

Saharan Peoples Support Committee
217 E. Lehr
Ada, Ohio 45810

August 1, 1978

Association of Concerned
African Scholars
729 Sunset Lane
East Lansing, Michigan 48823

Dear Colleagues,

I am enclosing a copy of the letter we have recently sent Secretary of State Vance. We have sent similar letters to Ambassador Andrew Young, Representatives Donald Fraser, Charles Diggs, and Clement Zablocki, and Senator Dick Clark.

As you may have noticed in this week's Africa News, the State Department is again preparing the ground for the sale of counter-insurgency equipment to Morocco for use against the Saharaoui people in the Western Sahara. Their action last March to "cancel" the request was only a delay, and their assurances to Congressional leaders that Morocco would cease to illegally use U.S. military equipment in the Western Sahara and in Mauritania were, at best, misleading.

We would urge you to write the President and the Congress immediately to a) call for an investigation of the mis-use of U.S. military equipment by Morocco
b) demand a moratorium on sales of arms to Morocco
c) urge that the U.S. live up to its standards of "human rights" in international affairs by not assisting in the genocide of a people.

Your prompt response is essential. We would appreciate your sending us copies of your letters for reference.

Letters might be sent to the following people:

President Jimmy Carter, The White House, Washington, D.C.

Congressman Parrin Mitchell, Chrm., The Black Caucus, 414 House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515


Senator Dick Clark, Chrm., Subcommittee on Africa, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510

Congressman Charles Diggs, Subcommittee on Africa, House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, D.C. 20515

Congressman Donald Fraser, Subcommittee on International Organizations, House For. Affairs Committee, Washington, D.C. 20515

We would urge you to write your own Congressmen as well.

Sincerely,


Anne Lippert, Chairperson

Saharan Peoples Support
Committee
217 E. Lehr
Ada, Ohio 45810

July 31, 1978

Mr. Cyrus Vance
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I am writing you again about the Saharaoui question because I ~~hve~~ recently returned from my second visit to the refugee camps in the area around and south of Tindouf, Algeria. One of the purposes of my visit was to ascertain for myself if U. S. arms are still being used in the Western Sahara by the Moroccans in their war against the Saharaoui people.

During my visit I talked with a number of prisoners of war including the Moroccan pilot shot down in a U.S. F-5 in the Western Sahara this June. I also talked with a number of Saharaouis recently escaped to the refugee camps or recently returned from the interior.

According to my informants there are currently five U.S. F-5's at El Aiun (Western Sahara) and these planes or replacements have been used there before, during, and after the U.S. protest of Morocco's use of U.S. arms of this type in the Western Sahara. In addition, there are three F-5's in Mauritania.

Despite two House Hearings on the question of self-determination of the Saharaouis and on arms sales to Morocco, it is apparent that U.S. arms are still being used in the Western Sahara and in Mauritania. It would seem that either the Moroccans do not take our protests seriously or that we (the U.S. through the agency of the State Department) are not serious or firm in our protest, but are proceeding as a matter of form.

What seems to be forgotten by many State Department people to whom I have spoken is that the aggressors in this conflict are Morocco and Mauritania, that the rights of the Saharaoui people to self-determination have never been exercised, that an attempt at genocide has been perpetrated against a defenseless people. Approval of use of U.S. arms in the Western Sahara (which would mean recognition de facto by the U.S. of Morocco's "sovereignty" in the northern 2/3 of the Western Sahara) would mark the U.S. as a supporter of illegal, imperialistic policies by another nation. By so doing we would frustrate the opinion of the International Court of Justice and the numerous U.N. resolutions (most of which we approved) calling for self-determination by the Saharaoui people. The result would be that no nation could take our statements about human rights seriously.

Because of the U.S. arms captured or downed in the conflict, many Saharaouis believe, unfortunately, that the U.S. is actively helping Morocco. They also believe, perhaps mistakenly, that former Secretary of State Kissinger urged Spain to turn over the Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania. U.S. arms sent to Iran have been captured in the fighting, as have N.A.T.O. arms. The Saharaouis do not understand why the U.S. should favor Morocco in this conflict because they, like us, are committed to democratic institutions, liberty and law. The Saharaouis in their state organization have also committed themselves to a non-aligned status. If the U.S. continues to sell arms and other forms of military equipment (eg., the Westinghouse radar system) to Morocco to be used in the Western Sahara, we may be responsible in part for forcing the Saharaouis from their non-aligned commitment. What is more, if Morocco were serious about its commitments to the bilateral agreement with the U.S., surely U.S. arms would have been withdrawn from use in the Western Sahara after the U.S. protest. Such bad faith should not be rewarded.

I believe that we are now approaching the moment in this crisis when some firm and positive action by the U.S. is necessary. The Western Sahara situation is one that the U.S. could seize to strengthen its own position with many Third World nations. Legitimacy lies with the Saharaouis despite attempts to discredit the people and their military struggle. Must the U.S. continually fail to act in terms of its own principles and best interest? The first step I would recommend is enforcement of the U.S./Morocco agreement on arms use. The second step would be to pressure all parties involved to de-escalate the conflict. Among other things this means no additional French involvement in the actual fighting. The third step is to recognize the legitimacy of the Saharaoui claims to self-determination and self-defense, which recognition would include some dialogue with members of the Polisario Front by State Department personnel. The fourth step would be to attempt to act as a mediator in the conflict, for as long as the conflict continues, the entire area of Northwest Africa remains destabilized.

What could such actions by the U.S. mean in terms of a return to stability in the region? A good deal. Our continued failure to act will lead to a lack of trust by all parties concerned. The extended war has not strengthened Hassan's regime. Certainly he fears a coup like the Mauritanian one of early this month. If we are to save him (I don't raise the question of should we), it must be by diplomacy, not by furnishing arms to extinguish a people and its rights to self-determination. In no case should we be required to support a regime that has ill-advisedly set out to flaunt international law and justice. Our past experience in Africa should alert us to the dangers of sacrificing principles for expediency, and a questionable expediency at that.

In talking with a number of Saharaoui officials it was frequently repeated that the Saharaouis would welcome visits to the refugee camps by Americans: members of Congress and/or their staffs, members of State Department missions, students, businessmen, etc.. The Saharaouis are eager to show the reality of their situation, to explain their policies and goals to all. The Saharaoui assemblies may be some of the most fully democratic assemblies in the world. It would seem more than unfortunate, if, in the goal of reaching some ephemeral, theoretical results in our diplomacy, the U.S. should succeed in stifling the emergence of a Third World nation truly committed to the values enunciated in our

own Constitution and Bill of Rights.

One thing that has concerned me in conversations with some State Department personnel in the U.S. and abroad is the refusal to deal with the issue of the Western Sahara in terms of the issue. There is a desire to link it with Soviet and Cuban influence in Africa (in this case this requires some manipulation of reality), with the problem of the Middle East, etc.. What is forgotten in all this is that there is a people, seeking its rights and the return of its land. All the sophisticated language that diplomacy uses cannot mask that reality.

I took a number of photos of U.S. arms (remains of the F-5 shot down in June, other F-5's, 106 guns, etc.) and of life in the camps while I was there. I also recorded a number of interviews (the Moroccan pilot shot down, recent nomadic "escapees," Saharaoui officials). I would be happy to forward some of this material to you, if you would find it useful. I would also be happy to talk with you at length about my impressions of the area and its people and the role I have proposed for the U.S. in the matter.

Sincerely,

Anne Lippert
Chairperson