



One Hundred and Thirteenth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

April 22, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to express our support for the statement by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice to include a human rights monitoring and reporting mechanism when renewing the mandate for the U.N. Mission of the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which is currently under review by the U.N. Security Council. As you might be aware, we first expressed our support for this position in an April 2011 letter to Secretary Hillary Clinton and we are grateful for your leadership on this important, but too often neglected, human rights matter.

Amnesty International and other credible reports indicate that pro-independence Sahrawi in Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara have experienced human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detention, lack of due process, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. According to those reports, Moroccan agents have perpetrated such abuses with impunity. Reports also indicate that Morocco continues to deny registration of non-governmental organizations based on political grounds and to limit the travel of foreign civil society interlocutors.

It is urgent for the people of Western Sahara to have access to an international, neutral, permanent monitoring and reporting mechanism that can receive complaints and investigate human rights violations. Importantly, the current renewal of the U.N. Mission of the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) underway at the U.N. Security Council presents an opportune moment for such a mechanism to be established. We encourage the U.S. to continue voicing support for such a mechanism and to advocate its extension to both Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara and Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria. Such a mechanism would represent a significant step toward greater protection of human rights, as well as promote stability and the rule of law in the region.

In addition, we respectfully call on the U.S. to encourage Morocco to immediately halt the harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary arrest and detention of pro-independence

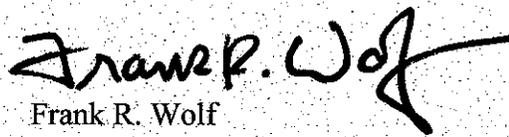
Sahrawi; to call for the release of Sahrawi prisoners imprisoned for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and association; to encourage Morocco to permit the registration of non-governmental organizations regardless of the political beliefs of its membership; to demand that Morocco allow "free interactions with all interlocutors," including with civil society representatives, as established in Security Council Resolution 2044 (2012); and to insist that all parties to the conflict cooperate fully with the operations of MINURSO.

American leadership is needed to advance a political solution to the final status of Western Sahara, to ensure the fair treatment of dissidents, and to protect the human rights of all the Sahrawi people. We look forward to working with you to achieve these goals and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
TLHRC Co-chair
Member of Congress



Frank R. Wolf
TLHRC Co-Chair
Member of Congress