

Polisario "pleased" with UN resolution on Western Sahara
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The Polisario Front said on Thursday it was "pleased to acknowledge" a UN resolution in support of self-determination for the disputed Western Sahara region, which is claimed by both Algeria and Morocco. The statement referred to a settlement plan drafted by former US secretary of state James Baker and which was backed by the UN Security Council in a July 30 resolution. "The National Secretariat (of the Polisario Front) was pleased to acknowledge" the adoption of UN resolution 1495 and reiterated its "availability" for "continued cooperation" with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the statement said.

Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony located on the northwest coast of Africa, was annexed by Morocco in 1975, but the Polisario Front, backed by Algeria, is seeking the disputed territory's independence. The Baker plan -- the fifth in the long-running dispute -- proposes a five-year self-governing period followed by a referendum among the region's 300,000-strong population to determine its political future. The Polisario Front added that only a "free, democratic and transparent referendum organised and supervised by the United Nations" could settle the conflict over the territory along north Africa's Atlantic coast.

The plan has so far been accepted by Algeria, but not by Morocco, which claims that it works against its own national interests and security in the Maghreb. The Moroccan government has said that any solution to the conflict would have to result from negotiations with Algeria.