

TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY MANIFESTO FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE SAHRAWI PEOPLE

The trade union movement in many countries has been one of the main pillars of international solidarity with colonised peoples and has always supported the struggle of the people of Western Sahara for self-determination and independence.

Gathered at the Trade Union Solidarity Meeting in Lisbon on 29 November, on the eve of the 48th Conference of Support and Solidarity with the Sahrawi People (EUCOCO), we welcome the struggle and resistance of the Sahrawi workers and people against the occupation of the Kingdom of Morocco. In particular, we welcome the essential role played by the General Workers' Union of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (UGTSARIO) in the organisation of the Sahrawi workers in the refugee camps in Algeria, in the Diaspora in exile and in the territory occupied by Morocco, which has been indispensable for the liberation of the Sahrawi people for 50 years.

We call on the growing number of workers' representative structures at regional, national and international levels to reaffirm their strong commitment to the struggle of the Sahrawi people for their legitimate right to freedom, self-determination and independence, in accordance with the principles enshrined in international law.

We denounce the support and complicity of the European Union and governments, in particular France and Spain, the United States of America and Israel, with the Moroccan occupation and its disregard for international law, attacking the social, economic and labour rights of the Sahrawi people.

We welcome the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) of 4 October 2002, which, at the end of a process lasting more than ten years, annulled the trade agreements signed between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco for including the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara and its natural resources without the consent of the Sahrawi people. This clear reaffirmation of international legality has strengthened our spirit of struggle for justice and opens up new perspectives of intervention for the solidarity communities and the Polisario Front, recognised as the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people.

In assessing the current challenges facing the Sahrawi people, we highlight the following key issues as the basis for our solidarity action:

1. Only the Sahrawi people can decide on their future. Efforts must be intensified to ensure the realisation of the Sahrawi people's inalienable right to self-determination and independence through the holding of a free and fair referendum.
2. The responsibility for making this democratic act a reality lies with the United Nations, as a community of nations, and its Security Council, but also with civil society, including the trade union world, and with communities in all countries, since this is an unfinished process of decolonisation. The existence of this last colony in Africa is an affront to the principles and practices of emancipation in which we find ourselves in the 21st century.
3. Injustice provokes resistance and resistance leads to increased repression, in an unstoppable vicious circle. We strongly condemn the ongoing human rights violations committed by the Moroccan regime in the occupied territory of Western Sahara, including:

- The policy of racial discrimination, marginalisation and systematic exclusion against the Sahrawi people.
- Land dispossession and illegal exploitation of Sahrawi natural resources, in violation of international conventions and the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- Persecution and arbitrary arrests of Sahrawi human rights activists and defenders, torture, trials based on false evidence, enforced disappearances, illegal and disproportionate sentences, detention in inhumane conditions and summary executions.
- Encouraging the settlement of Moroccan settlers, supporting the construction of new settlements to house them and occupy the territory, and encouraging the emigration of young Sahrawis.
- The media siege of the territory through a systematic policy of expulsions and deportations of human rights observers (300 documented cases in 10 years).

4. In this context, we demand the immediate and unconditional release of all Sahrawi political prisoners (as requested by the experts of the UN Human Rights Council), the protection of civilians in the occupied territory and free access for international observers and missions.

5. We also demand full respect for the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union on Sahrawi natural resources and the immediate change of policies and practices that this implies on the part of the European Union and its Member States.

Strengthening trade union solidarity is an essential part of this struggle. We call for the creation of trade union networks at regional and international level in solidarity with the just cause of the Sahrawi people and reaffirm our support for the General Workers' Union of Saguia El Hamra and Rio de Oro (UGTSARIO) in its mission to defend the labour, political, economic and social rights of Sahrawi workers.

We call on these networks to develop a solidarity action map - joint action plans that will enable them to:

- Raise awareness of the Sahrawi issue in trade union media and international trade union forums;
- Promote coordination between workers' representative structures with the aim of fighting colonialism and promoting social justice, taking Western Sahara as an example of struggle and resistance that deserves solidarity and support;
- To defend the principles of equity, equality and justice for Sahrawi workers in all possible spaces.

We renew our commitment to work tirelessly to support the struggle of the Sahrawi people and to build a future based on peace, justice and dignity for all peoples.

For a free and independent Western Sahara!

Lisbon, 29 November 2024

[Subscriptions are open until 31 Mars 2025]