

Adala UK
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The Rt Hon David Lammy MP

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
King Charles Street
Whitehall
London SW1A 2AH

Subject: Opposition to the UK Government's Position on Western Sahara

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I write to you on behalf of Adala UK, a British non-governmental organisation dedicated to documenting and raising awareness of human rights violations committed against the Saharawi people in the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara. Our work is supported by a growing network of activists across the region and in Morocco, who provide firsthand testimonies of the grave injustices faced by the Saharawi population.

We are deeply concerned by the recent joint communiqué issued by the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Morocco, in which the UK government publicly expresses support for Morocco's 2007 autonomy proposal as the "most credible, viable and pragmatic" basis for resolving the Western Sahara dispute. While the communiqué stops short of formally recognising Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, it marks a significant and troubling shift in the UK's historical position, and risks undermining the right to self-determination guaranteed under international law.

We find this position fundamentally at odds with the UK's own democratic principles and historical commitments. The United Kingdom has repeatedly affirmed the right of peoples to self-determination, most notably in the case of Scotland, where the UK government not only recognised the legitimacy of independence as a political aspiration but facilitated a national referendum in 2014 to allow the Scottish people to decide their future. This act of democratic engagement was premised on the understanding that the Union is a voluntary partnership between equal nations—a principle deeply rooted in the UK's own constitutional framework.

It is therefore difficult to reconcile this democratic ethos with the UK's current stance on Western Sahara. Why should the people of Western Sahara—who have been recognised by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice as a distinct population with a right to self-determination—be denied the same opportunity to decide their future? Supporting an autonomy plan unilaterally proposed by Morocco without requiring the consent of the Saharawi people directly contradicts the principle of self-determination that the UK has championed elsewhere, including in its own territory.

Furthermore, as a human rights organisation, we are gravely concerned about the persistent and systematic abuses committed against the Saharawi population under Moroccan occupation. These include arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and movement, and violent repression of peaceful protests. Numerous international human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have documented these violations. The UK's failure to publicly acknowledge or address these abuses risks

being interpreted as tacit approval, undermining its credibility as a defender of international human rights standards.

The UK High Court's ruling in *Western Sahara Campaign UK v HMRC and Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs* [2019] EWHC 254 (Admin) reaffirmed that Western Sahara is not part of Morocco under international law. Goods from Western Sahara cannot be treated as Moroccan without the consent of the Saharawi people—a consent that has never been granted. This principle is echoed in rulings by the European Court of Justice and in the 1975 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. In line with these legal precedents, the UK must ensure that all trade and investment agreements with Morocco explicitly exclude Western Sahara and that no economic activities are conducted in the occupied territory without the prior, free, and informed consent of its people.

While we acknowledge that the UK has not formally recognised Moroccan sovereignty and continues to support the UN-led process, we are troubled by the lack of reference to a referendum—the original and still valid mechanism endorsed by the United Nations to resolve this conflict. The silence on human rights abuses and the shift in tone towards the Moroccan proposal signal a worrying departure from the UK's stated commitment to the rules-based international order.

As an organisation committed to justice and accountability, we urge the UK government to:

1. Reaffirm its support for the Saharawi people's right to self-determination through a free and fair referendum, in accordance with international law.
2. Refrain from describing Morocco's autonomy plan as the most viable or pragmatic solution, particularly in the absence of Saharawi consent.
3. Publicly acknowledge and condemn the ongoing human rights abuses in Western Sahara and push for their inclusion in all bilateral dialogues with Morocco.
4. Avoid supporting or facilitating any economic activities in Western Sahara that do not have the explicit and prior consent of the Saharawi people, in line with the 2019 High Court ruling, the UN Advisory Opinion, and ECJ rulings.

We respectfully remind you that foreign policy based on principles of justice, legality, and democracy should not be selectively applied. The people of Western Sahara, like those in Scotland, deserve the right to freely determine their own political future. Anything less constitutes a betrayal of the very values the UK claims to uphold.

We remain available to discuss this issue further and provide any additional documentation or testimonies that might inform a more principled approach to this longstanding conflict.

Yours sincerely

Sidi Ahmed Fadel (Chair)

On behalf of Adala UK

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