



Mr. Claude Moniquet,
President of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre (ESISC),
Brussels

Bir Lehlou, 29 December 2005

Dear Mr. Moniquet,

We were astonished to read your report, **"THE POLISARIO FRONT, CREDIBLE NEGOTIATIONS PARTNER OR AFTER-EFFECT OF THE COLD WAR AND OBSTACLE TO A POLITICAL SOLUTION IN WESTERN SAHARA?"** that was released in November 2005. The purpose of the report, it seems, was to damage the reputation of the POLISARIO Front and the Saharawi people at this crucial time as far as the decolonisation conflict in Western Sahara is concerned. What marks this time obviously is Morocco's disregard for international legality, its obstruction of the peaceful settlement of the Western Sahara conflict through the holding of a self-determination referendum and its rejection of the Security Council resolution 1495 as well as its constant and systematic violations of human rights in Western Sahara. The abuses involve practices of brutal repression, abduction, detention and assassination that have been targeting the Saharawi peaceful demonstrations in the Territory in which the demonstrators have been demanding the settlement of the conflict through the democratic way, namely the self-determination referendum. These repressive practices were condemned by all international human rights organisations, the latest of which was Human Rights Watch in its letter addressed to the Moroccan King on 9 December 2005, in addition to the successive reports released by Amnesty International.

Given that the ESISC is based in Brussels, the European Capital where the traditions of impartiality and promotion of democracy as well as the defence of the rights of all men and women reign, it cannot thus flout the ethics and the minimum tenets of academic research in this way without being criticised in proportion to the professional and ethical mistake that it has committed.

Since your report is fraught with misrepresentations, lies and propaganda that aim at discrediting the struggle of the Saharawi people and their sole and legitimate representative, the POLISARIO Front, it needs therefore to be thoroughly examined. However, for methodological reasons and to avoid any engagement with the far-fetched claims and assumptions that bear no relation to reality and contradict historical facts, I would like to respond to some of those misrepresentations included in the report. In doing so, I will deal with them at two levels:

I: the Methodology and Form

Those familiar with research methodologies and methodical research will readily be able to realise that the intention to harm the reputation of the POLISARIO Front and the Saharawi people has led your centre to violate the basic rules of academic research in terms of:

- Exclusion of classical references on the conflict in terms of history, law and sociology such as: *Le conflit du Sahara occidental*, written by **Barbier** Maurice, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1982; *The Roots of a Desert War*, written by **Hodges** Tony, Lawrence Hill & Co, 1983; *Estudios saharianos*, **Caro Baroja** Julio, Ed. Jucar, Madrid, 1990; *Historia del Sahara Español: La verdad de una traición*, **Diego Aguirre** José Ramon, Kaydeda Ed., Madrid, 1988; *Front Polisario, l'âme du peuple*, written by **Miske** Ahmed Baba, Rupture, Paris, 1978; and *Sahara Occidental: La confiance perdue L'impartialité de l'ONU à l'épreuve*, **de Froberville** Martine, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1996 (to name but a few sources). In addition to this, one also can notice partial, selective and decontextualised use of some of those references (Tony Hodges, p.13)
- Selective use of Internet, which is a source of limited utility when it comes to presenting a rigorous academic study, with a view to serving the main purpose of the study, namely discrediting the POLISARIO Front at any cost.
- Absence of any rules of impartiality and detachment in relation to the human sources, where the Moroccan viewpoint was presented without bothering to conduct interviews with the leadership, cadres and activists of the POLISARIO Front that is the liberation movement under discussion. As for the claim of having conducted interviews with people interested in the conflict, the span of interest seems to shrink drastically and becomes focused exclusively on Rabat and some limited quarters within the French academe.
- Committing errors characteristic of novices when it comes to dates of significant events of the conflict such as distorting history by resurrecting Che Guevara and making him create the POLISARIO Front in 1973, despite the fact that he had already died in 1967.

II. Substance and Content

1. Origin of the conflict

Your keen interest in damaging the reputation of the POLISARIO Front and the struggle of the Saharawi people has led you to make up a new context for the conflict in Western Sahara and take an absurd approach to its origin. Thus, the conflict is described as an ideological dispute dating back to the Cold War (p.19), and sometimes it is presented as a regional conflict (p.19) or simply as a result of a personal attempt of a foreign leader to take revenge on Morocco (p.20). The fact that you have futilely tried to deny has already been established by history and the clarity of the aspects of the conflict in Western Sahara since 1966 when the UN General Assembly issued its resolution (21/2229) to the latest resolution passed by the Fourth Commission on Decolonisation regarding Western Sahara (October 2005). The conflict is about the decolonisation of a Non-Self-Governing Territory that must be conducted through **“the free and genuine expression by the inhabitants of the territory of their wishes through a self-determination referendum, under the supervision of the United Nations”** in accordance with international resolutions, in particular resolution 1514 (December 1960), regarding the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

The POLISARIO Front, which was created on 10 May 1973 to fight against Spain, the former colonial power, and for the holding of a self-determination referendum, has been leading the struggle of the Saharawi people for the same objective, since October 1975, against Morocco, the new colonial power. Thirty years have passed since its inception, and despite the vicissitudes that it has gone through, its position has remained unchanged, namely the

attachment to the implementation of international legality and law and to enabling the Saharawi people to have their say in choosing freely their future. It also remains committed to the respect for that choice even if it were the integration with Morocco, unlike the latter whose position, since the seventies, has been fraught with contradictions, reneging on its commitments and viewing the demand of a peaceful, just and strategic peace as a tactical outlet of an overwhelming desire for expansionism and plunging the region into conflict, chauvinism and enmity.

The whole world still recalls the statement made by the King of Morocco, Hassan II, in his press conference conducted in Rabat on 30 July 1970 when he said, **“I will put forth a precise demand, that is the organisation of a plebiscite in the territory for expelling the Europeans and enabling the people of Western Sahara to choose between living under the Moroccan rule, their own rule, or any other rule”**. Two years later, in June 1972, the Moroccan capital hosted the African ministerial meeting, in its 15th session, where the resolution 15/272 was adopted calling for **“enabling the Saharawi people to exercise their right to self-determination and independence.”**

The whole world still recalls also that, until 1973, Morocco used to approve all UN resolutions calling for the holding of a self-determination referendum in Western Sahara. When the Spanish administration declared, in its letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General on 20 August 1974, that it was planning to organise the referendum in the first half of 1975, Morocco turned its back on its previous commitments and, by the end of 1974, it surprisingly began to lay historical claims over Western Sahara, while requesting the UN General Assembly to refer the issue to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. In its resolution 29/3292, the General Assembly decided to (a) request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice relating to the Moroccan and Mauritanian territorial claims over Western Sahara and the bearing of this on self-determination, and (b) to send a UN fact-finding mission to Western Sahara and the neighbouring countries.

The way you presented the ruling of the International Court of Justice clearly reveals the main objective of the report, namely to discredit the POLISARIO Front, whilst radically embracing the Moroccan viewpoint and presenting it as that of the ESISC. The omission in the report of the UN fact-finding mission is very indicative of the willingness of your centre to sacrifice the tenets of impartial academic research and ethics for serving a parochial political objective. The advisory opinion of The Hague, which was issued on 16 October 1975, stipulates in paragraph 162 of its conclusions that, **“the Court’s conclusion is that the materials and information presented to it do not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity. Thus the Court has not found legal ties of such a nature as might affect the application of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) in the decolonization of Western Sahara and, in particular, of the principle of self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory”**. It is this right that was violated by Morocco, on 31 October 1975, at which point the Security Council issued its resolutions 1975/379 and 380 that called for the withdrawal of the Green March from the Territory, whereas the General Assembly issued its resolution 3458 (xxx) of 10 December 1975, calling on Spain, as the administering power of the Territory, to assume its responsibility regarding the holding of the self-determination referendum. These resolutions are crystal clear, but you (who are keen to serve the Moroccan viewpoint) have chosen to omit them from the ESISC report, as you have done with a host of other international resolutions and documents.

Another important document relating to the Western Sahara conflict as far as its origin is concerned is the report of the UN fact-finding mission that was issued on 11 October 1975, five days prior to the aforementioned ruling of the International Court of Justice. Because of your partiality and selectivity, this document was omitted from your report. Elaborated by a mission that was authorised by the United Nations and included personalities from different nationalities who visited the Territory and the neighbouring countries, the report affirms in its conclusions that “[the mission] **noticed that the inhabitants of the Sahara or at least the overwhelming majority of the people it interviewed had unequivocally expressed their wish for independence and their opposition to the Moroccan and Mauritanian territorial claims, and that they supporting the objectives of the POLISARIO Front calling for the independence of the territory**” para. (420).

This overwhelming popular will that was noted at the time, which has become a self-evident fact, has been the *raison d'être* and asset whereby the POLISARIO Front has been able to endure for thirty years despite the superiority of the enemy in terms of numbers and weaponry. It is also the source of strength whereby the Saharawi liberation movement has been able to carry on, boost its capabilities and expand the scope of sympathy with it in the context of major international changes. That is the truth that the ESISC has tried futilely to eclipse by making up new contexts such as the Cold War or regional conflicts or even personal settling of accounts when it refers to the history of the emergence and persistence of the POLISARIO Front. In fact, the POLISARIO Front, as a national liberation movement internationally recognised for more than 30 years, does not need a distorted birth certificate from a centre that was born only three years ago.

Therefore, in contrast to the claims whereby the report has tried to mislead the international public opinion, the Western Sahara conflict is a decolonisation issue on the annual agenda of the Fourth Commission of the General Assembly and is dealt with by the General Assembly every year. It is also dealt with regularly by the Security Council in the context of reviewing the UN settlement efforts and the work of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The legal status of the Territory, a gross omission in your report, is very clear in the sense that it is a Non-Self-Governing Territory to be decolonised through the holding of a self-determination referendum. Morocco does not have any sovereignty whatsoever over Western Sahara, since Spain did not transfer to it sovereignty (*see the statement of Spanish Foreign Minister made in September 2005*) and thus it is not even the administering power of the Territory (*see the letter of the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the Legal Counsel, Mr. Hans Corell dated 29 January 2002, S/2002/161*)

As the sole and legitimate representative of the Saharawi people, the POLISARIO Front is waging a legitimate liberation struggle sanctioned expressly by the United Nations (34/37/1979). Since its inception in 1973, its objective has always been the same, namely enabling the Saharawi people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination through a free, democratic, just and a UN-supervised referendum. Therefore, it remains committed, before the Saharawi people and the whole world, to respecting and accepting the outcome of the referendum, whatever it may be. The violation by Morocco of this right in 1975 is the context and the only cause for the eruption of the conflict in the first place and for its continuation until now

2. The future of the self-determination referendum in Western Sahara

From the very outset, the ESISC report tried to present the Moroccan position of rejecting the referendum as if it were given and an accomplished fact that should be accepted as such. Your blunder here involves not only the violation of the tenets of academic work but also the ethics and the minimum rules of common sense. How is it possible that such a prominent European centre, operating within the ambit of the European Union where values of democracy, justice and human rights reign, can oppose the referendum which represents (a) the position of the United Nations and international legality as well as a right the exercise of which has led to the freedom of dozens of peoples around the world, and (b) a very significant human right, namely the right to exist. It is also a basic democratic right, as it makes the ballot boxes the arbiter to solve a conflict that has lasted so long due to Morocco's insistence in sidelining the opinion of the Saharawis and suppressing their voices.

What credibility is left for a European centre that connives, in broad daylight, to deny a people the chance to exercise a democratic right?

After all, to ensure a balanced reading of the Moroccan position of rejecting the referendum, why did not you bother to answer a self-evident question: Why does Morocco reject the referendum? Did not Morocco say through its propaganda, which was fully reproduced in your report, that the Saharawis in the refugee camps, administered by the POLISARIO Front, were sequestered against their will, (p.52 and above), and that the Saharawis in the territories under Moroccan occupation were Moroccan citizens as other Moroccans. Why does it fear the holding of the referendum? Why is it afraid of giving the Saharawis the chance to choose their future, to reaffirm their Moroccanity, for instance?

With regard to Morocco's position as to the conflict in Western Sahara, why does the ESISC overlook the series of contradictions and reneging on commitments that have marked Morocco's conduct regarding the UN plan for the referendum in Western Sahara? Despite the calls made by the United Nations in the end of 1975, Morocco insisted on the idea of a "closed dossier" and that there would never be a referendum. This led the Saharawis to go through 6 years of war until Morocco, represented by the King Hassan II, accepted the referendum in the summit held in Nairobi in 1981. This position was further reaffirmed in a statement made by him during the 37th session of the General Assembly, held on 27 September 1983, when he said, **"Morocco tells you that it wants the referendum to be held in the Sahara territory, and that it is ready for it to be held tomorrow, if you want. Morocco is ready to facilitate the entry of observers to monitor the cease-fire and hold a free and fair referendum, and Morocco holds you witnesses to its commitments to respect its results"**. The same position was later reiterated by the King and his senior ministers in official statements that went to the extent of affirming **"Morocco's readiness to open the first embassy in Western Sahara if the Saharawis would choose independence"** (*Idriss Bassri, September 1997*).

This gave the Saharawis and the international community the impression that Morocco was serious in moving towards the referendum, and this, in turn, created the positive conditions for the acceptance by the two parties (Morocco and the POLISARIO Front) of the UN Settlement Plan, which was approved by the Security Council in its resolution (690-1991), and their subsequent signing of the additional Houston Agreements, which were approved by the Security Council in its resolution (1133 of September 1997). However, following the publication by the United Nations of the provisional lists in December 1999, Morocco began to exhibit positions similar, in substance, to those expressed in 1975, the last of which was the official statement made by the Moroccan State in a letter addressed to the UN Secretary-

General on 29 April 2004 in which it declared its rejection of the self-determination referendum. This position led the Saharawis and the international community to feel disappointed. This feeling of disappointment was expressed by Mr. James Baker, the UN former mediator, in his interview with the American TV station, PBS, broadcast in August 2004, when he said **“the closer we got to implementing the settlement plan... the more nervous I think the Moroccans got about whether they might not win that referendum.”**

Bent on serving the Moroccan position at any cost, your research team sought to pose a significant hypothetical question but only to reveal the real intentions and objectives of the report: is the independence of the Saharawi people, which is defended by the POLISARIO Front, the only way that can lead them to freedom? (p.40). The context of the question is very clear, that is to make the reader believe that, following Morocco's rejection of the referendum, the latter's proposal regarding the “granting of an autonomy” (which was expressed by the King Mohamed V in his speech of 6 November 2005) may be an alternative framework in which the Saharawis can attain their freedom. The fact that was wittingly or unwittingly overlooked by the ESISC is that the POLISARIO Front calls for the holding of a self-determination referendum in Western Sahara, and it is up to the Saharawis, and the Saharawis only, to choose what they want.

3. Saharawi Refugee Camps

In this section, you blatantly draw on the terminology of the Moroccan news agency (MAP) that bears no relation to reality. For 30 years, the camps have been open for visitors including Heads of State, Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the African Union as well as members of the international solidarity movement with the Saharawi people. There is an average of ten thousand visitors that visit the camps every year including 1000 journalist representing international media, missions of international organisations, diplomats, NGOs, in addition to the presence of the MINURSO, and offices of international organisations. All those people were able to acquaint themselves with the situation of the camps where the refugees have lived and achieved, for the first time in history, a great deal of organisation, freedom and reasonable standards of social services and civil rights, despite the hard situation and lack of resources. Anyway, the ESISC cannot credibly talk about those camps because—although it has set out to report “academically” on the POLISARIO Front—did not bother to visit them and verify its sources. Instead, it contented itself with blindly echoing the Moroccan lies that convince nobody, and which have been disproved by representatives of international community in Western Sahara such as the statement of the UNHCR dated 24 April 2005, and the statement of the head of office of UN mission in the Territory made in 2005.

By contrast, the ESISC, which claims to present an exhaustive report on the conflict, remains silent on the peaceful demonstrations, which are going on since 21 May 2005, in the occupied territories of Western Sahara, and some cities in Southern Morocco and universities where Saharawi students study, in which the demonstrators demanded the holding of the self-determination referendum. It also remains silent on the subsequent campaigns of massive and systematic repression of which some incidents were documented on the ground by international TV channels including EURONEWS. This silence betrays an act of complicity with the repression of fundamental and civil rights of the Saharawis in the occupied cities; the unfair court trials of human rights activists; the assassination of Saharawi citizens; the expulsion of foreign delegation, media and observers; the imposing a military siege; the deployment of the army in the streets of La Aiun, the capital; and lastly the sowing of discord

and civil strife between Saharawis and Moroccan settlers by deploying 20,000 Moroccan soldiers in plain clothes throughout Saharawi cities so as to engender an ethnic conflict.

The reading of the first pages of the report shows the intent exhibited in the ESISC report to remain silent on this movement of protest, for the simple reason that it does not serve the Moroccan agenda.

The report also remains silent on the abuses of human rights that were massively and systematically committed by the Moroccan State in Western Sahara since 31 October 1975, despite the official recognition by Morocco of the existence of mass graves of a group of Saharawi disappeared (*statement of the Reconciliation and Equity Commission, dated 8 October 2005*) belonging to 500 persons who were arrested and detained in secret detention centres by Moroccan authorities that are still reluctant to provide any information about them. The Moroccan authorities also are unwilling to account for the 151 Saharawi prisoners of war or handing them over to the Saharawi authorities, despite the release by the POLISARIO Front, thanks to a personal intervention of President George Bush, of 404 Moroccan POWs as the last group of more than 2000 POWs who were captured by the Saharawi army during the battles fought against Moroccan occupying forces before the coming into effect of the cease-fire in 1991. The release was also a gesture of good will to push forward the settlement efforts.

4. The future of the POLISARIO Front and the link with terrorism

Your centre fully reproduced the Moroccan official propaganda aimed at damaging the credibility of the POLISARIO Front and disturbing the sympathy and massive support that the struggle of the Saharawi people has been enjoying throughout the world.

The fact that the Moroccan declared propaganda and the misinformation, concocted in biased quarters such as the ESISC, cannot change is that the POLISARIO Front, since 1973, has been waging a clean liberation war within the ambit international legality and with great international support. (*UN General Assembly resolution 2983/1972*).

During the years of military confrontation in the seventies and eighties, the POLISARIO Front remained firmly committed to war within its legal equation (a soldier for a soldier) and has never resorted to the use of violence against the civilians or civil targets—this fact has earned the POLISARIO Front admiration and support throughout the world. Since its signing of the cease-fire as a responsible partner seeking peace as a strategic option, the POLISARIO Front has remained attached to this principle despite Morocco's reneging on all its commitments and disengagement from the agreements that it had signed. Despite the ferocity and brutality of the campaign of repression that the Moroccan authorities have been carrying out against the Saharawi peaceful demonstrations in the occupied territories of the Territory and in Southern Morocco, the POLISARIO Front has been attached—and will remain attached—to legal and clean resistance.

5. Absence of the will to dialogue on the part of the POLISARIO and its absence as a partner in the future of the settlement

An exhaustive reading of the report shows that this preconceived conclusion is actually the underlying objective of this study that is seen at great pains to discredit the Saharawi national

liberation movement and play down its role in order to justify the Moroccan viewpoint that is based on overriding the inalienable right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

Since the report shows clearly that your team did not do their “homework” well in terms of preparation and research and the use of the proper bibliography on the conflict, it is imperative to remind you of a number of self-evident facts relating to the position of the POLISARIO Front since the start of the conflict until now:

- The call for direct negotiations and dialogue with Morocco is one of the demands—pillars of the POLISARIO Front since the start of the conflict until now. By contrast, as evidenced by the whole world and all UN, continental and regional mediators, Morocco continues to reject the principle of dialogue and to sit at the negotiating table with the POLISARIO Front. It is to be recalled that it was the open negotiations between the POLISARIO Front and the Mauritanian Government that led to the signing of a peace agreement between the two parties in August 1979. It was also the firm belief of the POLISARIO Front in the importance of direct negotiations that led to the sending of a delegation to Morocco to negotiate with the King Hassan II in Marrakech in January 1989, and another one to meet the King Mohamed V (when he was crown prince) in Rabat in 1996.
- The POLISARIO Front was not only ready for direct negotiations but has remained committed to its commitments under all agreements, including Houston Agreements (1997) signed under the auspices of Mr. James Baker. It is well known that it is Morocco that was unwilling to go forward with the implementation of those agreements (Report of UN Secretary-General S/2002/178, para.48).
- The interest of the POLISARIO Front in reaching a peaceful and just solution in accordance with the dictates of international legality and law as well as its successive concessions have always been the driving force behind the UN efforts in Western Sahara. A closer reading of the changes that were introduced into the original UN-OAU plan from 1991 until the presentation of Baker Plan in 2003, shows the magnitude of the sacrifices that the POLISARIO Front has made for the just peace, which Morocco is now unwilling to accept. The acceptance by the POLISARIO Front of the **peace plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara**, which was approved by the Security Council in resolution 1495 (July 2003) is a case in point. Despite the risks involved—especially those relating to the autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty during 4 to 5 years, the electoral body for the self-determination referendum following the transitional period that will include, besides the Saharawis, Moroccan settlers—this gesture is a clear expression of the will of the POLISARIO Front to reach a just settlement of the conflict and to spare the Saharawi and Moroccan peoples, and the peoples of the whole region, other calamities that may result from the intransigence and obstructionism exhibited currently by Morocco.

As the sole and legitimate representative of the Saharawi people, the POLISARIO Front is committed to a just and lasting settlement of the conflict in Western Sahara by implementing international law particularly as far as the self-determination is concerned. More than ever, it remains an unavoidable peace partner that embodies the aspirations and will of the Saharawis to attain justice, freedom and the right to exist. If the ESISC is in doubt about this fact, it should have visited the occupied territories of Western Sahara and the refugee camps to be informed firsthand of the genuine wishes of the Saharawis instead of reproducing, in a distorted form, the Moroccan official propaganda.

In conclusion, such a work produced by a centre like yours, which is based in a capital on which peoples of the third world attach great hopes for promoting the values of democracy, justice, human rights and tolerance, does not only harm the peaceful and just solution to the conflict. It also makes large groups of sympathizers with the Saharawi cause and all just causes of peoples of the South feel very disappointed at seeing the reputation of European institutions of research being compromised. Their feeling of bitterness may even justify the use of all means, including legal acts, to ensure that the European institutions are not used for biased, and gratuitous propaganda and defamation. The compilation of all products of Moroccan official propaganda, lies and misinformation presented against the POLISARIO front and the Saharawi struggle for thirty years and embracing all that as an ESISC work leads us to pose certain legitimate questions: Is there actually a centre with this name? Even if it were there, may it still have something to do with the minimum values of objectivity, detachment and academic neutrality, given that its study that has chosen, in each one of its paragraphs, to go against the truth?

In keeping with our right to respond, I would appreciate if you would kindly publish this letter on your website.

Please accept, Mr. Moniquet, my highest regards and best wishes.

Malainin Ahmed,
Director of Political Affairs and Information,
Saharawi Ministry of Foreign Affairs

