



The Maritime Union of Australia

West Australian Branch

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3 September 2008

STATEMENT FROM THE MARITIME UNION OF AUSTRALIA

CONCERNING THE SHIPMENT OF PHOSPHATE ABOARD THE "FURNESS KARUMBA"

The Maritime Union of Australia has been following the trade and shipment of phosphate from the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara with growing concern.

We believe these concerns to be legitimate as the phosphate mined in Western Sahara and subsequently shipped to the Fremantle Ports do not belong to the beneficiaries of the trade but is a resource belonging to the Saharawi people, not the foreign occupiers of Western Sahara.

Such trade has been condemned in many international forums, principally by the United Nations, which is under a mandate to organise a referendum of the Saharawi's to determine their right to determine the future of their land and its resources. Trading in phosphate before such a plebiscite jeopardises its results and, further, places into question future trading relations with companies complicit in the current trading arrangements.

The Maritime Union also gravely notes the continued human rights violations carried out by the Moroccan government since its occupation of Western Sahara since 1975. The forceful separation of the Saharawi's by Morocco's construction of a military "wall" dividing the territory and physically separating the inhabitants is witness to the contempt the Moroccan government has towards the indigenous inhabitants. This wall is still guarded by 120,000 troops and deploys millions of land mines.

The Maritime Union has been joined in its concerns about the continued abuses of human rights and the delay in the long awaited UN sponsored referendum by the peak union, the ACTU. The ACTU and the MUA are currently lobbying the new federal ALP government and its Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith, for the government to carry out the policies adopted by three previous ALP National Conferences. (Attached).

Our union is also writing to the "Furness Karumba"s owners, its Shipping Agents, InchCape Shipping and the importers of the cargo of phosphate, CSBP outlining our objections to the trade. We also commit ourselves to raise our concerns amongst our members and the public at large of the impact of this illegitimate shipment and will continue to raise the legal, political and ethical reasons why the continued importing of the resource of Western Sahara should be discontinued until the Saharawi's can determine it's legitimate ownership.

Chris Cain, Secretary, WA branch of the Maritime Union of Australia.



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27 June 2008

The Hon Stephen Smith, MP
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I am writing to draw your attention to the question of Western Sahara.

The issue of Western Sahara is a decolonisation issue. There are striking similarities between Western Sahara and East Timor. Both East Timor and Western Sahara were abandoned by the former powers and occupied by neighbouring countries in 1975, but while East Timor has gained its independence, Western Sahara is still on the UN's list of the Non-Self-Governing Territories waiting for the right to self-determination.

Morocco constructed a 2,000km wall to seal the Territory while it embarked on hideous human rights abuses. It also forced thousands Saharawis to flee their homeland and seek refuge in neighbouring Algeria where they have been living in dire conditions for the past 33 years.

The issue of Western Sahara has an impact on issues that are relevant to Australia's foreign policy such as the role of the UN, international peace and stability.

Western Sahara is also relevant to Australia because it concerns issues of human rights, respect of international legality and the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

We are proud of the fact that the trade union movement in Australia, as well as the ALP have been very supportive for the struggle for freedom and emancipation in Western Sahara.

We are delighted that the ALP has adopted during its past three National Conferences a very positive Policy on Western Sahara. (Please see Chapter 14 of the last ALP Platform- the text is attached herewith.)

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Since the ALP position on this issue is clear and positive I hope that the Federal Government can play an active and positive role on this issue at the UN as we did in the past. Australia contributed a contingent of signals to the UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in 1991 and voted in favour of resolutions supporting the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

We would be grateful if you could kindly clarify the position of the Federal Government on this issue and whether our government still supports the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

We would appreciate an early response as our organisations are very concerned about the present situation in Western Sahara.

Yours sincerely



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President
ACTU



Dave Robinson
Secretary
Unions WA



John Robertson
Secretary
Unions NSW

Peter Jennings
Executive
Officer
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ALP Platform:

http://www.alp.org.au/platform/chapter_14.php#14western_sahara

1. Western Sahara

139. Labor supports the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination and is concerned about allegations of human rights abuses in the occupied areas of Western Sahara. Labor believes in maintaining an appropriate dialogue with the Polisario Front, the legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara. In government Labor will support UN efforts to organise a free and fair referendum on independence in Western Sahara, and calls on the UN to press Morocco to implement all UN resolutions pertaining to Western Sahara.

140. Labor urges the Australian Government to extend all due assistance to the UN in its efforts to organise a free and fair referendum in Western Sahara, and to maintain an appropriate dialogue with the Polisario Front, the legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara. Labor calls on the UN to press Morocco to implement UN resolutions with regards to the decolonisation process in Western Sahara, the last non-self-governing African territory on the UN decolonisation list.