

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JIM INHOFE  
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50  
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
Tuesday, March 15, 2022**

*To receive testimony on the posture of United States Central Command and United States Africa Command*

*Additional Comments Submitted for the Record*

General Townsend, I want to talk about an issue that I've been following closely for decades – the plight of the people of Western Sahara. Many of my colleagues may not know much about what's been going on in Western Sahara, but it's nothing short of a tragedy.

The fate of the Sahrawi people of Western Sahara has been in limbo since it was decolonized and the United Nations adopted a resolution calling for a referendum on self-determination in 1966. More than five decades later, no referendum has been held, and their destiny has been subjected to broken promise after broken promise by the Moroccan government.

All the Sahrawi people have asked for is the opportunity to decide their own fate – to hold a referendum on self-determination – something the United Nations has endorsed on multiple occasions.

Yet, Morocco has repeatedly failed to live up to its commitments. It's claimed for years that Western Sahara is under its sovereign control – a claim the International Court of Justice flatly rejected in 1975.

Rather than abide by the Court's ruling, Morocco instead attempted to annex Western Sahara by force. After 16 years of conflict, a UN-brokered settlement and ceasefire took effect in 1991, which again called for a referendum.

Yet, here we are. Tens and tens of thousands of Sahrawi people are still living in refugee camps, as they have done for most of their lives, waiting for a resolution. I know, because I've visited with them many times.

I spoke out strongly against the last Administration's decision to recognize Morocco's illegitimate claims of sovereignty over Western Sahara. It was misguided, it overturned decades of consistent U.S. policy, and it alienated a significant number of our African partners.

That's why I sent a letter to President Biden last year with 26 of my Senate colleagues urging him to reverse this decision.

Now members of the Administration are claiming that Morocco is making a good faith effort to reach a mutually acceptable solution between Morocco and Western Sahara. I couldn't disagree more.

Nothing I've seen from Morocco makes me think they're serious about a resolution after blocking one for all of these years. On the contrary, the misguided decision to recognize their sovereignty claims have only rewarded decades of bad behavior.

The United States owes it to the Sahrawi people to honor our commitment, to help ensure the Moroccans live up to theirs, and to see this referendum through. The Sahrawi people deserve the right to freely choose their own destiny.

###