

Australia Western Sahara Association

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PRESS RELEASE -For immediate release

Charges of torture and genocide levelled at high-ranking Moroccans by Spanish judge...But for Australian fertiliser firms, it's business as usual.

Next weekend (10 November) the bulk carrier, Jin Yi, is scheduled to be unloading a cargo of phosphate rock from occupied Western Sahara for Wesfarmers' fertiliser subsidiary, CSBP in Fremantle. Last weekend its sister ship, Jin Xing, unloaded a similar cargo for Incitec Pivot in Geelong.

"The Australian fertiliser companies importing phosphate from occupied Western Sahara are lending economic and political support to a brutal occupation", said Cate Lewis, secretary of the Australia Western Sahara Association (Victoria).

AWSA has been following the unethical and politically controversial imports from Western Sahara over recent years.

"The natural resources of Western Sahara belong to the Saharawi people, not to the Moroccan government", said Lewis. "Buying these stolen goods is in violation of international law. As long as Morocco earns money from the occupation, the violation of human rights in the occupied country will just continue", she added.

Morocco's phosphate plundering of Western Sahara is reaching 3 million tonnes a year, depriving its people of the benefit. Instead the Moroccan government pockets the value, estimated to be of the order of 170 million US dollars per annum. Australia is one of the leading importers of the mineral. It is the main ingredient in superphosphate used to enhance pasture for stock.

The Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carl Bildt, has become one of the strongest opponents to the foreign businesses in this Western Sahara trade. In a statement in the Swedish parliament in September said: "The area we today call Western Sahara, the former Spanish colony Spanish Sahara, is occupied by Morocco. We base this conclusion on the decision made by the International Court of Justice in 1975: that Morocco has no legally founded claim over Western Sahara. This means that Morocco has [...] no right to exploit the natural resources in Western Sahara for its own benefit."

No country in the world recognises Morocco's claim to the country, which is treated by the UN as the last colony in Africa. Last week, a Spain's leading

human rights judge, Baltasar Garzón initiated proceedings against 13 high-ranking Moroccan officials on charges ranging from torture to genocide of Saharawis. Through this inquiry he is seeking to account for 524 Saharawis who have disappeared during the 32 years of Morocco's military occupation of the country. Witnesses will be called as early as December.

AWSA demands that the Australian phosphate imports are stopped until a resolution to the conflict is found.

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Working for justice for the Saharawi people