



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2017

Western Sahara*

NOT FREE

4
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	-3/40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	7/60

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.

* Indicates a territory as opposed to an independent country.



Overview

The sovereignty of Western Sahara is the subject of longstanding dispute. Morocco claims authority over the territory, but the Polisario Front—a nationalist liberation movement comprised of members of the Sahrawi ethnic group—leads an independence movement. There are no free elections in Western Sahara. Morocco harshly represses Sahrawi activism. Corruption is rampant at all levels; freedoms of expression and assembly are severely restricted, as is the right to unimpeded movement; and most residents live in harsh conditions.

Key Developments in 2016

- In a reflection of ongoing tensions, both Moroccan authorities and the Polisario Front deployed new security forces in the Guerguerat region.
- In March, Moroccan authorities expelled dozens of civilian UN staff members, after UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon referred to Moroccan “occupation” of Western Sahara.
- In October, Moroccan authorities expelled a Spanish human rights expert who had been invited to appear at an event hosted by a newly recognized Saharawi rights group.

Executive Summary

Longstanding tensions between Moroccan authorities and the Polisario Front continued in 2016. Meanwhile, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), established in 1991 to implement a national referendum on independence for the territory, had yet to fulfill its mandate at year’s end. The UN Security Council renewed MINURSO’s mission for another year in April.

A few weeks prior to the Security Council vote, Ban sparked a diplomatic dispute when, while visiting a Sahrawi refugee camp in Tindouf, Algeria, he referred to Morocco’s “occupation” of Western Sahara. Morocco expelled dozens of civilian UN

staff members at MINURSO's office in Laâyoune in retaliation, though some returned later in the year. Tensions flared again in August, when Moroccan authorities sent security forces into the Guerguerat region, on the southern border with Mauritania, saying they were necessary to combat smuggling and drug trafficking. The Polisario Front protested the police action, and set up its own outpost near the Moroccan one.

In 2015, Moroccan officials permitted the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Human Rights Abuses Committed by the Moroccan State to legally register its status as a nongovernmental organization (NGO), winning praise from the human rights community. However, in 2016 Moroccan authorities interfered with its activities, including by expelling in October a Spanish human rights expert the group had invited to Western Sahara for an event.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

C. Functioning of Government Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

F. Rule of Law

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Western Sahara, see *Freedom in the World 2016*.



On Western Sahara

See all data, scores & information on this country or territory.

See More >

Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

4/100 Not Free

Other Years

2020

Be the first to know what's happening.

Join the Freedom House monthly newsletter

Email

Subscribe

ADDRESS

1850 M St. NW Floor 11
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-5101

GENERAL INQUIRIES

info@freedomhouse.org

PRESS & MEDIA

press@freedomhouse.org

@2020 FreedomHouse