



THE SAHARAWI CAMPAIGN TO BAN LANDMINES (SCBL) INFORMATION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

1-Background information:

The Western Sahara, known also as the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro, is a territory of 110 000 square miles, roughly the size of the United Kingdom or half of Spain. Located on the west coast of North Africa, near the Canary Islands, it is bordered by Morocco to the North, Algeria to the East and Mauritania to the South and Southeast.

While the mid- Seventies are best known for the exit of Portuguese colonization from the continent of Africa and the subsequent problems that arose, the exit of Spanish forces from the area of Western Sahara brought its own legacy of war, Landmines and UXOSs. The war saw Morocco, Frante POLISARIO (The Front for the Liberation of Saguia el hamra and Rio de Oro) and in the beginning Mauritania as well, battle for control of the former Spanish holding. The war lasted from 1976 to 1991 when the United Nations brokered a cease-fire, resulting in a territory divided between Morocco and Frente POLISARIO by defensive walls, known as berms.

These were constructed by the Moroccans and fortified with mines, and also there is substantial contamination from mines and UXO throughout the rest of the territory. Mines have been laid by both sides, making Western Sahara one of the ten most heavily mined areas in the word.

The question of who will govern Western Sahara remains unresolved. Recents efforts by the United Nations and the Secretary General's personal envoy, Mr: James Baker have yielded mixed results in advancing the referendum agreed to in principal by the two parties to determine independence for Western Sahara, or integration into Morocco.

Today, twenty five years after the war started, there are still approximately 160 000 refugees living in refugee camps close to Tindouf, Algeria waiting for the possible future referendum. However, over two decades in southwest Algeria means that a significant majority of the population has no understanding of the country they will repatriate to nor the considerable danger that awaits them as a legacy of years of war.

2-Why the idea of SCBL and its establishment:

The idea of SCBL came up as an initiative from some of the local staff, during Norwegian People's Aid Mine Awareness Programme comes to an end in June 2000, we decided that it was important to have been in direct contact with children, woman and men who have been injured by mines and we became aware of the enormous threat that the mines would present when the repatriation of the refugee take place. Also we know that POLISARIO has not yet signed the mine ban treaty of 1997. therefore SCBL was established to face these challenges which lie ahead of us.

3.0- SCBL Statement and objectives:

3.1 Statement

We, the Saharawi Campaign to Ban landmines, hereafter referred to as SCBL agree, and will work towards the so called Mines Ban Treaty set out by International Campaign to Ban Landmines, hereafter to as ICBL.

We fully understand the meaning and the content of the Mine Ban Treaty which is the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfert of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction.

We also understand the importance of the three pillars of the ban movement: a) Banning antipersonnel mines (use, production, transfer and stockpiling), b) humanitarian mine action and c) survivor assistance, and will work towards achieving these aims in a Sahara context.

We fully understand the importance of not being part of any political party or ministry, but will work independently towards the aims and objectives set out by the ICBL.

3.2 objectives:

- Influence POLISARIO to sign the Mine Ban Treaty
- Influence the population about the importance of signing the Mines Ban Treaty
- Spread the knowledge of ICBL and the SCBL
- Assist the possible future Mines Victim Support project with updated information about mines victims
- Continue spreading our knowledge of the danger of Mines in the society as a whole
- Continue spreading Mine awareness and information about SCBL in the schools
- Support in any future humanitarian mine clearance activity.

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