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For Immediate Release

Latest Appropriations Bill Continues US Support for Morocco's Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara

Washington, DC, May 5, 2017, Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) — The FY 2017 Appropriations Bill passed by Congress and signed Friday by President Trump requires that "funds appropriated under title III of this Act" for Morocco "shall be made available for assistance for the Western Sahara," thereby reinforcing longstanding US policy to support a negotiated solution to the dispute over the region based on autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.

As was the case last year, the final report accompanying the bill noted this policy and gave further clarification to the provision of the law:

[The Morocco subsection] is similar to language in prior years requiring that funds made available for assistance for Morocco shall also be made available for any region or territory administered by Morocco, including the Western Sahara. The Committee recommendation includes not less than the request for Morocco in title III of this Act and makes funds available for assistance for any region or territory administered by Morocco, including the Western Sahara. The Committee expects funds to support democratic reforms and economic development. The Committee remains concerned by the failure to resolve the longstanding dispute over the Western Sahara and the protracted refugee situation in the Polisario camps near Tindouf, Algeria. The Committee believes that the Secretary of State should pursue a negotiated settlement to the dispute, consistent with United States policy to support a solution to the issue based on a formula of autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty. These redoubled diplomatic efforts can lead to a realistic and lasting settlement, the completion of a UN Peacekeeping mission that has existed for more than twenty years, and a more stable region. The Committee also encourages the Administration to support private sector investment in the Western Sahara. The Committee recommendation includes a requirement to consult with the Committees on Appropriations on all of these issues not later than 45 days after enactment of this Act.

The past three US administrations – Clinton, Bush, and Obama – and strong bipartisan majorities in Congress have supported autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty for Western Sahara. In a Joint Statement after King Mohammed VI's 2013 visit to Washington DC, the King and President Obama pledged a "shared commitment to the improvement of the lives of the people of the Western Sahara," and over the past several decades, Morocco has invested billions of dollars in economic and social development in the area.

The 2017 bill also calls for the Secretary of State to consult with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Executive Director of the World Food Programme and, within 45 days, "submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations describing steps taken to strengthen monitoring of the delivery of humanitarian assistance provided for refugees in North Africa, including any steps taken to

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ensure that all vulnerable refugees are receiving such assistance.”

Tens of thousands of Sahrawi refugees are currently living in abject conditions in Polisario-run refugee camps in southwestern Algeria. Though the UN and other organizations have repeatedly called on Algeria and the Polisario to conduct a refugee registration in the camps to better ensure accountability and delivery of humanitarian aid, Algeria and the Polisario have refused, and in 2014 Agence France-Pressé revealed that the European Union’s Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) had documented “well-organized, years-long” embezzlement by the Polisario of humanitarian aid designated for Sahrawi refugees. On April 28, the UN Security Council voted to renew for another year the UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO), again “reiterating its request for consideration of a refugee registration in the Tindouf refugee camps and emphasizing efforts be made in this regard.”

“The 2017 Appropriations Bill unequivocally enforces longstanding US policy on the Western Sahara issue, and helps to ensure that the humanitarian aid we provide benefits the people living in the camps rather than lines the pockets of the Polisario leadership,” said Executive Director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy Jordan Paul. “But as importantly, it supports Morocco—our oldest ally, and sets the stage for finally reaching resolution on a conflict that has gone on for far too long.”

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The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials, and interested publics in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East.

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