heavy equipment or certain categories of dangerous goods.

66. The Mission also started to explore ways to adapt to the new circumstances and the changed operating environment. MINURSO assessed that the limited joint analysis capability and lack of a dedicated strategic planning capacity in the Mission, in line with standard practices for United Nations peace operations, was a major obstacle to efforts to promote integration and implement the Mission’s operational tasks.

67. The Mission’s lack of access to local interlocutors west and east of the berm continued to severely limit its ability to independently collect reliable situational awareness information and to assess and report on developments across its area of responsibility. The requirement of Morocco that MINURSO use Moroccan vehicle number plates west of the berm, in contravention of the status-of-mission agreement, together with the stamping of MINURSO passports by Morocco, also continued to affect the perception by the local population of the impartiality of the Mission. In March 2014, my Special Representative reached a verbal agreement with the Government of Morocco gradually to replace Moroccan licence plates with United Nations licence plates ([S/2014/258](#), para. 50). That agreement has yet to be implemented. The use of Moroccan number plates together with the stamping of MINURSO passports by Morocco continued to be the subject of regular objections from Frente POLISARIO.

## **V. Humanitarian activities and human rights**

### **A. Persons unaccounted for in the conflict**

68. The question of persons who are still unaccounted for in relation to past hostilities remained 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 to the protection of Western Saharan refugees

69. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) continued to deliver humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees in the five camps near Tindouf, Algeria. However, with alarming trends of malnutrition and over 80 per cent cuts in food rations, the refugees were at risk of serious food insecurity and malnutrition. On 24 August 2022, the United Nations system in Algeria issued a statement outlining the urgent and critical needs related to food and malnutrition in the camps and calling on the international community to renew funding efforts and to bring an appropriate response to the emergency.

70. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 age, gender and diversity assessment by UNHCR<sup>1</sup> and partners reported widespread loss of income and cash shortages. Inadequate access to food, health care, nutrition, quality education, energy and shelter were also identified as concerns.

71. The 2022 nutrition survey and joint assessment mission by UNHCR and WFP revealed a high prevalence of global acute malnutrition, anaemia and stunting among children under the age of 5 years and pregnant and lactating women in the camps near Tindouf. The food ration was severely reduced (from 17 kg to 5 kg per person) owing to funding shortfalls, increased shipping costs and unavailability of food items.

72. UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and other organizations implemented with the Government of Algeria the COVID-19 health preparedness and response plan through a risk communication and community engagement approach to build trust and boost vaccine demand, including among Sahrawi refugees.

73. UNICEF led the development of a five-year education strategy, which identified constraints affecting inclusive access to quality education. Children continued learning in a safe environment through the delivery of school kits and personal protective equipment to nearly 40,000 children, together with information and communications technology equipment to support online learning. UNHCR paid incentives to over 1,000 teaching and non-teaching staff and provided textbooks.

74. UNICEF strengthened the maternal and child health programme by providing equipment and training midwives and paramedics. In 2021, UNICEF provided 149,530 doses of seven antigens, helping to maintain a high immunization rate.

## C. Confidence-building measures

75. The confidence-building measures, pursuant to Security Council resolution [1282 \(1999\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, to allow family links between Sahrawi refugees and their communities of origin in the Territory, remained on hold.

76. During his visits to the region and in the course of other interactions with relevant interlocutors, my Personal Envoy expressed to all concerned his belief, which is shared by my Special Representative, that measures potentially leading to de-escalation between Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO, including confidence-building measures such as a resumption of family visits, would be highly welcome. He noted that none of his interlocutors had expressed immediate interest in further work on these issues.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, *Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability Report 2021: Advancing Participation and Inclusion* (2022). Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/62b5c4e24/age-gender-diversity-accountability-report-2021.html>.

## D. Human rights

77. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was unable to conduct any visits to Western Sahara for the seventh consecutive year despite multiple requests and despite the Security Council in its resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#) strongly encouraging enhanced cooperation. The lack of first-hand information was detrimental to a comprehensive assessment of human rights in the region. Moreover, international human rights defenders, researchers, lawyers and observers were allegedly expelled from or denied entry into Western Sahara.

78. OHCHR continued to receive allegations of human rights violations in Western Sahara by suspected Moroccan security forces. Reports alleged that the latter used disproportionate force when policing peaceful assemblies advocating for self-determination, resulting in injury of protestors, including five Sahrawi women, and destruction of property. Reports indicated that protestors were allegedly also arbitrarily detained.<sup>2</sup> Allegedly, Sahrawi women human rights defenders and their female family members also continued to be subjected to threats, harassment and physical violence.

79. Civil society actors in Western Sahara allegedly continued to operate in a highly restrictive environment where freedom of expression and association was severely curtailed. Reports also alleged that spyware was used to conduct unlawful or arbitrary surveillance of three persons, including a prominent Sahrawi woman human rights defender, who reportedly was subjected to reprisals for her engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms.<sup>3</sup> OHCHR received allegations of the possible enforced disappearance of a prominent Sahrawi tradesman in Western Sahara and a Sahrawi political prisoner in Morocco.

80. The Gdeim Izik group of prisoners continued several hunger strikes, demanding transfers to Western Sahara prisons and protesting lengthy prison sentences and harsh prison conditions, including prolonged solitary confinement, ill-treatment and torture and denial of medical care. Some family members were reportedly subjected to reprisals for having contacted United Nations human rights mechanisms.

81. On 25 July 2022, the National Human Rights Council of Morocco provided OHCHR with a report covering human rights issues in Western Sahara and their examination of human rights complaints, including with regard to the situation of prominent Sahrawi human rights defenders.

82. On 1 July 2022, Morocco provided OHCHR with a report on Morocco's cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms, compliance with its obligations to respect and ensure civil and political rights, protection of fundamental freedoms, the development model in Western Sahara and the activities of the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture. The report also contained allegations of human rights violations committed by Frente POLISARIO in Tindouf, including restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and association, and the recruitment of child soldiers.

83. On 20 January 2022, Algeria wrote to OHCHR challenging Morocco's previous allegations of the recruitment of child soldiers in Tindouf.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, opinion No. 46/2021 of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concerning Yahya Mohamed Elhafed Iaazza ([A/HRC/WGAD/2021/46](#)).

<sup>3</sup> See [A/HRC/51/47](#), annex II, sect. 19.

## VI. African Union

84. On 29 and 30 July 2022, the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security visited Tindouf on an information-gathering mission. During the visit, the Commissioner met with Frente POLISARIO, including its Secretary-General, and reiterated the Union's commitment for peace in Western Sahara.

## VII. Financial aspects

85. By its resolution [2602 \(2021\)](#), the Security Council extended the mandate of MINURSO until 31 October 2022.

86. The General Assembly, by its resolution [76/292](#), appropriated \$60.6 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of MINURSO beyond 31 October 2022, the cost of maintaining the Mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

87. As at 31 August 2022, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for MINURSO amounted to \$64.3 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$4,790.4 million.

88. Reimbursement of troop costs and the costs of contingent-owned major equipment and self-sustainment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2022 in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

## VIII. Observations and recommendations

89. I remain deeply concerned by the developments in Western Sahara. The resumption of hostilities between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO remains a major setback to the achievement of a political solution to this longstanding dispute. Daily incursions into the buffer strip adjacent to the berm and hostilities between the parties in this area violate its status as a demilitarized zone that should instead remain a cornerstone of a peaceful solution to the situation of Western Sahara. The continued lack of an effective ceasefire threatens the stability of the region, with a risk of escalation while hostilities persist. The conduct of aerial strikes and firing across the berm continues to contribute to increasing tensions.

90. Despite this challenging context, it remains my belief that a political solution to the question of Western Sahara is possible, provided that all concerned engage in good faith and there is continued support from the international community. The United Nations remains available to convene all those concerned with the issue of Western Sahara in the search for a peaceful solution. The efforts by my Personal Envoy provide an opportunity that I urge all to seize. Strong political will is required 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 \(2020\)](#) and [2602 \(2021\)](#).

91. To that end, I urge all concerned to approach the facilitation of the process by my Personal Envoy with an open mind and to desist from preconditions for the political process. In guiding present and future approaches, due consideration should be given to the precedents set by my previous Personal Envoys in the framework of existing Security Council resolutions.

92. I regret to note that lack of trust continues to permeate the region. In the Territory, ongoing unilateral assertive actions and symbolic gestures are a source of

enduring tension and have a negative impact on the situation. I encourage the parties to focus on the strong interests they have in common and urge them to refrain from escalating the situation further through rhetoric and actions.

93. As I reaffirm the crucial role of neighbouring States in the achievement of a solution to the question of Western Sahara, I reiterate the expression of my concern at the deteriorated relations between Morocco and Algeria. I encourage the two countries to re-establish dialogue towards the mending of their relations and renewed efforts aimed at regional cooperation, including with a view to an environment conducive to peace and security.

94. MINURSO has operated in a fundamentally changed operational and political context since the resumption of hostilities and has undertaken a wide range of efforts to adapt to the new circumstances, particularly with a renewed emphasis on operational planning. However, continued restrictions on freedom of movement have led to the inability of MINURSO to safely access areas at or near the berm or the buffer strip and operate a safe and reliable logistics, maintenance and resupply chain to team sites east of the berm. Fully restoring the ability of MINURSO to observe the situation in the entire Territory and to provide critical maintenance to its team sites east of the berm is intrinsic to its sustainability and as urgent as ever. I strongly urge Frente POLISARIO to remove all restrictions to the free movement of MINURSO military observers, ground convoys, air assets and personnel east of the berm. It also remains essential that the Royal Moroccan Army refrain from conducting military activity that might directly or indirectly affect MINURSO operations east of the berm. I am concerned that, without full freedom of movement, MINURSO may soon be unable to sustain its presence east of the berm.

95. I welcome the resumed engagement between Morocco and my Special Representative and urge Frente POLISARIO to resume regular contacts in person with the MINURSO leadership, both civilian and military.

96. I remain concerned about the continued suspension of regular mine action operations east of the berm, with the exception of ground patrol route clearance, emergency services and support for MINURSO investigations at sites of suspected aerial strikes. I am encouraged, however, by the signalled willingness by both parties to allow resumption of demining operations and call on both parties to reach a final agreement with MINURSO in this respect that enables the resumption of this life-saving work. I also call on both parties to engage with the MINURSO mine action component to facilitate the removal of landmines and explosive remnants of war throughout the Territory in adherence to international humanitarian mine action standards.

97. I would like to express my appreciation to the Mission's troop-contributing countries for their support for efforts by MINURSO to achieve full gender balance among its military observers, in line with the objectives of the Action for Peacekeeping 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. I reiterate my sincere gratitude to Morocco, Frente POLISARIO and Algeria for their cooperation to address the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular for the generosity of Morocco and Algeria for continuing to provide vaccines to the civilian and military staff of MINURSO.

99. I am concerned about the further deteriorating humanitarian situation in the refugee camps near Tindouf. Living standards for the vulnerable camp-based refugees worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the rise in global food and fuel prices and supply chain disruptions. As a result, the situation is

becoming increasingly alarming with serious short-term threats to the refugee population's food security and access to basic services. I thank the international community and the Government of Algeria for its assistance to the Sahrawi refugees and wish to echo the call of UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP to the international community to renew efforts and provide additional and urgent support to bring an appropriate response to this emergency.

100. I also remain concerned about the continued lack of access of OHCHR to the Territory. I once again reiterate my call to the parties to respect, protect and promote the human rights of all people in Western Sahara, including by addressing outstanding human rights issues and enhancing 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.

101. 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 this role despite the increasingly serious challenges it faces in a fundamentally changed operational and political environment and integrated strategic planning capabilities that are insufficient to respond to the current situation on the ground. 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 Security Council resolutions [2440 \(2018\)](#), [2468 \(2019\)](#), [2494 \(2019\)](#), [2548 \(2020\)](#) and [2602 \(2021\)](#). I therefore recommend that the Council extend the mandate of MINURSO for another year, until 31 October 2023.

102. I commend my new Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, for his efforts since taking up his duties. I also thank my Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, Alexander Ivanko, as well as the former Force Commander, Major General Zia Ur Rehman, and Acting Force Commander, Commodore Faustina Boakyewaa Anokye, for their dedicated leadership of MINURSO. I also wish to remember and honour the former Deputy Force Commander, Brigadier General Constance Emefa Edjeani-Afenu, who passed away suddenly on 24 January 2022 shortly after leaving the Mission on 19 December 2021, for her distinguished leadership and dedicated service to the United Nations. Finally, I thank the men and women of MINURSO for their continued commitment, under difficult and challenging circumstances, to fulfilling the Mission's mandate.

## Annex

## United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

## Contributions as at 30 September 2022

<i>Country</i>	<i>Military observers<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Troops<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Civilian police<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Total</i>
Argentina	3	—	—	3
Austria	5	—	—	5
Bangladesh	7	20	—	27
Bhutan	2	—	—	2
Brazil	11	—	—	11
Chad	4	—	—	4
China	11	—	—	11
Colombia	2	—	—	2
Croatia	6	—	—	6
Ecuador	2	—	—	2
Egypt	27	—	—	27
El Salvador	1	—	—	1
France	2	—	—	2
Germany	3	—	—	3
Ghana	9	7	—	16
Guinea	6	—	—	6
Honduras	10	—	—	10
Hungary	6	—	—	6
India	3	—	—	3
Indonesia	3	—	—	3
Italy	2	—	—	2
Kazakhstan	8	—	—	8
Malawi	4	—	—	4
Malaysia	9	—	—	9
Mexico	7	—	—	7
Mongolia	4	—	—	4
Nepal	5	—	—	5
Nigeria	8	—	—	8
Pakistan	15	—	—	15
Poland	1	—	—	1
Republic of Korea	3	—	—	3
Russian Federation	13	—	—	13
Sri Lanka	2	—	—	2
Sweden	2	—	—	2
Switzerland	2	—	—	2
Togo	3	—	—	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>238<sup>c</sup></b>

<sup>a</sup> Authorized strength is 218, including the Force Commander.

<sup>b</sup> Authorized strength is 12.

<sup>c</sup> Actual strength on the ground, for military and civilian police, including the Force Commander.

# Map



Map No. 3691 Rev. 94 UNITED NATIONS  
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Geospatial Information Section