



## Topic Synopsis Format

4<sup>th</sup> SPD, Western Sahara

### I. Background of Topic

Western Sahara is a mainly desert territory in northwest Africa and is the subject of a decades-long dispute between Morocco and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front. The site of Africa's longest post-colonial conflict, Western Sahara is still recognized by the international community as a "non-self-governing territory". The territory is phosphate-rich and believed to have offshore oil deposits. Most of it has been under Moroccan control since 1976. Western Sahara came under Spanish rule in 1884 and became a Spanish province 1934. Nationalism generated in the 1960s as nomadic Saharawis, settled in the region. On May 10, 1973, Polisario was established as the only representative of the Saharan people. In November 1975, Moroccan King Hassan II, ordered over 300,000 Moroccans into the territory. Spain surrendered and negotiated an agreement known as the Madrid Agreement, which partitioned the region; Morocco gained two-thirds in the north and Mauritania the remaining third. In addition, Spain agreed to end colonial rule. Polisario declared the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on 27 February 1976 and declared its first government on March 4. In August 1978, a new Mauritanian government signed a peace agreement with Polisario and gave up all territorial claims. Morocco mobilized to occupy areas allocated to Mauritania. In response, Algeria allowed refugees to settle in its town of Tindouf, where the Polisario main base exists. The Polisario led a guerilla war against Moroccan forces until 1991.



## **II. UN Involvement**

In 1972, the General Assembly instituted the Special Committee on Decolonization to monitor the implementation of the Declaration and to assist in its application. In October 1975 the International Court of Justice rejected territorial claims by Morocco and Mauritania. The court recognized the Saharawis' right to self-determination and Spain agreed to organize a referendum. In April 1991, the UN established the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara, Minurso. Its goal was to implement a peace plan outlined in a 1990 Security Council Resolution. In 1997, UN special envoy, James Baker, mediated talks between Polisario and Morocco in London, Lisbon and Houston. To break the deadlock, Baker proposed a "Framework Agreement," known as the Third Way, in June 2001. This enabled autonomy for Saharawis under Moroccan sovereignty, a referendum after a four-year transition period, and voting rights for Moroccan settlers residing in Western Sahara for over a year.

## **III. Possible Solutions**

Provide solutions to encourage both parties to enter negotiations. Consider how the international community can reform the "Framework Agreement" to make it more appealing to both sides. Include your country's views on which party has the sovereignty to rule over Western Sahara. Devise a compromise that would appease both sides of the issue. Consider the possibility of self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.

## **IV. Bloc Positions**

**African Nations:** African nations are conflicted between their positions on Western Sahara and forming political and economic alliances with Morocco and Algeria.



**Asian Nations:** Many Asian nations were once colonies and have experience with the process of decolonization.

**Latin American Nations:** Many nations recognize, or have withdrawn diplomatic relations with, the SADR.

**Middle Eastern Nations:** Mixed opinions exist about the future of Western Sahara.

**Western Nations:** Several nations still administer control over non self-governing territories. The United Kingdom controls ten of the sixteen remaining colonies.

## V. Guiding Questions

1. What is your country's history with decolonization?
2. What are the roots of the problem and how can they be addressed?
3. What incentives can you provide both sides to persuade them to enter negotiations?
4. How can you improve the compromises proposed by the United Nations that have been rejected by both parties?