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VOICES FROM THE RESISTANCE: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE OCCUPIED WESTERN SAHARA, DOCUMENTED DURING 2025.

REPORT PRESENTED BEFORE THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL, GENEVA, JUNE 2026

[1]

Abstract. *This paper provides a critical examination of the Report «Voices from the Resistance: Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Western Sahara Documented During 2025», prepared by the Working Group on Human Rights in Western Sahara, coordinated by the Catalan Association of Friends of the Sahrawi People (ACAPS Catalunya) and the Novact Institute for Nonviolence (NOVACT), and presented before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2026. It analyses the report's objectives, methodological approach, and substantive contribution in order to assess the role of the Working Group's documentation and advocacy efforts in advancing the protection of the human rights of the Sahrawi people under the conditions of Morocco's occupation, as well as in supporting the realization of their internationally recognized right to self-determination.*

Keywords. *Report, Working Group on Human Rights in Western Sahara, Occupied Territories, Human Rights, Right to Self-Determination.*

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1



VOCES DE LA RESISTENCIA: VIOLACIONES DE LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS EN EL SÁHARA OCCIDENTAL OCUPADO, DOCUMENTADAS DURANTE 2025.

INFORME PRESENTADO ANTE EL CONSEJO DE
DERECHOS HUMANOS DE LA ONU, GINEBRA,
JUNIO DE 2026.

Resumen. *La presente contribución pretende ofrecer un examen crítico del informe «Voces de la resistencia: Violaciones de derechos humanos en el Sáhara Occidental ocupado documentadas durante 2025», elaborado por el Grupo de Trabajo sobre Derechos Humanos en el Sáhara Occidental, coordinado por la Asociación Catalana de Amigos del Pueblo Saharaui (ACAPS Catalunya) y el Instituto Novact para la No Violencia (NOVACT), y presentado ante el Consejo de Derechos Humanos de las Naciones Unidas en Ginebra en junio de 2026. El estudio analiza los objetivos del informe, su enfoque metodológico y su contribución sustantiva, con el fin de evaluar el papel de las labores de documentación y defensa desarrolladas por el Grupo de Trabajo en la promoción de la protección de los derechos humanos del pueblo saharaui bajo las condiciones de la ocupación marroquí, así como en el apoyo a la realización de su derecho internacionalmente reconocido a la libre determinación.*

Palabras claves. *Informe, Grupo de Trabajo sobre Derechos Humanos en el Sáhara Occidental, territorios ocupados, derechos humanos, derecho a la libre determinación.*

Report for Those Who Still Hope

The past year was a deeply symbolic one for the Sahrawi people of Western Sahara: an anniversary that no one wished to celebrate – 50 years since the beginning of Morocco’s occupation of their territory [2]. Tragically, this same year was marked by the highest number of reported human rights violations ever recorded. The Working Group on Human Rights in the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara documented more than 170 violations committed during 2025, representing a 70% increase compared with the previous year and the highest annual figure since it began its monitoring work in 2021 [3]. Authored by Nora Miralles, Hayat Said, and the Working Group on Human Rights in Western Sahara, and coordinated by the Catalan Association of Friends of the Sahrawi People (ACAPS Catalunya) and the Novact Institute for Nonviolence (NOVACT), the report was presented to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2026.



Its aim is to draw the international community's attention to the protracted situation in the occupied territory of Western Sahara, where, after five decades of occupation, the Sahrawi people continue to seek the implementation of their internationally recognized right to self-determination amid ongoing and serious human rights violations [4].

The importance of the efforts undertaken by the Working Group, whose mandate is to document and report on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the occupied territory of Western Sahara, cannot be overstated. By bringing together Sahrawi human rights defenders representing Sahrawi civil society alongside international activists, the group is able to collect, analyse, and systematize evidence of serious human rights violations in Western Sahara despite increasingly restrictive conditions, including an intensifying information blockade and growing repression.

Additionally, the report seeks to identify the main patterns of abuse affecting economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights; assess the impact of these violations on the Sahrawi population; and formulate recommendations for states, including Spain and other European Union member states, international organizations such as the United Nations, regional bodies including the African Union and the European Union, and other stakeholders, including the International Committee of the Red Cross. These recommendations aim to strengthen the protection of human rights in the occupied territory of Western Sahara and ensure respect for international law, which requires Morocco to fulfil its obligation to enable the Sahrawi people to exercise their right to self-determination.

The report is structured around the current human rights situation in the occupied territory and the main patterns of violations documented during 2025. It traces a genealogy of reprisals to explain the recorded violations and examines the illegal exploitation of natural resources. It also analyses violations of economic and social rights, including forced land expropriation, displacement, destruction of property, labor rights abuses, economic marginalization, and racial discrimination.



The report further documents violations of civil and political rights, such as restrictions on human rights monitoring, freedom of information and the press, freedom of expression, assembly and protest, the right to privacy and freedom of association, torture and other degrading treatment, arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, prison-related abuses, and violations of the rights to life, justice, and an effective remedy. It concludes with recommendations and an annex outlining the applicable legal framework.

The structure chosen for the document is distinctive, as it begins with violations of economic, social, and cultural rights before addressing breaches of civil and political rights. This approach highlights the importance of the former for the survival of the Sahrawi people as a community with the right to self-determination and the development of their political future. At the same time, it exposes readers to the harsh daily realities faced by Sahrawis, including persistent restrictions on fundamental rights such as the right to life, personal integrity, and privacy.

The legal framework presented in the report's annex is a valuable tool, as it provides readers with a brief but essential understanding of the complex legal issues surrounding Western Sahara. It addresses key questions such as the territory's legal status under international law, Morocco's position as an occupying power, the concurrent application of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in occupied territories, and the main legal instruments establishing Morocco's human rights obligations.

It is important to emphasize that the situation in Western Sahara must be accurately characterized as an occupation [5], a status recognized in relevant United Nations General Assembly resolutions [6]. Although Morocco does not explicitly acknowledge this status, as demonstrated in the report, it has implicitly accepted the legal consequences associated with being the occupying power, including the applicability of international humanitarian law in the occupied territory. This entails that Morocco is bound by the full range of obligations arising from customary and conventional *jus in bello*.



However, the report also successfully demonstrates that Morocco's obligations are not limited to those derived from international humanitarian law alone. They also stem from international human rights law, which continues to apply extraterritorially in situations of effective control over a territory and population. Morocco is a party to numerous international human rights instruments. Their application therefore provides an important legal framework for the protection of the rights of the Sahrawi people through the United Nations human rights system.

The report was prepared in a complex internal and geopolitical context of 2025 that affected the human rights situation in Western Sahara, including increased diplomatic engagement by certain states and regional institutions, such as the European Commission, aimed at advancing a solution to the conflict. On 31 October 2025, the United Nations Security Council adopted the controversial Resolution 2797, which, while reaffirming the principle of self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, also encouraged negotiations based on Morocco's Autonomy Proposal [7]. At the same time, Morocco has experienced a notable consolidation of authoritarian practices [8], which has coincided with a significant and concerning increase in documented human rights violations affecting both the Sahrawi population and Moroccan citizens. These developments include patterns of exclusion and marginalization affecting Sahrawi communities in the occupied territories. In parallel, the humanitarian situation in the Sahrawi refugee camps has deteriorated to a critical level, as international organizations have substantially reduced humanitarian assistance funding for the five camps located near Tindouf [9].

The report is an important source of information on the human rights situation in occupied Western Sahara. The methodology employed by the Group is relevant and reliable, having been selected to ensure an objective assessment of the situation. Its work includes the documentation of allegations concerning arbitrary arrests and detention, intimidation, reprisals, harassment, and other human rights violations. Information is drawn from monthly reports prepared by local activists over the past four years and is verified prior to inclusion.



The consent of victims and local activists is obtained, and risk assessments are conducted by both local and international activists involved in the monitoring process. The information collected is further complemented by reports published by Sahrawi associations and international organizations, as well as by reports issued by the United Nations and articles published in various media outlets.

Accordingly, the efforts of the Working Group help counter Morocco's longstanding information blockade by providing independent evidence for international monitoring and accountability. Their work ensures that the Sahrawi people and their situation are not forgotten amid the rapidly changing international landscape and shifting geopolitical priorities of today's world. Such documentation is particularly valuable in the context of the strengthening of an increasingly authoritarian regime in Morocco, where repressive practices and intimidation have affected not only Sahrawi people and human rights defenders, but also Moroccan citizens and civil society actors.

The report highlights the changing political context marked by significant shifts in U.S. policy and their impact on the situation in Western Sahara. It shows how these developments contributed to Morocco's increasingly assertive economic policies in the occupied territory and the expansion of activities linked to the exploitation of its resources. The report not only highlights the situation in Western Sahara but also provides a structured analysis that helps identify patterns in Morocco's policies and practices in the occupied territory. One of the report's strengths is its practical approach, illustrating broader patterns through concrete cases and real-life situations.

One of the main trends identified in Morocco's repressive human rights policies is the targeting of Sahrawi human rights defenders and Sahrawi youth, who remain among the primary victims of repression. The former are perceived as a threat to Morocco's current policies because they not only support the protection of affected communities but also draw international attention to serious human rights violations in the occupied territory.



Sahrawi youth, meanwhile, represent the future of the Sahrawi people and their political aspirations. Restrictions on their rights to education, employment, and personal development leave many with limited opportunities and contribute to patterns of migration from Western Sahara, reinforcing concerns about the depopulation of the occupied territory.

Another trend clearly identified in the report concerns the increasing exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara, involving foreign companies and investors, and compounded by the forced expropriation of lands belonging to the Sahrawi people. It is important to emphasize that such activities raise serious issues under international law, as an occupying power does not have the right to exploit the natural resources of an occupied territory except for limited legitimate purposes, such as meeting military needs, covering administrative expenses related to the occupation, or in ways that benefit the local people. As concluded by the Court of Justice of the European Union in its 2024 Front Polisario II judgments, the conclusion of international agreements concerning the exploitation of natural resources in the land and maritime territories of Western Sahara requires the consent of the people of Western Sahara, as the holder of the right to self-determination [10].

This trend is accompanied by systematic restrictions on the economic and social rights of the Sahrawi population, including limited access to education and employment, as well as the disruption and destruction of traditional economic activities. Taken together, these violations appear to serve a broader objective: further obstructing the economic and social development of the territory and contributing to conditions that encourage, particularly among younger generations, the departure of Sahrawis in search of improved living conditions elsewhere.

Against the backdrop of intensified economic exploitation of the occupied territory of Western Sahara, an increasing information blockade has developed, accompanied by serious restrictions on the civil and political rights of Sahrawis, human rights defenders, and international observers, including access bans and deportations.



Such restrictions are implemented through both traditional methods, such as the dispersal of protests and restrictions on public assembly, and newer forms, including cyberattacks and digital surveillance.

The value of the report and the continued work of the Working Group as a whole lies in drawing sustained attention to the situation in Western Sahara, which currently receives significantly less representation in the mass media than other major international crises, such as those in Ukraine, Palestine, and Iran. Nevertheless, the situation in Western Sahara must not be overlooked or relegated from the international agenda. More than ever, it requires urgent measures and sustained international engagement to ensure the protection of the human rights of the Sahrawi people and to advance the realization of their right to self-determination.

In this regard, the report contains valuable and practically sound recommendations, particularly those addressed to various organs of the United Nations. Accordingly, an additional recommendation could be considered: that the UN General Assembly request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on questions relating to the occupation of Western Sahara, following a similar approach to that adopted in General Assembly Resolution 77/247 concerning the situation in Palestine. The 2024 Advisory Opinion, Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, adopted by the International Court of Justice pursuant to this resolution, provides important guidance in clarifying the legal obligations of an occupying power under international law. Although advisory opinions are not legally binding, they make a significant contribution to the development and clarification of international law and could assist in identifying the relevant obligations applicable to Morocco as an occupying power in Western Sahara.



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