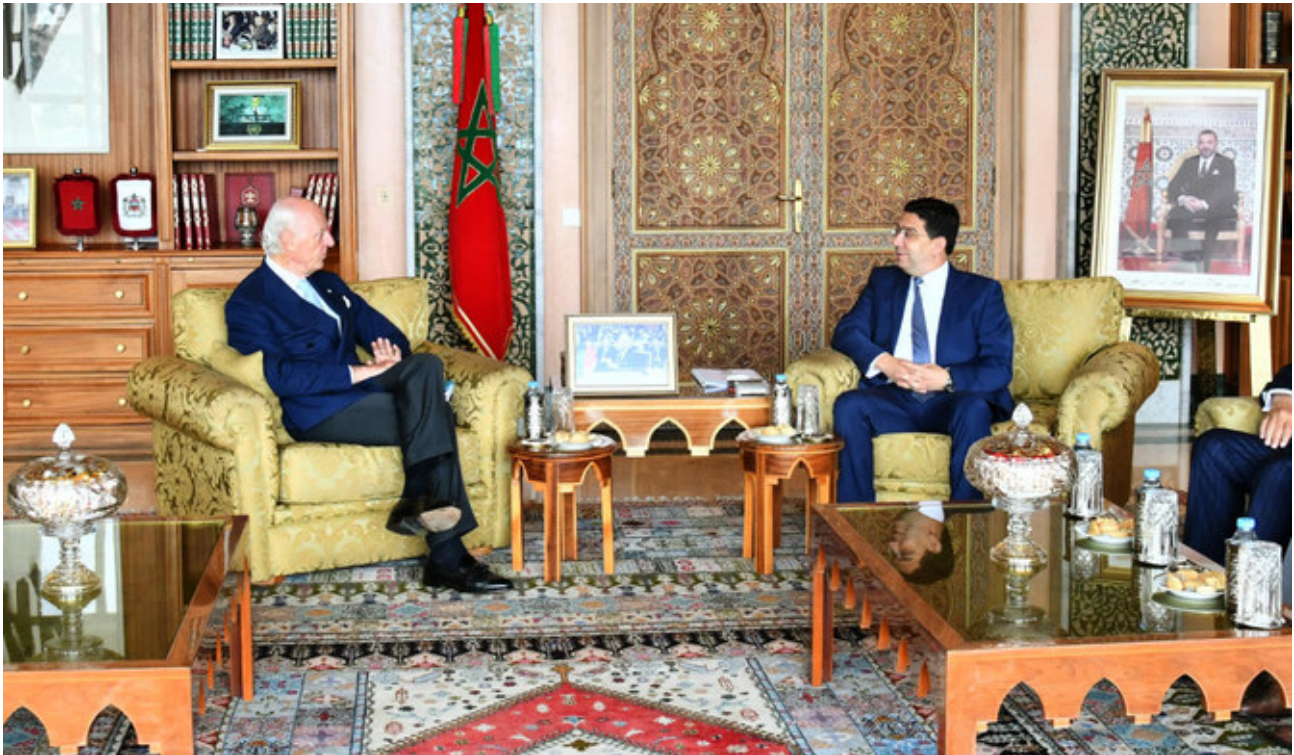


UN envoy in Western Sahara for talks on disputed territory



- Monday's UN statement said de Mistura's trip would focus "on the prospects of constructively advancing the political process on Western Sahara in the course of these regional engagements"

RABAT: The United Nations envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, arrived in Laayoune on Monday for talks on the disputed territory, the UN said.

A statement said he was "looking forward to conducting visits in the region and meetings, engaging all concerned ahead of the issuance of the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council in October."

The conflict dates back to 1975, when colonial occupier Spain withdrew from Western Sahara, sparking a 15-year war between the Algeria-backed Polisario Front and Morocco for control over the territory.

That ended in a 1991 cease-fire deal with the North African kingdom in control of 80 percent of the resource-rich desert region and the Polisario clinging to hopes of a UN-supervised referendum on independence provided for in the

deal.

The referendum has never taken place.

Monday's UN statement said de Mistura's trip would focus "on the prospects of constructively advancing the political process on Western Sahara in the course of these regional engagements."

UN chief Antonio Guterres named de Mistura as his personal envoy for Western Sahara in October 2021, and he has visited the region several times since then.

The Security Council called in October last year for all parties to the dispute to engage in talks to come up with a "lasting and mutually acceptable political solution."

Western Sahara is a vast desert territory bordering the Atlantic, with fish-rich waters and significant phosphate reserves.

The Security Council is due to vote next month on a resolution on the Western Sahara issue.