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Simon Thomson, CEO Cairn Energy
50 Lothian Road,
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Dear Mr Thomson,

I am writing to you regarding your oil extraction activities in the so-called “Boujdour Block” off the coast of Western Sahara. I strongly urge you to reconsider your role in these activities, which are ethically and legally questionable. I note that I received no reply to the letter, dated 19 February 2014, from myself, Sara Eyckmans (the Coordinator of Western Sahara Resource Watch) and our colleagues at Western Sahara Campaign UK.

As you are aware, the Western Sahara is a territory that is illegally occupied by Morocco in violation of the principles of the UN Charter and numerous Resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly. All these Resolutions and the International Court of Justice have accorded the people of Western Sahara, the Saharawi people, the right to self-determination, but the exercise thereof is being continuously blocked by Morocco. The war between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Saharawi people’s liberation movement the Polisario has resulted in a military division of the territory and a ceasefire that is being monitored by the UN.

The UN is currently attempting to negotiate a peace process in the region. However, creating financial gain for Morocco through oil revenue risks increasing Morocco’s determination to illegally hold on to Western Sahara, thereby undermining the UN’s process. In direct response to the exploration work carried out by the oil industry in occupied Western Sahara, the UN Security Council’s legal counsel has stated that any exploration or exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara would be in violation of international law if the people of the territory, the Saharawi people, do not consent to the activity nor stand to benefit there from (S/2002/161). Have Cairn Energy made any attempt to engage with the Saharawi people to ensure that these activities concur with their wishes and interests?

I am aware that your partner Kosmos has issued a "Position Paper" on Western Sahara in which it "commits to listening to all stakeholders" and talks of a consultation carried out by its Moroccan partner. However, it should be underlined that Morocco is in no position to speak on behalf of the Saharawi people, or to even conduct consultations with the Saharawi people. This is because, firstly, a significant proportion of Saharawi society currently resides in refugee camps in southwest Algeria, as a direct consequence of Morocco's invasion and subsequent annexation of their homeland. Secondly, the Saharawis living under Moroccan occupation are not able to speak their mind without risk to their physical safety. Thirdly, Saharawis that wish to register organisations that focus on self-determination in any way, including Saharawi self-determination of the country's natural resources, are prevented from doing so. The Polisario is the body responsible for representing the Saharawi people at the UN negotiating table. I understand that the Polisario has written to you but has yet to receive a reply. It has denounced your partnership publically, stating that "[a]ny exploration and production carried out by Kosmos, Cairn and Atwood can only serve to entrench Morocco's occupation, and serve as pretext for seemingly normal commercial activity."

On your website, you claim that Cairn Energy has "excellent corporate responsibility credentials" and "ethical business practices." I urge you to illustrate this by immediately halting your exploitation of the resources of an occupied territory, which undermines the UN peace process and is highly questionable legally and morally.

Yours sincerely,



Joanna Allan
Chair, Western Sahara Resource Watch