

ISOCARD
PO Box 93909
Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates

Brussels
27 March 2018

To the attention of Mr Abdulwahhab Al-Juboori
Secretary General of the International Society of Camelid Research and Development (ISOCARD)

Re. ISOCARD's 2018 annual conference in occupied Western Sahara

Dear Mr Al-Juboori,

It is our privilege to present you with our compliments. We are writing with regard to the decision of the International Society of Camelid Research and Development (ISOCARD) to host its annual conference in "Laâyoune, Morocco" on 12-15 November 2018 – as advertised on ISOCARD's website. In the call for abstracts, "Laâyoune" is located in "southern Morocco" and described as "the largest city in the Moroccan Sahara".

As stated on your website, ISOCARD is a "non-political" federation of scientists. Accordingly, we wish to alert you that ISOCARD is at risk of being hijacked for a deeply political project: creating the appearance of normalcy of Morocco's presence in Western Sahara, home to the city of El Aaiun (or Laâyoune in French spelling) where the ISOCARD conference is scheduled to take place.

Western Sahara is often referred to as the last colony in Africa, and is treated as such by the United Nations. It is one of the last remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories – territories pending the process of decolonization – but it is unique in the sense that it is the only territory that does not have an administering power appointed by the UN. From a legal perspective, the administering power still resides with the former colonizer, Spain, which abandoned its former colony in 1975.¹ Morocco does not have any sovereignty or international mandate to administer the territory.²

In violation of the Opinion of the International Court of Justice – which found no ties between Morocco and Western Sahara and stipulated the right of the Western Sahara people to self-determination - Morocco invaded the territory in 1975 and has gone on to annex large parts of the territory. Today, about three-quarters of Western Sahara are under Moroccan military control.

The part of Western Sahara that is under control of the Polisario Front – the Saharawi liberation movement – hosts the administrative institutions of the Saharawi Republic (the SADR), which is

¹ See e.g. the decisions of the Spanish Criminal Appeals Court (Audiencia Nacional) of 4 July 2014 and 9 April 2015, confirming that Spain, not Morocco, is the administering power over Western Sahara. The official English translation of the July 2014 decision can be found here:

wsrw.org/files/dated/2016-04-19/audiencia_nacional_4.7.2014_-_gdeim_izik.pdf

² See e.g. The Judgment of the General Court of the European Union, 10 December 2015, case T-512/12: Frente Polisario v Council of the European Union, §233: "The Kingdom of Morocco does not have any mandate granted by the UN or by any other international body for the administration of [Western Sahara]". Available via: www.curia.europa.eu

recognized by over 80 countries worldwide, and a full-fledged member of the African Union. Note that there is not a single country in the world that recognizes Morocco's claims to Western Sahara.

In 1991, the UN was able to broker a ceasefire agreement, and set up a UN Mission in the territory with a single mandate of organizing a self-determination referendum. That referendum has still not taken place, mainly due to Morocco's efforts to thwart the mission.

The lingering conflict continues to have a high human and humanitarian cost. During Morocco's violent invasion, many Saharawis fled to the neighbouring Algerian desert, which today still hosts the Saharawi refugee camps that are home to over 170,000 people. These refugees survive in harsh desert conditions and on dwindling humanitarian aid. Saharawi refugees are separated from their relatives who stayed in their homeland by a military fortified wall that is over 2000 kilometers long, and home to one the world's largest and most dense minefield. Saharawis who live under the yoke of Morocco's occupation are victims of serious human rights violations that have been reported by the UN Human Rights Committee, in addition to credible international organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and others.

Our organization monitors and comments on Morocco's taking of Western Sahara's natural resources – an activity that has been studied by the UN Legal Counsel in 2001. The UN Legal Opinion concluded that any such activity would be illegal if not carried out in accordance with the interests and the wishes of the people of the territory – as a natural corollary of their right to self-determination.

In recent years, following negotiations to seal a Geographical Indication Agreement with the European Union, we've taken note that Morocco has commenced according so-called 'Geographical Indications' to camel products: camel milk and camel cheese originating in Western Sahara. This is problematic, underlining that the government of Morocco is specifically using the camel sector in Western Sahara to gain political acceptance on its illegitimate claims to the territory.

In December 2016, the EU Court of Justice issued a ruling that no EU Trade or Association Agreement could be applied to Western Sahara, given its "separate and distinct status" from any country in the world, including Morocco. In February this year, the Court issued a similar Ruling on the EU-Morocco Fisheries Agreement, stating that the agreement would be invalid if applied to Western Sahara. As such, the proposed Geographical Indication Agreement – which is on hold following the EU Court Rulings – could not accommodate for the GIs now accorded to camel products.

We would be grateful if you would answer the following questions:

1. As a corollary of the internationally recognized right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, and given the legal requirement of obtaining the prior, free and informed consent of the people of Western Sahara with regard to activities or projects in their land – as put forth by several UN Treaty bodies and the EU Court of Justice – what steps has ISOCARD taken to obtain the consent of the people of Western Sahara through their political representation, the Polisario Front?
2. When ISOCARD decided to organize its annual conference in "Morocco", did it know that its Moroccan partners planned to organize it outside of Morocco, in the territory that it holds under occupation?
3. If ISOCARD itself decided to have its annual conference in Morocco, why is the conference not taking place in Morocco?
4. ISOCARD states on its website that El Aaiun (or Laayoune) is located in Morocco. Why?
5. On page 10 of ISOCARD's call for abstracts for the conference in El Aaiun, there is a map which lumps occupied Western Sahara in with Morocco. The map is not in line with UN maps. Why

would ISOCARD choose to display such a map? http://wsrw.org/files/dated/2018-03-27/isocard_2018.pdf

We are convinced that it is not in the interest of ISOCARD nor any of its members to become associated with the continued colonization and occupation of Western Sahara.

We call upon your organization to urgently make sure that the planned conference is moved *to a city in Morocco proper*, within its internationally recognized borders. If not, your organization risks becoming a pawn in the essentially political project of *Moroccanising* occupied Western Sahara, and that would be deeply unfortunate.

We are also baffled to see that FAO and OIE are enlisted as funders of the event, and that a representative of FAO is supposed to take part in the event in the occupied territory. We will address FAO on the matter. We will also proceed to recommend to ISOCARD's members to not take part in the conference unless it is placed in Morocco proper.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information on the above-raised issues. We thank you in advance for your consideration, and look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Sara Eyckmans
Coordinator
Western Sahara Resource Watch
coordinator@wsrw.org

A copy of this letter will be sent to:

- *UN Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, Mr Colin Stewart*
- *Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Western Sahara, Mr Horst Köhler*
- *Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO)*
- *World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)*
- *All Members of ISOCARD*