

# **WESTERN SAHARA DECLARES OFFSHORE ZONES**

## **President Abdelaziz calls on EU to cease illegal fishing in Western Sahara's waters**

The Government of Western Sahara declared an offshore exclusive economic zone on 21 January 2009, making official its exclusive rights to the oil, gas and fisheries resources offshore of the territory of Western Sahara.

Formerly known as "Spanish Sahara", the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) has been recognised officially by over 80 countries, and is a full founding member of the African Union.

The 21 January declaration of a 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) confirms the SADR's jurisdiction over its offshore fisheries and mineral and petroleum seabed resources, as provided for under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The EEZ also provides the legal framework for the SADR's offshore licensing regime, which is currently receiving international bids for offshore oil and gas exploration activities (see <http://www.sadroilandgas.com> for further information).

After signing the new legislation, SADR President Mohamed Abdelaziz said: "This is an exciting moment for the Sahrawi people. The EEZ declaration is an expression and exercise by the Saharawi people of their inalienable right to self-determination and permanent sovereignty over their natural resources. It is also a further step towards full statehood, and to taking control of our natural riches, which have been plundered illegally for many years by Morocco and other foreign interests".

With the passage of this legislation, the SADR has made clear its views regarding unauthorised activities in the Western Saharan EEZ. Abdelaziz said "This declaration bears out the illegality of all unauthorised natural resource-related activities conducted by Morocco and other foreign interests in Western Sahara's waters. We call on all parties to revisit immediately any agreements with Morocco that do not explicitly exclude the Western Saharan territory and its offshore areas, including the EEZ".

Abdelaziz added: "In particular, we call on the European Union to suspend immediately the 2005 EU-Morocco Fisheries Agreement in its current form, and to prevent EU vessels from encroaching upon the waters of Western Sahara. We are investigating various legal avenues to ensure that this theft of our world class fisheries resources does not continue".

The SADR EEZ borders those of Morocco, Mauritania and the Canary Islands (Spain). The new legislation provides that where the SADR's maritime entitlements overlap with those of its neighbours, the SADR will negotiate and conclude agreements delimiting maritime boundaries in accordance with international law.