



'Her father loved me, oft invited me'

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Background

The decolonising process of Western Sahara began in 1963, but it has not finished yet. Spain abandoned the country after the tripartite Madrid agreements of 1975 (rejected by the ONU), giving the territory to Morocco and Mauritania. This resulted in an armed conflict with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Sagula el Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO Front), which lasted from 1975 to 1991 and led to the refugee crisis. In 1976, the POLISARIO Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). In 1979, Mauritania returned the occupied zone to the POLISARIO Front, but Morocco annexed it and built a series of huge, mined walls that divide the territory, leaving the POLISARIO Front in the Western part. The ONU recognised the POLISARIO Front as the representative of the Sahrawi, considering Morocco the occupying Power. The MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) guarded the ceasefire in 1991 and was in charge of preparing a referendum that was supposed to take place in 1992, but which did not occur.

Present

Nowadays, the humanitarian situation is uncertain and, due to the lack of international action, the frustration of the population increases dangerously. The nomad people have been forced to stay in an arid and deserted space with extreme temperatures and scarce vegetation. Most of the camps are in Tindouf (Argelia), an isolated zone, which implies they cannot engage in productive activities. Besides, the food received is limited: baskets that fit the caloric input recommended, but provide insufficient vitamins. This causes the most common illnesses of malnutrition, anaemia, and growth retardation. Additionally, water and electricity are scarce resources, since the very few public infrastructures they own are rather deteriorated. Moreover, funds have decreased riskily over the last few years, mainly because of the European crisis.

Prospect for the young

Concerning the young (approximately 60% of the refugees), although most of them have had university education and are well aware and informed of their situation, they face a static present, unemployment, low wages, and a hopeless future: the camps survive mostly thanks to humanitarian help. Consequently, many join the army to try to solve the conflict by force. Others, however, opt for more diplomatic solutions, such as joining Nova (founded in 2012), a youth association against violence.



Fostering program "Holidays in peace"

- Sahrawi children stay in Spain for two months during the summer so they can find relief from extremely hot temperatures in the Sahara Desert. They see their stay in Spain as a great reward that also serves as a motivation to study.
- Sahrawi children can be taken in by Spanish families despite their family structure (traditional family, single parents, divorced parents, same-sex marriages).
- Thanks to international volunteers, literacy is increasing significantly although there are no official rates provided by UNESCO. Nevertheless, there are numerous initiatives to provide Sahrawi people with education without foreign intervention.
- Murcia is one of the Spanish provinces that joined the Madrasat programme. This programme fosters the inclusion of Sahrawi students in third level education institutions in Spain.
- Over 200.000 people live in refugee camps in Western Sahara, where Sahrawi women are in charge of all aspects of everyday life.
- Nomadic people are characterised by their patience, pacifism and pride. They avoid consuming drugs or alcohol as they could incite violence.
- Western Sahara is the single Arab territory where Spanish is one of the primary spoken languages.

Benefits of the program "Holidays in peace"

For the children

- Avoiding the temperatures in the Saharan desert in summer, which can reach 50° C degrees.
- Improvement in their diet during their stay in Spain. In the camps:
 - 7,5% of women and children (15-50 y.o.) suffer from severe malnutrition.
 - 60% of women have anaemia.
 - Almost 30% of minors exhibit a growth deficit.
- Access to a full medical.
- Getting to know what life is outside the refugee camp.
- Improvement of their second language: Spanish.

For the families

- Understanding more closely the situation a refugee goes through every day.
- Having contact with a completely different culture through the children.

Moreover, this program is a great way to bring visibility to the refugee cause and the problematic of the camps in Tindouf. It gives Spanish families an opportunity to help this collective and express their disagreement with the foreign politics that the government shows towards the Saharawi refugees. In a more general perspective, this program provides more than just an experience for the children and the family. It contributes to the acceptance of a more mobile society, showing the benefits of immigration and the importance of a more diverse society.

Love and integration are at the heart of Othello's line. A reminder of the importance of peaceful times, it epitomises the hospitality that results when two cultures share their history in peace.

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