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**Jens Holm, Member of Parliament, Sweden, the Left Party**

[www.jensholm.se](http://www.jensholm.se)

### **The Swedish recognition of Western Sahara**

#### **Senate, Paris, France**

Dear all. Thanks to the organizers for inviting me. Thank you to all of you in this audience for talking your time to listen to me.

The 5th December last year the Swedish Parliament, *the Riksdagen*, voted for a recognition of Western Sahara. Literally the decision was the following:

“We urge the government to as soon as possible recognize the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic (SADR) as a free and sovereign state. Sweden should also work for this to be accomplished within the European Union.”

Furthermore the decision lifts other important aspect about Western Sahara, such as:

- a) That Morocco has occupied Western Sahara since 1975 and that the future of Western Sahara must be solved in a free and fair referendum.
- b) To urge the government to work for an extension of the mandate of United Nation force, MINURSO, so that MINURSO also should monitor the human rights situation in Western Sahara.
- c) The parliament acknowledges that Morocco no longer has an active fishing agreement with the EU. Furthermore the parliament reiterates the criticism that the Swedish government earlier put forward when Sweden said *no* to a new mandate for a new fishing agreement. As long as Morocco occupies the territory of Western Sahara they should not be rewarded with a fishing agreement from the European Union.

With this, with Swedish terms, historical decision, I think the Swedish *Riksdag* was the first parliament in Europe that voted for a recognition of Western Sahara. I think that's fantastic and I hope this will be followed by similar decisions in other parliaments.

I should also be mentioned that according to the Swedish constitution and political practice: The *Riksdag* has the full political power, but it is the government that has the executive one. To put it simple: The parliament tells the government what to do, and the government must do it. But it is up to the government to decide *when* to do it. In this matter you can count on that we will follow very closely what the government does. We will do everything we can to keep up the pressure on the government and make sure that the government will implement the recognition of Western Sahara.

Some may say that it is great that that little country up in the far north supports Western Sahara. But it is not until the big powers in the world start to move we'll see some action. It's not until the USA, UK and France do something Western Sahara eventually will be free. Must it really be like that? With all respect to these great nations, but I'm not sure this is entirely correct. After all, how does big changes come around? Remember the anti-apartheid movement. Did that start with the then two big powers; the US or Soviet Union? No, it rather started with small independent countries such as mine that launched boycotts against the regime in South Africa, actively supported ANC and so on. How was it with the Vietnam war? It was *not* the UK, France, neither the Soviet Union that stopped that. Rather a very active opinion, mass movement and also some very brave and independent leaders. The Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was one of them. Who could, a few years back, imagine that the Arabian Spring should start with the protest camp Gdim Izik in the occupied Western Sahara and then continue to Tunisia, and after that become a great dynamic revolution in the whole region?

It is like when I ran the Sahara Marathon two years ago. A long fantastic race through the refugee's camps in southern Algeria. I started with one meter, and then one more. And eventually I had done my 42 150 meters. What ends up big and great almost always starts in what is small and modest. I think it is the same with the recognition of the Western Sahara.

So lets hope that the books of history in the future will tell us about the liberation of Western Sahara. It started with the recognition of Western Sahara in one parliament in a country up in the most frozen corner of Europe. It spread to its the neighbours, Norway, Finland and Denmark who also decided to recognize Western Sahara. Soon more countries in Europe did the same. And eventually the pressure on the big countries such as UK, Spain and France grow to big. They also recognized Western Sahara. Utopic? I think we can make it happen.

Yes, now we in Sweden wait for more parliament to follow our example. Let's recognize Western Sahara as a sovereign state.

Thank you for your patience.

**Jens**