

UN to push for W. Sahara peace talks

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More than 116,000 ethnic Sahrawis "forgotten by the world" have fled since Morocco sent forces to the West Sahara in 1975. Ban said he wants to restart negotiations to bring an end to the 40-year old conflict.

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sario Front launched a guerilla campaign against Moroccan forces in 1975

Image: picture-alliance/dpa/M. Messara

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UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Sunday that he had asked the UN envoy to Western Sahara to restart talks between the Polisario Front and

Morocco.

"I asked my special envoy Christopher Ross to resume his shuttle diplomacy to create the appropriate atmosphere for the resumption of talks," Ban told reporters in Algiers, the Polisario Front's largest state supporter.

When Spanish colonial forces withdrew from the Western Sahara in 1975, Morocco sent military forces to lay claim to the phosphate-rich territory, prompting a guerilla campaign by Sahrawi forces known as the Polisario Front.

The guerillas contest that the Western Sahara belongs to ethnic Sahrawis, although Rabat says the former Spanish territory is an integral part of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Ban said he wants to relaunch negotiations between both sides to bring a peaceful end to the 40-year conflict. The UN brokered a ceasefire in 1991, although the international body is hoping to push through a referendum on the territory's sovereignty.



ve referendum on the territory's sovereignty was part of a UN-brokered ceasefire in 1991

Image: picture-alliance/dpa/M. Messara

'Forgotten by the world'

The UN chief on Saturday visited Algeria's harsh Tindouf area, where a collection of camps house some 90,000 Sahrawi refugees, according to figures from the international organization.

"What really moved and even saddened me was the anger," Ban said after visiting the Sahrawi refugee camp.

"Many people expressed their anger, people who for more than 40 years have lived in the harshest conditions and who feel their plight and their cause have been forgotten by the world," the UN chief added.

Last week, Polisario leader Mohamed Abdelaziz said the UN chief's visit to the area was the best chance to reset negotiations between the feuding parties.



secretary general visited the Sahrawi refugee camp in Algeria

Image: picture-alliance/dpa/adel Sehrei/Wostok Press

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