

UN chief: Western Sahara has 'significantly deteriorated'

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The situation in Western Sahara has become much worse over the past year, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said. A 1991 UN peace accord for the region is now under threat.





s of the Saharawi separatist group fought a 16-year war against Morocco in the desert sands

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An upsurge in violence between Morocco and separatist fighters in Western Sahara has "**significantly deteriorated**" the situation on the ground, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned.

Polisario Front forces, backed by Algeria, have once again taken up arms against Moroccan troops that have occupied Western Sahara since 1975.

What did UN chief Guterres say?

The UN secretary-general said Saturday that the "resumption of hostilities between Morocco and Frente Polisario is a major setback toward the achievement of a **political solution**."

In a report submitted to the UN Security Council, he added that "there remains a clear risk of escalation while hostilities persist."

Guterres called on both sides of the Western Saharan territorial dispute to "de-escalate the situation" and agree to the appointment of a UN envoy to restart dialogue. The dispute has been **without an emissary since May 2019**, with all sides rejecting every UN proposed candidate for the post so far.



Western Sahara, formerly a Spanish colony, is located below Morocco in North Africa

Guterres noted that in November 2020 the Polisario Front had said it no longer was committed to a UN-brokered cease-fire agreed in 1991.

On Saturday, Moroccan authorities instantly deported two Spanish human rights lawyers and a doctor who arrived in Western Sahara on a Spanish and **UN-sanctioned humanitarian mission**.

Ines Miranda of the International Association of Lawyers for Western Sahara, speaking with the EFE news agency, said they had been "shoved" back onto the plane they arrived on after declaring their reason for arrival.

What is the goal of the Polisario Front?

Morocco sees Western Sahara as part of its territory, a claim vehemently opposed by the Polisario Front. The separatist group, recognized internationally as representatives of the Saharawi people, fought a 16-year war against Morocco in the desert sands.

Tensions between the two sides have continued to surface after the 1991 UN cease-fire, coming to the fore last year.

Former US President Donald Trump recognized Morocco's claim to the territory in December 2020, reportedly in exchange for the country's decision to [renew diplomatic ties with Israel](#).

Trump's replacement, Joe Biden, has not commented on that break with previous US positions over the Western Sahara issue.

Only days ago, [the EU annulled a "faulty" trade agreement with Morocco covering Western Sahara](#).

Neighboring countries, [Algeria, which cut off diplomatic ties with Morocco in August](#), and Spain, Western Sahara's former colonial power, have voiced support for the Western Saharan cause.