



NEWSLETTER ISSUE N° 9
APRIL 2009

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Timeline of the conflict
in the western Sahara

Interview of Medhi Bouaziz
TGH's head of mission

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Mr. Bouhabini Yahia

Salaam alekum !

News in Brief

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Refugees camp of Aoussert

The history of the Western Sahara is strongly connected to the ones of its neighbours, especially Morocco and Mauritania. The definitive status of this former Spanish Colony did not find any legal solution yet, more than 30 years after the departure of Spanish administration. Here is a more detailed historical fact sheet about this conflict, from the 60's to nowadays

1965

Resolution 2072 of the UN General Assembly: the Sahara appears on the list of regions to decolonize (resolution 1514 on the right to self-determination of colonized peoples)

May 10, 1973

Creation of the Polisario Front, the popular front for the Liberation of Saguia El Hamra and Rio de Oro, that demands independence

1975

The International Court of Justice in The Hague rejects Morocco and Mauritania's alleged "historical claim" on Western Sahara

November 6, 1975

The Green march: 350,000 Moroccan civilians invade Saharawi territory.

November 14, 1975

Madrid Accords signed by Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania asserting Spain's withdrawal by 28 February 1976 and the division of territory between Rabat and Nouakchott

February 27, 1976

Polisario Front declares the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)

August 5, 1979

Mauritania and Polisario sign a peace agreement, in Algiers, by which Mauritania renounces its claim to the Western Sahara. Moroccan forces annex the area left by the Mauritanian army

1981

Construction of an approximately 2,700 km-long defensive wall to separate Polisario-controlled sections and Saharawi refugees (in exile in Tindouf) from the rest of the Saharawi population

November 12, 1984

Morocco leaves the Organisation of African Unity following admission of the SADR at the Addis Ababa summit

August 30, 1988

The UN brokers a peace plan that both protagonists accept: a ceasefire, the organization of a referendum on self-determination and the deployment of a peacekeeping mission, MINURSO

1991

The UN Security Council unanimously approves the settlement of the Saharawi population (74,000 people)



Refugees camp of Dakhla

September 6, 1991

The ceasefire goes into force and MINURSO established to ensure the plan is respected

1997

Former US Secretary of State James Baker nominated United Nations Special Representative to resolve the dispute between Moroccans and Saharawis regarding the issue of the electoral body authorized to decide upon the territory's future

June 2001

Plan Baker I rejected by the Polisario and Algeria

January 2003

Plan Baker II calls for the holding of a referendum on self-determination after a four-to-five-year period of internal self-governance. Rejected by Morocco

July 2005

Peter Van Waslum nominated personal envoy of the UNSG

April 2007

Presentation of the Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara to the United Nations. Adoption of resolution 1754

June 2007

First round of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front, in the presence of neighboring states Algeria and Mauritania, in Manhasset (New York).

August 2007

Second round of negotiations

October 2007

Adoption of resolution 1783: mandate of Minurso extended until April 30, 2008, to organize the referendum of Western Sahara

April 2008

Adoption of resolution 1813 : mandate of Minurso extended until April 30, 2009, to organize the referendum of Western Sahara

January 14, 2009

Christopher Ross nominated Special Envoy of the UNSG



Interview of Medhi Bouaziz, TGH's head of mission

By Véronique Valty - Triangle G H's member of the board of directors

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Medhi Bouaziz, TGH's head of mission for almost five years, speaks with great passion about his work in the field and the strong links that have grown between TGH teams, the Saharawis, Algerians and expats, local institutions and Saharawi authorities.

Triangle has a long history with the Saharawi people...

Indeed, Triangle G H started working with the Saharawi refugees back in 2000. First, with a programme to support disabled people, then with the construction and equipment of centers for the disabled. The partnership launched in 2000 with the UNHCR¹ is still running in several programmes. Initially, it wasn't easy for TGH to position itself in the camps; much perseverance, work and listening skills were needed. Today, we are truly recognized and appreciated with programs that definitely improve the lives of people who, despite multiple efforts, have been living in difficult conditions.

Triangle G H projects for disabled people



Sewing workshop

Joinery workshop

Weaving workshop

What is the current status of the programmes?

We are continuing our « historical » work with disabled people through the management of 3 centers that we built, where education and vocational training are available. In addition, we've extended the micro-credit project to three other camps : Aousserd, El Ayoun and Smara. The micro-credit project establishes stalls selling basic goods. The income generated helps support disabled people and their families.

We are still managing the mechanical workshop (launched in 2002) catering to water and goods supply trucks, ambulances and vehicles used by NGOs working for the UNHCR, e.g. a total fleet of 78 vehicles. The highly professional workshop now employs 20 people. In 2003, TGH had the idea of building a bleach-making center to serve the camps' hospitals and health centers, and for consumption water. The bleach scheme now employs 4 people in Rabouni. In 2008, with 8000 liters of raw material, we made 35,400 liters of bleach. We also ensure management and maintenance of the UNHCR's base in Rabouni and Dakhla, we supply **consumable goods, radiology and stomatology equipment, medication, laboratory products, and manage remuneration of the health teams** (31 health professionals). Since 2005, for the 4th year, we are partnering with ECHO² on various projects: for instance, distribution of hygiene kits (soap, shampoo, washing powder, sanitary towels) to 38,000 women (4 distributions planned till August 2009) in Aoussert, El Ayoun, Dakhla, Smara and « 27 février » camps.

Triangle G H projects



Mechanical repair workshop

Bleach production unit

Distribution of hygiene kits

How do you imagine the mission's future?

How do you imagine the mission's future?

We are like a small firm now, with 40 local employees and 3 expatriates. Ever since we started working here, TGH has aimed to empower the local workforce's skills, particularly by giving project management to Saharawi people. Thanks to the bonus system that we distribute to staff in the centers for the disabled and the health centers, over 80 people are directly involved in TGH funding. It's difficult to describe the future, but in strictly humanitarian terms, I've seen the situation improving over the years. Our presence in the camps has a material impact, but it also affects each stakeholder – and that is priceless.

¹The UN Refugee Agency

²European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office

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Interview of the President of the Saharawi Red Crescent, Mr. Bouhabini Yahia

By Alexandra Harkay - Administrator Triangle G H / Algeria

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Mr. Bouhabini Yahia

When and in what circumstances was the Saharawi Red Crescent (SRC) created?

The Saharawi Red Crescent was created on November 26, 1975, just after the Moroccan invasion of Saharawi territories. It was an initiative of Saharawi militants and citizens. At that time, many families had left their homes and had scattered in the desert. The idea of founding the SRC came from the need to respond to the humanitarian crisis. So, like the creation of the ICRC¹, it was driven by circumstances. Back then, we had few available people and scarce means. All we could rely upon was the determination of Saharawi volunteers. We lacked experience regarding organisation and management of humanitarian relief, and we faced many hurdles: the first was the lack of means. The second was the world's unawareness about the humanitarian crisis hitting the Western Sahara.

What were your first actions?

In the face of the humanitarian crisis, we started by uniting families that had been displaced in the desert and organizing their voyage away from the battle field to neighbouring Algerian Sahara. We installed the first camp near the border between the Sahara, Mauritania and Algeria. Tragically, that camp was targeted by Moroccan and Mauritanian bombs which fuelled the displaced people's fear of re-grouping. We had to overcome that issue.

Having reached the Algerian Sahara, we then had to create the minimum conditions to live there. It was a harsh experience because Algeria had never, since its independence, received so many refugees – and in such a remote location, far from the capital, ports or major towns. We were 1700km away from the closest port (Oran), virtually without any roads. Logistically speaking, it was very hard to transport humanitarian aid. In addition, the UN only arrived in the camps in 1986. Up till then, we only received aid from Libya and Algeria.

We started by looking for places with water and we found some at Rabouni. However, for security reasons, we hadn't grouped everyone in the same place. We found other water points in the areas that would become the camps of Dakhla and Layoune, and we sent some of the families there.

Finding the water wasn't the only issue: we also had to get tank-trucks that could fill the water tanks in each camp. Before we could obtain such resources, the families – particularly women and children – had to walk miles, in the heat, to fetch water. Indeed, with most men away fighting, the women had to perform hard work.

After that, we had to provide the families with the necessary fuel to prepare food. No gas or coal were available so we organised firewood collection campaigns over a 70 to 120km range around the camps.



Saharawi refugees' tents

To face the problem of shelter, we had to find tarpaulins and tents. This difficulty was alleviated by the fact that most Saharawi families are of Bedouin origin and know how to build camps in the desert.

Once we had secured access to water, food and shelter, we created open-air schools and volunteer-teachers started giving classes. As for the health centers, they were just a few tents with little means and medical equipment. Spanish colonization had left us a single Saharawi doctor.

With all this action, we had no time to organise the actual institution, the structure of the SRC or the training of teams. For a long period, we operated thanks to the work of volunteers who were mainly women.

What is the SRC's role/mandate?

We have the same mission as the entire Red Cross and Red Crescent family and share its principles.

In the camps, we have the mission of identifying needs, priorities and coordination of projects in partnership with the Algerian Red Crescent (ARC). We also work to facilitate the relationship between the Saharawi authorities, the

funding agencies and the NGOs.

All the aid for refugees is channelled and directed by the SRC and the ARC. We are particularly involved in distributing food aid: every month 3000 tons of fresh products and basic food is distributed in the camps. Such work demands good logistical organisation and is costly so the SRC's contribution is essential, especially with regards to fuel, transportation and workforce.

We strongly rely on the big Red Crescent network inside the camps: in each wilaya (camp) we are represented by a regional representative, and in the daïras (communes), by local representatives. We also use distribution groups (groupings of 28 to 30 families), with each headed by an SRC representative. We work with the teams in charge of monitoring and post-monitoring which plays an essential role in our analysis and identification of needs.

What is the humanitarian situation in the camps at the beginning of 2009?

The situation of Saharawi refugees is exceptional. For 33 years now we have been living in exile, under tents, in a harsh climate (sand winds, heat), with almost no possibility to run income-generating activities, especially in the agricultural sector.

We must also note that the case of Saharawi refugees is not a priority among donors and the media rarely covers the humanitarian tragedy unfolding here. We are in a situation of silent emergency. In fact, ECHO² qualified the Saharawi situation as a « forgotten crisis ». So, whenever we face an emergency, we are its victims.

It is sometimes difficult for the international community to understand the permanent nature of our crisis. The terms, "permanent emergency" do not exist in the humanitarian language. Yet, the Saharawi refugees' situation is an exception. There is the case of the Palestinian refugees, but a special organisation, the UNRWA³, is helping them. The Saharawi refugees are under the protection of the UNHCR⁴...

At the start of this year, as is the case every year, our main preoccupations are access to water, food and tents. They are generally the problems that affect newcomers in the camps. After 33 years, we still have not managed to solve these problems – although they represent the most basic of needs.

Regarding water, for instance, we can't guarantee the OMS minimum standard of 15 to 20 litres per person and per day because the tank-trucks distributing water are too old and there is only one water tank for 5000 people.

Between 1997 and 2008, 4 nutritional surveys were performed. The last one revealed a high rate of anaemia among women aged between 15 and 45 years, together with high rates of malnutrition and anaemia among infants aged under 5. The situation is alarming: the level of malnutrition in the camps here is the same rate reported in Darfur refugee camps two years ago. This shouldn't happen in a stable situation like ours.

The main cause for high rates of anaemia and malnutrition are lack of food and water. We must recall that for Saharawi refugees, the rations (food ration, for ex.) applied match emergency situation standards, as in natural disasters, but this situation has been running on and on!

From a scientific and nutritional point of view, when we report high rates of anaemia and malnutrition, our situation should be declared a "humanitarian emergency."

As well as the aspects described, we must take into account the global economic and financial problem of which the primary victims are the poor, the refugees, the displaced... we are afraid of 2009. However, the humanitarian organisations and the United Nations are aware of this problem and will do their utmost to avoid crises.

What is your agenda for 2009?

We will multiply contacts with donors, international organisations, NGOs, European civil society and the international community to draw their attention to the situation of Saharawi refugees.

We also plan to conclude the reform program that we implemented 3 years ago in our institution. Our objective is to professionalize our work, adjust to international standards and criteria, and increase the transparency of our programmes.

In the aim of strengthening our capacities, this year we will continue to partner up with the Spanish Red Cross, the Spanish International Cooperation Agency, ECHO, CISP⁵ and the Italian government. In 2009, we will intensify our efforts to accelerate this process.

This year, we launched a reflection group that will study the SRC's history and humanitarian role over 33 years of its existence. The end of these works should coincide with the celebration of our 35th anniversary.

We plan to continue giving women a position of choice and priority: 80% of the local representatives and 50% of the representatives are women. They are elected every 5 years during our general assemblies. To strengthen their capacities, we have implemented training courses about humanitarian project management and information technology.

And in parallel, we will naturally continue our daily work and manage our projects.

What are your relations the NGOs working in the camps, particularly Triangle G H?

The SRC has always paid special attention to NGOs because we consider they play a crucial role in the implementation of humanitarian aid. They are the intermediaries between funding agencies and beneficiaries. They are witnesses in the field.

We have excellent relations with all the NGOs in the camps because, over the years, we have built a relationship of mutual trust. We are very satisfied with the cooperation of NGOs, the UN agencies and the donors.

As for our connection with Triangle G H, it is strong. We have a close dialogue and, thanks to the positive spirit that TGH conveys, we have made progress together. The image of the French NGO is very positive.

Triangle G H runs very useful projects for the refugees (distribution of hygiene kits, centers for disabled people). The NGO has proven its ability to succeed many programs. It has won the trust and respect of funding agencies such as ECHO and the UNHCR, thanks to transparent management and professionalism of teams. At first it wasn't easy, but after all these years, everybody shares this vision.



Triangle G H projects : distribution of hygiene kits

Allow me to say that Triangle G H has also won the trust of the Saharawi authorities – despite the challenge of bridging between donors and the authorities.

We have good relations with Triangle's team and share a similar vision in terms of running programmes, identifying priorities and needs, and future cooperation.

In the camps, what is the contribution of NGOs?

Almost all the NGOs in the camps today have been working here for years and are specialised in an area: distribution of fresh products (Mondubat), Ramadan programme (Oxfam), maternal-infant health (MdM Espagne), distribution and management of medication (MdM Grèce), SRC capacity strengthening and nutritional surveys (CISP), access to water (Solidaridad internacional), etc.

Thanks to their experience in the camps, every NGO has acquired strong skills, in terms of management, identification of needs and priorities, that are specific to our situation. This helps to further strengthen their relationship with SRC.

Thanks to the NGOs, the donor agencies have a deeper understanding of the Saharawi humanitarian crisis. The NGOs also play an important role raising awareness about our situation in the international community. They are powerful witnesses.

Together with the CRE and the ARC, we have all created one big, self-respecting family with complementary actions. Within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Federation, our collaboration can serve as an example of good practices in the field.

Do you wish to add anything?

The political framework must be separated from the humanitarian context. Indeed, the donor agencies and States sometimes make political decisions that are unfavourable to the Saharawi cause, but such choices must not prevent us from helping the victims, the refugees.

I am aware that we are not the only people living on humanitarian crises; but France is one of the largest donors in the world. We are not asking France to give us "everything"... just a very small amount. We are not asking to become a "French priority"... we just need to be recognized.

For the past 4 years, France has failed to contribute to the WFP⁶ basket. The latter had but 6 donors this year: the USA (approximately 20%), the European Community, Spain, Italy, Canada and Switzerland. Other bilateral contributions for the new WFP programme came from Sweden and Norway.

What with the financial and economic crisis, 2009 will be a challenging year.

Geographically speaking, France, like Spain, is very close to our land. It also has many relations with Northern Africa. France is known for its humanitarian principles, its belief in solidarity. So I do not understand why France, who sends aid to distant countries such as Darfur, Central Africa, Afghanistan, Palestinian Territories, etc, fails to contribute to solving the humanitarian crisis lying so close to its door.

¹International Committee of the Red Cross

²European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office

³United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

⁴The UN Refugee Agency

⁵Italian NGO

⁶World Food Program



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News in Brief

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By Alexandra Harkay - Administrator Triangle G H / Algeria

The mission in Algeria: straight from the Saharawi Refugee Camps...

Newsletters are generally an opportunity to give news about programmes, describe project progress and share the mood of the field.

Today, exceptionally, we wish to use the newsletter to introduce our team in Algeria and describe the project people without whom nothing would be possible.

We are proud of having a very multinational team, with certain members representing several different ethnical groups. Algerians (Kabyles, Chaouis, Touaregs) are working with Sahawari refugees from various tribes, French nationals and a Belgian. The mood is good with each of us making the necessary efforts to communicate.

Indeed, while Algerian Arabic is the language spoken by the greatest amount of people here, we must also consider other tongues: Hasaniya (the Sahawari language), Spanish (spoken by most of the refugees) and French. You can imagine the atmosphere at internal coordination meetings !

It may be impossible to find a common language, but we all share the same vision and values : that of supporting the Sahawari refugees, of working with and for them through projects aimed at improving the refugees' conditions of living.



Little boy in the distribution
of hygiene Kits



Inauguration of the
maternity



Notre équipe, chargée de mener à bien les 6 projetsThe team managing the 6 projects in operation this year (/Archives/Francais/html/Nos actions/ Missions humanitaires/Algerie refugeie PEC.html) is made up of about sixty people, the majority of whom are Sahawari refugees. Several are project managers and take part in the general management of the mission.



Triangle G H projects:
distribution of goats



Mechanical repair workshop

While the living conditions are not always easy (we live in tents, in the Algerian Sahara where extreme temperatures are commonplace), we have the fortune of having « hardliners » among us - people who have been working and "growing" here for years and are always ready to help newcomers with advice and know-how.



Sandstorm

Their presence, their unflinching support is the cement of our team. They remind us that even in this challenging Tower of Babel, every problem has a solution, especially when we can count on one another and provide mutual support.

في الوحدة قوة ، Here in the Sahara, we say la union hace la fuerza, l'union fait la force, strength lies in unity...



[Part of the Triangle G H's team](#)

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News about western Sahara

Nomination of Christopher ROSS

In January, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon nominated Christopher Ross as the UN's Special Envoy in the Western Sahara. Ross will act as mediator in the issue between Moroccans and the Polisario Front. Since the mandate of Dutch envoy, Peter Van Walsum, expired last August, the UN had no Special Envoy in the Western Sahara. The Polisario Front, the nationalist, pro-independence, *political and armed movement for the Western Sahara*, welcomed the new appointment, declaring its high expectations in a statement: "The Polisario Front assures Mr. Christopher Ross of its cooperation and all help necessary to finalize the process of decolonization of Western Sahara in line with UN resolutions". The new envoy also seems to please Morocco.

Since the 1991 ceasefire, no solution has been found to end the conflict between the Polisario Front and Morocco. To reach a durable political solution and guarantee the Western Sahara's self-determination, the American diplomat will have to work with both parties and neighboring states. Resolution 1813, adopted by the Security Council, and anterior resolutions will no doubt be the foundations of such work.



[Refugees camp of Dakhla](#)