

UN envoy starts new effort to broker deal on Western Sahara

Associated Press | JANUARY 13, 2022 — 2:11PM

RABAT, Morocco — A United Nations diplomat newly tasked with reviving stalled negotiations for a settlement to the decades-old Western Sahara conflict met with Moroccan officials Thursday during his first visit to the region.

U.N. envoy to Western Sahara Staffan De Mistura held talks in the capital Rabat with Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita and the country's U.N. ambassador.

Morocco's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the Moroccan officials reiterated the country's "commitment to the resumption of the political process conducted under the exclusive auspices of the U.N."

The Western Sahara is a former Spanish colony, annexed by Morocco in 1975 and claimed by the Polisario Front, which wants the territory to be independent.

In 2020, the Front ended a 29-year cease-fire with Morocco after a border confrontation with the Moroccan army. The latter had launched a military operation in the U.N.-patrolled Guerguerat border zone.

Morocco has proposed granting the Western Sahara greater autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty, but the Polisario Front insists on holding a referendum for self determination under the supervision of the U.N.

De Mistura, an Italian diplomat, is also expected to visit neighboring Algeria where the Polisario Front is headquartered, and which Rabat considers to be a key player in the conflict.

In August, Algeria severed diplomatic relations with Morocco after accusing it of committing "hostile acts" against it over the Western Sahara conflict.