

## Statement by HE Emhamed Khadad – 17 May 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful to you all for joining us today. It is not often that my country – the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic – is discussed here in London. But today I have an important announcement to make about my country and its future.

My country of the Western Sahara is an occupied country, one of the last occupied countries on earth. The international community, the UN and the Security Council have repeatedly said that this occupation must end. It is an illegal occupation. Processes have been set up, envoys come and go, resolutions are written, and yet the occupation continues. That occupation has now lasted nearly 30 years. For all of that time, the Saharawi people have waited, many of them – some 170,000 – in desert refugee camps, out of sight, and out of mind, of the world.

With the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the occupation this autumn, it is time for something to be done. The occupation and the injustice must end. The United Nations must hold to its principles, and the Security Council must enforce its decisions. I trust that the British government will support this. Only this spring, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Parliament called for action, saying,

“We conclude that the ongoing conflict over the Western Sahara is harmful both to Morocco’s international relations and reputation and to efforts to enhance regional cooperation. We recommend that the government work through the EU and UN to achieve a permanent end of the conflict”.

In July 2004 Robert Zoellick the United States Trade Representative, stated in reference to the recent Free Trade Agreement between the USA and Morocco that

“The (American) Administration’s position on Western Sahara is clear: sovereignty of Western Sahara is in dispute, and the United States fully supports the United Nations efforts to resolve this issue. The United States and many other countries do not recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and have consistently urged the parties to work with the United Nations to resolve the conflict by peaceful means.

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will cover trade and investment in the territory of Morocco as recognised internationally and will not include Western Sahara.”

The SADR trusts in law and in natural justice and in the will of right-thinking and fair countries to act.

Meanwhile, we are preparing for our future and this is why you are invited here.

Today, I am formally announcing the commencement of a licensing initiative to enable international oil and gas companies to participate in the exploration of our offshore territory. This means that my government is inviting oil companies to open discussions with us to agree licenses to explore the potential for oil and gas in our waters. This potential is great.

This initiative is to prepare for the day when the SADR will enjoy sovereignty over all its rightful territory, including offshore waters; the day when at last justice will have been done. When the people of Western Sahara, and not the occupiers, will enjoy what their country has to offer.

When that day comes, and we trust it will be soon, the world will see that the SADR is a lawful, democratic and rights-respecting government that will fully respect its obligations internationally and commercially. We are undertaking this initiative in accordance with UN legal opinion regarding commercial activities in the Western Sahara.

The SADR intends to be a self-sufficient government, no longer reliant, as today it must be, on international aid for the survival of its people. But we will need investment to exploit our country's many natural resources. This too is why we are announcing this initiative today. We are a government which wants transparent and lawful relations with our neighbours and with international commerce. Today's announcement is to say "welcome" to international investors and companies who wish to work with us. Rest assured that commitments we make today will be respected tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) has an obvious and inherent right to develop and conserve the resources of the sea off its coast. That area of the Atlantic Ocean which is to be preserved free of fishing and oil development by other States is clear: It is the area of the sea extending from north to south along the SADR coast - from our land frontier with Morocco to the frontier with Mauritania, all seaward to a distance of 200 nautical miles from this coast. Case after case in international law, together with the practice of coastal States throughout the world and the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention make clear this right to an offshore area. The Saharan Arab Democratic Republic is committed to peaceful and shared uses of the seas - and to asserting a sovereign jurisdiction over those resources which are found within what would be our 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone."

Over seventy countries, including South Africa and the African Union, now recognise the SADR as the legitimate government of the people of the Western Sahara. The resolution to this conflict is a question not of "if", but "when". Morocco will never enjoy stability and the assurance of peace as long as the occupation continues. Therefore, as law and the world have demanded, it must end.

We in the SADR have accepted the decisions of the United Nations and the Security Council, including the Baker Plan, though this involved for us a great sacrifice. It is time for Morocco to do so too, and for the international community to persuade them to do so. We all want stability in the region. We all should want an end to this enduring dispute.

One day, the SADR will be recognised by all as the legitimate and rightful government of the Western Sahara. A peaceful, law-abiding and open government, which will at last allow the country's riches to be enjoyed fairly. This day will come, and it will come soon.