

**TO DO!2002**  
**Contest Socially Responsible Tourism**

***Award Winner***

***SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG***

**A Tourism and Social Project  
Of Association Azalay Morocco  
and Azalay e.V. Deutschland  
in  
Zagora, Morocco**

**Represented by the Chairpersons:**

**Abdellah Naji  
and  
Daniela Vogt**

**Rationale for the Award**

**by**

**Klaus Betz**

“Chance is better than a thousand rendezvous.”  
Proverb of the nomadic Saharouis

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Investigations into the candidacy of the SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG took place between December 28, 2002 and January 7, 2003 on location in Morocco. At the request of the Study Institute for Tourism and Development the data concerning the concept and objectives of the project stated in the contest documents could be verified without any problem.

The authorised appraiser proposes that SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG be awarded a TO DO! Prize at the ITB 2003.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The starting point for all considerations is the desire and will of various nomadic peoples in the South Moroccan Sahara to continue with the practice of their century-old nomadic lifestyle in the desert in the future as well. The main proponent of this is the Touareg tribe of “Nouaji”<sup>1</sup> — in the knowledge that they, like all nomadic ethnic groups, are surrounded by societies that have become sedentary and generally show little understanding for these forms of existence. Please refer to previous court rulings on the subject of “Sedentarism vs. Nomadism”, which in the respective conflicts of interest have always been decided in favour of sedentarism (e.g. in Scandinavia, Australia or North America). Furthermore, the jurisdictions of the sedentary societies have always been the ones to decide in the last instance.

The idea of being able to move around freely within a cross-border habitat — without laying any claims to possession of land, houses or water rights — has apparently become unacceptable. Regardless of location. To only want to exercise pasturing rights in a habitat (with a land area of nearly twice the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany) or to engage in trade along the historic caravan routes is an idea that meets with practically no tolerance in the possession-oriented mindset of sedentary societies.

These are the external conditions under which the activities of the Touareg Tribe of Nouaji and its Tourism and Social Project SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG are to be evaluated in the present appraisal. However, the living circumstances of this nomadic tribe are also influenced by three other factors:

First: Since the onset of the Western Sahara conflict in 1975, which has remained unresolved up to the present (see the Foreign Ministry informational materials in the appendix), the border between Morocco and Algeria has been officially closed. As a result, all nomadic tribes in the south of Morocco have been practically cut-off from “their” traditional Trans-Sahara trade route and separated from their relatives in the South — along the 50-day-march salt-caravan route of the south Moroccan M'hamid (near Zagora) up to Timbuktu in Mali.

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<sup>1</sup> The Nouaji traditionally describe themselves as Touareg, whilst the scientific opinion represents the view that Touaregs live only in Lybia, Niger or Mali.

Secondly: A period of drought, which has been continuing for years and is possibly caused by the global climatic changes, is exacerbating the conditions for animal husbandry and pasture farming to a significant extent. Because of the fodder shortage quite a few families go on months-long journeys with their herds, which begin east of the Anti-Atlas mountains and end in the Western Sahara region. This corresponds to a distance of about 1,600 kilometres, approximately equivalent to the stretch from Copenhagen to Geneva.

Thirdly: The construction of a large (water supply dam) reservoir at Ouarzazate (1972-73) has indeed ensured adequate energy supply through hydroelectric power, while also providing a secure water reserve for the populace and tourist operators south of the High Atlas. However, in the course of its further development this measure has had disastrous consequences for the ecological balance of Vallée du Drâa, which is located below the reservoir.

The 1,200 kilometre-long Drâa river is/was originally the longest water artery in Morocco and is fed from various mountain streams in the High Atlas, which form the Drâa river from Ouarzazate. The course of this river now suffers from a water shortage (due to the reservoir at Ouarzazate) and during the year brings sufficient water only for a stretch of about 250 to 280 kilometres. This corresponds to the approximate distance between Ouarzazate and Zagora.

For the Touaregs from the tribe of Nouaji living south of Zagora the water of the Drâa river, which they traditionally see as their ancestral pasturing grounds, has gradually become a rare commodity. In its East-West extension flowing toward the Atlantic Ocean, Vallée du Drâa — or Oued Drâa (Wadi Drâa) as it is called in the area — it frequently dries up at the top. As a consequence, the sparse vegetation is constantly diminishing, giving way to increased desertification<sup>2</sup>.

### **3. THE TOURISM AND SOCIAL PROJECT: SOCIETE RENARD BLEU TOUAREG**

#### **3.1 The Touareg Tribe of Nouaji**

The presence of the Nouaji in the aforementioned region can be traced back approximately 800 years. At least this is as far back as the stories and fables passed on by word-of-mouth go. The tribe has maintained its orally transmitted culture to the present day, and most tribe members are illiterate. The Nouaji — Touareg tribe living at the furthest end of the Western Sahara desert — belongs to the Nomadic Confederation of the "Âaribe" (see 3.2.), which numbers 15,000 people or, expressed in nomadic terms, 1,500 tents. The caravan business and the pasture farming with the dromedaries is the men's job, whilst the women engage in sheep and goat husbandry; everything together comprises the communal property of (large) families.

The Nouaji derive their identity from the grave sanctuary of the tribe's ancestral progenitor "Sidi Naji", who is considered to be a Marabout, or saint. His sanctum - a small mausoleum in the middle of the desert — is believed to have healing properties. Therefore, each year all tribe members gather there in August to consult together and celebrate, but also to heal their sick in this holy place.

Unlike people from sedentary societies, the Nouaji do not view the desert as a "vast empty landscape", but, instead, literally as their living room. Therefore, they have assigned corresponding names and place descriptions to nearly all areas of their extended living habitat. Therefore, precise meetings points can be agreed in the

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<sup>2</sup>Desertification caused by humans/the advance of the desert into previously inhabited habitats.

geographic "nowhere. For example, in "Chegaga", one of the most important crossroads of their migration routes, in the immediate proximity of an immediately recognisable 130-metre-high dune called "Zahar". Not far from there is the 85-metre high dune "L'ebidya". The two together symbolise the story of the "two children of the King" who could not come together, which is also told among the Nouaji.

### **3.2 The Organisation Structure of the Tribe**

The Nouaji have a well structured and basically democratically organised community. "Decided" is only what has been agreed through unanimous consensus by all, and majority decisions are not binding. The smallest political unit is the family. However, several families can already form a so-called fraction (which in turn can send voting delegates to the meetings), whilst several or many fractions represent the tribe. In keeping with the early practices of the large trade caravans, which were essential for survival in earlier times, several tribes jointly formed a Confederation. The Confederation could then co-operate with the other co-operations in the neighbouring southern Sahara countries with a view to ensuring mutual protection for their respective trade caravans between M'Hamid and Timbuktu and successful transport through the desert. The "Âaribe" Confederation includes the Nouaji, the likewise nomadic "Ait Atta" originating from the Berbers, and the "Kaddascha" descendants of the former black slaves as members.

### **3.3 The Communications Infrastructure of the Tribe**

Whenever particularly important or dramatic decisions are to be taken, the tribe convokes a meeting of all assigned representatives at the last town before the desert in M'Hamid within one week. To this end, use is made of the age-old method of giving spoken messages to any passing shepherd, caravan operator, or desert traveller, which they are to tell to anyone they might meet along the way. These in turn ensure that important messages are broadly disseminated from camp to camp within the shortest possible amount of time — and that answers or reactions to the messages are sent back the same way just as rapidly. The tribe of Nouaji maintains ongoing communications and co-ordinates among itself in this way. The information pipeline – self-ironically referred to as "Telefón Arabe" or "Fax Berbér" - relies on the clarity and accuracy of the spoken word up to the present day.

### **3.4 Development Background and Objectives**

Due to the aforementioned conditions the Nouaji knew for a long time that they would have to tap into additional and, most importantly, new sources of income for the members of the tribe. Tourism appeared to be one immediate possibility because numerous privately operating tourism agencies, which allegedly offered (and still offer) unspoiled desert tourism were already established in both Ouarzazate (app. 35 000 inhabitants) and Zagora (app. 25 000 inhabitants). These offers were in the form of Jeep Safaris or dromedary trekking tours on so-called desert highways (staffed by guides clad as nomads, many of whom were not sufficiently experienced). The authentic knowledge of the Touareg remained unused until the Nouaji submitted their first offers of a possible co-operation.

As the appraiser was informed, however, various local travel agencies and a small German operator had already given the nomadic people unfair treatment in previous co-operations. The Nouaji guides or service staff were either poorly paid or not paid at all. The agreed rental fees for the dromedaries and expensive animal feed were not

calculated in, and the desert nomad culture was considered uninteresting. The tribe of Nouaji was thus confronted very quickly by this externally-determined post-colonial tourism, which in their view essentially ran only a "Caravan de Plastique" (plastic caravan) that had little or nothing to do with life in the desert.

This is the situation in which the present chairwoman of Azalay<sup>3</sup> e.V., Deutschland, Daniela Vogt, and the current chairman of Association Azalay Morocco, Abdellah Naji met in 1999. While Daniela Vogt (profession: psychotherapist) was travelling as an initially innocent participant in one such "Plastic Caravan", she became interested in taking a look behind the scenes. In the process she learned from Abdellah Naji — one of the few members of the tribe who could attend school, had finished high school and had later studied anthropology — about the partially dubious circumstances.

The encounter between the two "actors" grew into a professional friendship, which within a year's time led to the formation of the two Azalay associations in Germany and Morocco — with the association objective of contributing to the preservation of the nomadic way of life (see No. 4). Moreover, the Tourism and Social Project SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG<sup>4</sup> was called to life as a "commercially" active subsidiary of the two associations. The stated objective is to "develop ways of assistance for the present and perspectives for the future" for the desert Nomads".

Thus, within a period of three years a large number of activities were created, which can be categorised into two main areas of activity.

### **3.5 Touristic Activities**

SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG offers one-to-two-week desert journeys or camp accommodations (for details on the route, see detailed map on p. 3). All these programmes are provided exclusively under the guidance of tribe members of the Nouaji; in their ancestral area, in keeping with their tradition. The respective holiday group forms a small caravan of sorts, the dromedaries carry the luggage, and the tourists spend the night in sleeping bags under the open sky or - if anyone at all wants to give up the nightly spectacle of the stars - in nomadic tents. In its practice, this is tourism that is fully adapted to the desert biotope, which provides guests with an authentic glimpse into the culture and lifestyle of the Nouaji and enables intercultural understanding among people that extends beyond the confines of the academic. This type of caravan concept is associated with many advantages for the Nomadic guides.

- Through it they can continue to exercise their activity, which they know and highly value. However, instead of transporting salt they now guide people through the desert with inimitable hospitality and care.
- They earn above-average wages relative to their standard of living (see Number 4).
- At these trips, one sooner or later encounters a social project along the way. These have become possible since at least 8 percent of the price of the holiday package is withheld for such purposes. In addition, there are charitable contributions, and it has been possible to get German financing from the development co-operation.

### **3.6 Social Activities**

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<sup>3</sup> Azalay is the name of the salt caravan route from M'hamid to Timbuktu.

<sup>4</sup> "Renard bleu" means: blue desert fox.

Since their formation the German-Moroccan associations have concentrated their activities on:

- the construction of five well installations spread throughout the desert (necessary life-sustaining stations for people and animals),
- imports of medical supplies (e.g. used wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc.)
- the initiatives for treatment of eye diseases (chronic conjunctivitis, cataract),
- support for a family sponsorship programme to help nomadic families which have been forcibly exiled (e.g. due to drought and fodder shortage) to cope with the transition into the sedentary life of the city.

And finally, the largest first-of-its-kind project co-sponsored by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development for:

- the now completed construction of a nomadic school with integrated clinic — amidst the desert area of Chegaga; the best strategic location for the Tribe and the Confederation of the Âaribe, because all families sooner or later go there with their children.

The independence achieved in this way (self-determined tourism, help to self-help in the social sector), has generated significant unrest and resistance in Zagora, particularly among its tourist and political development establishment. One contributing factor is that, at important junctions in the desert, the activities of the two Azalay associations always receive attention because they evoke questions (e.g. among holiday travellers of conventional tourist operators) or create bafflement or amazement, when, for example, the participants in a Jeep Safari organised by Touaregs are politely asked to leave their cars on the road and to journey into the desert by foot instead. Then, they would be bidden a hearty welcome into the hosts' "living room".

#### **4. APPRAISAL**

The comparison of the activities of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG with the TO DO! Criteria for Socially Responsible Tourism resulted in the following appraisal:

##### **Involvement of the different interests and requirements of the local people through participation**

In view of the living conditions in the desert the idea of participation is a basic prerequisite for survival, which in this instance is coupled with the concept of solidarity in practice. Before one can eat oneself, it must be ascertained that one's neighbour also has something to eat. If not, the food is shared. If a Nomad loses his herd, his neighbour gives him animals as a gift, so that he can build up a new herd. As a rule, every passer-by can draw water from a well, regardless of who built it. This also applies for animals of strangers, which are treated as one's own and given water without distinction.

This basic attitude on the one hand, and the aforementioned basically democratic structure of the tribe, on the other hand, warrant consideration of the interests and needs of the people. Therefore, prior to the formation of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG extensive consultations took place among the tribal councils and authorisation was given from the respective fraction delegates assigned by their families.

The current owners, operators and users of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG are practically all Nouaji families in their entirety, which co-operate in the "Âaribe" Confederation with the aforementioned Ait Atta and Kaddascha.

Similar to the principle of fund holdings, the participating family associations bring their available capital-in-kind into the company, for example their valuable dromedaries, their tents, the complete caravan equipment, navigational know-how, and – according to the rotation principle – skilled men who can care for the guests as guides and service staff: from the caravan driver through to the respected “Tea King“ (tea ceremony), baker, and cook, to the “Chamelier“, the camel operator.

Although the Nouaji continue to be nomadic, they have rented a small store office as their meeting point and "permanent address" for SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG in Zagora. There, interested travellers can get information and inquire about the respective tour dates. In the meantime, however, the office of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG has also become firmly established as a meeting grounds and administrative centre of the tribe. The nominal head of organisation is Abdellah Naji, who because of his education, can build a bridge between nomadic tradition and western modernism.

**Contest Criterion:**

***Strengthening the awareness among the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life***

With regard to the risks, as already mentioned, the Nouaji have had enough negative encounters with tourist development, which has put a strain on their economic, social and cultural everyday existence. In the meantime, through the formation of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG, they have taken independent responsibility for trade and through their tourist services finally see a chance of safeguarding their communal values. In the opinion of the appraiser this is the best conceivable approach to transcending the oppression of the opening and development process through active participation in their design.

**Contest Criterion:**

***Participation of a broad local population strata in the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism.***

Due to the involvement of Azalay e.V. Deutschland, at present most of the holiday tourists are from the German-speaking countries. Increasingly, French- and English-speaking tourists are also booking via the Internet. The prices vary in accordance with the programmes and season. The average package price for a two-week holiday is 1,500 Euro (incl. airline ticket, transfers, etc.). Based on the existing advance bookings for the 2002/2003 season, approximately 140 guests are to be expected.

This has the immediate consequence that each time for each tour about twelve men from different tribes of the Âaribe Confederation can be employed, whose wages flows directly back into the family associations (up to 60 or 80 people). The payment corresponds to twice the local daily wage. An oasis worker receives app. 35 Moroccan Dirham (3.50 Euro) per day, guides from conventional travel agencies receive between 4 and 5 Euro per day, at SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG 10 Euro is paid (incl. free food); even in the preparatory stages of a caravan tour (transfer of dromedaries, purchase of food supplies, etc.). In addition, rental fees are paid for the dromedaries used in the tour, which are community family property.

Tourism proceeds have an especially high value from a social perspective. Since 8 percent of the price of the holiday package is transferred to the tribal community, a number of general measures can be financed, together with charitable contributions. Of particularly life-sustaining importance was the construction of five wells, which thanks to the provided funds currently distribute water over the core region of the Âaribe Confederation. (see Map p. 3). An added effect is achieved through family sponsorships by holiday tourists (monthly from 25 Euro), which are used for the especially needy families. In the meantime these families are identified by the two Azalay associations—over the messages from the information pipeline of the tribe and through the office of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG. Thus, support is given to families whose file says: "Family father disabled, no income, live from handouts."

The third and greatest emphasis is the completed construction of the nomadic school in Chegaga (with adjacent clinic) The school building can possibly be opened in the Summer of 2003 (currently the fixtures and furniture are still missing). For this measure the two Azalay associations, i.e. SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG have provided 25,000 Euro of their own funding up to date (one quarter of the construction costs), and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has made a pledge for a contribution of three quarters of the costs, however, only after the Nouaji (for the first time in the history of the tribe) receive the land surrounding the school in the context of a secured ownership transfer— in the middle of the desert. The purpose of the school building is naturally the long-term intention of providing a suitable location where children of the nomadic families can receive an education, acquire knowledge of their own culture and get basic medical care (along with the adults).

In the meantime a strong controversy is being stirred up against the school building which is nearly ready to be occupied. Particularly on the part of the commercial tourism sector in Zagora (which also includes Jeep Safaris in its offering), but also from political development representatives who in unsolicited e-mails to the appraiser have classified the building as a "crystallisation point for further settlements" "with all the negative consequences for the ecology of the region ". No mention is made of the fact that those who have practised a responsibly-sustainable behaviour in the desert have a right to the independent design and development of their future.

Ex.: In the interim a "consensus with the feet" is underway. Even during the exploratory trip of the appraiser various families from the Âaribe Confederation had already registered 55 children (boys and girls) for the new Nomad School. Since then the number has grown to 89 registrations.

#### **Contest Criterion:**

***Assurance of attractive jobs in tourism for the local population by improvement of working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and training***

To be able to work for SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG is already considered to be highly desirable, not only because of the guaranteed wages and fair treatment. Visitors and hosts also enter into encounters as equals, which is of great benefit for all parties involved. Furthermore, as long as the local workers work in their own métier (in the caravan business), they have already attained an optimum level of professionalism, coupled with the customary hospitality and care, which is almost unsurpassed. To this extent, an improvement in the work conditions cannot be considered as a criterion, since the respective work load of the workers is exactly determined by the natural rhythm of caravan life — from sunrise to sundown.



**Contest Criterion:**

***Reinforcement of the local culture and cultural identity of people living in the tourist target areas***

The aforementioned considerations, taken as a whole, are aimed at this criterion or are implicative of its requirements. The safeguarding and strengthening of the nomadic culture *is* the objective of the action (see also association objective of the two German-Moroccan Associations). Independently of this, efforts are already underway to document through voice tape recordings the spoken stories, songs, legends and sayings, which were previously transmitted only by word of mouth. The historic tradition of the nomadic Sahara people is frequently told in poems, which also indicate a complex social structure. Abdellah Naji, nominally Head of Azalay Morocco and Director of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG, wrote his graduate thesis on the "Poems During the (First) Golf War".

**Contest Criterion:**

***Avoidance/minimisation of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in target areas.***

With one or two exceptions, the caravan operators of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG have not reported of any guests who had caused serious social or cultural problems. On the one hand, Azalay e.V. Deutschland provides information regarding customs and traditions prior to the trip and offers tips on behaviour. On the other hand, for most travellers the desert is such an impressively unknown habitat that most guests very quickly recognise the high level of competency of the caravan operators and therefore feel protected. In general there is an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance.

**Contest Criterion:**

***The projects and measures entered into the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility.***

The first thing to be noticed is that almost all employees of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG constantly collect rubbish left behind by the desert guests during the caravan trekking. Empty plastic bottles are especially common. They themselves are organised in such a way, that very little rubbish is generated on their tours, and whatever rubbish there is gets taken away.

The food is almost always prepared with fresh ingredients (local soups, vegetables, salads, potatoes, noodles, goat meat, beef and lamb, winter radishes and fruit), any leftovers are given to the dromedaries in addition to their regular feed. Orange peel is an especially popular "rubbish" among the animals.

The food supplies are kept fresh through the use of a "nomadic refrigerator". This is a container whose interior is kept cool during the day by wrapping wet towels around the exterior-- evaporation principle – at night the cold desert air has the same effect.

Another noteworthy aspect is the careful treatment of the dromedaries. Only animals held in the nomadic families who already know their guides well are used. The careful treatment includes varying their carrying loads to avoid the formation of pressure spots in any of the animals.

**Criterion for Future Sustainability:**

Through which measures/mechanisms is the economic and institutional sustainability of the project guaranteed?

Independently of the seriousness and quality of the work of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG, the institutional sustainability of the new project is still precarious. On the one hand, because in the initial years the entire pool of energy and financial resources was used to alleviate the greatest needs, on the other hand, because Azalay e.V. Deutschland is currently still organising all tours on an honorary basis. This means that the success of the project is currently still dependent on the continued involvement of its two founders, Daniela Vogt and Abdellah Naji. However, both are in the process of introducing appropriate measures. On the Moroccan side further caravan operators have been trained and have already partly taken over this task — so that the entire responsibility does not rest with Abdellah Naji. On the German side negotiations are underway with a smaller travel agency, which is prepared to accept and help promote the objectives of the association — so that Azalay e.V. Deutschland, could spin off the organisation and sales of travel offers of SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG.

**5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The authorised appraiser is not able to make any direct recommendations based on his experiences. He considers SOCIÉTÉ RENARD BLEU TOUAREG's Project to be well-thought out and coherently conceptualised in all its applications and approaches. Except for one consideration which, however, could only become meaningful in the future: The daily camp fires (in the morning and evening) are built mostly from dead wood collected along the way or shortly before a camping stop. In the opinion of the appraiser, this method can be retained only as long as the scope of caravan trekking remains at a manageable level. In the event of an exponential increase in the number of participants a necessity for converting to a kerosene burner might arise. This, however, would have a somewhat negative effect on the ambience.

**6. CONCLUSION**

When 34-year-old Abdellah Naji was asked why he is doing all this, why he puts himself on the line for the welfare of his people day and night, and why he runs himself to the ground, he responded: "The most important thing in life is to help others. Nomads, too, have the right to education and medical help. This is my goal in life. Anyone who loves his country should do everything possible to help develop it."

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**Appendix: The Western Sahara Issue**

(Source: Country-Related Information by the German Foreign Ministry, see "www.auswaertiges-amt.de")

The Western Sahara conflict has to do with the issue of who has the legal right to sovereignty over Western Sahara, ceded by Spain in 1975 through the Madrid Agreement. The International Court of Justice appointed by the United Nations, in an appraisal dated 16 October 1975, indeed established the existence of pre-colonial connections between individual tribes in Western Sahara and the Moroccan sultans. In the opinion of the International Court of Justice

these associations, however, do not give Morocco territorial sovereignty rights over the region of Western Sahara.

Morocco took possession of the region in 1975 through the "Green March". In 1981, King Hassan II declared his readiness to approve a popular referendum of the population of Western Sahara under the auspices of the United Nations. Former General Secretary of the United Nations, Pérez de Cuéllar, formulated a peace plan for the performance of the referendum. Following the acceptance of the plan by Morocco and the POLISARIO in August 1988, an armistice entered into effect, which has been upheld to the present. The onset of the armistice, also marked the start of the activities of units of the UN observers mission MINURSO in Western Sahara. The process of identification of persons eligible to vote was not completed. There are 130,000 appeals against non-authorization to vote. In June 2001, the Security Council of the United Nations supported the proposal of the General Secretary and his special envoy to Western Sahara, James Baker, that Polisario, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania should negotiate a general treaty, providing for extensive autonomy of Western Sahara with accompanying foreign representation by Morocco. At the end of the transition period the resident inhabitants of Western Sahara are to decide on the final status. These proposals were rejected by the Polisario and Algeria. In a report of the United Nations Security Council at the beginning of 2002, the General Secretary of the United Nations named four possibilities for dealing with the conflict :

- Resumption of the Efforts towards a Referendum
- Political Negotiation Solution
- Division of Western Sahara
- Withdrawal of the United Nations

At present, the parties have not reached any agreement on any one of these models. The mandate of MINURSO was conditionally extended until January 2003.

Germany's commitment to finding a solution for the conflict has been comprised in sending MINURSO staff in the mid-1990s and diplomatic efforts for the release of the last imprisoned Polisario fighters in Morocco in 1996.

At present, 1,260 Moroccans are prisoners of the Polisario, some for over twenty years; the release of these prisoners is contingent on a general agreement. Diplomatic efforts on the Spanish side led to the release of 115 prisoners in January 2002. In June 2002, the release of another 101 prisoners was negotiated through German diplomatic channels.