



**Massachusetts  
Institute of  
Technology**

# **Model United Nations Conference**

**Background Guide**



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## Letter from the Secretary General

Dear Delegates,

I am very excited to welcome you to Massachusetts Institute of Technology's 17th annual Model United Nations Conference - MITMUNC XVII! After months of planning, training and organizing, we hope this conference will be a new, challenging, and enriching experience for you.

With all the difficulties the world has experienced last year and is currently still experiencing, we still look forward to a brighter future. Building a sustainable future requires a lot of collaboration and effort and we are all hopeful to see that from you, the leaders of tomorrow.

This year, we decided to focus on technology and its impact on our societies and the whole world to test the pros and cons of technological advancement. Tech diplomacy is an important theme that defines MITMUNC XVII, especially with the prevalence of Artificial Intelligence. Technological advancements have paved the way for great and helpful solutions, yet they also opened up space for tech-abuse, which really makes us think, where are we heading? What's next? Dialogue, international relations and collaborations create the backbone of tech diplomacy and we are all looking forward to see your creativity spark during the conference to help implement tech diplomacy around the world, and fight technology-abuse that harms the international community.

Having experienced MITMUNC as a chair, then as a Secretary General, I am humbled and thrilled to guide MITMUNC into its best conference yet. Do not hesitate in contacting me or the secretariat team should you encounter any doubts along the way. I wish you the best of luck!

Sincerely,

Your Secretary General, Jad Abou Ali

For further inquiries, do not hesitate to contact us at [sg-mitmunc@mit.edu](mailto:sg-mitmunc@mit.edu).

**MITMUNC XVII 2025**



## Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

International Court of Justice was created in June 1945 by the Charter of the UN and began work in April 1946. Its headquarters are at the Peace Palace in Hague. The court settles legal disputes submitted to it by States and give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by any of the UN organs and agencies. This MUN committee is highly challenging, but we will make sure it's also an exceptional learning opportunity.

My name is Lama Diriyeh, and I'm a sophomore at MIT studying Mechanical Engineering. I have been doing MUN since I was a freshman in high school. More than being an excellent space for practicing public speaking skills it also created a space of constructive discussions of relevant topics of global concern. Through organizing conferences, chairing different committees, and being a delegate myself, I also got the opportunity to meet exceptional people and form wonderful friendships. I hope you use this experience to build long lasting skills and strong relationships, and most importantly enjoy it to the most.

Sincerely,

Your Chair: Lama Diriyeh

For further inquiries, do not hesitate to contact us at [icj-2025@mit.edu](mailto:icj-2025@mit.edu).

**MITMUNC XVII 2025**



## Committee Introduction



The World Court, officially known as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), emerged from the 1945 San Francisco Conference on International Organizations and began its mandate in April 1946. Established to resolve inter-state legal disputes, it operates through contentious cases—binding rulings on disputes between consenting member states—and advisory opinions for authorized UN organs.

Comprising 15 judges elected by the UN General Assembly and Security Council for nine-year terms, the ICJ abides by legal documents like the UN Charter, the Court's Statute, the Rule of the Court, and Practice Directions. Its jurisdiction covers disputes among UN member states while offering advisory opinions, exemplified in its counsel on Kosovo's statehood in 2011.

As the principal judicial organ of the UN, the ICJ settles disputes submitted by parties under its statute, excluding intervention in state matters. While all 193 UN member states adhere to the ICJ Statute, provisions exist for non-member entities. Unlike other UN bodies, the ICJ prioritizes resolving disputes based on international law rather than drafting resolutions, emphasizing the judges' adherence to international legal principles.

Functioning as the sole international court for inter-nation disputes, the ICJ has handled over 177 cases since 1949. Nevertheless, challenges persist in pursuing impartial justice globally. Criticisms of bias have arisen, exemplified by instances like the *Nicaragua v. United States* case, revealing limitations due to the

Security Council's power to veto ICJ decisions. Furthermore, the ICJ faces hurdles in securing jurisdiction over contentious cases, relying heavily on the consent of conflicting parties for exercising its authority.





## Topic: Western Sahara

### I. Introduction

The Western Sahara lies in the western most region of the Sahara. It has borders mostly with Morocco to the North, slightly with Algeria to the Northeast and mainly with Mauritania to the South and East. It has two main regions Río de Oro, the southern two thirds of the region, and Saguia el-Hamra the northern third. Geographically it is mostly a desert with important resources including iron and potash ore, as well as a large reserve of phosphate near Bu Craa. <sup>6</sup>



Fig. 1. United Nations, Map No. 3175 Rev. 4, Oct. 2012 <sup>4</sup>

## II. History

### A. Pre-Colonization

The region had established trading ties with Europe by the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It had contact with the Romans, and was later occupied by the Ṣanhajāh Amazigh, who later were dominated by Muslims around 1000 CE. Portuguese and Spanish colonial discoveries and claims over the region were limited, however, in 1884, The Spanish Society of Africanists and Colonists established treaties with the local population in the coastal region of Río de Oro. Spain then claimed protectorate over the coastal region. Their colonial expansion was impeded by the French colonial expansion in Mauritania and the establishment of Semara between 1898-1902 by Sheikh Mā' al-'Aynayn. Nevertheless, the Spanish rule over the region expanded until it had complete control of the Western Sahara by 1934. <sup>6</sup>

### B. During and Post Spanish Colonization

In 1957, newly independent Morocco claimed authority over the territory, and its military was repelled by the Spanish troops. A year later, Spain declared both Río de Oro and Saguia el-Hamra one Spanish province: Spanish Sahara. Joining the conflict, Mauritania, also newly independent, claimed authority over the region in 1960. To complicate the situation, the phosphate reserves near Bu Craa were discovered in 1963, making the territory not only strategic geographically but also a resourceful profitable territory. <sup>6</sup>

By the 1970s, The Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro), a guerrilla insurgency, was established by the indigenous Sahrawi people. Consequently in 1975, Spain declared it will withdraw from the area and partitioned the Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania even though the World Court (ICJ) declared both their claims to the territory tenuous. Morocco was given the northern two thirds -with the phosphate reserves- and Mauritania the remaining southern third. The Polisario Front became based in Algeria, which supported the Sahrawis' right to independence and sovereignty. Fighting ensued between the Polisario Front and both countries and in 1976, the Front declared a government in exile of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). <sup>6</sup>



By 1979, Mauritania left the conflict and established a peace agreement with the Polisario Front, but Morocco simply took control of their portion of the Western Sahara and fortified the region.<sup>6</sup>

In 1988 the UN proposed a solution to the conflict allowing the Sahrawi people to decide who they would prefer to be ruled by: the Polisario Front, or Morocco in a referendum conducted by the UN. After both parties accepted the referendum and agreed on a cease-fire in 1991, Morocco moved tens of thousands of “settlers” into the territory and requested the UN assess their voting rights before the referendum is conducted. A process which dragged on into the early 2000s with Morocco continuously expanding its rule and infrastructure in the region.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these setbacks as well as Algeria’s diminished material capacity of support for the Polisario Front (though its diplomatic support remained unwavering), it continued its diplomatic effort for self-determination. In 2001, the new Moroccan King declared Morocco will no longer agree to a referendum in Western Sahara. UN peace efforts continued with renewing the peacekeeping forces in the region and proposing new resolutions which got rejected by Morocco. In 2007, Morocco suggested a plan that includes autonomy within the Moroccan state, but no referendum, which was rejected by the Polisario Front. After the fighting ensued again between the parties in 2020, the US became the first country to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the region in exchange for normalization of ties with Israel, and in 2023 Israel followed in exchange for an embassy.<sup>6</sup>

### III. International Actions

As mentioned in the previous section, the UN had several proposed resolutions and negotiation efforts mostly with no fruitful results. Since 1963 the UN has listed Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory awaiting decolonization.<sup>4</sup> In 1974, the ICJ published its advisory opinion on the Western Sahara in response to two questions:

- I. “Was Western Sahara (Rio de Oro and Sakiet El Hamra) at the time of colonization by Spain a territory belonging to no one (terra nullius)?”

II. “What were the legal ties between this territory and the Kingdom of Morocco and the Mauritanian entity?”

The answer to I was negative, and the answer to the II in brief was that evidence supports the existence of legal ties of allegiance between the Sultan of Morocco and some of the local tribes, as well as the existence of similar ties between the Mauritanian entity and the territory of Western Sahara. The court concluded, however, that there is no evidence to any territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity. <sup>5</sup>

#### **IV. Countries' Positions**

As mentioned previously the US recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over the region, a declaration that was rejected by the UN, EU, and the African Union (AU). Several European countries including Spain and Germany strongly opposed the proclamation and lobbied with other EU members preventing the EU from following the US's proclamation. The African Union which recognizes the SADR as a member state supports the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination and urged Morocco to respect colonial borders (border that existed at the time of independence). <sup>1</sup>

#### **V. Projections and Implications**

The people of the Western Sahara are obviously heavily affected by the issue, economically, and politically. This conflict has been ongoing for over 60 years and has affected the diplomatic relations and cooperation between involved countries. The natural reserves in the Western Sahara especially the phosphate reserves are crucial to global food supply chains, and the rekindled conflict could disrupt the extraction and processing. <sup>2</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

It is essential to consider current resolutions on the table as well as the demands and claims of both parties in forming a resolution and to keep the rights of the people of Western Sahara at the forefront of the efforts to resolve the issue. Understanding past resolutions and why they didn't succeed, as well as countries' positions and their development over time will also be important in the process.

## VII. Questions to be Addressed

- How can the UN address the human rights problems in the Western Sahara and the refugee camps for Sahrawi people in Algeria?
- What is the most viable, just resolution to the conflict given the current situation that would grant the Sahrawi people their right to self-determination?
- How can the international community, including the UN, EU, AU, and others contribute to the advancement of a resolution to the conflict?

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