

Distr. RESTRICTED

CRS/2024/CRP.50

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth
International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism:
pursuing goals and addressing needs of
the Non-Self-Governing Territories**

Caracas, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

14 to 16 May 2024

STATEMENT BY

MR. M'HAMED ABBA

(WESTERN SAHARA)

Draft Speech of Mr. M'Hamed Abba
2024 Session of the Special Committee on Decolonization (C-24)
14-16 May 2024, Caracas- Venezuela

Madam Chair

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I would like to extend to you my heartfelt congratulations Madam Chair on your reelection as head of the Committee.
2. I am honored to participate in this regional seminar and thankful for the opportunity I have been granted, as the **democratically elected representative of Laâyoune Sakia El Hamra**, one of the provinces of the Moroccan Sahara, to update you, on the strategic, structuring and large-scale development projects in the Southern Provinces of Morocco.
3. Indeed, the Moroccan Sahara is today a **prosperous and fast-developing region** thanks to the massive investments made by the Moroccan government over the last decades.

Madam Chair

Ladies and Gentlemen

4. I am Mohammed Abba, I was elected at the **Regional Council of Laâyoune Sakia El Hamra**. I am in charge of international cooperation and Chairman of the Finance, Budget and Programming Committee within the Regional Council, which has 39 members.
1. Furthermore, all the elected presidents and members of the regional and local councils in the Moroccan Sahara are native to the region, reinforcing the management by the population of the Moroccan Sahara of their local affairs.
2. We are the only legitimate representatives of the Moroccan Sahara population who enjoy democratic legitimacy, unlike a minority who illusorily and without the slightest legal basis attempt to proclaim themselves representative of these populations.
3. In fact, during the last general elections held on 8 September 2021, the voter's turnout in the Sahara region reached 66.94% for Laâyoune Sakia El Hamra and 58.30% for Dakhla Oued Eddahab, the highest at the national level.
4. These elections took place under optimal democratic conditions and were monitored and observed, in complete independence and neutrality by 5020 national and international observers.
5. The turnout figures in the Southern Provinces are an explicit plebiscite of the local population of their Moroccan identity and their commitment to the democratic process. It is also the most obvious disavowal of **polisario's chimeras** concerning its representativeness.
6. Hence, the **polisario** enjoys no legal, popular or democratic legitimacy to claim to represent the population of the Moroccan Sahara.
7. The Moroccan Sahara has been able to produce political elites at the level of national institutions (one of the two chambers of Parliament is chaired by a politician and unionist from Southern Provinces), regional councils and provincial councils, as well as through the participation of the elites in the activities of political parties.

Madam Chair

Ladies and Gentlemen

8. A dynamic and diverse region, the Moroccan Sahara is becoming a regional economic hub and logistics platform on the African continent.
9. In His Royal Address of 6 November 2023, commemorating the 48th anniversary of the Green March, His Majesty King Mohammed VI emphasized the need to strengthen the Atlantic façade, a place of human communion and a pole of economic integration fostering trade between states in the interests of all stakeholders through a win-win approach.
10. The three Royal Initiatives namely the Morocco-Nigeria Gas Pipeline, the African Atlantic Initiative and the Initiative to promote access to the Atlantic for Sahel countries will establish the Moroccan Sahara as a platform for security, stability and co-development in Africa, the Atlantic and beyond.
11. The Royal initiatives, aim to transform the Atlantic façade into a focal point of continental and international influence facilitating access to the Atlantic for sahelian countries, and delivering multiple economic benefits.
12. The Royal initiatives represent a step forward in the Kingdom's Atlantic policy, symbolizing the emergence of the Moroccan Sahara as a hub and gateway to Africa for Europe and the Americas.
13. The New Dakhla Atlantic Port (NPDA) on which construction began on October 2021 and will be achieved in 2028, will support regional economic, social and industrial development in all productive sectors and also provide the Kingdom's southern provinces with modern, scalable logistics tool to match their development ambitions, in addition to enhancing the value of maritime fishing products.
14. With a total investment of 10 billion DH (around 1 billion USD), the New Dakhla Atlantic Port, located on the N'tireft site, 40 km north of Dakhla, will include a 270-hectare industrial zone, including around 60 hectares dedicated to various industrial, administrative and storage activities, as well as a 13-hectare free zone.
15. With the establishment of an industrial-logistics zone, an area dedicated to trade and a section devoted to the development of the sea-fishing industry, Dakhla Port will place southern provinces in the network of international shipping lanes and will allow the southern provinces to be a regional hub for investment, logistics and international trade, particularly with the African continent.
16. The infrastructure of the ports of Laâyoune (town of El Marsa), Tarfaya and Boujdour has been reinforced to give a strong boost to economic activities in the region, in addition to the creation of a new port in Tarfaya. This integrated project, for which a budget of almost 379 million DH has been earmarked, is part of the Halieutis Plan and the National Plan for the Development of Coastal Fishing Activities.
17. By the end of October 2023, the Tiznit-Dakhla expressway had progressed by over 90%. This road project, an integral part of the development program for the southern provinces initiated in November 2015, required an investment of 10 billion dirhams.
18. It covers 1,055 kilometers and is divided into two sections: The first segment, linking Tiznit to Laâyoune, has been converted into an expressway, while the Laâyoune-Dakhla section has been widened and strengthened. These infrastructures will be made accessible to African nations

to support their development, reflecting Morocco's commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation aimed at shared prosperity

Madam Chair

Ladies and Gentlemen

19. The population of the Sahara region is not a minority or a population with special status. This population is equal to its fellow Moroccan citizens. Hence, we enjoy the same rights and exercises the same freedoms as any other Moroccan citizen.
20. In the Moroccan Sahara, the associative network exercises its activities in various areas of economic and socio-cultural development with complete freedom and without any restrictions. The number of associations operating in the southern provinces has increased to more than 7997 associations.
21. Like other parts of Morocco, the Moroccan Sahara is open to the free movement of goods and people regardless of their nationality or public opinion. Numerous politicians from different countries, businessmen, diplomats, and representatives of international, intergovernmental and non-governmental human rights organizations were able to visit the Moroccan Sahara. Moreover, journalists representing international media reported freely from within the Sahara.
22. Since the recovery of its territorial integrity in 1975, the Kingdom of Morocco continues to make tremendous efforts to guarantee the socio-economic development of its southern provinces.
23. The Human development indicators in the Sahara region were, in 1975, 6% lower than in the northern regions of Morocco, and 51% lower than the national average in Spain. Today, the indicators in the Sahara region far exceed the average of other regions of Morocco.
24. The population of the Sahara region actively participates in the establishment of national policies dealing with the management and exploitation of national resources, through our representatives in Parliament and the elected authorities at local and regional level.
25. The New Development model for southern provinces launched by His Majesty King Mohammed VI in 2015 is a mechanism for the application and acceleration of advanced regionalization, with the aim of democratic governance and integrated sustainable human development respecting the specificities of the Sahara region.
26. I am proud to report that through the investments made within the framework of this development model, the projects completion rate exceed 80%, totaling more than USD \$ 10 billion spent in major projects that have been launched in the fields of infrastructure, health, education, training, industry, agriculture, renewable energy and fishing.
27. This model is implemented within the framework of a comprehensive and integrated national development strategy, which aims to improve the living conditions of local populations and carry out major infrastructure projects, in order to ensure a real take-off of the region.
28. GDP per capita in Moroccan Sahara is 1.6 times greater than the national average, and household consumption is at least 8% above the average level across Morocco.
29. As an elected member of the Regional council, I am proud to report that nearly 29.12 billion MAD were invested in Laâyoune-Sakia Al Hamra for the implementation of 90 projects in support of production sectors, such as phosphates, agriculture, aquaculture, industry, renewable energy, marine fisheries and ecotourism.
30. These include, among others, the realization of a hydro-agricultural development on an area of 1,000 ha promoting plant and animal production in the province of Boujdour, the solar power

plants Noor Laâyoune (1) and Noor Boujdour (1) with a total capacity of 100 megawatts, several wind power generation fields in Tarfaya (300 megawatts), Foug El Oued (50 megawatts), and Akhfennir (100 megawatts), as well as a new industrial complex for the production of fertilizer (16.8 billion MAD), and a desalination plant of sea water completed in October 2022 with an overall production capacity of 26,000 m³ of drinking water per day.

31. The structuring projects that aim to consolidate the competitiveness and attractiveness of the region, also include a Technopole in Foug El Oued (2 billion MAD) which houses the multidisciplinary University Mohammed VI of Laayoune, a high school of excellence and a skills and qualification center. In addition to the first medical school in the Southern Provinces (257 million MAD) and a University Hospital Center (1.2 billion MAD) with a capacity of 500 beds.
1. Through the investments made within the framework of this Development Model, whose projects completion rate exceeds 80%, the Moroccan Sahara region has been risen to an economic hub meeting international standards and becoming a union between Morocco, Africa and Europe.
 2. Thanks to these achievements, the Southern Provinces of Morocco record considerable performance, placing them at the top of the list compared to the other regions of the Kingdom. In 2021, the annual growth rate in Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra was at 10.9%, much higher than the national average.
 3. With regard to GDP per capita, it totalizes 52,301 MAD per capita in the city of Dakhla and 27,442 in the city of Laayoune, which shows that the impact of the projects on the daily living of the local population is very encouraging and promising.

Madam Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

32. We remain preoccupied by the catastrophic situation prevailing in the Tindouf camps, where our brothers and sisters are deprived from their basic rights and are considered as a commercial fund used by the armed group of "polisario" and the host country for the purposes of enrichment, via the diversion of aids.
33. The humanitarian situation in the Tindouf camps, is a situation of despair and inaction which lasted for nearly 50 years and is a source of danger and instability for the whole region.
34. The Security Council, in its latest resolutions, reiterated its solemn request for the High Commissioner for Refugees to continue to work for the realization of the registration of the populations of the Tindouf camps.
35. The systematic diversion of humanitarian aid intended for the population of the Tindouf camps was once again confirmed by the report of the World Food Programme (WFP), titled "Evaluation of Algeria, WFP Interim Country Strategic Plan 2019-2022: Centralized Evaluation Report".
36. Thus, the WFP has irrefutably documented the diversion and sale of foodstuffs from humanitarian aid in the markets of the town of Tindouf, outside the camps, as well as in neighboring countries, even though our brothers and sisters in the camps live in appalling conditions marked by chronic undernutrition, especially among women and children.
37. The WFP has again expressed its concern about the lack of registration and census of the population of the Tindouf camps as well as the possibilities of diversion that this unique situation makes possible.

38. It is also an exceptional situation in the world with regard to international humanitarian law insofar as, for nearly 50 years, this population has never been identified, nor registered as refugees, nor surveyed. This unique situation has deprived this population of all the rights guaranteed by the 1951 Refugee Convention, relating to the status of refugees.
39. All Security Council resolutions since 2011 have called on the host country of Tindouf camps to authorize the census of the populations of the Tindouf camps, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

40. Morocco presented to the UN Secretary-General on 11 April 2007, the Moroccan autonomy plan. Through this initiative, Morocco guarantees to the population of the region the possibility of democratically running their own affairs through legislative, executive and legal bodies.
41. Morocco's Autonomy Plan for Moroccan Sahara is defined by respect for modern democratic society, the rule of law, cultural and social identities, individual and collective liberties, and socioeconomic development.
42. This initiative, based on compromise and qualified by the UN Security Council as « serious and credible », is in full conformity with international law, the UN charter and the resolutions of both the General Assembly and the Security Council as well as with the right of self-determination.
43. This plan was developed in a participatory process through a large national consultation involving the local population of the Sahara region and political parties, as well as consultations at regional and international levels.
44. Indeed, Morocco's credible and serious plan for autonomy has received heavyweight support from more than 107 countries.
5. Furthermore, 32 countries and regional organizations opened consulates general in the cities of Laâyoune and Dakhla, marking the irreversible dynamic of the moroccanness of the Sahara.
45. This concrete recognition of the Moroccanness of the Sahara must be taken into account by the UN when dealing with this issue. This is a major and foreground development illustrating the absence of any other solution to the Question of the Moroccan Sahara than within the framework of the Moroccan Sovereignty and territorial integrity.
46. However, the status quo leaves the door open to security risks including violence, extremism, human trafficking and economic exploitation.
47. Instead of engaging into the dynamics of compromise, induced by the Moroccan initiative, polissario still cling to an outdated approach, which has not adapted to the current international and regional context, and which has shown its limits and resulted in a stalemate, unduly prolonging the suffering of the populations in Tindouf camps and, hindering, thus, the progress of the whole region.
48. Polisario and the host country of Tindouf Camps have a moral and legal responsibility to stop exploiting the misery of our brothers and sisters sequestered in these camps, using them as a lucrative business, even though it is spending colossal sums to maintain the lifestyle luxury of a handful of "polissario" leaders and providing them with the latest generation of military equipment.
49. I appeal to the international community to demand that the host country and polissario respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to put an end to the situation of lawlessness that exist in Tindouf camps, allowing a dignified return of our brothers and sisters sequestered in these camps to their homeland Morocco.