

CONSULTATION

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PEACEKEEPING MISSION IN MAGHREB* : THE MINURSO

In 1975 Morocco invaded Western Sahara, and after a long war between Morocco, Mauritania and the inhabitants (sahrawis), in 1985 the Secretary General of the UN and the Organisation of African Unity decided to set up a mission aimed at the final settlement of the disputed territory. Both the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario agreed on the purpose of the mission but the agreement was achieved as late as 30th August 1988.¹ In 1990 the Secretary General of the UN submitted a report (S/21360) to the Security Council, which comprised a finalised plan offering a peaceful resolution for the armed conflict having been escalated for numerous years. The draft was approved by the Security Council on 29th

April 1991 as ‘Resolution 690’ and thus a UN mission (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) tasked with resolving the future of and the rule over a territory was established.² This plan provided a transition period during which the Special Representative of the Secretary General, SRSG, had the responsibilities to prepare and implement all decisions and resolutions linked with a prospective referendum on the future of the area. The question was how the local inhabitants decide - would they wish to support the idea of an independent state or would prefer to live in an area integrated into Morocco. The SRSG was also tasked with directing civil employees, military personnel and police officers of the mission, and with the establishment and operation of the office of The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Originally, the MINURSO was planned to have 800–1,000 civil employees, 1,700 military observers and a 300-strong police unit.³ *The mission was tasked with the following:*

- Controlling the ceasefire and verifying the decrease of strength of Moroccan troops in Western Sahara;
- Observing Moroccan and Polisario forces in certain regions with special regard to troops concentrations or other military build-up;

* In this article I am writing about the UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara, where I served 12 months, between 2003 and 2004

¹ Dunbar: Saharan Stasis: Status and Future Prospects of the Western Sahara Conflict. p. 527.

² Norrie Macqueen: United Nations Peacekeeping in Africa Since 1960. p. 242.

³ Jocelyn Coulon–Phyllis Aronoff–Howard Scott: Soldiers of Diplomacy: The United Nations, Peacekeeping, and the New World Order. p. 61.

- Taking measures for releasing political prisoners from Moroccan prisons;
- Supervising the exchange of prisoners of war (POW);
- Accomplishment of repatriation encouraged by the UN. In the framework of the action refugees would be freely returning to their previous homes;
- Identifying and registering those entitled to participate in the referendum to be held on the future of the area;
- Organising and ensuring free and fair elections then declaring its official outcome.⁴

On 24th May 1991 an official proposal was submitted by the UN Secretary General regarding the starting day of the ceasefire between the warring parties (6th September). All involved parties agreed upon the date nevertheless it seemed that no ceasefire agreement could be achieved due to the conflict situations. In the region of Bir-Lahlou and Tifariti a general anti-Polisario offensive was launched by the Moroccan High Command in the month before the ceasefire was due. After initial success Moroccan troops withdrew behind the Berm.⁵ The map below shows the post-offensive situation and the military districts and sectors established by the opposing parties:



Source: <http://www.esisc.org/documents/pdf/en/the-polisario-front.pdf>

⁴ Yearbook of the United Nations 1991. pp. 793-796.

⁵ Raymond W. Copson: Africa's Wars and Prospects for Peace. p. 63. and Jarat Chopra: Peacemaintenance: The Evolution of International Political Authority. p. 165.

The diplomatic efforts of the UN proved successful and the official ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario was declared. After the agreement 100 military observers were deployed to the region in order to control the compliance with ceasefire and soon this number increased to 228 and some administrative and logistic elements.⁶

That time the MINURSO was tasked with observing the ceasefire agreement and prevention of potential clashes. The mission HQ was set up in the town of Laayoun and two sector commands were established in the controlled Sahara areas with their HQs in Dakhla (Sector South) and Smara (Sector North). Moreover, a Liaison Office was also established in Tinduf,

Algeria, in order to ease the co-operation with Algerian authorities and the Polisario.⁷ The next step was taken in 1993 in the form of the establishment of an office for processing the data of people entitled to participate in the referendum and responsible for preparing the balloting lists. The preparation phase was accomplished in August 1994, which was followed by the collection and processing of the data of potential voters.⁸ This activity was significantly impeded by the fact that the opposing parties often complicated the work of the office workers and challenged the voters delegated by the other side.⁹

Organisation work was in progress not only in Morocco but also in Mauritania, and on 23. October 1995 UNSG Representative Erik Jensen met with Mauritanian President Maaouya Ould Sidi Ahmed Taya. The purpose of the meeting was to set up an office in Mauritania, too, for the registration of Saharawian descendants dwelling in the country. As a result of the negotiations, the UN was allowed to open its office in the town of Nouadhibou, and the collection of data of potential voters' belonging to ethnic Saharawians could be started. However, due to the multitude of problems the registration of potential voters was halted by the UNSG in May 1996. Then, the number of office workers and police officers was reduced by 20% (28th May 1996).¹⁰

The work in the office was re-started as late as December 1997 and was finally accomplished on 3. September 1998. Then, mainly military aspects of the mission got in the focus, such as enforcement of the ceasefire, patrolling, inspection of military units, and demonstrating the presence of the UN. In accordance with the latest resolution on 31st October 2003 the entire

Office and Police Section was "temporarily" disbanded and the material they collected and processed was transferred to the UN HQ in Geneva.¹¹

⁶ Yearbook of the United Nations 1991. p. 796.

⁷ Besenyő János: Magyar Logisztikusként az ENSZ nyugat-szaharai missziójában. p. 210.

⁸ Dunbar: Saharan Stasis: Status and Future Prospects of the Western Sahara Conflict. p. 529.

⁹ Jarat Chopra: Breaking the Stalemate in Western Sahara. pp. 307-311.

¹⁰ Dunbar: Saharan Stasis: Status and Future Prospects of the Western Sahara Conflict. p. 530.

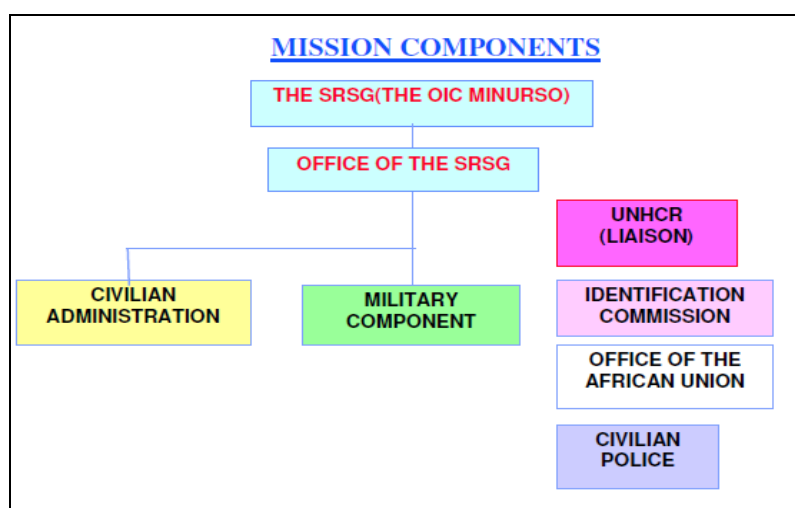
¹¹ Besenyő János: Magyar Logisztikusként az ENSZ nyugat-szaharai missziójában. p. 211.

The structure of MINURSO

MINURSO is subordinated to the United Nations Secretary General but the leadership rights are exercised by the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), who is the Head of Mission at the same time. Today, the Special Representative is Mr. Hany Abdel-Aziz from Egypt.¹² The military commander of the mission is the Force Commander (FC), who is invited by the UN Secretary General and consented by the Security Council. The military counsellor supervises his job in the UN Headquarters, New York, and informs the Special Representative of the Secretary General at the same time.

The MINURSO HQ is located in Laayoune, in the centre of the territories occupied by Morocco. 231 military personnel serve in the mission, including the commanding General (currently, Major General Abdul Hafiz from Bangladesh).¹³ There are 203 military observers, while 27 personnel serve in jobs connected to leadership, service and the security the mission (there is a medical group from Bangladesh and an administrative group of 7 Ghanian non-commissioned officers) and other 6 police officers.¹⁴ The following states have delegated military observers to the mission: Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, the Republic of Guinea, South Korea, Egypt, Salvador, France, Ghana, Greece, Honduras, Croatia, Ireland, Kenya, China, Poland, Hungary, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nigeria, Italy, Russian Federation, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uruguay.

Apart from them, 99 personnel from various countries all over the world and 162 local employees and 18 United Nations Volunteers contribute to the work of the mission.¹⁵ The Department of Identification of the mission are closed down temporarily. The Civilian Police office was closed as well, but later it was opened and nowadays 6 police officers are working in the mission. The organisation chart of the mission:



Source: MINURSO

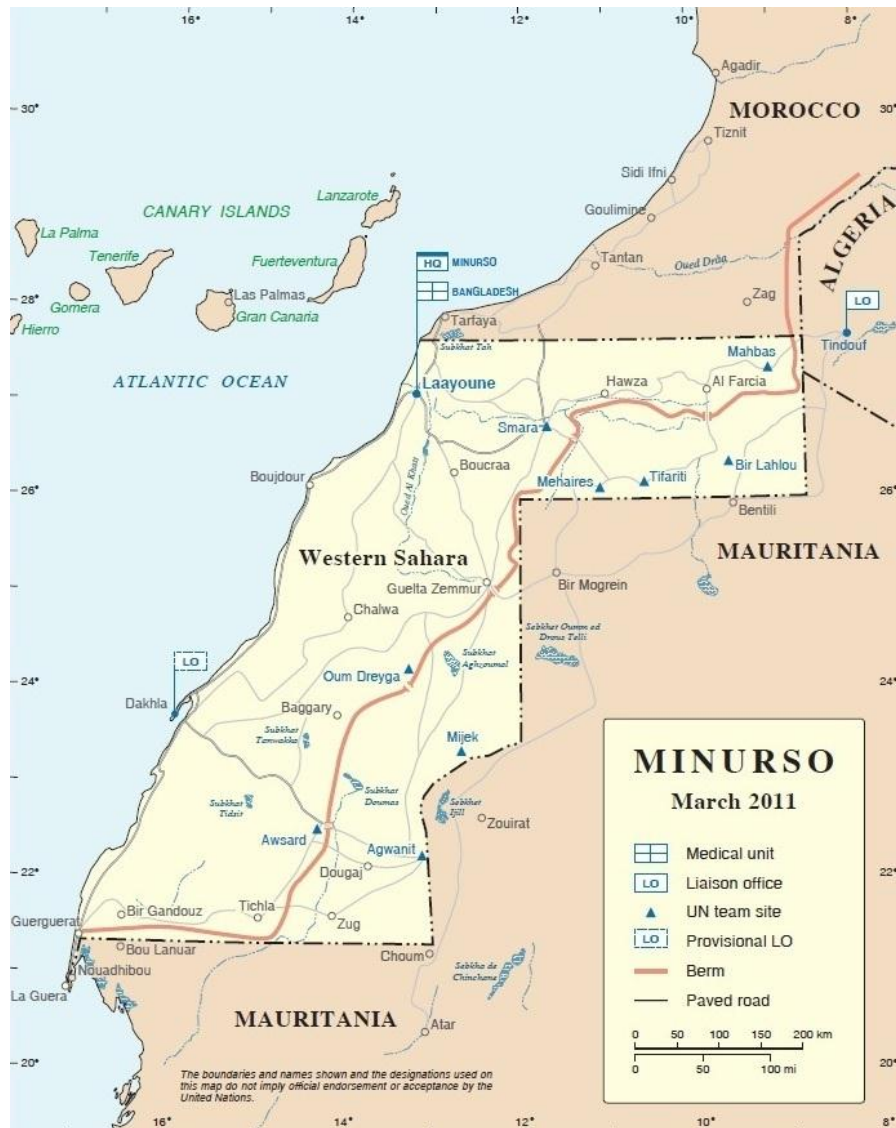
¹² <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minurso/leadership.shtml> (downloaded: 23.11.2011)

¹³ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minurso/leadership.shtml> (downloaded: 23.11.2011)

¹⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minurso/facts.shtml> (downloaded: 23.11.2011)

¹⁵ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minurso/facts.shtml> (downloaded: 23.11.2011)

The operating area of MINURSO earlier had been divided into two sectors: the centre of the Northern sector was located in Smara city while the centre of the Southern sector was in Dakhla on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. Later the missions leaders terminate the sectors system and every peacekeeper under the direction of Layounne Headquater. *The mission area:*



Source: MINURSO

Team sites were established at the appropriate places of the sectors, where they were able to control a certain area due to their location. The officers selected for the military observer position and trained either by the UN or the delegating states serve in these team sites. MINURSO has an unwritten law, which states that two military observers from the same nation should not serve in one team site, if possible, unless in special situations. Naturally, this can only be applied effectively to soldiers from countries with small contingents. The same principle is to be applied to soldiers serving in the headquarters.

In general, the staff serving at the headquarter are divided according to the current NATO organisational structure. The tasks of the Staff Officers is regulated by the **Standard Operating Procedure for Peacekeeping Operations** (SOP).

- The main duties and obligations of the Staff Officers serving at the headquarters include:
- To prepare suggestions in professional matters for the Commander and the Chief of Staff (COS).
- To co-operate with civilian organisations, to co-ordinate and manage their professional work.
- To co-operate with other military departments (G1-Personnel, G3-Operations, G4-Logistics service, etc).
- To prepare and check personnel serving in team sites and are subordinated to them professionally.
- To prepare different documents for MINURSO and New York HQ.
- To provide up-to-date information on professional matters to the Chief of Staff (COS).

The personnel serving in the Staff Command:

Chief of Staff (COS)

Based on the agreement between the Malaysian government and the UN, the position (Colonel) can be filled by Malaysia. In case of the absence of the military commander, he controls the work of the military observers, monitors everyday affairs, organises and supervises the professional and military work done at the HQ.

Senior Liaison Officer (SLO)

Based on the agreement between the Russian government and the UN, the national position (Colonel) can be filled by the Russian Federation. His tasks include the management of the military liaison office in Tinduf, controlling the work of the military observers serving here, maintaining contact with the Polisario leaders and the Algerian government.

Chief Operations Officer (COPO)

Based on the agreement signed by the government of Ghana and the UN, the national position (Lieutenant Colonel) can be filled by Ghana. From the beginning of the mission until January 2003, the United States of America appointed the officer for the position and only after they had left the mission the position was transferred to Ghana.

His primary tasks include the control of the operational level of the mission, the organisation and supervision of the military and patrolling tasks. As

the advisor of the Chief of Staff is responsible for working out and applying different operational and service instructions of operational matters, and also for preparing and classifying mission reports (OPORDS, etc) and informing the control centre in New York. He is responsible for organising and holding training courses and meetings organised at the headquarters, preparing and controlling the services. He deals with the security matters of the headquarters, by involving the civilian security service (Service) and the Moroccan security and law enforcement agencies.

Chief Military Personnel Officer (CMPO)

The position can be applied for by officers of any nation, and generally officers from African countries are selected. His primary tasks include the organisation and control of personnel tasks (arranging leaves, reports, personal descriptions, preparing identification cards, orders, etc). He evaluates the reports of the military observers and prepares them for review by the commander. He represents the commander in disciplinary and other matters (accident, death, etc) concerning the military observers and organises and supervises the work of the Investigation Commission. He acts as the advisor in personal matters and prepares the roster for both duty officers and patrols at the headquarters. He maintains contact with the Chief Medical officer, coordinates the round-trips of the military observers arriving for medical check-ups or treatment between the camps and the headquarters.

Chief Logistics Officer (CLO)

The position can be applied for by senior officers of any nation. His tasks are to provide full logistic service (food, petrol oil and lubricant, drinking water, furniture, other equipment, etc.) to the mission and supply the military observations posts. He carries out his tasks in co-operation with the General Service Section-Integrated Support Services. He is responsible for the preparation and application of the logistics regulations and orders. He is to visit the team sites regularly in order to personally check the sectors and the logistic services there.

Senior Co-ordination Officer (SCO)

Based on the implicit agreement within the mission, the position can be filled by South American (Salvador, Honduras, Chile, Uruguay) senior officers on a rotational basis. His main task is to supply goods to the staff canteen, organising and co-ordinating freetime activities. He is responsible for providing accommodation to military observers going on leave, or arriving to the headquarters for duty and to organise and co-ordinate various military holidays (national days, official events). Military protocol and maintaining contact with the representatives of electronic and printed media are also his responsibilities.

Force Training Officer (FTO)

Senior officers of any nationality can apply for the position. All training matters belong to him (professional courses, organising Arabic, French and Spanish language courses, publishing journals and regulations). He prepares weekly and monthly reports, updates the military training programmes of the mission and checks the execution of the trainings (UNMO Mission Training Programme – MTP). He checks the training, the expertise of the personnel serving in the sectors and organises lectures and training courses for them if necessary. Besides his training tasks, he also fulfills the positions of the Sports Officer of the mission.

Force Medical Officer (FMO)

Based on the agreement between the Bangladeshi government and the UN, Bangladesh can fill the national position (Lieutenant Colonel). His task is to co-ordinate the job of the Bangladeshi medical team and to manage and control the organisation of all health, medical and hygienical tasks related to the mission.

Commander of the Bangladeshi Medical Unit (CBMU)

In accordance with the current international agreements, the medical supply of the mission is provided by the military medical team of 20 members delegated by the Bangladeshi Armed Forces under their own command. The commander of the unit is responsible for the work of the team and the providing medical care for the mission, in cooperation with the Moroccan military hospital (Casablanca) and the navy hospital of the Spanish Armed Forces (Las Palmas).

Aide-De-Camp (ADC)

Due to the implicit agreement of the mission and the special requirements accompanying the agreement (command of the French language and contact with the Moroccan military organisations), the position is filled by the captain of the French contingent. He organises the trips, meetings of the commander within Morocco, maintains contact with the leaders of the local organisations, participates at official meetings and takes the minutes there. He organises the correspondence at Commander's Office, participates in organising and coordinating the administrative work and executes the commanders commands.

Military Assistant of Force Commander

Generally, the position is filled by a captain from the same country as the commander. His tasks include organising the commander's meetings, taking minutes at the meetings, doing the correspondence of the commander, going through and classifying the incoming daily mail, preparing the draft of the commander's official speeches, copying it if necessary. He takes photos at official events, records and archives the events for later use (internal

publications, press, etc). In case of the absence of the ADC, he takes over his tasks, but he in command.

Military Assistant to the Chief of Staff

The position is filled by a captain selected by the Chief of Staff, who is of the nationality of the commander. He fulfills administrative tasks for the Chief of Staff. He prepares and organises the programmes of the Chief of Staff, maintains contact with the different military organisations and sectors. Basically, his job description is identical to that of the Military Assistant.

Force Sergeant Major (FS M)

In accordance with the current agreement, the position can be filled by a non-commissioned officer, sergeant-major or warrant officer from Ghana. He has significant role in organising various military events; he is responsible for observing the dress-code of military observers, and acts as the advisor to the commander of the mission in disciplinary matters. The FSM organises, controls and checks the work of non-commissioned officers subordinated to the office of the commander. He escorts the Commander on his official trips and helps the military assistants organise the programmes.

The following departments function at the Mission Command:

Personnel Department

The tasks of the Personnel Department include all the personnel tasks (travelling, service trips, unexpected death, accidents, medical checkups or treatment, etc) related to military observers at the MINURSO Staff, including the preparation of identification cards, of various reports, reviews, providing help in religious and conscience matters, setting up and operating disciplinary committees. Besides the commander, two commissioned officers and two non-commissioned officers work for the department. The non-commissioned officers do registration, and administrative work under the DCMPO's control but their superior is the Force Sergeant Major.

Planning and Operations Department

Reconnaissance (G2) and operations-planning department are integrated mainly due to the shortage of human resources. The work of the department is led by the Chief Operations Officer (COPO). Their tasks include all types of military planning, information gathering, the processing and evaluation of information within the mission and the coordination of the work of military observers (patrolling and other service duties).

Five officers serve in the department (the deputy of the Chief Operations Officer, the Air Liaison Officer and three other Staff officers).

Deputy Chief Operations Officer (DCOO)

He is responsible for organising the work of the officers working in the department, maintaining contact with the operational and intelligence officers of the sectors and the camps, checks the gathering, evaluation of information, and sending the reports to the Operations Centre in New York.

Air Liaison Officer (ALO)

He is responsible for organising and coordinating the air transport, air reconnaissance, trainings and rescue activities of the mission. His task is to ensure that military observers apply and do not violate air safety regulations. He prepares flight manifests and organises special flights in co-operation with the local military and civilian air traffic services.

Staff Operations Officers (SOO)

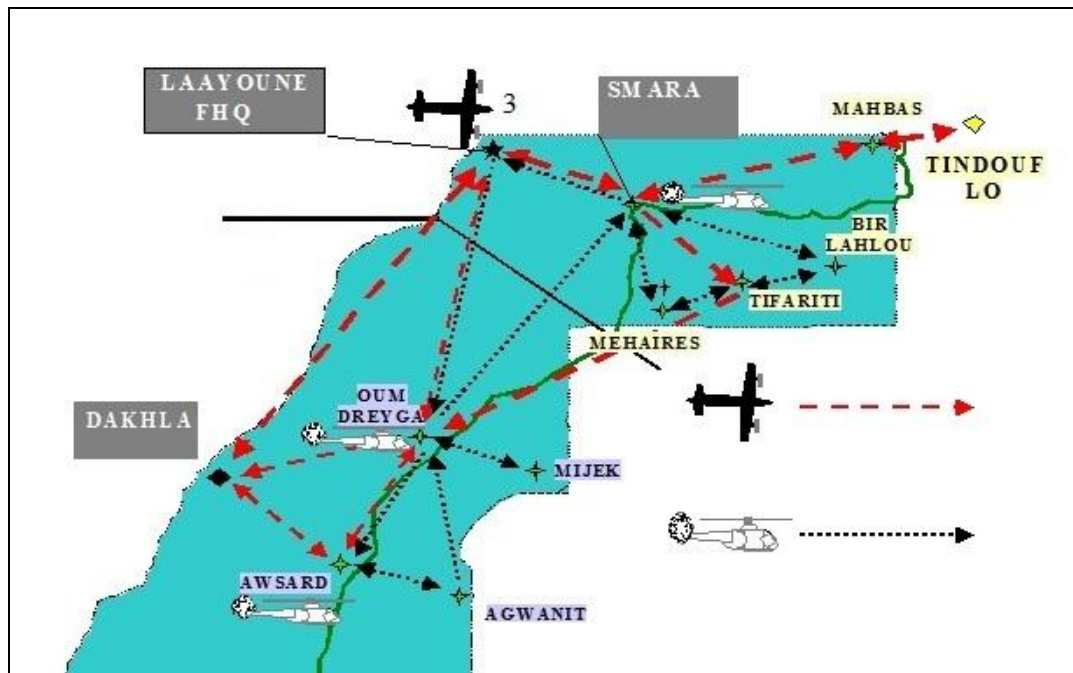
Their tasks include checking the daily operation of the team sites and preparing, controlling and checking the services, processing and evaluating the incoming intelligence (ORBAT) for the mission commander. They take part in working out different orders, controlling the observance of military and ceasefire agreements, and in case of violation start investigating the case. They prepare the daily, weekly, monthly and other periodical reports (SITREP, etc) for the leaders of the mission and the UN. Deputy of Chief Operational Officers, Air Liaison Officers and Staff Officers must be senior officers.

Logistics Department

Like anywhere else, this department has the most responsibilities and work load, as there is always need for fuel, food, drinking water and other logistic supply. The transport of the supply is done by three helicopters (MI-8) and three Antonov transport planes due to the large distances. This requires daily contact and continuous coordination with the other departments involved. The planes are rented together with their crew from the Ukraine and Russia, generally for six-month time periods.

The logistic supply of the mission is primarily done by the civilian part of the mission not the military. This is obvious as the military observers spend 4-6 months in a position in the headquarters on average. Due to the special situation prevailing in team sites and sector commands, only the military observers do logistics work, while the civilian logistics service is based on the HQ (Laayoune). The civilian experts (in cooperation with the military personnel) provide the following services in the mission: repair and maintenance of the vehicles, transport, signals, finance and other administrative tasks.

The logistic - transportation system of MINURSO:



Source: MINURSO

The Logistics Department is headed by the Chief Logistics Officer and the following positions can be found within the department:

Deputy Chief Logistics Officer

He is responsible for the maintenance and operational tasks. He receives the supply necessary for running the team sites, he is responsible for executing fire-protection tasks, the repair and if necessary replacement of electric generators and other technical equipment used in the team sites. He is entitled to assign any kind of task to the garages on behalf of the military organisation and he organises the temporary deployment of technicians to the team sites.

Transport and Plans Officer

He is responsible for the repair and maintenance of all vehicles used by the military observers, for fuel, lubricants and airplane fuel supply. His tasks also include finalising the reports of the Logistics Department and sending them to the consignees.

Supply Officer

He receives the requests for supplies from the team sites (except for food and fuel), which is provided dependent on the current needs and the stock available. He maintains daily contact with the Procurement department, civilian logistic personnel, the ones responsible for the store-houses and Receiving and Inspection.

Food Officer

All tasks connected to the food supply of military observers belong to him. He monitors the food supply tasks in the team site, the results of the weekly and daily reports, checks and approves requests for food supply. He controls the quality of food together with the Hygienic officer, co-operates with the civilian logistic and supply companies. His tasks include checking of the invoices received and only he is entitled to authorise any payment to the companies supplying food for the mission. The positions of the Logistics Department can be filled by senior officers, however, if a candidate is suitable for the job, the military commander of the mission can authorize a captain to be selected for the position, as a professional position.

Welfare and Co-ordination

This is the smallest department of the mission and it is responsible for supplying the canteen with goods (cigarettes, alcohol, confectionery, etc) organising and co-ordinating freetime activities all over the area of the mission. Apart from the mission commander, there are two other officers serving at the headquarters.

Welfare Officer

He runs the shops of the mission, purchases goods, calculates the prices of the products and it is his duty and responsibility to transport the goods to the team sites. He is in charge of the money of the welfare fund of the military observers and if necessary purchases cultural items (DVDs, CDs, videos, cassettes, board games, etc) and sports equipment from the fund. He organises the sports and cultural programmes in co-operation with other departments.

Co-ordination Officer

He is responsible for providing accommodation to the military observers arriving from the team sites to Laayoune, receiving the newcomers, organising and coordinating various military and official events (National days, awarding medals, etc). He maintains contact with Moroccan and Spanish hotels, travel agents and other tourist organisations to provide discount air tickets for officers travelling home for holiday.

Communication Department

Due to the fact that the mission is located in three countries and the insufficient infrastructure of the area, the communications experts developed their own communication system independent of the host nations the mission. The personnel serving in the communication department, in cooperation with the civilian experts (UN employees) operate the radio (long and short waves, VHF and HF) and telephone system, operate, maintain, repair the IT and telecommunication (facsimiles, computers, photocopy machines, etc) equipment.

Two senior officers serve in the department

Force Communication Officer (FCO)

He co-operates with the leaders of the civilian communication department. They plan the purchase of the equipment together, co-ordinate the work of the military, civilian and repair departments. He receives the communication daily reports from the team sites and sectors, which he sends to the Chief Staff Officer after processing and evaluating them.

Assistant Force Communication Officer (AFCO)

His primary task is to help the work of the Force Communication Officer, and to observe the deadline of the planning tasks. He supervises the operation of the communication systems between the headquarters, sectors and team sites and to troubleshoot (computer security, daily maintenance, etc) in cooperation with the civilian departments, if necessary. He maintains daily contact with the Force Communications Officers of the sectors and team sites and is also responsible for their professional training and control.

Below you can read about the organisations co-operating with other military parts of the mission. I do not have an insight into the work of the administrative department as this is not a very important area for military observers, however, I have written about the police department, the identification and the refugee offices in detail, as their work influenced the events of the mission for years. Presently, the identification office have been suspended temporarily in the mission but can re-open anytime following a decision in the future.

CIVPOL

When the UN in its Resolution 690 decided to establish MINURSO (29 April 1991), it was clear that certain tasks cannot be accomplished by the military observers due to the lack of appropriate training, so the UN Secretary General recommended delegating police forces to the mission. In his report (S22464-46. paragraph – 19 April 1991), the Secretary General proposed to employ 100 police officers immediately to aid the work of the staff preparing the census. They would have increased the number of staff by 200 in order to secure the repatriation of refugees to the territories occupied by Morocco.

The police force worked hand-in-hand with the staff of the Identification Commission and Registration Centres from the very beginning. The work started in July 1993 under the command of Police Colonel Jürgen Friedrich Reinman.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nassrine Azimi: The Role and Functions of the Civilian Police in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. pp. 107-111.

The first police unit was composed of 19 personnel (4 Germans, 5 Belgians, 5 Malaysians and 5 Togans), who also carried out the security tasks of the mission but their primary task was to escort and protect the employees of the Identification Centre during the preparation period for the census.¹⁷

The moment the identification of eligible voters started the number of police officers increased proportionally with their tasks, thus the UN Secretary-General authorised the employment of as many as 26 police officers in his report (S/1991/819 – 12 July 1994), and by the end of the year 55 police officers had been in service (S/1994/1257 – 5. November 1994). Resolution (973/1995) of the Security Council authorised the increase of police staff to 160 but it never manifested. There was a downsizing again followed by an increase in the number of staff. The highest number of the police staff was 91 in January 1996.¹⁸ At that time, there were 19 Identification Centres established in Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria, where police officers served together with the civilian staff. The task of the police officers included maintaining law and order in the identification centres and providing the possibility of uninterrupted work for the civilian employees.¹⁹

The UN established identification centres in Laayoune, Dakhla, Boujdour, Smara, Tan-Tan, Goulmine, Assa, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakesh, Sidi Kacem, Zagora, Taroudant, Tata, Zourat, Nouadhibou, Elkelaa, Meknes and Tinduf.

The primary tasks of the police force during the identification period were the following:

- To provide registration and the opportunity to vote for anybody who would like to participate at the referendum deciding about the future of the territory, after presenting their legal documents.
- To take a photograph and fingerprints of the eligible voters in order to simplify their identification later.
- To escort tribal leaders and all people who supported the work of the UN, preparing the referendum.
- To protect personnel and facilities.
- To collect the documents processed during the identification process and to transport them to Tinduf and Laayoun and finally to the UN centre in Geneva (346,000 documents were transported to Geneva by the end of December 2003).
- To provide escort for the finance officers transporting the salary of the UN employees and the military observers and the security of the venues of payment.

¹⁷ Roxane D. V. Sismanidis: Police Functions in Peace Operation, Report from Workshop organised by the United States Institute of Peace. p. 3.

¹⁸ Martin Ira Glassner: The United Nations at Work. p. 270.

¹⁹ Nassrine Azimi: The Role and Functions of the Civilian Police in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. p. 108-110.

- To organise joint patrols together with the military observers in the region of Laayoune and Tinduf.
- To participate in military observer training (driving in the desert, navigation- and GPS-training).
- To plan the establishment of the police forces of Western Sahara having received autonomy, their training and checking they comply with the democratic norms.
- To assist the work of the security service and to accomplish other tasks requiring security technological experience and police expertise.
- To give advice in police and security policy issues for both the military and civilian leadership of the mission.
- To participate in the repatriation programme.
- To conduct investigation of disciplinary and criminal cases in MINURSO in co-operation with the local authorities.
- To co-operate with the UNHCR in refugee matters.

81 police officers (including Hungarians) served in Western Sahara and the neighbouring countries in the time period after the census. There were only 26 police officers in the mission in June 2003.²⁰ The police unit was dismissed after the identification process and due to the suspension of the identification centre for an indefinite time period. But as written previously, later 6 police officers arrived in the mission again, and today they are working in the Headquarters.

The police unit had an excellent disciplinary conduct, nevertheless, two police officers had to be sent home before completing their service due to causing road accidents and their poor command of English.

Identification Centre

The Identification Centre or Census Preparation Office was established by Security Council Resolution 690 (April 1991), as one of the organisations of MINURSO. The employees of the office started the preparatory work immediately after the office was opened. They requested the Spanish government to issue the documents containing the data of the 1974 census (Spanish Census) and started the data-processing. The result of the census then was 74,343 people, although some Saharawians had been registered more than once as a member of different tribes.²¹ This could occur as the staff of the census were often confused about the fact that one person can be a member of several tribes and sub-tribes due to kinship. After processing all data of the Spanish Census, a database was ready for future activities.

²⁰ Yearbook of the United Nations 1999. p. 178.

²¹ Statement of Frank Rudy before the Subcommittee on the Departments of Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary and Related Agencies. <http://www.arso.org/06-3-1.htm> (downloaded: 21.11.2011.)

The staff of the office started registering the eligible voters for the referendum about the future of the territory on 20 June 1993 on the basis of the data of the previous census. The first two identification centres were established in Laayoune (Western-Sahara) and Tindouf (Algeria). Due to the insufficient personnel and financial background the registration work could only start on 3. November 1993. The Head of Office sent the registration documents together with the filling instructions to both the Moroccan and the Algerian governments. Due to political reasons, the work in the Mauritanian office could only start in late February 1994, despite the fact that the UN officially published the data of the Spanish census overviewed and corrected by its staff. There were only 72,370 people registered. This document was especially important as this provided the base of the census carried out in the future. According to the original plans, people or their descendants living in then Spanish Sahara in 1974 could vote about the future of the territory.

Due to the pressure of the opposing parties, however, the UN changed its original plan concerning the requirements of eligible voters. Five preconditions had to be met in order to be registered on the list:²²

- Being registered on the list prepared by the Spanish authorities in 1972.
- Living in Spanish Sahara during the 1974 census but not being registered for some reason (this was very likely due to the migration periods of the nomadic tribes).²³
- The immediate kins were registered but the potential voter was not registered for some reason.
- If the potential voter's father was born and lived in Spanish Sahara.
- If the potential voter lived in this area for six years continuously from 1. December 1974 or for 12 years with some interruptions.

The official list was published on 29. November in both Laayoune and Tindouf cities (including the refugee camps). The representatives of both parties (Morocco and Algeria) handed over the registration documents (sent to them before hand) and their recommendations to the UN staff on 16 May 1994. The office staff started data-processing the incoming material and the identification process immediately. This meant that a person whose personal data was registered on the computer had to appear in the identification centre where their identification was confirmed and photographs and fingerprints were taken. This was necessary to prevent forging of votes or multiple registration of one person. The representatives of both opposing parties - the Moroccans and the Polisario - intended to manipulate the office staff.²⁴

²² Dunbar: *Saharan Stasis: Status and Future Prospects of the Western Sahara Conflict*. p.528.

²³ Norrie Macqueen: *United Nations Peacekeeping in Africa Since 1960*. p. 241.

²⁴ Anna Theofilopoulou: *The United Nations and Western Sahara – S Never-ending Affair*. <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr166.pdf> (downloaded: 10.11.2011.)

On 28 August 1994, in Tinduf, the confirmation of data and the checking of voters registering to vote started in the refugee camps.²⁵ However, due to the lack of data-processing staff, the work was very slow. The number of office staff reached its maximum capacity only in 1998, which speeded up the process. By that time, the office had established 19 Identification Centres in Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria, four of which were located in Western Sahara, four in refugee camps, two in Mauritania and nine in Morocco. The first phase of the identification process started on 28 August 1994 and finished on 23. December 1995. The gathered data could only be processed completely by 3 September 1998.²⁶

Out of the 179,497 potential voters only 84,262 met the UN requirements, so they all were entitled to participate in elections to be held in the future.²⁷ The non-contested tribes appearing in the first phase and the 1st Provisional List of Voters of Saharawians was published on 15 July 1999 and were made accessible for the Algerian, Moroccan and Mauritanian governments.²⁸ In the second phase, the contested tribal groupings, 51,220 applicants were registered as potential voters in the identification centres but only 2,163 met the requirements and were put on the 2nd Provisional List of Voters. The second list was made public on 15 June 1999 and similarly to the first list this was also sent to the governments of the three countries and the Polisario leaders.²⁹

The work of the Office is well illustrated by the following:

- 244,643 registration sheets were processed;
- 243,625 invitations were sent out for the registrations in the identification centres (179,437 in the first phase and 64,188 in the second phase);
- 198,469 people completed the identification process (i.e. after registration, went to the identification centres, had their photographs taken, confirmed their personal details with their fingerprints and signature);
- 86,425 people met the requirements of the UN and the Office organised to inform them.

Then, in February 2000 the situation between the Moroccan government and the Polisario had become so tense that working in the identification centres became impossible and they were closed down. Afterwards the employees of the UN processed the results of the data-gathering phases and corrected the forms stored on the computer. As the opposing parties were not able to reach an agreement, on 15. January 2002 the UN decreased the number of employees in

²⁵ Jarat Chopra: *Peace-maintenance: The Evolution of International Political Authority*. p. 173.

²⁶ *Yearbook of the United Nations* 1998. p. 194.

²⁷ Por Martin Zirlingen: *Western Sahara: The United Nations Will determine for You*. <http://www.gees.org/articulo/1314/> (downloaded: 23.11.2011.)

²⁸ Andreu Solá-Martín: *Lessons from MINURSO*. p. 373.

²⁹ *Yearbook of the United Nations* 2001. p. 214.

the office to 40. Due to the lack of other tasks, the UN workers continued to archive the materials, while other colleagues did research and conducted the analysis of the information gathered during long years and prepared studies for the UN. The final decision about the office was made in July 2003, when the leadership of MINURSO was informed that all ongoing tasks must be completed by the end of October and the documents must be sent to the UN centre in Geneva. The transport of the processed documents started on 8 September and finished on 6 October. The staff left the territory of the mission at the end of the month.³⁰

Refugee Office (UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

The organisation started working in 1975-76 among the Saharawians fled from Western Sahara and living in the refugee camps established in Algeria. Although the office is not part of the structure of MINURSO and follows orders received from New York independently, there has been good and close co-operation between the organisations since the very beginning. One of the major tasks of the office would have been to organise the return of the Sahrawi refugees to Western Sahara—so far, this has not been achieved.³¹

The organisation had established and maintained good relationship with the opposing parties and very often acted as a mediator organisation to solve problems.³² The office staff forwards the food offered by the non-governmental aid organisations to the camps where they hand it over to the local authorities supervising its distribution. Despite this fact, the food received as aid does not always reach the needy but ends up on the black market. I have personally seen food items (sugar, flour, etc) carrying the logo of the UN, originally from international aid being sold in shops in villages. This may be why the leader of the World Food Programme warned the UN representatives in the summer 2003 about the serious food shortage in the camps. Basic food items (sugar, flour, rice, semolina and canned fish) were already scarce at the beginning of spring and there were not enough vegetables and fruits for the refugees.

According to the UN, in such a situation there is a great risk of an epidemic, so, on 16 October 2003, the Security Council in its Resolution S/2003/1016 demanded that the international organisations get involved in the solution of the problems and help feed the refugees in the camps with every possible means.³³ The organisation helped several times to maintain contact

³⁰ Yearbook of the United Nations 2003. p. 262.

³¹ Toby Shelley: Endgame in the Western Sahara. What Future for Africa's Last Colony? p. 144.

³² Reinoud Leenders: Western Sahara: Africa's last colony, Searching for Peace in Africa, 2000.<http://www.conflict-prevention.net/page.php?id=40&formid=73&action=show&surveyid=16> (downloaded: 23.11.2011.)

³³ Yearbook of the United Nations 2003. p. 262.

between the refugees in the camps and their relatives living on the territories occupied by Morocco. They organised and co-ordinated meetings between the relatives occasionally.³⁴

Negotiations were initiated between the government of Morocco and the representatives of the Polisario to establish a regular postal service and telephone connection (confidence-building measures) between the refugee camps and the occupied territories.³⁵ This was not so simple as the Moroccans demanded the right that the letters arriving from the refugee camps should be forwarded to the addressees by the Moroccan postal service, but this would not guarantee the intactness of the letters. Naturally, the UNCHR did not accept the proposal so the UN would continue to guarantee the intactness of the letters and their safe delivery. In March 2003, an agreement was reached, which guaranteed the uninterrupted operation of the postal service, and not tapping the telephone conversations between the refugee camps and the relatives from the Sahara. On 15 April, the UNHCR announced that there were limited postal service and personal telephone calls available between the refugees in the camps and the occupied territories.³⁶ The telephone line was shut down by Morocco after one day. It re-started only on 11 January 2004. Until 2006, according to the report of the office, 60,000 calls were made between refugee camps and the occupied territories.³⁷

The third important element of the programme was to provide constant contact and meeting opportunities between refugees in the camps and their relatives left behind in Western Sahara.³⁸ This may be an even more delicate issue than the postal service and its operation. The first suggestion of the Polisario was that only people who were registered in the Spanish Census, or met the requirements of the UN to vote about the future of the territory should be allowed to attend family get-togethers.

Morocco would provide opportunity to meet other family members to anybody with a relative living in Western Sahara. In 2004 the UNHCR organised the first encounters between relatives. In the first round 1,200 people attended these meetings, mainly coming from refugee camps. In 2005 19,000 people registered for the programme, and with the mediation of the office 1,476 people could meet up with their relatives.³⁹ The action had to be halted for a while as the required financial means were missing. Later on it was re-launched, and ever since it has been smoothly running.

³⁴ Dunbar: *Saharan Stasis: Status and Future Prospects of the Western Sahara Conflict*. pp. 540-542.

³⁵ Hakim Darbouche, Zoubir, Yahia H: *Conflicting International Policies and the Western Sahara Stalemate*. p. 94.

³⁶ *Yearbook of the United Nations* 2003. p. 260.

³⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/home/PUBL/4666d2520.pdf> (downloaded: 23.11.2011.)

³⁸ Toby Shelley: *Endgame in the Western Sahara. What Future for Africa's Last Colony?* p. 117.

³⁹ *Yearbook of United Nations* 2005. p. 366.