



Report:

CONFLICT TOMATOES

- The Moroccan agriculture industry in occupied Western Sahara and the controversial exports to the EU market

The European Union is about to conclude a trade agreement opening up for large EU imports of agricultural products from Morocco.

Morocco, however, is an occupation power. And the deal can be used by plantation companies in occupied Western Sahara to export fruits and vegetables to EU supermarkets free of tariffs.

This report documents the massive boom of the Moroccan agriculture industry in the territory it brutally and illegally occupies, and documents how the EU trade with the occupied territory is already taking place.

EMMAUS
STOCKHOLM

WSRW
Western Sahara Resource Watch 

WESTERN SAHARA occupied colony

Morocco is illegally occupying its neighbouring country, Western Sahara. While the people of Western Sahara are legitimately struggling for liberty, the territory is treated by the UN as the last remaining colonial issue in Africa. The Moroccan occupation is in violation of the Opinion from the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and in violation of more than 100 UN resolutions that call for the self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.

The Moroccan occupation of the former Spanish colony took place in a highly violent manner. As Moroccan air forces bombed local Western Sahara settlements with napalm bombs, a majority of the indigenous Saharawis were forced to leave their homes, and fled to the Algerian desert. There, they still live. The Saharawis remaining on the occupied land are subjected to severe human rights violations if they speak out for their legitimate demands for liberation. At the time this report was published, the secretary-general of the Saharawi association that works for the protection of natural resources in Western Sahara has been in military jail for 15 months, still without a trial.

Morocco is today turning the agriculture industry into a driving force behind populating the territory with settlers. In 2008, the

agricultural sector around Dakhla employed around 4.000 seasonal workers with 10-month contracts, and approximately 200 permanent employees. In 2010, the total number of workers in Dakhla's agribusiness had reached 6.480. Most of the workers are of Moroccan origin. As we will see later: The outlook for the future growth is highly worrisome.

“The General Assembly deeply deplores the aggravation of the situation resulting from the continued occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco”.

UN General Assembly res. 34/37, 1979, as the Moroccan forces entered the territory where the tomato production is now taking place.



Half of the Western Sahara population lives in refugee camps in Algeria, many originate from the place where the lands in Dakhla that are now allocated to commercial farming. The UN's legal office has concluded that wishes of the Saharawi people must be respected in matters of natural resources in Western Sahara.

EU - WORST IN CLASS

disrespecting
international law

The EU is a main aid contributor, and ally, of Morocco. The continued occupation of Western Sahara is rarely part of the EU's talks with the kingdom. The EU systematically ignores the matter in trade talks with Morocco, in deep contrast to other states and institutions.

In 2012, a new EU-Morocco Free Trade Agreement could lead to a further liberalisation of the EU's imports of agricultural and fisheries products from Morocco. It provides for the immediate liberalisation of 55% of the EU's imports from the occupying power. Fruit and vegetables account for 80% of these imports. The agreement which is about to be concluded with Morocco fails to clearly exclude production currently taking place in Western Sahara.

By comparison, the United States' free trade agreement with Morocco clearly excludes Western Sahara from its application. "Morocco does not have the right to exploit the area's resources as if they were its own", stated Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs on Western Sahara trade. Norway and the rest of the European EFTA free trade cooperation do not consider Western Saharan produce included in their trade agreements with Morocco. In 2011, a Norwegian firm received a 1,2 million Euro fine for having falsely applied the EFTA free trade agreement with Morocco to import produce from occupied Western Sahara. No state in the world has recognised the Moroccan claims over the territory.

Yet, the EU, which carries out strict control on goods from Palestine, fails to do so with regards



Our research reveals that the two French-Moroccan labels Azura and Idyl receive tomatoes from at least 4 of the 11 identified plantations in this report. These cherry tomatoes were bought in the French supermarket Inter Marché.

to occupied Western Sahara. The former UN legal counsel has stated that the former EU fisheries activities in Western Sahara are in violation of international law. The European Parliament put a halt to the practice in December 2011. A free trade agreement for agriculture produce from identified plantations on the occupied land would surely fall into the same category: violating international law.



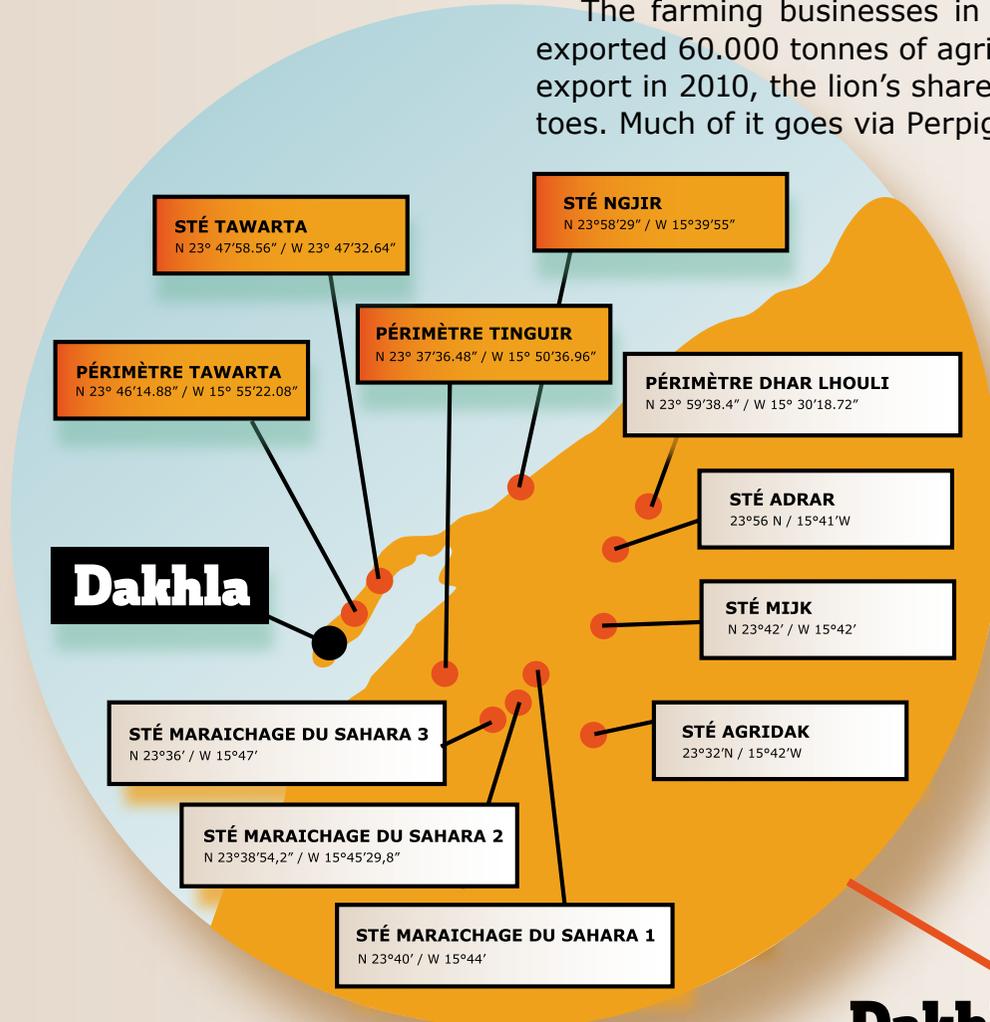
All over Europe, the tomatoes from Western Sahara are labelled "from Morocco". These Azura products are observed in Sweden.

CONTROVERSIAL AGREEMENT

WSRW has identified 11 agricultural sites in the vicinity of Dakhla, in occupied Western Sahara. Our research shows that all sites were either owned by the Moroccan king, powerful Moroccan conglomerates or by French multinational firms. No firms are owned by the local Saharawi and not even by small-scale Moroccan settlers in the territory.

The farming businesses in Dakhla would have exported 60.000 tonnes of agricultural produce for export in 2010, the lion's share of which are tomatoes. Much of it goes via Perpignan, France.

The agriculture is export-oriented: 95% of the tomatoes, cucumbers and melons produced in occupied land, reach foreign markets. At the same time, European farmers oppose the EU-Morocco agriculture agreement as they fear that the increase of trade concessions in fruits and vegetables from Morocco will severely damage the EU's own industry. By importing from Western Sahara, the EU undermines international law, and complicates the UN peace efforts in Western Sahara, which includes talks on the territory's natural resources.



BIG BOOST, BIGGER PLANS

In recent years, the agricultural production of the farms near the town of Dakhla has shown a tremendous boost: the vegetable produce increased by 2800% between 2002-2003 and 2008-2009, while the production of fruits went up 500% during the same period.

The Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries estimates the cultivable area of the southern parts of Western Sahara at about 1.000.000 hectares. The most recent available official data indicate that in mid-2009, 646 hectares had been equipped for agricultural activity, out of which 588 hectares were already being exploited. These cultivated zones all lay within 11 larger irrigated agricultural sites which spanned around 1.894 hectares at the time. All of these farms are located in a radius of 70 kilometres from Dakhla town.

The Moroccan government aims to increase agricultural activity in Dakhla in the years to come. The Regional Agricultural Plan foresees in the expansion

of areas for early season crops from the 588 hectares in 2008 to reach 2.000 hectares by 2020. The plan also stipulates an increase of greenhouse production from 36.000 tons (in 2008) to 80.000 tons in 2013 and 160.000 tons in 2020. That increased production will be destined exclusively for export. The number of people working in agriculture in the region is expected to triple by 2020.

To achieve this objective, 11 projects have been identified and evaluated. Ten of these projects focus on the extension of surface areas planted with early season crops. In addition, a packaging station with a capacity of 4 tons/hour will be constructed. The Moroccan government markets agricultural activities around Dakhla as an investment opportunity. A large part of the people of the Dakhla region that used to inhabit the lands before are now living in the refugee camps in Algerian desert following the Mauritanian-Moroccan invasion. The idle lands are now marketed as reserves available for the industry.

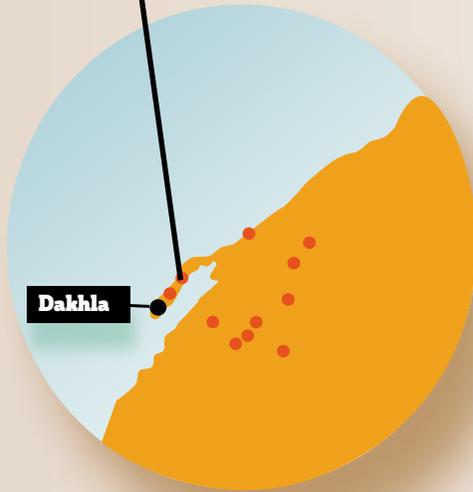
Domain	Exploited area in 2008 (ha)	Equipped area in 2008 (ha)
Perimètre Tawarta	37	37
Dhar El Houli	15*	40
Tiniguir	81	81
Tawarta	57	57
Maraîchage du Sahara	211	229
Mijik	90	90
Negjir	76	76
Adrar	24	24
Agridak	12	12
TOTAL	588	646

Source: The Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries.

* Estimate based on La Gazette du Maroc

STÉ TAWARTA

N 23° 47'58.56" / W 23° 47'32.64"



TAWARTA: the French involvement

Constructed in 2002, the French-Moroccan owned Tawarta is the only farm which is located on the Oued-Eddahab peninsula, at about 11 km from the town of Dakhla. All other farms are located inland, on the other side of the bay. They've been built in so called graras – dales in the Saharan desert's terrain which offer protection from the wind, and which have a richer soil.

The Tawarta company owns two sites on the peninsula; one for greenhouse crop growing and another for cultivation in the field. The crops grown in the field are mainly forage crops, particularly the alfalfa for intensive dairy farming.

Tawarta's vocation is the production of melons and tomatoes, above ground and in greenhouses. In Dakhla, the company owns one of the largest cherry and cocktail tomatoes farms in "Morocco". The zone is equipped with a gravity irrigation system connected to three storage and cooling basins with a capacity of 1.660 m³. The company operates two deep wells, both more than 500 meters deep, pumping up water reserves from non-renewable underground water basins at a speed of 13-14

liters per second. The plant is endowed with a desalination station and a fertigation station.

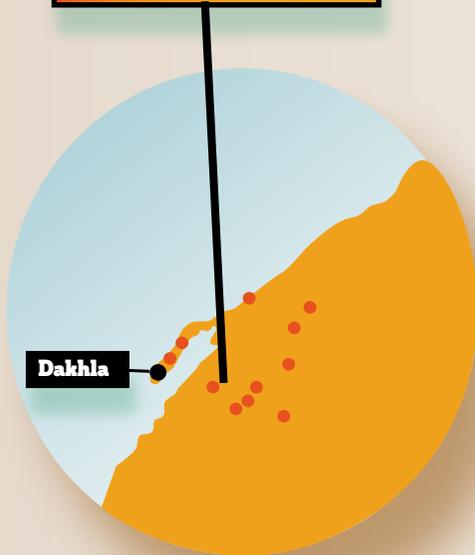
Once the tomatoes are picked, they are immediately transported to the loading dock, which is at the heart of the farm. From the loading docks, the produce is transferred into refrigerated trucks that transport the produce to Agadir –1.200 kilometres up north. After a trip of 20 hours, the produce is stored in Agadir before being exported abroad, labelled as "Moroccan".



The Tawarta plantations in the occupied territories of Western Sahara exports agriculture products to European supermarkets.

PÉRIMÈTRE TINIGUIR

N 23° 37'36.48" / W 15° 50'36.96"



TINIGUIR:

the King's property

At approximately 50 kilometres from Dakhla town, lies Tiniguir, known locally as the Royal Domain. Tiniguir is one of the farms of Domaines Agricoles, a subsidiary of the royal holding Siger. The farm was created in 1989 at the instruction of the late King Hassan II. Tiniguir was the pilot project for greenhouse agriculture in the Dakhla region, in an attempt to break the city's dependence on the fisheries sector.

The domain spans an area of 2.500 hectares, of which 500 to 600 hectares are suitable for agriculture. According to the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture, 81 hectares were being exploited in 2008, covered by greenhouses and equipped with a dripping network. The irrigation of the perimeter is assured by wells pumping up in total 153 litres of water per second.

The tomato and the melon are at the centre of the greenhouse cultivations, and assure very high yields (300 tonnes/ha and 60 tonnes/ha, respectively). In addition, Tiniguir focuses on products such as bananas, pineapples and cucumbers.



The Moroccan king is one of the world's wealthiest rulers, and an investor in the plantation industry in the occupied Western Sahara. This is a poster of his portrait in Western Sahara, hanging in front of a police patrol.

EU grocery chains taking responsibility

“It turns out that the tomatoes are from Dakhla in occupied Western Sahara, so we are not going to sell them anymore. These things are not supposed to happen”, stated media officer Ingmar Kroon at the Swedish grocery chain Axfood.

“I know the Western Sahara issue well. Of course we should not sell products from an occupied territory”.

Media officer of Swedish grocery chain Axfood

When Axfood carried out its first control, they were told that the tomatoes were from “Southern Morocco”, but when looking further into the issue, they discovered they were from Dakhla. Azura stated to Axfood that EU’s agreement with Morocco also covers Western Sahara.

“But we are not of that opinion”, stated Mr. Kroon. In 2011, Finnish grocery chain Kesko communicated its decision to refrain from buying any more tomatoes from French firm Azura due to the Western Sahara issue. Similar decisions were made by the large grocery chain Coop in Sweden and Norway. In a similar decision, all vaguely labelled fisheries products from Morocco were permanently kicked out of the shelves of Co-operative Group of UK in December 2011.

Saharawis marginalised

“We don’t benefit at all from the Moroccan agricultural businesses”, stated El Mami Amar Salem, president of the Committee Against Torture in Western Sahara. Mr. Amar Salem



lives in Dakhla and has observed the controversial industry developing rapidly over the years. His town is a good place for greenhouses. With more than 300 sunny days a year, Dakhla receives 30% more sunshine than Agadir – one of the agricultural hotspots in Morocco proper.

“The people who work on these farms are Moroccans, not Saharawi. They work on the farms for months on end, and live in government sponsored housing programmes. Meanwhile, the Saharawi population in Dakhla remains unemployed”, stated Mr. Amar Salem.

“The only ones who really benefit are the owners of these plantations: they benefit from tax exonerations, etc, so their profits don’t even flow back to the Dakhla area”, he said.

“The fruits and vegetables are not even consumed locally. All the time, we see big trucks leaving the plantations, heading north of out town”, he stated.

Western Sahara Resource Watch and Emmaus Stockholm recommend the EU institutions to not conclude an agriculture agreement with Morocco without specifying that it does not apply to produce from Western Sahara.

Doing otherwise, will undermine international law, fail to respect the Saharawi people's most fundamental rights and negatively interfere with the UN peace talks.

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of the people of Western Sahara

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Foto: Anette Karlsen