

On this day, December 14th 2020, which marks the 60th anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples¹, IFOR is issuing a statement on the recent developments regarding the conflict in Western Sahara.

STATEMENT ON THE U.S. RECOGNITION OF MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER WESTERN SAHARA

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) was founded over 100 years ago, and at the heart of the fellowship is the steadfast belief in multilateralism as a way to engage within the international community.

On December 10th, President Donald Trump issued a proclamation stating that the United States will recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.² A departure from decades of U.S. policy, the move follows last month's breakdown of the nearly 30-year ceasefire between Morocco and Western Sahara and the resumption of hostilities.

In 1991, the United Nations and the international community made a promise to the Saharawi people that a referendum would be organized, and that they freely and fairly would get to decide their own fate. 30 years later, that promise remains unfulfilled. Neither renewed fighting nor unilateral moves that disregard international law absolves the international community of this promise. On the contrary, it highlights the urgency of finally implementing the right to self-determination. Saharawi organizations have long sounded the alarm about the consequences of continued inaction and the eroding trust in the international community that follows.³

The initial reactions to the U.S. Administration's announcement have been somewhat encouraging, with many countries denouncing the move. **IFOR calls on all UN Member States to also act collectively in demonstrating their commitment to abide by international law and to be accountable for the implementation of fundamental rights.** In 2017, following the Trump administration's announcement that the U.S. would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel – another example of unilateral action that disregarded international law– the UN General Assembly held an emergency special session and decisively backed a resolution that rejected the move.⁴ Such action is again appropriate and necessary to reaffirm the primacy of international law.

With the current administration on its way out, it is also imperative that the new leadership in the U.S. act. **IFOR urges President-Elect Biden to, immediately upon taking office, reverse the Trump administration's decision and reaffirm the principles of international law, as the foundation for settling international conflicts, and multilateralism to strengthen international cooperation.**

Further, **IFOR calls once more for the UN Secretary-General António Guterres to immediately appoint a new UN Personal Envoy for Western Sahara⁵.** The vacancy at this position, and the continued wait of a credible path to a peaceful resolution, leaves the door open for the kind of negative developments seen in the last month.

¹ General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Independence.aspx>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-recognizing-sovereignty-kingdom-morocco-western-sahara/>

³ Open Letter to the UN Secretary General on the 45th Anniversary of the Western Sahara Conflict, released on November 14th by NOVA, a local nonviolent Saharawi youth organization.

⁴ General Assembly resolution 11995 of 21 December 2017, adopted at the 10th Emergency Special Session.

⁵ IFOR Statement on the current situation in Western Sahara, released on November 13th 2020. <http://www.ifor.org/news/2020/11/13/ifor-statement-on-the-current-situation-in-western-sahara>