

Addressing the effects of prolonged separation



A Saharan refugee, who has been living in a camp near Tindouf, Algeria, greeting a relative living in Western Sahara he has not seen in 30 years

When family members see each other for the first time in decades, there are tears of love and joy. At the end of the visit there is uncertainty as to whether they will see each other again.

Yahdih, Mohammed Fadel, and Sidi Brahim had been separated from their older brother, Ali Salem for several decades. Through the CBM programme they travelled from their home in the refugee camp near Tindouf to Western Sahara to visit their brother and his family in April, 2009. The elder Ali Salem had been suffering from cancer and was bed ridden. During the stay the elder brother succumbed to his ailments and passed away. The joyous visit became one of sombreness and grief, but also appreciation for at least the chance for the family to be together and share in their elder brother's final hours.



UNHCR works in close cooperation with the parties concerned, the host country, and with the support of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Western Sahara. UNHCR also works closely with MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), which provides logistical support.



MINURSO was established in 1991 to monitor a ceasefire between Morocco and the Frente Polisario and to organize a referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.



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UNHCR
 United Nations High
 Commissioner for Refugees

**Confidence
 Building
 Measures**
 2009/2010

Western Sahara

Meeting Humanitarian Needs through Confidence Building Measures

The Confidence Building Measures Programme (CBM) is a unique programme for UNHCR aimed at addressing the effects of prolonged separation between the Saharan refugees in the camps near Tindouf, Algeria, and their families in Western Sahara. UNHCR has been facilitating their communication and contact with family members in Western Sahara through the exchange of family visits, and free telephone services so refugees in the camps may contact family members in the Territory.



Beneficiaries boarding the CBM flight at Laayoune airport to visit their families in the camps.

In accordance with UN Security Council resolutions, through close cooperation with the parties concerned, and with the support of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Western Sahara, the CBM programme focuses exclusively on the humanitarian needs of the Saharans. UNHCR also works closely with United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which provides logistical support on a reimbursable basis, including aircraft and ground transportation for the programme.

With the continued support of the international community and cooperation of the parties, UNHCR is looking to expand the CBM programme in order to further meet the humanitarian needs of the Saharans.



An elderly refugee woman in Smara Camp calls her family in the Territory.

From the start of the programme in March 2004 until April 2009, about 8,129 persons have benefited from the family visits by air, of which 56% were women. There are, however, a large number of registered Saharans waiting to be part of the visit programme that have not been able to do so due to the limited capacity associated with air travel.

During the same period UNHCR has been operating telephone centres in the Laayoune, Smara and Awsard camps, as well as 27 February School. Beneficiaries have made over 108,738 telephone calls, of which about 60% were made by women. UNHCR is also pursuing the establishment of a telephone centre in the remote refugee camp of Dakhla, as well as expanding the existing telephone centres and providing internet services.

The humanitarian impact of person-to-person contact delivered through the CBM programme is difficult to overstate—individuals meeting with their parents, children, and siblings, in some cases, for the first time in 30 years.

In view of the increased humanitarian importance of CBM programme, UNHCR would like to:

- Recall the importance of a continued adherence and respect of the humanitarian and nonpolitical character of the CBM programme
- Request Member States and private donors provide support to fund Confidence Building Measures that allow for increased contact between separated family members
- Call upon the two parties and the host country to strongly consider the principles for the expansion of the CBM programme
- Reiterate its appreciation for MINURSO's continued logistical support

UNHCR proposes expansion of the CBM programme through:

- The addition of road transportation for family visits to increase the number of Saharans who can benefit from the family visits, in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1813 (30 April 2008), and furthered in Resolution 1871 (30 April 2009).
- Arranging visits for special family occasions, such as weddings.
- Holding a youth summer school programme in a third country
- Establishing a telephone centre in the remote refugee camp of Dakhla, as well as expanding the existing telephone centres and providing internet services

