

Bir Lehlou: 12 October 2005

## **INTENDED ACTIVITIES BY COMPANIES IN WESTERN SAHARA AGAINST THE EXPRESS WISH OF THE INDIGENOUS SAHARAWI POPULATION**

The Government of the Saharawi Republic (SADR) wishes to draw the attention of the UN and the international community to plans by the United States oil companies, Kerr McGee Corporation, and its partners Kosmos Energy LLP and Pioneer Natural Resources Company to commence drilling operations offshore Western Sahara.

The sovereignty of the indigenous Saharawi people over the territory known as Western Sahara has been upheld by the International Court of Justice. The SADR government is widely recognised as the legitimate governing authority of the territory. It is a full member of the African Union (AU).

The coastal region of territory is currently illegally occupied by the Moroccan army, and consequently Western Sahara is defined by the UN as a non-self governing territory, waiting for a decolonisation process. Under a UN mediated ceasefire, peacekeeping troops are deployed while the UN Security Council, via the Special Envoy to the Secretary General, seeks a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

The SADR government has strongly objected to the signing by Kerr McGee of an exploration agreement over Western Saharan territory with the occupying Moroccan regime. Kerr McGee has however shown a repeated disregard for the wishes of the Saharawi people and for the impact that its actions may have on the UN efforts to resolve the crisis.

The SADR government has sought UN legal opinion on Kerr McGee's actions. It believes that the continued presence and activities of Kerr McGee and its partners to be a violation of international law, UN law with respect to non-self governing territories and the UN legal opinion. The fact that Kerr McGee and its partners are now planning to escalate this situation and commence drilling activities is a further violation of international law. It is an affront to the Saharawi people. It will escalate tension in the territory and complicate and delay peaceful resolution to this protracted conflict.

This intended action by Kerr McGee and its partners comes at a time when Saharawi civilians in the occupied areas are involved in programmes of civil protest and hunger strikes against widespread human rights abuses by the Moroccan forces. These systematic abuses have been widely documented by international organisations.

The SADR government wishes to make it clear to Kerr McGee, Kosmos and Pioneer that their presence and future plans are deeply offensive to the Saharawi people. The conflict in Western Sahara has not been resolved. Western Sahara remains an active war zone, with a UN peacekeeping force (MINURSO) currently deployed. Should UN efforts to organise a referendum on self-determination, identical to the process completed in East Timor and in accordance with UN principles on decolonisation, fail then it is likely that hostilities will resume.

The government of the SADR further wishes to state that it cannot guarantee the safety of any individual involved in the intended operations of Kerr McGee. Existing ceasefire arrangements do not envisage such operations in a war zone, and consequently the Saharawi army must carefully consider its position and response if these inflammatory activities proceed.

The SADR government calls on the UN Secretary General and the UN Security Council to intervene and prevent Kerr McGee acting in clear contravention to the principles of international law and UN guidelines.

The SADR government calls on its supporters, friends and allies, including all governments that recognise the legitimate rights of the Saharawi people, to assist in protecting the natural resources and sovereignty of our country by doing all in their power to prevent Kerr McGee, Kosmos and Pioneer from continuing this illegal action. We also urge the companies shareholders, investors, advisors and contractors to seriously consider the serious consequences if drilling offshore Western Sahara were to proceed.

On behalf of the Saharawi people, the SADR government once more urges Kerr McGee and its partners to respect the principles of international law and the efforts of the UN mediators, and to end their involvement in Western Sahara immediately.