



Children playing at sunset in Aousserd refugee camp, southwest Algeria. ©Tineke D'Haese/Oxfam

40 YEARS OF EXILE

Have the Sahrawi refugees been abandoned by the international community?

Forty years after the Sahrawi refugee crisis began the social pressure on the men and women who live in these camps and the problems concerning their humanitarian situation are becoming ever more unbearable. The refugees have reached an impasse in regards to the status quo. Today, their voices must be heard. In order to bring about a definitive resolution to the crisis, the international community must increase its efforts to ensure dignified lives for these people and to see that international law is respected.

SUMMARY

Sahrawi refugees are forced to live in very insecure humanitarian conditions. This situation in and of itself is a source of serious concern. It is, however, the exceptionally long duration of this crisis and the total lack of any prospects which is making this situation all the more unbearable for the men and women living in the Sahrawi refugee camps.

The Sahrawi refugees – especially the young – are desperate to take control of their own lives. Even if they are particularly well informed and well educated, their options are severely limited. The frustration which stems from this is exacerbated by the sheer uncertainty of what their future holds. The words of young Sahrawis are growing sharper, and their views more critical, faced with an international community they consider incapable of ensuring that their rights will be respected. The majority we have spoken to are openly questioning whether their cause would not make more progress if they took up arms once again.

Much of the responsibility for reaching a just and lasting resolution lies with the parties of the conflict, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario Front. However, in view of the two parties' inability to find such a solution, the cards are now in the hands of the international community, in particular the United Nations (UN) and the member states of the UN Security Council. Today, these bodies must demonstrate to the Sahrawi refugees that they are fully engaged in defending their rights.

This report calls attention to the responsibility of the international community. The Security Council and members of the Group of Friends must do more to foster conditions conducive to bringing the decolonization process to an end and finding a solution to the conflict, in accordance with international law. They must also persuade the parties in the conflict to make changes to their positions, which are currently irreconcilable. Only a solution such as this can put an end to the refugee crisis and strengthen stability in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Current and future donors must:

- Provide funding for the humanitarian response to meet the level of needs outlined by UN agencies and International NGOs in cooperation with the refugees' authorities, as well as for programmes aiming to respond to additional needs due to the prolonged nature of the crisis, particularly for the youth.
- Make sure that funding mechanisms are multiannual and flexible, taking into account the prolonged and protracted nature of the refugee crisis. This will enable implementing agencies to respond more efficiently to the needs of the refugees and adjust interventions according to the evolving situation.

The UN Security Council must:

- Give new momentum to the negotiation process to overcome the deadlock, publically recognizing that the status quo is not an option. This momentum must lead to an understanding on the substance of a potential solution, as well as on the means of achieving self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.
- Demonstrate the political will to reach a lasting solution that is in accordance with international law. The actions of the members of the UN Security Council must be steered by the commitments made to the Sahrawi people and their prosperity, rather than the national interests of the member states.
- Complement the UN Security Council's private consultations with public briefing sessions, at least once a year. These meetings must feature presentations from the personal envoy and the special representative of the Secretary-General.
- Reaffirm the role and the mandate of the MINURSO, making sure it can fulfil the standard functions of peacekeeping, which include monitoring, evaluation and reporting on local developments which affect the situation in Western Sahara and the refugee camps in southwest Algeria. This involves appointing personnel responsible for civil affairs to the MINURSO to work systematically and directly with the communities concerned.

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Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Alexander Therry, Jean-Patrick Perrin, Nicolas Vercken, Sally Chin, Eveline Rooijmans, Mariam Kemple, Manal Warde, Julie Theroux-Seguín, Paula San Pedro, Richard Stanford and Esther Favre-Felix in its production. Oxfam would also like to thank the Sahrawi refugees. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on humanitarian and development policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this publication, please e-mail advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-859-4 in April 2015. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, United Kingdom.

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