



Congressman Donald Payne

Tenth District - New Jersey

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Contact: Kerry McKenney
(202) 225-3436

Payne Calls for Morocco's Withdrawal from the Last Colony in Africa

Today, Congressman Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, convened the briefing, "Western Sahara – Current Developments and Challenges to Self-Determination." During the briefing, Payne reaffirmed his support for allowing the people of Western Sahara to exercise their right to self-determination.

Since Spain's withdrawal from Western Sahara in 1975, Morocco has tried to exert its control over the territory and its people – the Sahrawi. In the face of a 1975 International Court of Justice ruling which maintained the right of self-determination for the Sahrawi people, Morocco has continued to occupy Western Sahara and has made concerted efforts to repress any attempts by the people to exercise the right to determine their own fate.

"I find the Moroccan government's actions against the Sahrawi people reprehensible," Payne stated. "From the time when it marched into Western Sahara, Morocco has brutally suppressed any attempts at freedom of expression, association and assembly. These human rights abuses are in violation of international law and are morally wrong."

In another attempt to retain control, the Moroccan government recently presented an "autonomy" plan for Western Sahara. This proposal, which would impose Moroccan sovereignty over the territory, does not include any prospects for independence nor does it address the contentious issue of who will be allowed to vote on this referendum.

Payne added, "The United States needs to put pressure on Morocco to allow a referendum to be held. If the Sahrawi people want their country to be integrated into Morocco, then that is what they will choose. We cannot say that we want to promote democracy and human rights elsewhere but not allow the people of Western Sahara that same right. Morocco should withdraw from the Western Sahara and support a free, fair and transparent referendum."

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