

Polisario 'ready' for direct Western Sahara talks with Rabat



ALGIERS: The Polisario Front which seeks independence for Western Sahara said Monday it is ready for direct negotiations with Morocco on the future of the disputed territory.

Mohamed Salem Ould Salek, foreign minister of the self-declared Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic which controls a thin strip of the territory, said a Polisario delegation had met in Berlin on January 25 with the UN envoy on Western Sahara, Horst Koehler.

“This is a new phase of discussions aimed at preparing for a new phase of direct negotiations,” he told a news conference in Algiers, which supports the Polisario.

The Polisario is “ready for direct negotiations with the Kingdom of Morocco to make peace,” Ould Salek said.

Morocco has also said it would meet with Koehler, a former German president appointed in August as special envoy to lead a new UN push for talks, but without giving a date.

The Polisario and Morocco fought for control of Western Sahara from 1974 to 1991, with Rabat taking over the desert territory before a UN-brokered ceasefire in the former Spanish colony.

Rabat considers Western Sahara an integral part of Morocco and proposes autonomy for the resource-rich territory, but the Polisario Front insists on a UN referendum on independence.

The two sides have not held direct talks since 2012.
