



Global Monitoring Center, Inc.

1 July 2025

House Foreign Affairs Committee
2471 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Letter Opposing Terrorist Designation of the Polisario Front (H.R. 4119)

Dear Chairman Mast and Ranking Member Meeks,

The Global Monitoring Center respectfully brings to your attention serious concerns regarding H.R. 4119, a recently introduced bipartisan bill that seeks to designate the Polisario Front of Western Sahara as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. This proposal is based on inaccurate and misleading claims. If enacted, it would undermine longstanding efforts to advance peace, justice, and self-determination in Western Sahara. It would also harm the work of nonprofit organizations like ours that are committed to nonpartisan advocacy, education, and human rights monitoring in line with international law. We urge a careful, fact-based review of this legislation and its potential implications for U.S. foreign policy, regional stability, and the integrity of civil society efforts.

Background: On June 24, 2025, Representatives Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) introduced H.R. 4119, a bill seeking to designate the Polisario Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. In public remarks, Rep. Wilson alleged that “The Polisario is a Marxist militia backed by Iran, Hezbollah and Russia, providing Iran a strategic outpost in Africa and destabilizing the Kingdom of Morocco.” These assertions present a highly distorted narrative of both the Polisario Front and the broader context of the Western Sahara conflict.

The Global Monitoring Center emphasizes that the Polisario Front is a recognized national liberation movement, acknowledged by the United Nations as the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people. It is not classified as a terrorist group by the UN, the African Union, or any credible international legal authority. The proposed designation in H.R. 4119 lacks factual basis and threatens to delegitimize a peaceful struggle for self-determination under international law.

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Below, we present key points that challenge the claims made in support of H.R. 4119 and explain why branding the Polisario Front as a terrorist organization is both unjustified and harmful to U.S. foreign policy credibility and regional peace efforts:

- **No Terrorist History:** The Polisario Front is not, and has never been, a terrorist organization. Over its nearly 50-year history, the Polisario has maintained a consistent track record of zero terrorist activity – no attacks on civilians, no links to extremist factions, and no involvement in conflicts outside its struggle for Western Sahara. These are verifiable facts, acknowledged by observers, even as Moroccan officials spread disinformation to suggest otherwise.
- **Legitimate International Recognition:** The Polisario’s credentials are those of a legitimate national liberation movement, not an extremist militia. It was founded in 1973 to end colonial domination in Western Sahara and lead the Sahrawi people to independence. The United Nations General Assembly and the African Union recognize the Polisario and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as the representatives of the Sahrawi people. (Western Sahara’s SADR is a full member of the African Union.) Such international recognition would not exist if the Polisario were a terrorist group – instead, it underscores their role as an indigenous liberation movement rooted in the right to self-determination.
- **Unsubstantiated Allegations of Extremist Ties:** Claims that the Polisario is allied with or controlled by Iran, Hezbollah, or other extremist actors are baseless. Even U.S. allies and experts have refuted these accusations. Former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton recently noted that allegations of Iranian influence on the Polisario are being spread “without evidence,” likely as a propaganda ploy to distract from Morocco’s continued obstruction of a Western Sahara peace referendum. Indeed, the Polisario Front – as well as Syria’s new government, which was falsely accused of hosting Polisario fighters – have flatly denied these claims, and the United Kingdom’s government officially rejected the allegation of Polisario collusion with Iran as unfounded. The U.S. State Department’s own reporting over the years has consistently found no indication that the Polisario has adopted extremist ideologies. In short, there is no credible evidence that the Polisario Front has any ties to terrorism or Islamist extremism, despite the bill’s insinuations.
- **Moderation and Openness:** Far from being radical, the Sahrawi people and their Polisario leadership are known for their moderation and secular, progressive values. They have never succumbed to the wave of extremist radicalism that affected some other regions. On the contrary, Sahrawi refugee camps (administered by the Polisario in Algeria) have long welcomed international aid organizations, including American and faith-based NGOs, which have operated freely to provide education and humanitarian relief. This would not be possible if the Polisario were hostile extremists. U.S. officials who have visited the camps – such as the late Senator James Inhofe, a staunch supporter of the Sahrawi cause – frequently praised the community’s religious tolerance and openness. Numerous American

diplomats and members of Congress have met with Polisario leaders over the years and can attest that Morocco's terrorism allegations are false. This history of engagement and the Polisario's secular outlook stand in stark contrast to the image painted by H.R. 4119's proponents.

- **Commitment to International Law:** The Polisario Front has demonstrated a strong commitment to international norms and law, further belying any "terrorist" label. The Polisario has formally ratified the Geneva Conventions and their protocols, as well as the African Union's Convention on counter-terrorism. Its military wing, the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army, adheres to international humanitarian law in its conduct. The Polisario's forces are engaged in defensive operations aimed at protecting the Sahrawi population under occupation – they do not target civilians or employ terrorism. These actions are consistent with those of a national defense force in a protracted conflict, not a rogue terrorist militia. Designating such an entity as an FTO would be a politically motivated mischaracterization, ignoring the reality that the Polisario abides by globally recognized legal standards of armed resistance.
- **Morocco's Occupation and Human Rights Abuses:** It is crucial to recognize the broader context: Western Sahara is Africa's last colony, and the Sahrawi people have been fighting for their freedom and rights against Moroccan occupation. In 1975, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion confirming that Morocco has no sovereign ties to Western Sahara and affirmed the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. Nevertheless, Morocco illegally annexed the territory, and for decades has denied the Sahrawis a promised referendum on independence, despite a UN Settlement Plan that both sides accepted in 1991. In fact, Morocco has repeatedly obstructed and delayed the UN-sponsored referendum from the moment it was agreed to – fearing that a free, fair vote would confirm the Sahrawis' desire for independence. During this time, Morocco has also engaged in systematic repression of Sahrawi civilians in the occupied areas. Human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented ongoing abuses: Sahrawis have faced arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances, and violent crackdowns on peaceful protests under Moroccan rule. Meanwhile, Morocco has even blocked the UN Peacekeeping mission (MINURSO) from monitoring human rights in Western Sahara, making it the only modern UN mission without a human rights mandate. This is the real human rights crisis in Western Sahara – the Sahrawi people are the ones being terrorized by an occupying force, not the other way around. By attempting to label the Polisario as "terrorists," Morocco and its lobby are cynically trying to flip the narrative and divert attention from their own violations and the occupation.

As former U.S. Secretary of State and UN envoy James Baker noted from his extensive engagement with the conflict:

"I also toured the region several times and developed a real sympathy for the humanitarian costs of this frozen-in-time conflict. Despite the harsh conditions in which they lived, the

Sahrawi people had exercised a degree of democracy, maintained a high literacy rate, and never resorted to terrorism. At the same time, my relations with Morocco had always been good, going all the way back to the 1980s when, as treasury secretary, I assisted King Hassan in obtaining satellite photography to help in building a huge sand wall, or berm, as part of Morocco's military efforts against the Polisario."

Baker's reflection not only underscores the unjust suffering imposed on the Sahrawi people, but also debunks the dangerous and false narrative that seeks to criminalize their legitimate national liberation movement.

Considering the above facts, designating the Polisario Front as a terrorist organization is both factually unfounded and deeply damaging to efforts for peace and justice. H.R. 4119 risks setting a troubling precedent by politicizing and misapplying the term "terrorism" to an internationally recognized indigenous liberation movement. The Global Monitoring Center urges Congress to carefully examine the broader implications of such a designation, which would undermine legitimate decolonization efforts and weaken the credibility of U.S. foreign policy. We respectfully submit the following key concerns for consideration should this bill advance:

- **Undermining Peace Efforts:** The United States has long professed support for a peaceful, negotiated solution in Western Sahara. Designating the Polisario as terrorists would torpedo U.S. diplomacy and the UN peace process. It is hard to envision how U.S. officials or envoys could work toward negotiations if one party to the conflict is blacklisted as a terrorist. Such a move would destroy U.S. credibility as a potential broker, leave the Polisario with no incentive to return to ceasefire, and likely escalate the conflict. Even career diplomats and national security experts warn that this is a perilous course: as Ambassador John Bolton argues, neglecting or mishandling the Western Sahara issue – especially amid growing global competition in Africa – only creates opportunities for America's rivals (China, Russia, Iran) to gain influence. By ostracizing the Sahrawi independence movement, the U.S. would push it toward reliance on other powers, ironically creating the very geopolitical opening that proponents of this bill claim to worry about.
- **Humanitarian Consequences:** The Polisario Front, through the SADR, administers refugee camps housing over 170,000 Sahrawi civilians in harsh desert exile, as well as the portion of Western Sahara outside Moroccan control. Labeling them as an FTO would criminalize many interactions and transactions necessary for those people's survival and wellbeing. Humanitarian organizations could find themselves unable or afraid to deliver aid to Sahrawi refugees for fear of U.S. legal penalties. We have a clear analog in recent history: when the U.S. designated (or considered designating) other de facto authorities like Yemen's Ansar Allah (Houthis) as terrorists, aid groups warned of devastating impacts on civilians. An FTO designation can chill commercial trade, banking, and aid deliveries, effectively blocking food, medical supplies, and humanitarian assistance to an already

vulnerable population. We must not let a similar tragedy befall the Sahrawi people. Cutting off aid or dialogue would only increase suffering and desperation, punishing innocent refugees for political points.

- **Betraying American Values and International Law:** This bill runs counter to core American principles of supporting freedom and opposing colonization. The Sahrawi cause is fundamentally about self-determination, a right the United States has historically championed. Many in Congress – across party lines – have recognized this. In fact, a bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers over the years has stood with the Sahrawis: for example, the late Republican Senator Jim Inhofe and Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy were outspoken advocates for Western Sahara’s freedom; more recently, a coalition of members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee wrote to President Biden urging a halt to arms sales to Morocco and a renewed commitment to a referendum for Western Sahara. These legislators understood that the U.S. should be on the side of international law and human rights in Western Sahara, not enabling Morocco’s occupation. Passing H.R. 4119 would do the opposite – it would align the U.S. with Morocco’s expansionist agenda and against a people’s legitimate aspiration for liberty. It would also put the U.S. at odds with the African Union and much of the international community, which affirm the Sahrawi people’s rights. Such a stance could isolate us diplomatically in Africa and undermine our moral standing.

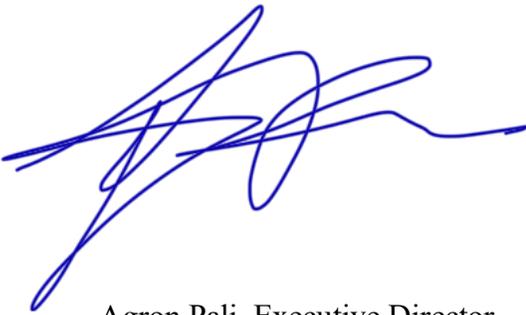
In summary, H.R. 4119 represents a deeply flawed and counterproductive legislative proposal. The effort to designate the Polisario Front—a legitimate national liberation movement recognized by the United Nations—as a Foreign Terrorist Organization is unsupported by credible evidence and contradicts longstanding international legal frameworks. Such a designation would not only distort the facts on the ground but also lend legitimacy to a narrative that seeks to criminalize a peaceful struggle for self-determination.

The Global Monitoring Center urges Congress to approach this issue with caution and integrity. Rather than advancing a measure that risks escalating tensions and undermining international law, we encourage members of Congress—particularly those serving on the House Foreign Affairs Committee—to engage in a thorough, evidence-based examination of the bill’s potential consequences. What is needed now is renewed support for UN-led negotiations and increased attention to the root causes of instability in Western Sahara: the lack of a free and fair referendum and ongoing reports of human rights violations under Moroccan occupation.

Rejecting the false and dangerous “terrorist” label for the Polisario Front would signal a reaffirmation of the United States’ commitment to international law, justice, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It would also help safeguard U.S. credibility as a global leader on human rights and decolonization. The future of Western Sahara must be determined through a legitimate UN-backed process—not through the suppression of political representation.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter and respectfully urge your office to consider the serious implications of H.R. 4119 for regional peace, U.S. policy credibility, and the rights of the Sahrawi people.

Sincerely,



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On behalf of the Global Monitoring Center, Inc.
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