

## Building Regional and International Consensus Workshop: *Egypt and Western Sahara*

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Thursday 5 September 2013  
Burgers Park Hotel, 424 Lilian Ngoyi St (Van der Walt Street), Pretoria

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### First Session

**Chair: Ms Carmen Smidt**, ANC International Relations Manager, South-South Cooperation

**Mr Ebrahim Ebrahim**, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa

### Second Session

**Chair: Mr Aziz Pahad**, Former SA Deputy Foreign Minister

**Mohamed Mohamed Yahia**, Ambassador of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

**Prof. Khaled Ahmad Qasaymeh**, UNISA: Nuclear Energy Law and International Law

**Mr Na'eem Jeenah**, Executive Director of the Afro-Middle East Centre (AMEC)

**Mr Lucian Segami**, Head of the International Department for NEHAWU (National Health Education and Allied Workers' Union) and SALO Board Member

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# Building International and Regional Consensus

## Policy Dialogue Report No.19: Egypt and Western Sahara 5 September 2013

### First Session

Ms **Carmen Smidt** welcomed all present and introduced the first speaker, the South African **Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ebrahim Ebrahim**.

The Deputy Minister gave a briefing on South Africa's foreign policy perspectives on Egypt and Western Sahara. Firstly, on Egypt, he briefly laid out events since the uprising against the rule of Hosni Mubarak: the control by the army, the removal of Mohamed Morsi from office, the suspension of the constitution, the disbandment of the Shura Council, the arrests of various Islamic leaders from the Muslim Brotherhood and other parties, the shutdown of media that was critical of the interim government, the army's selection of Mansour as Interim President and of an interim cabinet largely dominated by the Mubarak-era people, the army's crackdown on protesters, which resulted in about five hundred people reported killed, the occurrences of sectarian violence, and the appointment of a committee to amend the constitution to be followed by a referral to a constitutional council, a referendum, and an election.



He said that the African Union (AU), and many countries in the world, including South Africa, condemned the unconstitutional take-over of government as well as the violence and killing of peaceful, unarmed protesters. South Africa also called for an inclusive dialogue, and indicated that it was prepared to assist in such a dialogue aimed at achieving reconciliation. In response, Egypt's Department of Foreign Affairs issued a very strong statement condemning South Africa's stance as "being a stark intervention in Egypt's internal affairs."

In terms of the Lomé Declaration, Article 30 of the AU Constitutive Act, and the AU Charter, the AU does not recognise any government that comes into power through unconstitutional means or a *coup d'état*. Egypt was therefore suspended from the AU. The United States, however, did not want to use the words "military coup". Some Arab countries such as Qatar and Turkey condemned the takeover and violence, but others such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) endorsed the takeover, and the Bahrain also voiced support for the crackdown. The AU appointed a high level panel led by the former leader of Mali, the former president of Botswana, and the former Prime Minister of Djibouti.

The Deputy Minister referred to other historical events to draw a parallel to the move to declare the Muslim Brotherhood an illegitimate organisation, and warned that if they are driven underground, it could lead to violence and extremist elements. In Algeria, in the early nineties, when the Islamists won power through an election but were not allowed to rule, the army stepped in, leading to a bitter and long war. In Palestine, although Hamas won in a democratic election, the European Union(EU) and other Western powers made certain that they were not allowed to rule because of Hamas' Islamic background, and "the result is still there; there has not been any stability there".

"So what are we saying? Are we saying that there is no room in the democratic process for organisations that have an Islamic ideology . . . They cannot come into power and be given the opportunity to rule because of their ideological background or ideological orientation?"

He argued that the international community, through the AU and the UN, should come out very strongly in support of a new initiative in Egypt, a dialogue which must include all the parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood. South Africa, he said, would continue to engage the Egyptians bilaterally and through the AU.

Secondly, on the Western Sahara, the Deputy Minister said that it had been occupied by the Kingdom of Morocco since 1976, and was the last remaining colony on the African continent. The Polisario Front was established in 1976 and founded the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, which was formally recognised by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and resulted in Morocco pulling out of the OAU. South Africa also recognised Western Sahara and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, which resulted in Morocco pulling out their ambassador to South Africa, and refusing to accept South Africa's ambassador to Morocco (the two countries do have *chargé d'affaires*). South Africa has diplomatic relations with Western Sahara.

The Deputy Minister stated that South Africa remained steadfast in its support for the Sahrawi people's inalienable right to decolonisation and self-determination through the UN's process and a referendum. "*We think that the United Nations should deal with this issue and resolve the question of Western Sahara in line with the wishes of the people of Western Sahara and the question of decolonisation of Western Sahara,*" he said

South Africa was also opposed to the exploitation of mineral wealth, oil, and a very lucrative fishing area by Morocco and even some of the Western countries. In addition, there have been human rights violations by Morocco in Western Sahara. The United Nations Observer Mission in Western Sahara was the only UN Mission without a human rights mandate.

"So what we are demanding, and what the international community has been saying, is that the United Nations mandate should also monitor the human rights in Western Sahara. And I think that the Americans have now come to accept that there has to be a human rights component."

## Second Session

Mr **Aziz Pahad** opened the second session by thanking SALO for hosting a workshop on the Western Sahara, at a time when the Sahrawi issue was increasingly becoming a forgotten one. The Moroccan rule over Sahara had been on the UN agenda for many years and MINURSO had been deployed in that region since 1991. However, this fact, and all the UN Security Council Resolutions – particularly the 1979, 2001, and 2013 UN Reports and Resolutions – had not fundamentally changed much. He noted that today there are still some 150,000 troops continuing to occupy eighty-five percent



of the territory. The recent uprisings in the occupied city of El Aaiún, the capital of Western Sahara, and the consequent serious repression against the people, was an indication of the deteriorating situation in the occupied territory. The failure to close this last chapter on colonisation in Africa was causing serious political, human, economic, and security challenges for the region.

**Ambassador of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Mohamed Yahia**, acknowledged diplomats present and



thanked SALO for the opportunity. He stated that they are suffering from oppression and injustice and called on the international community to deal with the Western Sahara issue. The Moroccan authorities had built a wall of about two thousand kilometres surrounding the Western Sahara that prevented the Sahrawi people inside the wall from communicating with those outside.

“Occupation and colonisation and oppression do not have identities. When the Spanish occupiers left Western Sahara, we have had another occupation from Morocco. When the Spanish occupied Western Sahara, brothers from Arab countries supported us; however now that

the occupation is by Morocco there is not the same support. Occupation is occupation, killing is killing, oppression is oppression, it does not matter who is practicing it, Spanish or Arabic occupation.”

**Prof. Khaled Ahmad Qasaymeh** spoke about how easily people are labelled, making it convenient to ostracise a huge segment of the world’s population, Muslims who form almost a third of the world. He also argued that former elected President Morsi did not have the time nor was he given a chance to rule due to interference from other states.



**Mr Na'eem Jeenah** advocated for a much more serious grappling with the Western Sahara issue within civil society and the development of not only a South African but a continent-wide civil society campaign.



On Egypt, he believed that there was a need to go beyond South Africa’s positions. Three things needed to be seriously considered by the AU: reforming and building the economy in a way that serves the interests of the majority of the people; security sector reform (though he acknowledged that this was easier said than done in a country where the military has controlled politics for six decades, has control over forty percent of the GDP, and owns thirty percent of the land); and reform of the judiciary. Mr Jeenah asserted that as Africans and as global citizens, what we wanted to see in Egypt was simply democracy, a situation where people are able to make choices about their

own lives and their choices are respected.

“And if we want democracy in Egypt, then we have to accept what Egyptians choose to do with that democracy. We have to accept whoever they choose to lead them; and whether the people they choose to lead them are Islamists or liberals or a former general, that is the choice they have made.”



**Lucian Segami** then made a presentation from a trade union perspective. He explained that they had received correspondence from an Egyptian trade union federation of five million members, who stated that in their view, the ouster of former President Morsi from office did not constitute a military *coup* but a popular revolution backed up by over thirty million people, and appealed for support and solidarity. Mr Segami clarified that NEHAWU needed to and was in the process of getting more information. Meanwhile, he affirmed that the violence was condemned regardless of whether it was attributed to the current or the Morsi government, and that the working class in the main would be at the cutting edge of the deepening political crisis.

On Western Sahara, the union and alliance's stance was very clear, in support for the right of the Sahrawi's to self-determination. And whilst there was agreement that the best viable framework for the resolution is dialogue, there was waning confidence about Morocco's commitment to this process. He also detected a re-radicalisation of young people in the Western Sahara. Mr Segami expressed concern about the human rights violations and the basic humanitarian needs of the Sahrawis, which South Africa and the international community must pay attention to, in addition to pursuing dialogue with the UN and within the political process.

Through two forums, the Western Sahara Solidarity Forum and South Africa Friends of Western Sahara, COSATU linked up with civil society to assist in popularising the notion of self-determination. He expressed appreciation for the role that countries like Algeria were playing in assisting the people of Western Sahara, and the initiative to bring the four countries – Nigeria, South Africa, Western Sahara, and Algeria – together into a platform that can help take up the issues, including through multilateral processes.

Lastly, he highlighted the issue of the exploitation of Western Sahara's resources by Morocco and the EU. There was a need to continue engagement with countries including France and the US, but also to recognise that there are emerging powers such as the BRICS countries, which must be brought into the efforts to support and resolve this protracted conflict.



**From the floor, Ambassador Welile Nhlapo** explained that in 1976 when Western Sahara was recognised as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Africa was divided. In 1998, before the summit in Mozambique had even started, the de-recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was placed on the agenda by the newly elected summit chair at Morocco's behest, which split the OAU. During the period 1999 to 2000, the AU chose the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to deal with the AU-EU Summit for North Africa, which was not acceptable to the EU. At the following preparatory committee that took place in Europe, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic was not recognised or allowed to attend, though Morocco was invited. And at the last Summit of the EU-Africa, the issue had been reopened. The EU's position was also supported by

that of the Arab countries, none of whom recognise the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

Ambassador Nhlapo also responded to Mr Segami's report back on the Egyptian union federation's correspondence and advised that caution and further analysis were necessary.



**Mr Pahad** thanked everyone in closing the day's session. He noted that although the initial analysis of the euphoric 'Arab Spring' may have been too simplistic and optimistic, the struggle was ongoing, and we should not move from an over-optimistic to an over-pessimistic analysis. Thus, he said, "No uprising or revolution is in a straight line: you have retreats, forces regroup, the balance of forces determines when you progress."

*The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Dialogue Report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.*

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**SALO would like to thank the generous support of this project by:  
The Royal Norwegian Embassy, Pretoria**

