

## Western Sahara Red Crescent



### The humanitarian aid situation to the Saharawi Refugees in Algeria

#### Refugees of 40 years

As it is well known more than 200.000 Saharawi refugees left their country, Western Sahara, in the late 1975 fleeing the Moroccan-Mauritanian military invasion after Spain abandoned the territory without accomplishing its engagements regarding the creation of the appropriate conditions for a free exercise of self-determination for the Saharawi people as recommended by the UN General Assembly's resolutions and as ruled in the International Court of Justice legal opinion of October 1975 regarding this territory identified as a Non-Self-Governing territory.

The hospitable Algeria, and due to the exodus of the Saharawi population, sheltered these refugees in its territory and provided them with all conditions postulated by The Geneva Accords of 1951 relative to the protection of the refugees and the 1961 AU convention on protection of refugees.

This population lives currently in 5 main camps that bares the names of the main cities of Western Sahara (Aaiun, Dajla, Smara, Bojadour and Auserd), in extreme meteorological and geographical conditions where the temperatures can reach 50 degrees in the summer and become freezing cold in the winter in addition to sand storms.

All these conditions makes it even worse, when they do not allow any kind of agricultural activity that can generate supporting sources to the precarious diet, in addition to the fact that there are no real possibility to have other economic activity that would generate important incomes (rocky desert, salty water..etc)

Due to this invasion to their country, thousands of women, children and elderly, and after 40 years, continue suffering the consequences of this brutal and inhuman war that caused separation for thousands families since part of

them are still under Moroccan occupation and the other part in refugee camps in the South-West Algeria or dispersed in other neighboring countries. According to the UNHCR, which organizes family exchange visits, more than 48.000 Saharawis registered in its offices, knowing that we are talking here only about direct family members (father, mother, sons and brothers) separated by a Moroccan military wall (1), which is a violation to the international law and humanitarian law as it has been approved by many international organizations.

So, as long as the Moroccan military occupation of Western Sahara continues and plunders the natural resources of this territory, the situation of the Saharawi refugees will remain one of the most vulnerable ones.

### The situation becomes more vulnerable

Last October 2015, heavy rain fell uninterruptedly for more than a week in the Saharawi Refugee Camps in the region of Tindouf, Algeria, caused severe destruction, damage and lose of household food stocks. 17821 families houses had been totally or partially destroyed and more than 80,000 refugees had been effected. Worryingly, a great majority of them are vulnerable children and women who constitute 70 to 80% of total refugee population. Tents and improvised houses built of mud suffered extensive damage and became completely inhabitable, leaving entire families without any shelter; more than 30% of schools and health centers were severely damaged.

The situation before the this heavy rain and flood was very vulnerable and it becomes more vulnerable than any time before. In October 2013, WFP and UNHCR carried out a Joint Assessment Mission (JAM), and it confirmed in its report that most refugees remain highly depend on humanitarian assistance from international community. Requirements on resources for food assistance to satisfy the minimum needs of 125 000 most vulnerable persons in 2015 is more than 20 million USD. WFP still requesting for more than 8 million USD to cover the remaining period of this year. Next year refugees will face a very critical situation if no additional contribution will be arrived .

---

(1) In the beginning of 1980 morocco build a a wall in Western Sahara dividing the Territory into two zones to protect his army against POLISQRIO FRONT attacks. The zone west of the wall is under Moroccan occupation and east of the wall is liberated zone under SADR administration. This wall of 2700 km from the north to the south is fortified with barber-wires, and more than 7 millions of anti-personal landmines and military units.

### **The High level of malnutrition and anemia will be increased.**

The 2012 UNHCR/WFP nutrition survey indicated that malnutrition reaches 30% among kids less than 5 years old while anemia reaches in them 53%. Among pregnant women anemia reaches 56%, while among milking women it reaches 67% and 50% for women in procreative age. This high level of malnutrition and anemia will increased

The same report warns against the important increase of diseases such as glycerin, diabetic and blood pressure.

Minimum of drinkable water, as recommended by the World Health Organization (15 to 20L per person) in situations of emergencies and catastrophes, is not yet reached.

Medication is insufficient, and there is an important shortage in those dedicated to chronic diseases. There is also need of training and recycling the personnel of the health system, especially specialized doctors.

### **Needs are increasing**

In complement to the past conclusions of the WFP-UNHCR's Joint assessment mission (JAM), the UNHCR office in the Saharawi refugee camps and the NGOs operating in these camps stressed during its annual meeting last October 2014 that the minimum amount of money required to cover the global needs in the different sectors for 2015 is 37million USD (needs that are not covered by other donators). Nonetheless, the aid planed by the UNHCR for 2015 is 9,1 million USD, which means that the unmet needs gap remains very high. After the flood of last October the global needs will be increased to 73 million usd

In the following figures, we will explain these needs:

- 1- The Saharawi refugees continue to live in tents. Yet the aid only covers 45% of the needed tents. Each family should receive 60 meters of canvas to make the tent every 5 years. And since the families are over 28.000 then there is a need for 5.600 tent per year. The gap remains high (13 176 tents).
- 2- The distributions of gas doesn't cover the needs, and register a shortage of 34%. Every family should get one gas cylinder for each 20 days, knowing that the cylinder of gas only covers 12 to 15 days of the needs.

3- 47% of the needs in the education sector is not covered by any donors (school equipment, rehabilitation and construction of schools and kindergartens, class tables and chairs...etc).

4- There is no co-funding of hygienic materials, only UNHCR funded kits provided through TRIANGLE (THG), which doesn't have funding now and this will have serious consequences on women health. They are distributing to 38 450 women but the gap remains at 66,67%.

The international crisis and its consequence on the main donors, the continuous increase of prices of food, the increase of natural catastrophes, conflicts ..etc and the decrease of the funding, raise concerns in the Saharawi refugee camps because of the humanitarian situation that we feel coming, and for this we launch this appeal to the international community, especially to the European institutions so as they provide all needed solidarity to the Saharawi refugees in this situation of doubts until the legitimate right to self-determination and independence is guaranteed and they can return to their homes in dignity.

Finally, the Saharawi Red Crescent would like to express its gratitude and recognition to the donor countries for the support and generosity with which it supported the Saharawi refugees since 1975.



His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary-General of the United Nations  
UN Headquarters  
New York, NY 10017

2 March 2016

**Subject: The situation in the Sahrawi refugee camps**

Dear Secretary-General,

We recently returned from a visit to the Sahrawi refugee camps and Oxfam's 40 year-long program in southwest Algeria. We would like to draw your attention to several concerning trends that we witnessed.

We believe that your upcoming visit to the Sahrawi refugee camps is most timely, and as you will be well aware, of critical importance to the Sahrawi people.

We met with Sahrawi officials, representatives of UN agencies, and numerous Sahrawi women, men and children. The common thread through our exchanges with the refugees was a mix of disbelief, frustration and a constant balancing between hope and despair. These recent encounters underlined a heightened sense of urgency. In our view, this impasse and status quo must not linger on.

People in Dakhla camp for example, were extremely grateful for the help they are receiving following the October floods. However, they were also very frustrated that once again they were rebuilding their houses in a place they feel they do not belong. On numerous occasions we heard refugees commenting "I want to go home", or for example talking about how "this desert is not a place to live in". After 40 years, the patience and the resilience of ordinary refugees to cope with their severe humanitarian conditions is eroding. The dire humanitarian conditions are likely to

become markedly worse in the course of the coming months, due to a further decrease of the financial resources made available for this crisis.

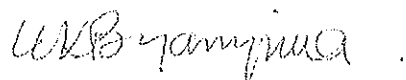
A trend that particularly alarmed us was the hardening discourse of some of the young people we met with. Increasingly connected with the outside world, they live under the impression that the international community only acts when violence occurs. This impression, enshrined in the mindset of some of the young people, risks being left unaddressed. Your upcoming visit to the region, including the Sahrawi refugee camps, is extremely significant in this context.

Together with the refugees that we met, we hope that your report on Western Sahara, expected in April, will include concrete suggestions on how to break the deadlock in the negotiations process, so that the people of Western Sahara are able to exercise their right to self-determination in the context of the uncompleted decolonization process.

We believe that the people of Western Sahara require now a strong sign from the international community that their fate is not forgotten, nor the promises made to them.

If we can be of assistance in your endeavor to seek a resolution, we would be most willing to oblige.

Yours sincerely,



Winnie Byanyima  
Executive Director Oxfam International



Stefaan Declercq  
Executive Director Oxfam-  
Belgium

March 1<sup>st</sup>

His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon  
United Nations Secretary-General  
United Nations Headquarters  
New York, NY 10017

**Dear Mr. Secretary-General,**

In advance of your upcoming trip to the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria, we would like to express you our full support for your mission and your mandate, to ensure the rights of the Sahrawi refugees are fully respected.

After 40 years of exile, this protracted crisis remains forgotten. We are talking about entire generations growing old in the camps. The frustration at the socio-economic situation within the camps grows all the more when faced with the struggle to understand the status quo at the international level. In this vulnerable region, the patience of many young Sahrawis has never been thinner.

As you mentioned in your last report, the severe living conditions of the Sahrawi refugees have declined further as a result of reductions in international humanitarian aid. The international community must provide urgent additional funding for the UN agencies and NGOs, as it is getting harder to match basic requirements in terms of food, nutrition, health, water and education.

Your visit to the Sahrawi refugee camps is a major opportunity to convey UN concern at the highest level and to raise awareness about their alarming situation.

The status quo is no longer an option for the refugees.

Sincerely,

**The NGOs Consortium, Sahrawi Refugee Camps.**

