



## **YEPP Resolution: Defend the rights of the people of Western Sahara**

*Adopted at the YEPP Congress in Sofia, Bulgaria on May 10, 2013*

### **Recognising:**

No European Member State recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over or claims to the territory of Western Sahara. More than 100 UN resolutions call for the Saharawi people's right to self-determination over their territory. Since Morocco illegally annexed parts of Western Sahara in 1975, half of the Saharawi people have fled to refugee camps in Algeria. The other half live under Moroccan rule. The UN's plans to carry out a referendum on independence are put on ice.

YEPP shares the concerns of the UN Secretary-General and the European Parliament with regard to the continuous human rights violations committed by Morocco in Western Sahara. A report from the UN special rapporteur on torture describes the total impunity for officials carrying out violations in Moroccan jails. The recent conviction of Saharawi civilian activists by a Moroccan military court is not in line with international standards on fair trials.

Western Sahara is ranked at the very bottom of global rankings taking into account freedoms and civil rights, such as in Freedom House's annual reports. Last year, after a recommendation in the UN Human Rights Council, Morocco stated that it does not wish to follow international minimum standards for registration of civil society organizations, including for Saharawi organizations that advocate the Saharawi people's right to self-determination.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted in his latest report the pressing need for a permanent mechanism for human rights monitoring in Western Sahara. While the efforts were lobbied by the US in the Security Council in April 2013, the suggestion of including a human rights component in the UN operation in Western Sahara was again prevented by Morocco.

### **Acknowledging:**

YEPP welcomes the establishment of free trade agreements between the EU and Morocco, and salutes the negotiations over a so-called Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, launched on 22 April 2013. YEPP believes that such trade relations will be to the mutual benefit of the peoples of Morocco and Europe, and will give the EU further leverage for demanding respect for human rights from the Moroccan authorities.

However, EU's envisioned free trade agreement with Morocco should only apply to the territory of Morocco proper, and not the territory of Western Sahara. The UN has established that the natural resource exploitation of Western Sahara cannot take place unless in respect of the wishes of the Saharawi people, as the original people of the territory.

An inclusion of Western Sahara into the free trade negotiations will offer an unfortunate sign of political recognition of the illegal Moroccan annexation of three quarters of the territory. Out of such concerns, the US and the EFTA states have clarified that their respective free trade agreements with Morocco only cover the internationally recognized Moroccan territory – and not Western Sahara.

**YEPP calls on:**

- YEPP urges Morocco to cooperate with the Security Council in allowing the UN operation in the territory to monitor human rights violations.
- YEPP urges Morocco to follow up the recommendations from the Special Rapporteur on Torture.
- YEPP urges the European Commission to clarify that a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Morocco will only cover the territory of Morocco, as it is internationally recognized, specifically excluding the territory of Western Sahara.
- YEPP urges the parties to the conflict to find a solution to the dispute that allows the Saharawi people to immediately exercise their legitimate right to self-determination in relation to their territory emphasizing that any political solution should be established through regional negotiations and peace talks, including the Moroccan government, the political leaders of the Sahrawi people and, not in the least, the Algerian government. .