

the conditions on the ground for most Sahrawis remained poor.

Western Sahara was ruled by Spain for nearly a century until Spanish troops withdrew in 1976, following a bloody guerrilla conflict with the pro-independence Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario Front). Mauritania and Morocco both ignored Sahrawi aspirations and claimed the resource-rich region for themselves, agreeing to a partition in which Morocco received the northern two-thirds. However, the Polisario Front proclaimed an independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and continued its guerrilla campaign. Mauritania renounced its claim to the region in 1979, and Morocco filled the vacuum by annexing the entire territory.

Moroccan and Polisario forces engaged in a low-intensity armed conflict until the United Nations brokered a ceasefire in 1991. The agreement called for residents of Western Sahara to vote in a referendum on independence the following year, to be supervised by the newly established UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). However, the vote never took place, with the two sides failing to agree on voter eligibility.

Morocco tried to bolster its annexation by offering financial incentives for Moroccans to move to Western Sahara and for Sahrawis to move to Morocco. Morocco also used more coercive measures to assert its control, engaging in forced resettlements of Sahrawis and long-term detention and “disappearances” of pro-independence activists.

In 2004, the Polisario Front accepted the UN Security Council’s Baker II plan (named after former UN special envoy and U.S. secretary of state James Baker), which called for up to five years of autonomy followed by a referendum on the territory’s status. However, Morocco rejected the plan, as it could lead to independence, and in 2007 offered its own autonomy plan.

Because the Polisario Front remained committed to an eventual referendum on independence, the two sides failed to make meaningful progress in several rounds of talks that started in 2007 and continued through 2009. Also in 2009, some UN Security Council members expressed concern about the human rights situation and proposed that the council consider expanding MINURSO’s mandate.

#### POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

As the occupying force in Western Sahara, Morocco controls local elections and works to ensure that independence-minded leaders are excluded from both the local political process and the Moroccan Parliament.

Western Sahara is not listed separately on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, but corruption is believed to be at least as much of a problem as it is in Morocco.

According to the Moroccan constitution, the press is free, but this is not the case in practice. There is little in the way of independent Sahrawi media. Moroccan authorities are sensitive to any reporting that is not in line with the state’s official position on Western Sahara, and they continue to expel or detain Sahrawi, Moroccan, and foreign reporters who write critically on the issue. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that in October 2009, plainclothes police told two Morocco-based Spanish journalists to leave the El-Aaiun home of Sidi Mohamed Dadach, who heads the Committee to Support Self-Determination in Western Sahara (CODAPSO). Online media and independent satellite broadcasts are largely unavailable to the impoverished population.

Nearly all Sahrawis are Sunni Muslims, as are most Moroccans, and Moroccan authori-

ties generally do not interfere with their freedom of worship. There are no major universities or institutions of higher learning in Western Sahara.

Sahrawis are not permitted to form independent political or nongovernmental organizations, and their freedom of assembly is severely restricted. As in previous years, activists supporting independence and their suspected foreign sympathizers were subject to harassment in 2009. HRW, which has documented several violations, reported that Moroccan authorities referred seven Sahrawi activists to a military court in October after charging them with harming state security; there were no verdicts at year’s end. Moroccan officials appear to be particularly wary of Sahrawis who travel abroad to highlight the plight of their people and argue for independence. According to HRW, police in October 2009 began breaking up visits by foreign reporters and human rights activists to the homes of Sahrawi activists, rather than simply monitoring them; the police said the visits required clearance from Moroccan authorities.

Among Sahrawi activists themselves, HRW documented the case of Naama Asfari of the Paris-based Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Western Sahara (CORELSO), who has been detained and harassed on numerous occasions over the years. In August 2009, he was sentenced to four months in jail after an argument with a police officer over the Sahrawi flag that Asfari had on his keychain. Asfari’s cousin, who was with him during the encounter, was also sentenced to jail time. In another high-profile case, activist Aminatou Haidar, head of the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA), returned in November to Western Sahara from the United States, where she had received a human rights award. She indicated on her reentry paperwork that she lived in Western Sahara, and when she refused to change the document to indicate Morocco, she was detained and eventually deported without a passport to Spain’s Canary Islands. Haidar was able to return home in December 2009 after a month-long hunger strike and considerable diplomatic pressure, but the authorities continued to monitor her and restrict her movements.

Sahrawis are technically subject to Moroccan labor laws, but there is little organized labor activity in the resource-rich but poverty-stricken territory.

International human rights groups have criticized Morocco’s record in Western Sahara for decades. A highly critical September 2006 report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights—intended to be distributed only to Algeria, Morocco, and the Polisario Front—was leaked to the press that October. The human rights situation in the territory tends to worsen during periods of increased demonstrations against Moroccan rule. The Polisario Front has also been accused of disregarding human rights.

Morocco and the Polisario Front both restrict free movement in potential conflict areas. Morocco has been accused of using force and financial incentives to alter the composition of Western Sahara’s population.

Sahrawi women face much of the same cultural and legal discrimination as Moroccan women. Conditions are generally worse for women living in rural areas, where poverty and illiteracy rates are higher.

5TH ANNIVERSARY OF HURRICANE KATRINA

### HON. ANH “JOSEPH” CAO

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, July 30, 2010*

Mr. CAO. Madam Speaker, August 29th of this year will mark five years since the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Gulf Coast. Tragically, 1,822 lives were lost in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and Alabama.

As a result of what was one of the greatest disasters this nation has ever seen, more than 1.2 million people were under some type of evacuation order, 3 million were left without electricity for weeks, and hundreds of thousands were left jobless.

Yesterday, with the support of the members from the Louisiana delegation, I introduced a resolution observing the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina’s landfall.

This resolution honors and remembers the lives lost on that fateful day. It also salutes the dedication of those who responded in our darkest hour and those who have stood by our sides during our recovering and rebuilding. We simply could not have done it without the thousands who answered the call and recognized our need. Our rebuilding continues and we take each new challenge one day at a time. We are strong, and we will recover.

On behalf of my constituents in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes and all those across Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, I thank the American people for their generosity and support.

HONORING THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 19TH AMENDMENT

### HON. MARIO DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, July 30, 2010*

Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Madam Speaker, next month the United States celebrates the 90th anniversary of women’s suffrage. On August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment gave women in the United States the right to vote, and for 90 years, women have been actively participating in the democratic process.

The battle for women’s suffrage was not an easy one. It took the courage and steadfast leadership of trailblazers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and all the women who gathered at Seneca Falls so many decades ago and began advocating for the right to express their views and let their voices be heard at the ballot box.

As we celebrate this important anniversary, I urge women across our great nation to continue taking an active role in the democratic process and politics, and to exercise their right to vote, as they have for so many years.

In March, the House celebrated Women’s History Month and remembered the accomplishments of women in our nation and around the world. August 26th allows us yet another opportunity to celebrate the history of American women and their accomplishments. Today women everywhere are breaking barriers and reaching new heights not only in the political arena, but also the business world,