

De Mistura must enjoy broader mandate similar to Baker's one

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Washington, 10 January 2022 (SPS) -The former United Nations (UN) Envoy for Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, called on the United States to give the new Personal Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, a "broader" mandate, similar to the one James Baker worked with from 1997 to 2004.

"If the existing negotiating process remains stalemated, the United States should work with the other members of the Security Council to give the new envoy a broader mandate similar to the one James Baker worked with from 1997 to 2004. During those years, the search for a settlement was in the hands of the Personal Envoy, not the parties," Ross said at a webinar held recently by the US NGO Defense Forum Foundation themed "Western Sahara: The Ongoing Human Rights Tragedy in North Africa."

"The US should support the new envoy fully as he tries to revive the existing negotiating process. The US should try to convince Morocco to negotiate without preconditions and to engage on the Polisario's proposal," he affirmed.

In 2007, after James Baker had resigned, the Security Council called for negotiations without preconditions between Morocco and the Polisario. And the purpose of these negotiations was to arrive at "a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara."

"From 2007 to 2019, my predecessor, my successor, and I sponsored 15 sessions between these two parties with Algeria and Mauritania present as the neighboring states. Unfortunately, nothing that could be called negotiations took place during those meetings. You may ask why. Well, it's fairly simple. The Polisario came to each session ready to discuss both proposals, but Morocco came with a major precondition: that it would discuss only its own proposal," he stated.

"To break out of this stalemate, I pushed for discussions on various issues outside the two proposals. These included confidence-building measures, natural resources, and human rights. I mentioned human rights. To deal with this problem, the Secretary-General in each of his reports to the Security Council called for independent human rights monitoring, but to no avail. Morocco refused to permit it in that part of Western Sahara under its control, claiming this would violate its self-proclaimed sovereignty," recalled Ross.

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