Fact-Finding Missions to the Sahrawi Refugee: Since 1993, DFF has organized over 50 trips for hundreds of American citizens to visit the Sahrawi refugee camps. These missions have been composed of key Congressional staff members, journalists, leaders of Christian humanitarian organizations, and other non-governmental organizations. Nearly every American who has become involved in the Western Sahara issue was first inspired through these fact-finding missions.

DFF’s U.S.-Western Sahara Foundation Promotes Awareness, Action: DFF established the U.S.-Western Sahara Foundation in 1999 with a distinguished Board of Advisors including the late Congressman Donald Payne, Congressman Joseph Pitts and former MINURSO Deputy Chairman Ambassador Frank Ruddy. The purpose of the Foundation is to raise awareness of the issue of the Western Sahara and the need for a free and fair referendum and provide a network for individuals and organizations that support the Sahrawi people. The U.S.-WS Foundation has led letter writing campaigns, petition drives, humanitarian aid projects, and other grassroots activities. Currently, the Foundation has an international campaign underway calling for the release of the Sahrawi political prisoners and for the referendum to be held in 2015.

Congressional Briefings, Forums and Special Events on Capitol Hill: DFF has also helped organize Congressional hearings on the Western Sahara and seven Capitol Hill forums. Speakers have included Sahrawi President Mohamed Abdelaziz and Ambassador Mouled Said, Ambassador John Bolton, former MINURSO Deputy Chairman and DFF Board Member Ambassador Frank Ruddy, and Aminatou Haidar. DFF has also organized four Congressional Receptions to focus attention on the Western Sahara issue including one honoring the Noble Peace Prize nomination of Sahrawi Republic President Mohamed Abdelaziz.

Testimony Before the United Nations’ IV Committee: DFF has personally testified and also regularly organized others to testify before the United Nations IV Committee (Decolonization Committee) on Western Sahara self determination.

Sahrawi Human Rights Advocate Aminatou Haidar Wins Civil Courage Prize and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Awards: As a result of the nomination by Suzanne Scholte of the Defense Forum Foundation, Aminatou Haidar won two prestigious international awards: the Train Foundation’s Civil Courage Prize and the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. Haidar is known as the Sahrawi Ghandi for her peaceful efforts advocating for Western Sahara self-determination in occupied Western Sahara. She was one of the “disappeared” Sahrawis jailed in Morocco’s black prisons.
Western Sahara: Did You Know?

Western Sahara is the only colony in Africa that has not been de-colonized; once a colony of Spain known as Spanish Sahara, it was invaded by Morocco, a former colony of France, in 1975, and currently Morocco occupies most of Western Sahara.

The Sahrawi people, the indigenous people of Western Sahara, have strived for over 40 years for the right to vote on self-determination which was first promised by Spain in 1974; reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice in 1975 (the day Morocco invaded their country); and promised by the United Nations (UN) in 1991.

Sahrawis have adopted a constitution guaranteeing the right to vote for all citizens 18 years of age; equal rights for women; a free market economy; religious freedom; and elected government. They have run their refugee camps utilizing a democratic system with elections for their leaders.

The Sahrawis, a Muslim people, renounce all forms of terrorism and instead have relied on the rule of law and peaceful demonstrations to achieve their right to self-determination.

Most Sahrawis, approximately 165,000, live in refugee camps outside Tindouf in western Algeria where they fled when Morocco invaded; Despite the harsh conditions in the refugee camps the Sahrawi people have achieved an over 90% literacy rate making them the most educated African people group.

There are also Sahrawis living in Moroccan-Occupied Western Sahara who have disappeared, been tortured and killed for peacefully advocating for self-determination according to reports by the U.S. State Department, Freedom House, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the World Organization Against Torture, and Reporters without Borders. Because of the repression of the Sahrawis, Freedom House has annually designated Moroccan-Occupied Western Sahara as one of the world’s ten worst regimes.

“The right to self-determination was a principle upon which our nation was established, and any effort to deny it to the Sahrawi would be inconsistent with our values and international commitments.”

Congressman Joseph Pitts
Founding Board of Advisors of DFF’s U.S.–Western Sahara Foundation

“At this time in history, it is more important than ever to show the world that non-violence, reliance on the rule of law, and trust in the UN — the approach the Sahrawis have employed — are the way forward. If the UN fails to uphold justice and its promises to the Sahrawis, it instead sends a terrible message to the world that invasion, occupation, extrajudicial execution, and violence — the methods Morocco has employed — are the way forward. What a terrible message to send when the world is gripped in conflict with those who employ terrorism to achieve their ends.”

Suzanne Scholte
Chairman, U.S.–Western Sahara Foundation

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To support our efforts for the Sahrawi people and self-determination for Western Sahara, please send contributions to:
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or via paypal at www.defenseforumfoundation.org