

Thursday, 14 April 2005 - Strasbourg

## Humanitarian assistance to refugees from Western Sahara

Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group. - (PT) In March, I spent three days, along with other Members of Parliament, in tents and I saw the appalling conditions in which people live there. We came home and they stayed there. My conviction grew that it is of pressing importance for the EU to work to free us from the duty to continue for many more years to provide for the Sahrawi people's most basic needs. The Sahrawis know - and have shown that they know - how to work, how to organise themselves and how to survive in the most inhospitable conditions, were they able to go back and regain control of their land, which is illegally occupied by Morocco.

Through humanitarian aid, the EU must not resign itself to appeasing the conscience of the international community and its Member States with particular responsibilities in the process towards decolonisation in Sahara, which has found its path blocked by obstacles. The EU must take action to give impetus to the search for a political solution to the process, under the auspices of the UN. Morocco has blocked the process, repeatedly vetoing the most up-to-date proposals made by James Baker, and this ultimately led to his resignation.

The Member States, and in particular those on the Security Council, must not continue to overlook the nub of the issue. The conflict is directly linked to Europe and not only because of historical responsibility. European interests are at stake.

Western Sahara could be a supplier to Europe, if its abundant natural resources of oil, phosphates, fish and others could be legitimately and sustainably exploited, something that is not happening under the illegal occupation. It is also the case that Europe's very security is at stake.

Western Sahara is on our doorstep, and we have an immediate obligation to understand the underlying problems that feed into international terrorism. What kind of anger is being passed on to new generations of Sahrawis in the Tindouf refugee camps involved in the resistance in occupied Sahara, if they are not taken from the arms of fundamentalist radicals, if the EU, the United States, the Arab world and the rest of the international community denies them an outlet for resolving their conflict, thereby condemning them to impotent despair in the face of injustice, violence and destitution? I shall finish by saying that the EU must also make Rabat understand that it is in Morocco's interest to end the illegal occupation of Western Sahara.