# UK endorses Morocco’s Western Sahara autonomy plan, deepening geopolitical divide



The United Kingdom's recent endorsement of Morocco's plan for the disputed territory of Western Sahara represents a significant shift in international relations regarding this long-standing conflict. At a joint press conference in Morocco's capital, British Foreign Minister David Lammy hailed the Moroccan proposal for autonomy under its sovereignty as "the most credible, viable and pragmatic" resolution to the territorial dispute that has persisted for decades. This endorsement aligns the UK with two other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, France and the United States, who have previously voiced support for Morocco's claims.

In his remarks, Lammy expressed optimism for the future, asserting that a resolution is overdue and crucial for bolstering stability in North Africa. He urged for more detailed proposals from Morocco regarding the autonomy arrangement, indicating a willingness to engage further while maintaining the framework of UN-led negotiations. His comments came amidst a backdrop of sustained international interest in the region’s economic potential, particularly in sectors like fishing, agriculture, and renewable energy—a shift that has drawn investment from both European and American companies.

Western Sahara, rich in resources such as phosphates and fish, has been designated as a “non-self-governing territory” by the United Nations, with its fate long debated since Morocco's annexation of the region in the 1970s. The territory is challenged by the Polisario Front, a pro-independence group advocating for the rights and recognition of the Sahrawi people. In response to the UK's backing of Morocco, Algeria, which has historically positioned itself on the side of the Polisario, expressed strong disapproval. The Algerian government denounced Morocco's autonomy plan as "empty of content and incapable of contributing to a serious and credible settlement of the conflict."

Importantly, the UK's recent support comes in the context of its broader strategy to enhance relations with Morocco, including commitments made during earlier strategic dialogues. This deepening partnership underscores a mutual interest in stabilising the region and fostering economic growth, with agreements in areas such as trade and renewable energy emerging as focal points of collaboration.

However, the engagement in Western Sahara continues to prompt concern over human rights issues, particularly regarding the Sahrawi people living in refugee camps. Formal statements from the UK government have reiterated a commitment to supporting the UN-led process designed to achieve a just solution while emphasising the need to uphold human rights standards in these humanitarian contexts.

As the situation unfolds, the implications of the UK's stance may reverberate through international diplomatic relations, particularly as Morocco seeks to solidify its claims and foster economic development in the region, while Polisario strives to command international support for its cause. The dual priority of economic advancement and humanitarian responsibility presents a complex landscape for all parties involved.

The evolving dynamics around Western Sahara reflect not only a geopolitical struggle but also the interplay of local aspirations for autonomy against broader regional interests. With high-stakes negotiations ahead, the path to a resolution remains incremental and highly contested.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/morocco-david-lammy-algeria-united-nations-united-nations-security-council-b2761642.html), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/morocco-uk-strategic-dialogue-session-4-joint-declaration-2023/fourth-session-of-the-moroccan-uk-strategic-dialogue-and-second-session-of-the-association-council-of-the-uk-morocco-association-agreement-joint-decl)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/morocco-david-lammy-algeria-united-nations-united-nations-security-council-b2761642.html), [[3]](https://en.hespress.com/74762-uk-reiterates-support-for-un-led-efforts-for-political-solution-to-western-sahara-conflict.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/morocco-david-lammy-algeria-united-nations-united-nations-security-council-b2761642.html), [[4]](https://www.spsrasd.info/en/2023/11/30/1395.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/morocco-david-lammy-algeria-united-nations-united-nations-security-council-b2761642.html), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/morocco-uk-strategic-dialogue-session-4-joint-declaration-2023/fourth-session-of-the-moroccan-uk-strategic-dialogue-and-second-session-of-the-association-council-of-the-uk-morocco-association-agreement-joint-decl), [[5]](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-11-14/1780/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/morocco-david-lammy-algeria-united-nations-united-nations-security-council-b2761642.html), [[6]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-10-30/debates/986805AE-A319-4236-86E4-7B17FC38E995/WesternSahara)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/morocco-david-lammy-algeria-united-nations-united-nations-security-council-b2761642.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/morocco-uk-strategic-dialogue-session-4-joint-declaration-2023/fourth-session-of-the-moroccan-uk-strategic-dialogue-and-second-session-of-the-association-council-of-the-uk-morocco-association-agreement-joint-decl> - In May 2023, the UK and Morocco held the fourth session of their Strategic Dialogue and the second session of the Association Council under the UK-Morocco Association Agreement. The joint declaration emphasized the commitment to deepen bilateral relations based on mutual respect and trust. Both nations agreed to enhance cooperation on various issues, including regional and international matters. Notably, the UK reaffirmed its support for a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution to the Western Sahara conflict, consistent with the principles of the United Nations Charter.
3. <https://en.hespress.com/74762-uk-reiterates-support-for-un-led-efforts-for-political-solution-to-western-sahara-conflict.html> - In November 2023, the UK reiterated its support for the United Nations' efforts to achieve a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution to the Western Sahara conflict. The UK emphasized its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights in the Tindouf camps. The statement also highlighted the strong trade relations between the UK and Morocco, following a partnership agreement signed in January 2021, and the UK's support for UN Security Council Resolution No. 2703, which renewed the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).
4. <https://www.spsrasd.info/en/2023/11/30/1395.html> - In November 2023, the British government reaffirmed its traditional position on the Sahrawi issue, advocating for a solution that guarantees the people of Western Sahara their right to self-determination. This stance was in response to parliamentary questions regarding the security situation in Western Sahara and the UK's role in promoting a peaceful resolution. The UK supported UN Security Council Resolution 2703, which renewed the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for 12 months, and expressed support for the efforts of Staffan de Mistura, the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy.
5. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-11-14/1780/> - In November 2023, UK Foreign Minister David Rutley responded to parliamentary questions regarding the UK's position on the security situation in Western Sahara. The UK supported UN Security Council Resolution 2703, which renewed the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for 12 months. The UK emphasized its support for UN-led efforts to achieve a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, based on compromise, that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The UK also expressed strong support for the work of Staffan de Mistura, the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy.
6. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-10-30/debates/986805AE-A319-4236-86E4-7B17FC38E995/WesternSahara> - In October 2024, during a parliamentary debate, the UK reaffirmed its support for UN-led efforts to reach a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution for Western Sahara. The UK emphasized that such a solution should provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, in line with UN Security Council resolutions. The debate highlighted the UK's commitment to regional security and prosperity, and the potential economic benefits for communities affected by the long-standing dispute. The UK also acknowledged the humanitarian situation facing Sahrawi refugees and its contributions to support the refugee camps.
7. <https://www.spsrasd.info/en/2024/11/03/6122.html> - In November 2024, UK Under-Secretary of State for the Middle East, Hamish Falconer, reaffirmed the UK's long-standing support for the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination during a parliamentary debate. Falconer emphasized the UK's alignment with UN-led peace efforts for Western Sahara and its commitment to a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution. He noted that the UK would not publicly comment on Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan but expressed openness to any solution that respects the Sahrawi people's rights and garners broad support. Falconer also addressed concerns about humanitarian conditions in Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria, highlighting the UK's ongoing support through the UN.