



SADC Solidarity Conference

with the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)/Western Sahara

▶ 25 – 26 March 2019,
Pretoria, South Africa

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Newsletter

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The SADC Solidarity Conference with the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)/Western Sahara, kicked off in Pretoria this morning.

SADC Solidarity Conference kicks off in Pretoria



South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Lindiwe Sisulu, welcomes delegates to South Africa.

About the SADC Solidarity Conference

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is hosting a solidarity conference with the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)/Western Sahara in Pretoria from 25 – 26 March 2019 at the level of Heads of State and Government.

It is expected that the Conference will, on 26 March, bring together the 16 SADC Heads of State and Government; the President of the SADR; Heads of State and Government of like-minded countries, such as Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria and Uganda; the Chairperson of the African Union (AU); the Chairperson of the AU Commission; invited guests from Europe; the Americas; the Caribbean; Asia Pacific as well as other guests including representatives of civil society, academia and political formations.

The conference aims to renew SADC's solidarity with the Saharawi people and will reiterate that the solution to the question of Western Sahara should be based on the principle of self-determination and decolonisation, through the holding of a referendum.

The Conference is preceded by a meeting of SADC ministers, representatives of civil society, political formations and other invited guests which commenced this morning in Pretoria.

According to a press statement released by the SADC, "SADC's collaboration on and with Western Sahara has been informed by the region's own decolonisation experiences and the quest for liberation and self-determination.

The Solidarity Conference is expected to conclude with the adoption of a SADC Regional Strategy and a Declaration which will, among others, establish mechanisms to engage relevant stakeholders and partners, including Morocco, to observe the spirit of the African Union decisions and United Nations resolutions in order to expedite the resolution of the Western Sahara matter"

Minister Lindiwe Sisulu welcomes delegates

South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Lindiwe Sisulu, welcomed delegates to the ministerial session of the SADC Solidarity Conference.

The Minister said: "I am glad that this conference is happening in South Africa, the most recently decolonised on the continent. It serves to remind us of what we have always believed, that until the last colony, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic is decolonised, none of us are truly free."

"On behalf of the host country, I welcome you all, in particular those representing the people of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. We are glad we have finally come together here in the land of Nelson Mandela to pledge the solidarity of the peoples of SADC. The progressive people of our country out there are extremely excited about this event and I hope it is televised and streamed to all of them so that they can feel part of this occasion."

The Minister said the Conference was a clear demonstration of the international solidarity with the Saharawi people in their quest for self-determination.

"Over the next two days, SADC hopes to come up with concrete steps in which to strengthen and support the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

"Most of us here have attained our freedom, strengthened and assisted by the solidarity of people who cared about our plight. We knew that every country has an inalienable right to independence and self-determination, consistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and applicable UNSC resolutions as well as the relevant decisions of the African Union and its predecessor the Organisation of the African Unity (OAU).

"As we gather here today for a just cause, we note with sadness that the Saharawi people are still fighting for their inalienable right to self-determination and for far too long. This notwithstanding the various attempts that have been made by our continental community, mainly by the African Union (and its predecessor the OAU) as well as the United Nations which has long decided that there must be a referendum in Western Sahara.

"The year 2019 marks 28 years since the signing of the Western Sahara ceasefire agreement, yet the Saharawi people have, year-in-year-out since then been denied the opportunity of holding a referendum to decide their future.

"The Saharawi people are not asking for something impossible, but, a right to self-determination so that they can take responsibility for their own destiny. They do so because they have a right to it like any other nation in the world. A right that has been recognised in terms of International law since 1975 when the International Court of Justice provided an advisory note in which it did not recognise Morocco's claim to this land. Since then there has been a myriad of international resolutions and court judgements that have recognised the Saharawi people's right to self-determination. The time has come to allow them to exercise their legitimate right to self-determination through a referendum!"

The Minister wished all delegates success in their deliberations and for the conference to provide concrete support to the people of Saharawi.

"Let them leave this conference with a lighter burden and the knowledge that we are fully behind them."

Follow the conference on social media #SADCSaharawiSolidarity.

WATCH LIVE

<https://youtu.be/a5ti92dTlrQ>

Chair of SADC Ministerial Council delivers her opening address

In her opening statement, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, and Chair of the SADC Council of Ministers, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah expressed her deepest thanks and appreciation to South Africa for the warm welcome extended to all and for having availed the venue for the conference.

She thanked the ministers, invited guests and other delegates from all over the world for taking the time to express solidarity with Polisario and the people of Western Sahara.

"As a child and product of our national liberation struggle, I can only say with confidence that it is such solidarity that sustained us during our protracted struggle. In this context, this Conference may be considered as a small measure in the scheme of things. However, it is extremely important, as it will make an immeasurable contribution in the process of consolidating peace on the continent of Africa and by extension the world at large."

"We know it very well that with assistance from the International Solidarity we have obliterated colonialism and apartheid from the Southern African region, where it was more entrenched. We thank the International Solidarity for the unreserved support to us during the time when we were fighting for the liberation of our respective countries. It was the sacrifices made by the people in Southern Africa complemented by the international support and solidarity that brought about the implementation of numerous Resolutions of the UN and the then OAU, resulted into our freedom and independence.

"As a continent we should not talk of illegal occupation in this century having defeated all the colonial powers. We welcome the engagements between the Polisario Front and Morocco being facilitated by the United Nations Secretary General envoy for Western Sahara, Horst Koehler, a former German President.

"Those diplomatic engagements are very imported and we call on both parties to take them serious. Both Western Sahara and Morocco are members of the AU and as children of the same house they must stay at peace with one another like all members of the AU.

Minister Nandi-Ndaitwah called upon delegates to support the plight of the Saharawi people "just as we were supported during the dark days of our liberation struggle".



Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of Namibia as Chairperson of the SADC Ministerial Council delivers her opening remarks.



In pictures



Mohamed Salem Ould Salek, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic delivers remarks.



South African International Relations and Cooperation Deputy Minister, Lluwelyn Landers during an interview with the SABC's Morning Live.



Arrival of the President of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, His Excellency President Brahim Ghali at Waterkloof Airforce Base on 24 March 2019, ahead of the SADC Solidarity Conference with Western Sahara. He was welcomed by Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Lluwelyn Landers.

