



Polisario Front Obstructs UN Negotiations for Peaceful Resolution of Western Sahara Conflict

Washington, DC (August 28, 2008) – Dutch diplomat Peter Van Walsum confirmed that United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has not renewed Van Walsum's appointment as his Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara, threatening to bring the current negotiations between Morocco and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front to a halt.

Van Walsum was appointed Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara in 2005 and in addition to mediating four rounds of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front, he traveled in the region numerous times and met with representatives from neighboring countries and other interested parties. In his report on the status of the negotiations to the UN Security Council in April of this year, Van Walsum concluded that "an independent Western Sahara is not an attainable goal."

This conclusion prompted the Polisario Front in a series of public statements during August, to threaten that it would not participate in any future negotiations unless the UN Secretary General appointed a new mediator for the conflict.

This month, Polisario Front leader Mohammed Abdelaziz reiterated his threat to derail negotiations if a new mediator was not chosen, evoking the possibility of "the military option" if the Polisario Front is unable to define the outcome of the negotiation process. The Polisario's threats to end negotiations raise the bleak prospect of prolonging the status quo, troubling many in the international community in addition to Van Walsum.

"It's a shame," said Van Walsum in an August 8, 2008 interview with the Spanish daily *El País*. "The last four rounds were futile, and I was hoping that the fifth round would offer us the opportunity to discuss my belief that the insistence of the Polisario on full independence is deepening the deadlock and perpetuating the status quo."

Key members of the UN Security Council, including the United States and France, welcomed Van Walsum's assessment and noted that negotiations based on Morocco's proposal would open the door for a truly realistic "compromise political solution" as called for in numerous UN Security Council resolutions.

In June of this year, White House Press Secretary Dana Perino reiterated the US government's position that "autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only feasible solution for the Western Sahara dispute." Last summer, in letters sent to President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, 173 members of Congress and key foreign policy experts such as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed their strong endorsement of Morocco's compromise proposal and urged the US government to publicly support the plan and the negotiations progress.

"It is very unfortunate that just when the negotiations were beginning to gain momentum towards a realistic basis for moving forward, the Polisario Front's refusal to negotiate in good faith has halted the process," said Robert Holley, Executive Director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy. "Morocco is one of the United States' strongest allies in the Arab world and it, along with others in the international community, should not let the Polisario Front and Algeria put a stranglehold on multilateral, UN-led efforts to peacefully resolve this thirty-year-old conflict."

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