

# Support for a Census in the Polisario-Run Refugee Camps in Algeria

- Tens of thousands of [refugees](#) have been sequestered in refugee camps in southwest Algeria near the town of Tindouf since 1975. Despite repeated calls from the international community, a census and registration exercise has not been conducted in the camps, leaving the true number of Sahrawis in the camps unknown.
- Since 1991, the United States has provided over \$400 million in assistance to the Sahrawi refugees through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme, and the USAID Food for Peace Program. Absent a census to determine the size of the population, the efficacy of such assistance is unclear. A census is necessary to determine appropriate aid and spending levels.
- A census would better identify the types and levels of relief assistance needed to meet the refugees' needs; improve aid efficiency for donor countries; and limit opportunities for the continued [embezzlement](#) of humanitarian aid by the Polisario leadership.
- A census would allow the registration of refugees and the provision of internationally-recognized documents to improve freedom of movement for those who wish to return to their homes and families in Morocco or start a new life elsewhere.
- The [UN Security Council](#), [UNCHR](#), and the [European Union](#) have all called for a census:
  - Since [2011](#), the UN Security Council has called for a census in the camps as part of the annual renewal of the MINURSO peacekeeping mandate. In 2016, the Security Council [resolution](#) reiterated the “request for a consideration of a refugee registration in the Tindouf refugee camps” and invited “efforts in this regard.”
  - During a [2009](#) visit to the refugee camps, Antonio Guterres, then High Commissioner for Refugees, called for a census in order to improve humanitarian aid effectiveness, noting, "The habitual practice of census conducted in the framework of the humanitarian operations has nothing to do with the political considerations;" rather, it is "a tool for the humanitarian assistance."
  - The European Union, one of the biggest donors to the camps, has increased its calls for a census after a report by the European Union's Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) was leaked in January 2015 by Agence France Presse/[Le Monde](#) documenting that the Polisario engaged in a “well-organized, years-long” embezzlement of humanitarian aid designated for Sahrawi refugees, selling it on the black market for its own personal enrichment.
  - At a budget meeting in [January 2016](#), the European Council emphasized the need for a census to be conducted in the Tindouf camps in order to improve humanitarian conditions there.
- In July 2016, the US House of Representatives' Committee on Appropriations also called for a census in the camps, including the following language in the draft [FY 2017 House Appropriations Bill](#) adopted by the full committee: “The Secretary of State shall take all practicable steps to secure the cooperation

of the Government of Algeria for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to conduct a census of the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria.”

- Chairwoman of the Appropriations subcommittee on State-Foreign Operations Kay Granger stated during the bill markup that “given the significant need for humanitarian assistance around the world the committee should support efforts to ensure the highest level of accountability with respect to refugee and disaster assistance.”

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