

Western Sahara: More than 40 years of conflict

The United Nations is meeting this Wednesday in Geneva, Switzerland to discuss the situation in Western Sahara. Since the departure of Spain, which ruled the country during the colonial era in 1976, the region is 80% controlled by Morocco while the Polisario Front group continues to call for the region's independence.

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In the middle of the city of Laayoune, the capital of the Arab Republic of Western Sahara. © Bjørn Christian Tørrissen/CC/Wikimedia Commons

Negotiations, under the auspices of the United Nations, have been stalled since

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2012. As a result, Horst Kohler, the new UN envoy on this matter, has decided to revive the negotiations by inviting all stakeholders in Geneva, hoping to reach a solution to the crisis. The former of more than 40 years.

Stakeholders who meet for two days in Geneva have not met since 2012 to discuss the issue of Western Sahara. An area whose fate has been dark for several years.

For a long time Western Sahara was a Spanish colony. In 1975, an agreement signed in Madrid ended the colonial rule and divided the region in two. The area south of Western Sahara was given to Mauritania, which returned it six years later, while the northern and central areas were taken by Morocco.

The agreement was signed a few days after a peaceful demonstration organized by King Hassan II when more than 350,000 Moroccans visited the area. Since then, tension has emerged between Hassan II's regime and the Polisario Front rebel group.

The Polisario Front is asking for the independence of Western Sahara.

In 1976, the Polisario Front declared the region as the Sahrawi Democratic Republic (SADR). In 1984, it joined the African Union (which was still called the OAU) and Morocco decided to withdraw from the institution.

Fighting between the two sides continued until 1991 when a ceasefire agreement came into effect. A United Nations mission was sent to the country to organize a referendum on self-determination.

Since then, the referendum has been a source of tension between Rabat and the Polisario. Several plans have been developed by various parties, but each time, they have been scrapped.