

# UN urges talks on Western Sahara after cease-fire breakdown



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NEW YORK: The UN Security Council extended the UN peacekeeping mission in disputed Western Sahara for a year on Friday, expressing concern at the breakdown of the 1991 cease-fire between Morocco and the pro-independence Polisario Front and calling for a revival of UN-led negotiations.

The vote was 13-0 with Russia and Tunisia abstaining.

The US-drafted resolution makes no mention of US backing for Morocco's claim to the mineral-rich territory in the waning days of the Trump administration as part of efforts to get Morocco to recognize Israel.

Morocco annexed Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony believed to have considerable offshore oil deposits and mineral resources, in 1975, sparking a conflict with the Polisario Front.

The UN-brokered the 1991 cease-fire and established a peacekeeping mission to monitor the truce and help prepare a referendum on the territory's future that has never taken place because of disagreements on who is eligible to vote.

The Front ended the 29-year cease-fire with Morocco last November and resumed its armed struggle following a border confrontation with Morocco which continues today.

The Moroccan military had launched an operation that month in the UN-patrolled Guerguerat border zone to clear a key road it said had been blockaded for weeks by Polisario supporters.

Morocco has proposed wide-ranging autonomy for Western Sahara.

But the Polisario Front insists the local population, which it estimates at 350,000 to 500,000, has the right to a referendum.

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