



Tuesday, September 15, 2026

**Statement of the Sahrawi NGOs Alliance
on the Occasion of the International Day of Democracy**

On the occasion of the international community's commemoration of the International Day of Democracy, established by the United Nations General Assembly in affirmation of the universal values of good governance, free political participation and the safeguarding of fundamental rights and freedoms, the Sahrawi NGOs Alliance, mindful of the ethical, legal and human-rights responsibility incumbent upon it, wishes to recall the profound gap existing between these universal principles and the reality experienced by the population of the Tindouf camps, an environment that has, for decades, remained hostage to an exceptional situation devoid of the most elementary foundations of democratic legitimacy and free political representation, as well as of the minimum legal guarantees attesting to the human and civil existence of the Sahrawi individual as a person holding rights in his or her own right, rather than a mere statistical unit within a demographic mass of unknown size and identity.

While the Tindouf camps lie, geographically and in terms of sovereignty, within Algerian territory, the host State, as the party legally and morally accountable to the international community, has chosen to disengage from this responsibility, handing over effective control of the fate of thousands of human beings to the Polisario Front. The camps have thereby become a closed grey zone, beyond any genuine legal or human-rights oversight, and beyond the reach of international humanitarian law itself.

It should be noted that this deliberate legal vacuum is not a passing technical oversight, but a manifest complicity that produces near-total impunity for the grave violations affecting the rights of the population, transforming the camps into a sanctuarised space in which the controlling party acts without accountability or oversight.

For five decades, the Sahrawi individual has remained hostage to de facto confinement in this arid desert expanse, and continues to be a being without recognised legal identity: neither a full citizen in the host country, nor counted within an independent and transparent population census revealing his or her true number and identity, this despite calls to that effect made for decades by the Security Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and dozens of international human rights organisations.

It is now established that depriving a human being of his or her legal identity for half a century is not administrative negligence, but a continuing crime against the civil existence of an entire human group, making the Tindouf camps a glaring example of an asylum environment devoid of legitimacy, stripped of free will, and lacking the most basic elements of human dignity.



Alongside its commemoration of the International Day of Democracy, the Alliance wishes to draw the attention of international, national and local public opinion to the fact that the administration of the Tindouf camps operates under a one-party system, whereby the Polisario Front monopolises all political, administrative and security decision-making, with no room whatsoever for the formation of opposition political parties or independent civil bodies capable of competing to represent the population.

This organisational structure is devoid of the most elementary components of democratic practice, free and fair elections, peaceful transfer of power, and institutional oversight of public affairs. This political monopoly has emptied the concept of representation of its substance, reducing any organisational structure within the camps to a mere formal façade that falls well short of the standard of democratic governance enshrined in international human rights law as an inherent right of every individual to participate in the management of public affairs affecting his or her daily life.

The Alliance further regrets that the public space within the Tindouf camps is subjected to strict control that silences every dissenting voice, through the arrest and detention of activists and bloggers on account of their peaceful protests, in flagrant violation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as through the imposition of coerced self-censorship driven by fear of losing access to aid or of facing prosecution, and through strict restrictions on freedom of movement that particularly constrain women and young people.

This closure gives rise to a serious chain of consequences: growing impunity that fuels the exploitation of influence and the mismanagement of aid; accumulated frustration among young people that may spill over into violence or extremism as a substitute for the absence of representation; near-total dependence on relief assistance, entrenching precariousness and stripping the population of any capacity to make claims; and the crude political instrumentalisation of the humanitarian file, which prevents individuals from freely expressing their choices regarding their fate, whether return, integration, or any other durable solution.

The Sahrawi NGOs Alliance, in recalling these facts on this symbolic occasion, affirms that any discourse on democracy and freedom of expression remains incomplete unless it is translated into effective and tangible guarantees for the population of the Tindouf camps. The Alliance therefore calls for:

1. The conduct of an independent and impartial census and registration of the camp population, under genuine international supervision, guaranteeing every individual a legal status and a documented human identity attesting to his or her existence.
2. The opening of space for political and civil pluralism within the camps, and the holding of free and fair elections under independent international monitoring.



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3. An end to all forms of arbitrary prosecution or detention of activists and opponents, and the guarantee of freedom of opinion, expression and movement in accordance with international human-rights standards.
4. The establishment of independent mechanisms for accountability and transparency in the management of humanitarian aid, with the effective participation of women, young people and vulnerable groups.
5. The enabling of every individual to freely express his or her choice regarding his or her fate, free from any pressure or political instrumentalisation of the humanitarian file.

In reaffirming its unwavering commitment to defending the dignity of the Sahrawi individual and his or her inalienable rights, the Coalition calls upon the international community and the competent United Nations bodies to accord this file the attention and urgency it deserves, commensurate with the place occupied by democracy and freedom of expression within the universal human-rights system.