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UN calls for Western Sahara talks based on Morocco's autonomy plan

By Michelle Nichols
October 31, 2025 8:31 PM EDT · Updated October 31, 2025

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Summary

- UN urges negotiations based on Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan
- Algeria did not vote, says resolution ignores Polisario proposals.
- Russia, China, Pakistan abstained; 11 members supported resolution

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Key Points

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 31 (Reuters) - The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution on Friday stating that genuine autonomy for Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty could be the most feasible solution to Rabat's 50-year conflict with the Algeria-backed Polisario Front.

Western Sahara, a tract of desert the size of Britain, has been the scene of Africa's longest-running territorial dispute since colonial power Spain left in 1975.

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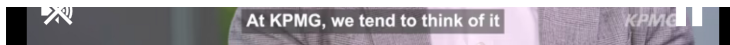
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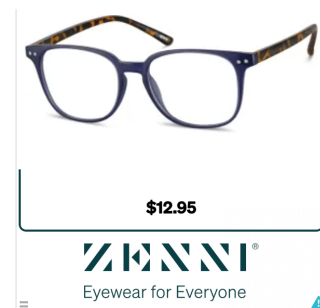
The U.N. Security Council, in a U.S.-drafted text, called for the parties to engage in negotiations based on an autonomy plan first presented by Morocco to the United Nations in 2007.

Morocco considers the territory its own while the Polisario Front seeks to establish an independent state called the Sahrawi Republic.

"We urge all parties to use the coming weeks to come to the table and engage in serious discussions," U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Mike Waltz told the council after the vote. "We believe regional peace is possible this year, and we will make every effort to facilitate progress."

Russia, China and Pakistan abstained, while Algeria did not vote. The remaining 11 council members voted in favor of the resolution, which also renewed for one year the mandate of the U.N. peacekeeping force in Western Sahara, known as MINURSO.

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"The final decision on the future cannot, must not, belong to anyone other than the people under colonial domination," Algeria's U.N. Ambassador Amar Bendjama told the council after the vote. "This text ignores the proposals of the Polisario Front."

SECURITY COUNCIL ASKS FOR REVIEW OF MINURSO

Morocco's autonomy proposal would establish a local legislative, executive and judicial authority for Western Sahara elected by its residents, while Rabat would retain jurisdiction over defense, foreign affairs and religious matters. The Polisario instead wants to hold a referendum with independence as an option.

Morocco is seeking a win-win and "face-saving" solution for all the parties to the conflict, King Mohammed VI of Morocco said after the U.N. vote. He urged Sahrawi refugees held in the Polisario-run Tindouf camps in southwestern Algeria to endorse autonomy.



The King said Morocco is starting "a new chapter in the process of consolidating the Moroccanness of the Sahara." He also renewed his call for a "brotherly dialogue" with Algeria and said Morocco is committed to the Maghreb Union.

Thousands gathered in the streets of Morocco's cities to celebrate the vote, carrying flags and chanting patriotic slogans.

Polisario Front representative Sidi Omar said the resolution does not imply any recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Afterwards, the Polisario Front issued a statement saying it will not take part in "any peace process or negotiations based on proposals that aim to legitimize the Moroccan military occupation."

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The Security Council resolution also asked U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to provide within six months "a strategic review regarding MINURSO's future mandate, taking into account the outcome of the negotiations".

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U.S. President Donald Trump reaffirmed support for Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara in July, saying a Moroccan autonomy plan for the territory was the sole solution. Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, had said the U.S. is working on a peace deal between Algeria and Morocco.

France made a similar move, recognizing Rabat's sovereignty over the territory and greenlighting investments there. In June, Britain became the third Security Council member to back autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.

Spain has also backed Rabat's position, along with an increasing number of European states, signaling a shift in EU member states' foreign policy on the issue.

Reporting by Michelle Nichols; additional reporting by Ahmed El Jechtimi; Editing by Jasper Ward and Edmund Klamann

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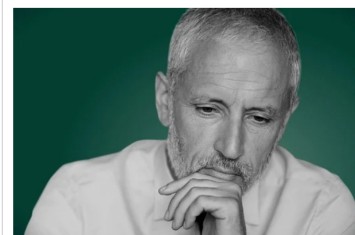
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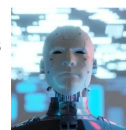
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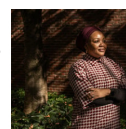
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