

Dansk Marokkansk Raad



المجلس الاستشاري المغربي الدانمركي

Natural Resources and Sahara

The Kingdom of Morocco's approach is clear: we give a careful analysis of the facts on the ground and simply let the facts speak for themselves.

The Moroccan Southern provinces are a sparsely-populated territory on the west coast of Africa: 570.000 inhabitants for a land area almost the size of Great Britain. During the Spanish control of the region, most parts of Southern provinces were populated by Arab and Amazigh nomadic and whose historic and religious allegiance went to the ruling Sultan (King) of Morocco. As a matter of fact, an advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Netherlands) on October the 16th, 1975 recognizes the « *legal ties between this territory and the Kingdom of Morocco* ».

1. Natural Resources, Economic & Infrastructure Development

It is only since Morocco has taken back this territory again that coastline cities such as Laayoune and Dakhla have seen significant economic and socio-cultural development. To develop the Southern provinces during the last four decades, **the Moroccan government has been spending 7 additional dollars for each and every dollar it collected and re-invested locally**, as officially stated by His Majesty King Mohammed VI in a recent speech.

Moreover, the Polisario claims phosphates as the principle motivation for Morocco's presence in the Sahara, but this is basically irrelevant since **75% of the world's phosphate reserves are found in the northern Moroccan city of Khouribga, not in the Southern provinces. Phosphates extracted from the Southern provinces represent only 8 percent of Morocco's total production.** That goes without saying that phosphates production, transportation and exportation costs are higher in Southern provinces compared to other areas in Morocco; yet, they have been kept mainly for social reasons, such as preserving employment and meeting the local population's needs.

The financial income Morocco earned from phosphates and fishing in the Sahara does not exceed \$5.2 billion over four decades. Has Morocco used these funds in projects that do not serve the interests of the Saharan population as the leaders of the Polisario claim? Has Morocco exploited the natural resources of the region? **A mere comparison between the state of the Sahara at the time of Spanish colonialism and the present time will suffice**

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to show that the Moroccan government has spent tens of billions of dollars to build entire cities and turn a desert area into a prosperous region.

When Spain departed from the Sahara on February 28, 1976, the area lacked the most basic requirements of a decent life. There were no hospitals, no schools, no roads, and no airports. The Moroccan government built entire cities from scratch and equipped them with all the necessities of life and wellbeing for their inhabitants, including hospitals, schools, four maritime ports, two airports, 10,000 km of roads, recreational facilities, facilities for the desalination of sea water, irrigation systems, **world-leading solar and wind renewable energy projects**, etc.

One of the most important indicators that shows clearly how **the Saharan population has benefited from the heavy investments made by the Moroccan government at all levels is the fact that human development indicators in the Southern provinces outweigh the human development indicators in the rest of Morocco.** Social protection programs and economic initiatives have consistently placed the Sahara in the highest ranks in the country in terms of human development. Today, 97% of children in Southern provinces are enrolled in school with this number stabilizing at 78% in secondary levels as compared to 14% in 1976. In a 20-year period, poverty in the region decreased by 66% or two times that of the national level. Housing is built and available for any Saharan family fleeing the refugee camps.

The Sahara region benefits from an ambitious program of sustainable development as part of a comprehensive approach initiated under the leadership of HM King Mohammed VI who recently announced the launch of new mega-projects worth an estimated US \$ 15 billion, aiming to turn the Sahara into a hub for trade and human constructive interaction between Africa and Europe and to make the people of the region the stakeholders in their day-to-day lives. The Moroccan government is confident that the efforts it has been exerting in recent years to promote the economic development of the Sahara will eventually convince large numbers of Saharans still living in Tindouf refugee camps to join their families back in Morocco's southern provinces, as a final solution to this artificial conflict.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that **the UN's SG report on Southern provinces for 2015** tackled the management of natural resources (in response to a Moroccan official request) and **it made no mention of any illegality in this regard.** Likewise, the UN's Security Council never referred to any illegality concerning Morocco's management of its natural resources in the Sahara region. None of the UN's 63 Sahara resolutions has described the region as an «occupied territory». **Today, the Moroccan Autonomy Plan is strongly backed by the United States, France, all Arab League countries (except Algeria) and most of the UN member countries.**



2. Political rights, Local Governance & Regionalization

As stated above, the Moroccan government has been spending 7 additional dollars in the Southern provinces for each and every dollar it collected and re-invested locally. **This would not have been possible without the solidarity of the other Moroccan regions.** The country has recently launched a global governance reform in order to establish an « advanced regionalization », devolving political power to local and regional authorities throughout the country, including the Southern provinces; in order to directly address the local needs of citizens and improve political accountability on national and local levels.

Every time a local and or a national election is held, participation rates in the Southern provinces highly exceeds national ones, demonstrating clear Saharan enthusiasm about Moroccan governance and political life. On September 4th, 2015, the participation rate in regional elections stood at 53.67% nationwide, but neared 80% in the Sahara region. Likewise, on October the 7th, 2016, the participation rate in national elections stood at 43 % nationwide, but neared 62 % in the Sahara region.

The elected representatives are the legitimate representatives of the southern provinces of the Kingdom of Morocco, unlike the polisario, a separatist movement, which presents itself as the sole representative of these provinces.

The Saharan population is represented by 52 deputies and local representatives in the Moroccan national Parliament. Locally-elected institutions include three regional councils and 87 local councils. More than 6000 NGOs are active in the region. The numbers and facts speak loudly for themselves and answer Hans Corell's interrogation regarding the « need to consent with local population on their matters ».

Most importantly, the Moroccan 2011 constitution recognizes and preserves the country's cultural diversity. The preamble states that « national unity was forged by the convergence of Arab-Islamic, Amazigh and Saharan-Hassani components and enriched by 'African, Andalusian, Mediterranean and Hebrew' heritage ». The Arabic language is no longer the only official language of the country. **The Constitution urges the State to preserve the Saharan culture and the Amazigh language as parts of a common heritage for all Moroccans, without exception.** A national council of languages is responsible for the protection and development of languages and diverse local cultural expressions. **While protecting the rich**



diversity of the Moroccan national identity, the country has broadened in recent years its strategy to fight religious extremism, under the leadership of King Mohammed VI.

3. International Aid to Tindouf Camps, The need of a Census

The Kingdom of Morocco strongly urges national policy-makers as well as international analysts to always bring the human being and local populations' empowerment at the center of any strategy or debate concerning the Moroccan Southern provinces.

Accordingly, Morocco is extremely concerned about the harsh and deplorable conditions that the Saharan refugees endure in the camps established by the Polisario on Algerian soil. Again, it is important to look at the facts.

The EU Commission allocates annually € 10 million for Tindouf camps population. Yet, a recent report issued by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) revealed the existence of mass embezzlement of European aid sent to the Tindouf populations, with networks involved in large-scale diversion of the international humanitarian assistance, and noted that aid was extended on the basis of inaccurate figures, since no census of the population has ever been conducted. “Algeria and Polisario have refused despite repeated calls from the UN's refugee agency and Union Nations Secretary General, to identify and record Tindouf populations”, said OLAF.

Over the past four decades, the UNHCR, the World Food Program (WFP) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) have been unanimous in their recognition of the embezzlement on international aid sent to Tindouf's residents. The fraud has reportedly been conducted at the hands of Algerian officials and Polisario leaders.

Any human rights or local empowerment advocate must ask : why does Algeria still refuse to issue a mere asylum card to refugees on its soil for decades ? Why are they being denied their most basic human rights of mobility, trade and acquisition ?

Morocco strongly urges the international community to call on Algeria to conduct a refugee registration process backed by the UNHCR to acquire an accurate count of the camps' population so that aid supplies can be distributed accurately. The only way to know the exact number is by allowing the UNHCR to conduct a census.



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Likewise, several European and international bodies have called for a census of Tindouf populations in order to put an end to the embezzlement of the humanitarian aid sent for these populations. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, said not only she was in favor of a census of Tindouf camps population, she also believes that a census is « key to solve the Sahara dispute ».

“The EU maintains its view that the agreements between Morocco and the European Union do not violate international law (...) The agricultural agreement, meanwhile, remains in force.” concludes Federica Mogherini.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, it is clear that the claim that Morocco exploits the Saharan natural resources is a politicized claim that is not based on accurate and objective data. Its goal is rather to weaken Morocco’s position vis-a-vis international public opinion, which has little knowledge, if any, of the different aspects of the conflict.

Quite the contrary, Morocco is determined to implement its global autonomy plans and economic development projects in its Southern provinces, in line with the proposal it presented to the Security Council in April 2007. And **while the Kingdom of Morocco welcomes any constructive criticism aiming at improving local populations’ vital needs, it deeply regrets the politicized fallacious use of the « natural resources » argument to shamefully call on the international community to refrain from buying Moroccan Saharan goods.**

Those who call for an international boycott of Saharan goods are the same ones responsible for the massive humanitarian-aid embezzlement that has been ongoing for decades in Saharan refugee camps. They most certainly serve their own political agendas; and do not represent nor seek to defend the rights and well-being of the Saharan people.