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Africa stands with the Saharawi people until attainment of liberation and independence

Saharawi Republic – 29 February 2016: The call for the decolonization, liberation and independence of Africa's last remaining colony was increasingly re-echoed in Western Sahara and around the world, when the Saharawi people celebrated the 40th anniversary of the proclamation of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on 27 February, 2016.

An African Union delegation from the Commission and some Member States joined other international dignitaries to deliver strong messages of support and solidarity to the people of Western Sahara. The message was clear and unequivocal: Africa will not be free, until the last of its colonies, Western Sahara, was liberated, free and independent.

African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs, Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, represented the AU Commission Chairperson, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, at the celebrations in the Dakhla Refugee Camp near Tindouf. He delivered the Chairperson's message of congratulations, support and solidarity, reassuring the people of Western Sahara that, "that Africa will stand side by side with the Sahrawi people, until victory is achieved!"

Dr. Kaloko reiterated the Decisions of the 25th and 26th AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in which they called on the United Nations to, 'determine a date for

the holding of the self-determination referendum for the people of Western Sahara and protect the integrity of Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory from any act which may undermine it.'

On her twitter handle, the AU Commission Chairperson, Dr. Dlamini Zuma, reassured the people of Western Sahara that Africa will stand with them until victory is achieved. "The Western Sahara referendum is a promise that Africa and the international community have made to you, we must make it come true," she wrote.

Delegation after another took the rostrum to echo the same message of encouragement and solidarity. Namibia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, who herself lived in refugee camps in different countries before her country's independence, said, "Africa will be with the people of Western Sahara until independence is achieved. We will be with you, to have your place in the international community as we did in the doors of the African Union."

Western Sahara was welcomed as a member of the Organisation of African Unity in 1982. It remains an active member of the AU to date.

In his 40th anniversary address to the Saharawi people and the rest of the world, the President of Saharawi Republic, H.E. Mohamed Abdelaziz paid tribute to Africa, which he described as the continent of revolutions and liberation movements, for embracing SADR.

"We value highly the African Union's commitment to the defence of the Saharawi cause, and we note with appreciation its rejection and condemnation of the Moroccan colonial practices," President Abdelaziz said in a televised message.

The Saharawi President took the opportunity to call on the AU to intensify its engagement as a partner of the UN, in bringing the UN-OAU Plan of 1991 on the referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara to conclusion.

The people of Western Sahara are undoubtedly keenly waiting for the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, to announce a date for the referendum, promised 25 years ago, when he visits the region on the 4th and 5th of March.

Among other international dignitaries, official and unofficial delegations from AU Member States included: Algeria, Angola, Gabon, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Outside of Africa, delegations also came from Cuba, Mexico, and several European countries.

The celebrations included a military, civil and cultural parade, with the active participation of Saharawis from the liberated as well as the occupied territories. They continuously chanted the choruses, “No alternative, No alternative to self-determination!”

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