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Human rights at the heart of the extension of the MINURSO's mandate: Letter to the Member States of the United Nations Security Council

Ladies and Gentlemen Heads of State and Government,

On 27 April, the Member States of the United Nations Security Council will take a decision on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). On this occasion, EuroMed Rights, a network of over 80 human rights organisations located on both shores of the Mediterranean, calls on you to ensure that human rights are at the heart of these discussions.

26 years after the establishment of the MINURSO, the situation in Western Sahara remains unchanged. The international community must commit itself to observe and promote human rights by endeavouring to devise a just and sustainable overall solution that is consistent with international law, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Security Council's previous resolutions on Western Sahara.

EuroMed Rights has noted that many obstacles to the full exercise of human rights remain in the area in question, including major violations of the freedom of expression and assembly, as well as restrictions imposed upon the activities of local and foreign human rights organisations. The fact of several delegations being denied entry is also unacceptable. We have also noted with concern the serious allegations of torture and ill treatment in the territory in question, which were confirmed by the decision taken by the United Nations Committee against Torture on 26 December, ruling that, in the case of Naâma Asfari, the Kingdom of Morocco was in breach of the Convention against Torture. In addition, we regret the fact that, despite the will expressed by the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to reintegrate all staff of the civil and political component of the MURSO, who were expelled from Laâyoune in March 2016, only 25 staff members have been authorised to resume their duties, which affects the MINURSO's ability to carry out its mandate. We also call for a speedy appointment of a new Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Western Sahara following the resignation of Mr. Christopher Ross on 6 April.

In light of this situation in Western Sahara, EuroMed Rights urges you to mandate your Ambassadors to the United Nations to:

- Renew the MINURSO's mandate and ensure that it is fully operational, so that it may carry out its mission unimpeded;
- Extend the MINURSO's mission to assessing the human rights situation, or establish permanent international mechanisms for vigilance and monitoring observance of human rights. The mandate should be able to be carried out in the refugees camps hosted in Algeria and under the control of the Polisario Front.

We remain at your disposal for any further information you may require.

Yours faithfully,

Michel Tubiana,
EuroMed Rights President