

WESTERN SAHARA: A WAR THAT'S NEARING THE END

MANUEL SOMOZA



meridian
liberation



Guerrilla struggle and diplomacy joined

AS the three open vehicles shifted into low gear to make their slow and noisy ascent to the Marabúe Heights, cries of welcome rose from a guerrilla base in the Sahara Desert.

Behind lay what some call civilization, although here there was another type of civilization, a lengthy geeting in the Hasania dialect, a particular concept of time and death, with smiling men and women.

Up until a short time ago, this was one of the bases in the north-central part of Western Sahara used to launch Moroccan commandos wearing camouflage uniforms that the oldest guerrillas now wear with pride.

There's no need to ask why these men fight once you know that their country has been occupied since 1975 by the forces of the Rabat regime. And, when you see what that occupation was like, it becomes clear that the only solution to this war is independence.

Thousands of kilometers away, in the beautiful halls of the United Nations, at Monrovia's Unity Conference Center — current OAU headquarters — or at any similar meeting, other men who also speak Hasania are doing their utmost to defend the same cause.

This almost perfect joining of the guerrilla struggle and diplomacy is the basis on which this people, numbering just over a million, is certain of winning victory for its republic in arms.



It's hard for the Moroccans to raise the morale of their professional army, that doesn't know the desert (60° C. in the summer), especially after five years there without a just cause for which to fight. The elite units are equipped with powerful weapons but haven't fought as yet, and everyone is asking when they will use their power against a guerrilla force that knows the desert, is fighting on its own terrain and doesn't rely on regular warfare, anyway.

Bachir Mustafá Sayed, one of the top nine Saharawi leaders, is a tall, thin man of about 32 who explained the latest guerrilla actions and answered all my questions succinctly, in a mixture of Spanish and Hasania.

Queried about the guerrilla forces' ability to respond to enemy bomb-



ings and hold on to the initiative in the war, he said, "We Saharawis began the struggle against Spanish colonialism and continued it against the Moroccan occupation on camel back, using spring bolt guns.

"We captured our infantry weapons from the enemy, got ourselves on wheels, learned guerrilla warfare and began to receive international aid so we could shoot down F-5 supersonic planes with 12.4-caliber machine guns.

"We've always said — even to the North Americans before they sold Morocco new weapons — that an increase in the enemy's technical means would also supply our arsenal while forcing us to step up the war in all directions.

"Those weren't just words. Early in 1979, French-made Mirage planes reached Morocco, and in October,

when they were flown in combat, we shot down the first one.

"This feat prompted the French advisers to inform King Hassan II that the guerrillas couldn't possibly have touched the Mirages and that the lost plane must have fallen because of a technical flaw.

"In December, we shot down two more and captured one of the pilots. I can assure you that the guerrilla forces now know the Mirage's weak points and have the technical know-how to shoot them down, just as we did the F-5s.

"Moreover, not a day goes by without the Moroccan units being attacked by different caliber mortars or artillery wherever they're stationed. We also know that Mo-

roccan territory has everything we need for guerrilla warfare, which will do serious damage to the enemy's main logistics bases."

This assertion, made while the base of Zaak, in southern Morocco, was in its 19th day of siege, was dismissed by Rabat. "The Saharawi guerrilla is a fiction," King Hassan insisted, following the same line he had taken in 1975 when he assured his troops that the occupation of the former Spanish Saharan colony would be only "a matter of days."

Now, in 1980, Rabat continues to affirm that "Our men are confronting mercenary bands of Algerians, Cubans and Vietnamese. There is no such thing as the problem of the Sahara."

That hypothesis is completed with the assumption that the war in the Sahara is a consequence of "a disagreement between Algeria and Morocco" and that everything revolves around the Alauite Kingdom's claims to parts of Algeria, Mauritania and Mali and all of Western Sahara.

Hassan's ambition for a greater Morocco, which is unfortunately supported by the legal opposition, implies, in the Sahara alone, seizing one of the major unexploited African uranium deposits, the phosphates of Bou Cras and the gas and oil in the Saharan subsoil.

A CIA report released in the United States notes that, in five years of war, the annexation of the Sahara continues to be nothing more than a hope that is costing the Moroccans a million dollars a day as they try to impose further warfare with an already demoralized army.

Between September 1979 and February 1980, the Saharawi fighters

strengthened their control of the northeastern Sahara, liberated Mahbes, occupied the city of Smara, made systematic attacks on the bases of Tan-Tan and Zaak in southern Morocco and inflicted more than a thousand casualties on the royal Army, including killing a colonel and a lieutenant colonel. During this period, Rabat issued war communiqués minimizing its losses, while its elite units proceeded to find "abandoned corpses of foreigners."

One of these divisions, commanded by Colonel Ahmed Dlimi, was accompanied by a group of Western journalists who took color shots of its maneuvers.

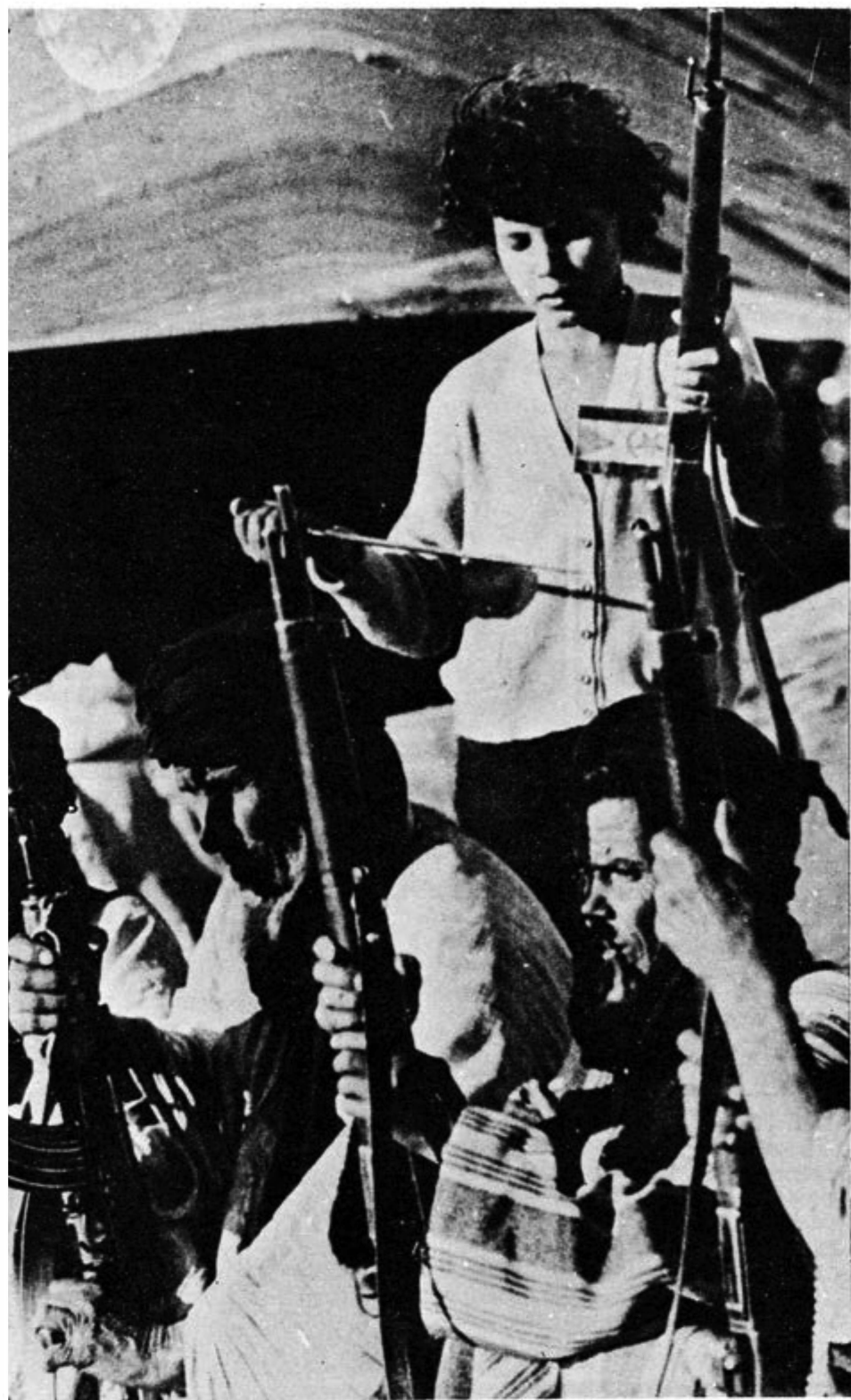
But the publicity group was unable to explain why that division of 5000 vehicles "preferred to evade the Umdreiga Mountain Pass in the middle of the Sahara as a possible guerrilla base" — an admission made by the Moroccan High Command.

Umdreiga is a mountainous zone with huge rocks and dry river beds, where the desert vegetation is almost always composed of tall, thorny bushes.

There I saw a guerrilla group in action. The average age of its members was 20, and they had been gathering weapons and fuel for several days in order to surprise the Moroccans and wipe them out.

I also saw the F-5s firing bombs and bullets from a height of more than 1000 meters in order to stay out of range of the heavy machine guns on the ground. Guerrilla "casualties" from the attack were limited to one dead nanny goat.

Many more actions followed Umdreiga before the Bir Enzaran base was destroyed and Captain Mohamed Aid Charif, a veteran of the





French-Indo-Chinese war, was captured.

I interviewed this man, who had been wounded and then healed by the guerrillas. "When you're fighting a people that is struggling for independence," he said, "it all becomes very difficult, and you wind up losing your morale."

"How many Algerians, Cubans or Vietnamese did you see during the attack?"

"What?!" he exclaimed and smiled before he added, "None. Look, my friend, to fight a desert war and win, you have to have been born on the desert."

In June 1979, the 16th Summit Conference of the Organization of African Unity recognized the Saha-

rawi people's right to self-determination, a right reaffirmed by the 6th Summit Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in September and broadened in November at the final session of the United Nations General Assembly to include a call for Morocco's immediate withdrawal from Western Sahara.

The diplomatic battle is almost entirely won, and Bachir Mustafá Sayed considers the Democratic Arab Saharawi Republic's admission in the OAU before its next Summit Meeting this year to be almost inevitable.

Eden Kodjo, Secretary-General of the OAU, also made that eminently logical prediction in the halls of the Unity Conference Center, where a minisummit of African Heads of State met in December to discuss the matter.

In informal talks with a number of journalists, Kodjo recalled that the Saharawi people's right to independence was approved by the United Nations, with 30 African states voting in favor of it, and that 20 governments in the region already have relations with the Saharawi Republic.

According to the OAU's statutes, he said, that government needs only five more votes in order to be admitted automatically to membership.

Rabat will try to block that path, of course, but observers consider that it has little chance of success, especially after the United States, France, Egypt and Israel intervened in the conflict by financing Saudi Arabia.

OAU President William Tolbert said at the Monrovia meeting that the OAU would mobilize all the forces of Africa in order to arrive at a political solution to the conflict,



and he called on Morocco to accept the fact that recognition of the Saharawi people's right to self-determination is the only possible basis for solving the problem of Western Sahara.

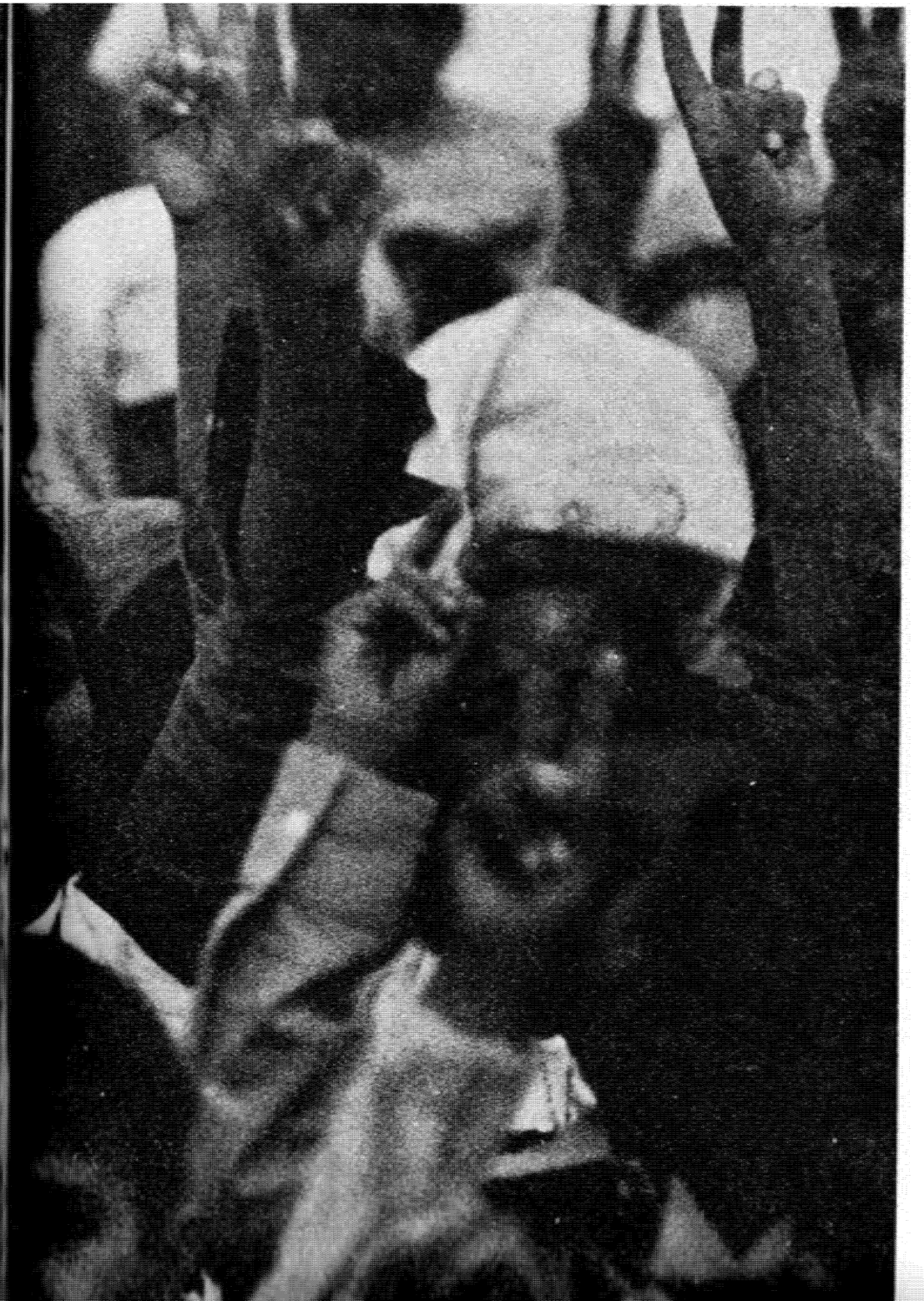
The leaders of Tanzania, Mali, Nigeria and Sudan, all members of the Special OAU Committee on the Sahara and those of Algeria, Mauritania and the POLISARIO Front, who were guests at the Liberian meeting, have taken similar positions.

The participants in the Monrovia meeting denounced the Republic of Guinea, the sixth and final member of the Committee, and Morocco for refusing to attend the meeting.

For the Saharawis, Morocco's absence confirmed Hassan's inability to face up to the problem. When

the leaders of the POLISARIO Front were asked whether or not they were still willing to negotiate, they answered, "We've always been ready, but negotiate with whom? Hassan not only doesn't understand the current reality in the area but also fails to take into account the will of Africa as expressed by the OAU."

Many observers believe that the Saharawi Republic's possible admission in the OAU as a government, together with the rise in the national liberation struggle, could well give even greater force to Bachir Mustafá Sayed's final words as he bade us farewell: "Victory is closer than ever."



REPORT ON OPERATIONS
BY THE SAHARAWI PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY
FROM NOVEMBER 1978 THROUGH OCTOBER 1979

The Saharawi Ministry of Defense has published a report on the 500 actions carried out by fighters of the Saharawi People's Liberation Army (ELPS) from November 1978 through the end of October 1979, especially during the Houari Boumediene Offensive, launched in January 1979.

The communiqué from the Saharawi Ministry of Defense notes that, during the course of the national liberation struggle, the Saharawi People's Liberation Army has successively liberated the cities of Tifarati, Ambala, Ejdeiria and Mahbes, plus other regions. This offensive has put important units and columns of the occupation troops out of action, especially in Lemseyid, Udei-Esfa and Engab.

The Saharawi People's Liberation Army has seized and occupied several of the strongest Moroccan garrisons, including Lubeirat, Smara and Tan-Tan, which was attacked three times. The occupation troops suffered extremely heavy losses in men and matériel during these battles, while our forces captured an impressive amount of war matériel — that the ELPS fighters then used against the Moroccan Army.

The overall results of these operations are the following:

Personnel

10 335 soldiers of all ranks up through colonel killed; 9804 wounded; 48 soldiers joined the ELPS ranks; 739 soldiers, NCOs and officers, including two captains, captured.

Matériel destroyed

Planes: 5 fighters, including 3 F-5s, and 7 helicopters.

Armored vehicles: 1649 trucks, a jeep and a Land-Rover.

Heavy weapons: fifteen 23-mm. batteries and 292 pieces of artillery and mortars.

Installations: numerous bases and garrisons seized by the ELPS.

Matériel seized

Armored vehicles: 5 armored cars, 7 BRIMs and 4 AML 90s.

Heavy and light weapons: two 122-mm. pieces of artillery; sixteen 105-mm. pieces of artillery; two 85-mm. pieces of artillery; eight 23-mm. bitubes; seven 75-mm. pieces of artillery; three 120-mm. pieces of artillery; seventy-seven 106-mm. pieces of artillery; a hundred and twenty-five 120-, 81- and 60-mm. mortars; four hundred and twenty-three 12.7-mm. machine guns; fifty-two 30-caliber MAGs; 24 Douchka machine guns; a hundred and twenty-nine 88.9-mm. LRACs; 7 RPGs; and 3500 guns, including three thousand one hundred and sixty-six 7.62-mm. FALs, 742 PMs and 295 PAs.

Other vehicles: 187 trucks, including 14 water tank trucks and 3 repair trucks; 292 jeeps and Land-Rovers; 95 Unimongs and Virans; 4 high-ranking officers' cars; and 6 ambulances.

Transmitters: 1 mobile radio station and 247 transmitter-receivers, 3 of them very powerful.

RESOLUTION ON WESTERN SAHARA

ADOPTED BY THE 34TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

NOVEMBER 21, 1979

The General Assembly:

Having considered in depth the question of Western Sahara, recalling the inalienable right of all peoples to self-determination and independence in accordance with the principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960, containing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,

Having considered the relevant chapter of the report of the Special Committee on the situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,

Having heard the statements made on the subject of Western Sahara, including the statement of the representative of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Río de Oro (POLISARIO Front),

Bearing in mind the profound concern of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the non-aligned countries regarding the decolonization of Western Sahara and the right of the people of that territory to self-determination,

Recalling its resolution 33/27 of 1 December 1978 regarding co-operation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity,

Taking note of the decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at its sixteenth ordinary session, held at Monrovia from 17 to 20 July 1979, by which the Assembly adopted the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Organization of African Unity, on the question of Western Sahara,

Also taking note of the peace agreement concluded at Algiers on 10 August 1979, between Mauritania and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Río de Oro and the decision of Mauritania to withdraw its forces from Western Sahara,

Aware of the profound concern of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the non-aligned countries at the aggravation of the situation prevailing in Western Sahara because of the continuation and extension of the occupation of that territory,

Recalling the part of the Political Declaration adopted by the Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Havana from 3 to 9 September 1979, relating to Western Sahara,

1. Reaffirms the inalienable right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and independence, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the Organization of African Unity and the objectives of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and the legitimacy of their struggle to secure the enjoyment of that right, as envisaged in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity;
2. Takes note with satisfaction of the decision concerning Western Sahara taken with the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at its sixteenth ordinary session;
3. Also takes note with satisfaction of the part of the Political Declaration adopted by the Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries relating to Western Sahara;
4. Welcomes the peace agreement concluded between Mauritania and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Río de Oro and considers that this agreement constitutes an important contribution to the process of achieving peace and definitive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Western Sahara;
5. Deeply deplores the aggravation of the situation resulting from the continued occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco and the extension of that occupation to the territory recently evacuated by Mauritania;

6. Urges Morocco to join in the peace process and to terminate the occupation of the territory of Western Sahara;

7. Recommends to that end that the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Río de Oro, the representative of the people of Western Sahara, should participate fully in any search for a just, lasting and definitive political solution of the question of Western Sahara, in accordance with the resolutions and declarations of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the non-aligned countries;

8. Requests the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples to continue to consider the situation in Western Sahara as a priority question and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session;

9. Requests the Administrative Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity to keep the Secretary-General of the United Nations informed of the progress achieved with regard to the implementation of the decisions of the Organization of African Unity concerning Western Sahara;

10. Invites the Secretary-General to follow closely the situation in Western Sahara and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

Votes	Countries
In favor	88
Against	6
Abstentions	40
Nonparticipating	13

RESOLUTION* ON WESTERN SAHARA

ADOPTED AT THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY SUMMIT

CONFERENCE HELD IN MONROVIA, LIBERIA, JULY 1979

Having reviewed in detail the report of its subcommittee's on-the-spot meetings in Mauritania, Algeria and Morocco with all parties, including representatives of the Saharawi people;

having heard the report from the mission composed of the Secretary General and the Ambassadors of Nigeria and Mali, that went to Spain on behalf of the subcommittee;

considering that all the parties concerned — with the exception of Morocco — agree that the Saharawi people's right to self-determination is not yet recognized; and

also considering that the tripartite agreement signed by Spain, Morocco and Mauritania refers only to the transfer of the administration of the territory to Morocco and Mauritania and does not constitute a transfer of sovereignty;

the Conference recommends that

1. the conditions be created for declaring an immediate and general cease-fire as a prerequisite for the establishment and maintenance of peace in the region;
2. the Saharawi people exercise their right to self-determination by holding a free and general referendum to choose between
 - a) complete independence and
 - b) a continuation of the status quo;
3. a meeting be called of all the interested parties to request their cooperation in implementing this recommendation; and
4. a special five-member committee be appointed by the 10th regular session of the Summit Conference to work with the United Nations to define the standards for and supervise the organization of the referendum, on the basis of "One man, one vote."

* Retranslated from Spanish ●