

For Six Month Period Ending 07/31/2008  
(Insert date)

**I - REGISTRANT**

1. (a) Name of Registrant (b) Registration No.  
Avatar Enterprises, Inc. 5821

(c) Business Address(es) of Registrant  
9 Gateway Drive  
Collinsville, IL 62234

2. Has there been a change in the information previously furnished in connection with the following:

- (a) If an individual:
- |                           |                              |                             |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) Residence address(es) | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (2) Citizenship           | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (3) Occupation            | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
- (b) If an organization:
- |                          |                              |  |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| (1) Name                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| (2) Ownership or control | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| (3) Branch offices       | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
- (c) Explain fully all changes, if any, indicated in items (a) and (b) above.

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IF THE REGISTRANT IS AN INDIVIDUAL, OMIT RESPONSE TO ITEMS 3, 4 AND 5(a).

3. If you have previously filed Exhibit C<sup>1</sup>, state whether any changes therein have occurred during this 6 month reporting period.  
Yes  No   
If yes, have you filed an amendment to the Exhibit C? Yes  No   
If no, please attach the required amendment.

<sup>1</sup> The Exhibit C, for which no printed form is provided, consists of a true copy of the charter, articles of incorporation, association, and by laws of a registrant that is an organization. (A waiver of the requirement to file an Exhibit C may be obtained for good cause upon written application to the Assistant Attorney General, National Security Division, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC 20530.)

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4. (a) Have any persons ceased acting as partners, officers, directors or similar officials of the registrant during this 6 month reporting period? Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name	Position	Date connection ended
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(b) Have any persons become partners, officers, directors or similar officials during this 6 month reporting period?

Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name	Residence address	Citizenship	Position	Date assumed
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5. (a) Has any person named in item 4(b) rendered services directly in furtherance of the interests of any foreign principal?

Yes  No

If yes, identify each such person and describe his service.

(b) Have any employees or individuals, who have filed a short form registration statement, terminated their employment or connection with the registrant during this 6 month reporting period? Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name	Position or connection	Date terminated
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(c) During this 6 month reporting period, has the registrant hired as employees or in any other capacity, any persons who rendered or will render services to the registrant directly in furtherance of the interests of any foreign principal(s) in other than a clerical or secretarial, or in a related or similar capacity? Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name	Residence address	Citizenship	Position	Date assumed
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6. Have short form registration statements been filed by all of the persons named in Items 5(a) and 5(c) of the supplemental statement?

Yes  No

If no, list names of persons who have not filed the required statement.

N/A

**II - FOREIGN PRINCIPAL**


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7. Has your connection with any foreign principal ended during this 6 month reporting period?

Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name of foreign principal

Date of termination

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8. Have you acquired any new foreign principal<sup>2</sup> during this 6 month reporting period?

Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name and address of foreign principal

Date acquired

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9. In addition to those named in Items 7 and 8, if any, list foreign principals<sup>2</sup> whom you continued to represent during the 6 month reporting period.

Kingdom of Morocco

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10. **EXHIBITS A AND B**

(a) Have you filed for each of the newly acquired foreign principals in Item 8 the following:

Exhibit A<sup>3</sup> Yes  No  N/A  
 Exhibit B<sup>4</sup> Yes  No

If no, please attach the required exhibit.

(b) Have there been any changes in the Exhibits A and B previously filed for any foreign principal whom you represented during the 6 month period? Yes  No

If yes, have you filed an amendment to these exhibits? Yes  No

If no, please attach the required amendment.

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<sup>2</sup> The term "foreign principal" includes, in addition to those defined in Section 1(b) of the Act, an individual organization any of whose activities are directly or indirectly supervised, directed, controlled, financed, or subsidized in whole or in major part by a foreign government, foreign political party, foreign organization or foreign individual. (See Rule 100(a)(9).) A registrant who represents more than one foreign principal is required to list in the statements he files under the Act only those principals for whom he is not entitled to claim exemption under Section 3 of the Act. (See Rule 208.)

<sup>3</sup> The Exhibit A, which is filed on Form NSD-3 (Formerly CRM-157), sets forth the information required to be disclosed concerning each foreign principal.

<sup>4</sup> The Exhibit B, which is filed on Form NSD-4 (Formerly CRM-155), sets forth the information concerning the agreement or understanding between the registrant and the foreign principal.

### III - ACTIVITIES

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11. During this 6 month reporting period, have you engaged in any activities for or rendered any services to any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, and 9 of this statement? Yes  No

If yes, identify each such foreign principal and describe in full detail your activities and services:

On behalf of the Kingdom of Morocco, a congressional legislator and staff member were contacted about apparent human rights violations in Algeria (see below).

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12. During this 6 month reporting period, have you on behalf of any foreign principal engaged in political activity<sup>5</sup> as defined below? Yes  No

If yes, identify each such foreign principal and describe in full detail all such political activity, indicating, among other things, the relations, interests and policies sought to be influenced and the means employed to achieve this purpose. If the registrant arranged, sponsored or delivered speeches, lectures or radio and TV broadcasts, give details as to dates and places of delivery, names of speakers and subject matter.

On May 28, Rep. William Delahunt was contacted regarding published reports of apparent human rights violations in Algerian detention camps and possible diversion of foreign aid intended for refugees. The next day, Cliff Stammerman of Rep. Delahunt's staff was contacted on this matter. On June 3, Rep. Delahunt wrote to the State Department to inquire about these reports. On June 4, a copy of a New York Times article about the original allegations was provided to Rep. Delahunt's office.

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13. In addition to the above described activities, if any, have you engaged in activity on your own behalf which benefits any or all of your foreign principals? Yes  No

If yes, describe fully.

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<sup>5</sup> The term "political activities" means any activity that the person engaging in believes will, or that the person intends to, in any way influence any agency or official of the Government of the United States or any section of the public within the United States with reference to formulating, adopting or changing the domestic or foreign policies of the United States or with reference to the political or public interests, policies, or relations of a government of a foreign country or a foreign political party.

**IV - FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

**14. (a) RECEIPTS - MONIES**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you received from any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, or 9 of this statement, or from any other source, for or in the interests of any such foreign principal, any contributions, income or money either as compensation or otherwise? Yes  No

If no, explain why.

If yes, set forth below in the required detail and separately for each foreign principal an account of such monies<sup>6</sup>.

Date	From whom	Purpose	Amount
06/23/2008	Strategic Communications Group	Fees	80,000
			<u>\$80,000</u>
			Total

**(b) RECEIPTS - FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you received, as part of a fund raising campaign<sup>7</sup>, any money on behalf of any foreign principal named in items 7, 8, or 9 of this statement? Yes  No

If yes, have you filed an Exhibit D<sup>8</sup> to your registration? Yes  No

If yes, indicate the date the Exhibit D was filed. Date \_\_\_\_\_

**(c) RECEIPTS - THINGS OF VALUE**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you received any thing of value<sup>9</sup> other than money from any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, or 9 of this statement, or from any other source, for or in the interests of any such foreign principal? Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Name of foreign principal	Date received	Description of thing of value	Purpose
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<sup>6, 7</sup> A registrant is required to file an Exhibit D if he collects or receives contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for a foreign principal, as part of a fund raising campaign. (See Rule 201(e).)

<sup>8</sup> An Exhibit D, for which no printed form is provided, sets forth an account of money collected or received as a result of a fund raising campaign and transmitted for a foreign principal.

<sup>9</sup> Things of value include but are not limited to gifts, interest free loans, expense free travel, favored stock purchases, exclusive rights, favored treatment over competitors, "kickbacks," and the like.

15. (a) **DISBURSEMENTS – MONIES**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you

(1) disbursed or expended monies in connection with activity on behalf of any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, or 9 of this statement? Yes  No

(2) transmitted monies to any such foreign principal? Yes  No

If no, explain in full detail why there were no disbursements made on behalf of any foreign principal.

If yes, set forth below in the required detail and separately for each foreign principal an account of such monies, including monies transmitted, if any, to each foreign principal.

Date	To whom	Purpose	Amount
02/15/2008	Sher & Blackwell	Fees	2,500.00
03/26/2008	Sher & Blackwell	Fees	2,500.00
04/22/2008	Sher & Blackwell	Fees	2,500.00
05/13/2008	Sher & Blackwell	Fees	2,500.00
06/26/2008	Sher & Blackwell	Fees	2,522.86
07/16/2008	Sher & Blackwell	Fees	2,500.00

15,022.86  

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Total

(b) **DISBURSEMENTS – THINGS OF VALUE**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you disposed of anything of value<sup>10</sup> other than money in furtherance of or in connection with activities on behalf of any foreign principal named in Items 7, 8, or 9 of this statement?

Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Date disposed	Name of person to whom given	On behalf of what foreign principal	Description of thing of value	Purpose
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(c) **DISBURSEMENTS – POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

During this 6 month reporting period, have you from your own funds and on your own behalf either directly or through any other person, made any contributions of money or other things of value<sup>11</sup> in connection with an election to any political office, or in connection with any primary election, convention, or caucus held to select candidates for political office?

Yes  No

If yes, furnish the following information:

Date	Amount or thing of value	Name of political organization	Name of candidate
03/04/2008	1,000.00	Longhorn PAC	
05/07/2008	500.00	Citizens for John Olver for Congress	John Olver
05/30/2008	500.00	Donna Edwards for Congress	Donna Edwards
05/30/2008	4,000.00	Jose Garcia for Congress	Jose Garcia
06/24/2008	2,600.00	Klein for Congress	Ron Klein

<sup>10, 11</sup> Things of value include but are not limited to gifts, interest free loans, expense free travel, favored stock purchases, exclusive rights, favored treatment over competitors, "kickbacks" and the like.

V - INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

16. During this 6 month reporting period, did you prepare, disseminate or cause to be disseminated any informational materials<sup>12</sup>?  
Yes  No

IF YES, RESPOND TO THE REMAINING ITEMS IN SECTION V.

17. Identify each such foreign principal.

Kingdom of Morocco

18. During this 6 month reporting period, has any foreign principal established a budget or allocated a specified sum of money to finance your activities in preparing or disseminating informational materials? Yes  No

If yes, identify each such foreign principal, specify amount, and indicate for what period of time.

19. During this 6 month reporting period, did your activities in preparing, disseminating or causing the dissemination of informational materials include the use of any of the following:

- Radio or TV broadcasts
- Magazine or newspaper articles
- Motion picture films
- Letters or telegrams
- Advertising campaigns
- Press releases
- Pamphlets or other publications
- Lectures or speeches
- Internet
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

20. During this 6 month reporting period, did you disseminate or cause to be disseminated informational materials among any of the following groups:

- Public officials
- Newspapers
- Libraries
- Legislators
- Editors
- Educational institutions
- Government agencies
- Civic groups or associations
- Nationality groups
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

21. What language was used in the informational materials:

- English
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

22. Did you file with the Registration Unit, U.S. Department of Justice a copy of each item of such informational materials disseminated or caused to be disseminated during this 6 month reporting period? Yes  No

23. Did you label each item of such informational materials with the statement required by Section 4(b) of the Act? Yes  No

<sup>12</sup> The term informational materials includes any oral, visual, graphic, written, or pictorial information or matter of any kind, including that published by means of advertising, books, periodicals, newspapers, lectures, broadcasts, motion pictures, or any means or instrumentality of interstate or foreign commerce or otherwise. Informational materials disseminated by an agent of a foreign principal as part of an activity in itself exempt from registration, or an activity which by itself would not require registration, need not be filed pursuant to Section 4(b) of the Act.

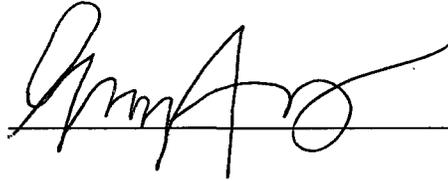
**VI – EXECUTION**

In accordance with 28 U.S.C. §1746, the undersigned swear(s) or affirm(s) under penalty of perjury that he/she has (they have) read the information set forth in this registration statement and the attached exhibits and that he/she is (they are) familiar with the contents thereof and that such contents are in their entirety true and accurate to the best of his/her (their) knowledge and belief, except that the undersigned make(s) no representation as to the truth or accuracy of the information contained in the attached Short Form Registration Statement(s), if any, insofar as such information is not within his/her (their) personal knowledge.

(Date of signature )

(Type or print name under each signature<sup>13</sup>)

08/29/2008



Gary Fears

<sup>13</sup> This statement shall be signed by the individual agent, if the registrant is an individual, or by a majority of those partners, officers, directors or persons performing similar functions, if the registrant is an organization, except that the organization can, by power of attorney, authorize one or more individuals to execute this statement on its behalf.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
FARA REGISTRATION UNIT  
NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20530

**NOTICE**

Please answer the following questions and return this sheet in triplicate with your Supplemental Statement:

1. Is your answer to Item 16 of Section V (Informational Materials – page 8 of Form NSD-2, formerly Form CRM-154 Supplemental Statement):

YES   X   or NO \_\_\_\_\_

(If your answer to question 1 is "yes" do not answer question 2 of this form.)

2. Do you disseminate any material in connection with your registration:

YES   X   or NO \_\_\_\_\_

(If your answer to question 2 is "yes" please forward for our review copies of all material including: films, film catalogs, posters, brochures, press releases, etc. which you have disseminated during the past six months.)

  
Signature

8/29/08  
Date

RM/CES/REGISTRATION UNIT  
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Gary Fears  
Please type or print name of  
Signatory on the line above

President  
Title



U.S. Department of Justice  
National Security Division

Washington, DC 20530

THIS FORM IS TO BE AN OFFICIAL ATTACHMENT TO YOUR CURRENT SUPPLEMENTAL  
STATEMENT - PLEASE EXECUTE IN TRIPLICATE

SHORT-FORM REGISTRATION INFORMATION SHEET

SECTION A

The Department records list active short-form registration statements for the following persons of your organization filed on the date indicated by each name. If a person is not still functioning in the same capacity directly on behalf of the foreign principal, please show the date of termination.

**Short Form List for Registrant: Avatar Enterprises, Inc.**

Last Name	First Name and Other Names	Registration Date	Termination Date	Role
Kjellander	Robert	07/30/2007		
Fears	Gary	07/27/2007		
Schwadron	Steven	07/27/2007		

NO CHANGE

  
GARY FEARS  
President

8/29/08

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U.S. Department of Justice

National Security Division

Washington, DC 20530

SECTION B

In addition to those persons listed in Section A, list below all current employees rendering services directly on behalf of the foreign principals(s) who have not filed short-form registration statements. (Do not list clerks, secretaries, typists or employees in a similar or related capacity). If there is some question as to whether an employee has an obligation to file a short-form, please address a letter to the Registration Unit describing the activities and connection with the foreign principal.

Name	Function	Date Hired
N/A		

Signature:  Date: 8/29/08  
Title: President Gary Fears

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CRM/CES/REGISTRATION UNIT

**POWER OF ATTORNEY**

The undersigned, Gary Fears, an individual resident of Florida, ("Fears") does hereby make, constitute and appoint Terence M. Dunleavy or his nominee of Vedder Price P.C., 222 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2600, Chicago, IL 60601, its true and lawful attorneys-in-fact, to have power without consultation with or without the consent of others to do all things for and on behalf of Fears, in place and stead relative to all matters thereto without limiting the generality of the foregoing, specifically authorize and empower him or her to sign, on Fears's behalf, any document requiring our signatures and to otherwise bind and commit Fears to any agreement or other transaction.

Terence M. Dunleavy or his nominee shall exercise, or fail to exercise, the powers and authorities granted herein in each case as our attorneys-in-fact in his or her absolute discretion, deem desirable or appropriate under existing circumstances. Fears hereby ratifies and confirms as good and effectual, all that its attorneys-in-fact may do by virtue hereof. However, despite the above provisions, nothing herein shall be construed as imposing a duty on our attorneys-in-fact to act or assume responsibility for any matters referred to above or other matters even though our attorneys-in-fact may have the power or authority hereunder to do so. Upon our written request for same and as required by law, our attorneys-in-fact shall keep and produce a record of all receipts, disbursements and significant actions taken hereunder, if any.

This Power of Attorney shall become effective as of the date set forth below and, unless sooner revoked, shall terminate as of September 30, 2008. Each person, partnership, corporation or other legal entity relying or acting upon this power of attorney shall be entitled to presume conclusively that this power of attorney is in full force and effect unless written notice shall have been given by me to such person, partnership, corporation or other legal entity that this power has been revoked.

No person, partnership, corporation or legal entity, relying upon this power of attorney shall be required to see to the application and disposition of any monies, stocks, bonds, securities or other property paid to or delivered to our attorneys-in-fact, pursuant to the provisions hereof.

We are fully informed as to all the contents of this power of attorney and understand the full import of this grant of powers to our attorneys-in-fact.

CRM/ES/REGISTRATION UNIT  
2008 SEP 11 AM 2:31

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have set our hands and seals this 1<sup>st</sup> day of August 2008.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Gary Fears

Forwarding Address:  
9 Gateway Drive  
Collinsville, IL 62234

The undersigned, a notary public in and for the above county and state, certifies that Gary Fears, an individual resident of Florida, known to me to be the same person whose name is subscribed as principal to the foregoing Power of Attorney, and acknowledged signing and delivering the instrument as his free and voluntary act and in his capacity as President, for the uses and purposes therein set forth.

Dated this 24 day of August 2008

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public

My Commission Expires:

\_\_\_\_\_



HOWARD L. BERMAN, CALIFORNIA  
CHAIRMAN

GARY L. ACKERMAN, NEW YORK  
ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA, AMERICAN SAMOA  
DONALD M. PAYNE, NEW JERSEY  
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RON KLEIN, FLORIDA  
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ROBERT R. KING  
STAFF DIRECTOR

PETER M. YEO  
DEPUTY STAFF DIRECTOR

DAVID S. ABRAMOWITZ  
CHIEF COUNSEL

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, FLORIDA  
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER

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YLEEM D.S. POBLETE  
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MARK C. GAGE  
REPUBLICAN SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR

DOUGLAS C. ANDERSON  
REPUBLICAN CHIEF COUNSEL

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS  
**CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES**  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

TELEPHONE: (202) 225-5021  
[HTTP://WWW.FOREIGNAFFAIRS.HOUSE.GOV/](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/)

June 3, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice  
United States Secretary of State  
The State Department  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary of State Rice:

I am writing to propose that the US Department of State undertake a thorough review of apparent human rights violations suffered by refugees in the Polisario camps in southern Algeria.

As you may know, a group of Sahrawi refugees recently visited Capitol Hill to offer eye-witness accounts about mistreatment of camp residents and diversion of humanitarian aid by the Polisario Front. For 30 years, the conflict over the region's sovereignty has displaced tens of thousands of Sahrawis, who rely on international assistance to stay alive. In meetings this month with a dozen bipartisan House and Senate offices, survivors described desperate conditions in these remote desert camps.

The political landscape – starting with a chronic dispute between Morocco and Algeria – makes it difficult to parse highly-charged claims and counter-claims about the respect for human rights on the ground. The personal testimonials delivered recently to members of Congress, including the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, however, raise deeply disturbing questions which I believe require closer examination. In particular, I am concerned about charges of corruption in the delivery chain for humanitarian aid from the United States and other donor nations and organizations.

There appears to be a need for careful review of these issues by the State Department. I know you fully appreciate the life-and-death urgency of these concerns and – as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, International Organizations and Oversight – I look forward to your counsel in this area.

Sincerely,



Bill Delahunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on  
International Organizations,  
Human Rights, and Oversight

*Members of Congress Pledge to Address Inhumane Conditions and Theft of Humanitarian Aid in Polisario Refugee Camps PR Newswire May 12, 2008 Monday 1:43 PM GMT*

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PR Newswire

**May 12, 2008 Monday 1:43 PM GMT**

WASHINGTON, May 12 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- This week, members and staff of the U.S. Congress met with former Sahrawi refugees who recently returned from the Polisario camps in southern Algeria. These refugees -- some held in the camps their entire lives -- shared eye-witness accounts of human rights abuses and the diversion of international humanitarian aid by the Polisario Front.

"We can make sure that the dollars we send are used in the way the Congress intended it to be used, making sure that the aid is going to the people and that is not being resold and making sure that the people have the freedom to leave the camps when they want to and make sure that the humanitarian conditions are as we expect in any camp around the world," said Rep. Corrine Brown (D-FL), an active member of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus and the Caucus for Women's Issues.

Rep. Brown pointed out that Congress can adopt resolutions and urge the United Nations to lead investigations into the conditions in the camps to make sure that the humanitarian aid reaches those it is intended to assist. This pledge to encourage oversight by the U.S. Congress was welcomed by Naba Deddah El Meki, a former Polisario humanitarian aid coordinator who shared her accounts of systematic corruption and theft with the Congresswoman.

The former Sahrawi refugees also visited the offices of Rep. Robin Hayes (R-NC), Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA), Rep. John Boozman (R-AR), Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI), Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI), Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL), Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS), Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI), and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT).

After speaking with the former Sahrawi refugees about the lack of freedom of movement in the camps Congressman Ellison said that if these conditions exist, he would do what he could.

"International pressure, particularly from the United States Congress, is the most effective tool to bring an end to the suffering of the Sahrawi refugees and their families," said Robert Holley, Executive Director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy. "Until Algeria and the Polisario realize that the international community will no longer tolerate this shameful humanitarian crisis, the refugees will not have the choice to leave the camps."

The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials and an interested public in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East.

1 of 3 DOCUMENTS

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June 4, 2008 Wednesday  
Late Edition - Final

**SECTION:** Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; Pg. 10

**LENGTH:** 1133 words

**HEADLINE:** Western Sahara's Conflict Traps Refugees in Limbo

**BYLINE:** By CARA BUCKLEY

**BODY:**

The refugees' eyes burned as they recounted terrible tales, culled, they said, from decades of hard living in camps in an unforgiving desert, half a world away.

One man told of a holding center for unwed mothers, cordoned off from relatives and friends. A woman said that a camp's leaders smuggled away foreign aid, even as residents of the camp starved. Another man described escaping with his pregnant wife under the cover of night, fleeing toward the Moroccan border as the camp's police chased them through a thicket of land mines.

But were the refugees' depictions of life in the camps overstated, as some human rights workers wonder? And were they brought to the United States to advance a foreign country's claim on their homeland?

The refugees are Sahrawis from Western Sahara, products of a tangled, nearly forgotten conflict between Morocco and a Sahrawi rebel group, the Polisario Front, that has dragged on for more than 30 years.

Western Sahara is a former Spanish colony wedged among Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco and the Atlantic Ocean, and it has been in political limbo since Spain withdrew in 1976.

After Spain's departure, Morocco annexed most of the land, an action that no other country recognized, and the Polisario Front waged a bitter battle for independence that led to a cease-fire in 1991. There has been a political impasse over its status ever since.

In the course of the conflict, many of the Sahrawi people fled to western Algeria to live in camps administered by the Polisario Front and paid for by international and humanitarian aid. An estimated 90,000 to 160,000 Sahrawis currently live in these camps.

A delegation of six Sahrawi refugees -- four women wrapped in brilliantly hued abayas and two men with somber stares -- recently visited New York and Washington to talk about their suffering under the Polisario Front. In doing so, they also reflected the highly politicized tug of war over the sovereignty of Western Sahara.

Western Sahara's Conflict Traps Refugees in Limbo The New York Times June 4,  
2008 Wednesday

They all once lived in refugee camps run by the Polisario Front in Algeria, but are now based in Western Sahara, subsisting in part on Moroccan aid. Their trip was sponsored by a lobbying group for Morocco, and they met with officials and reporters, to whom they described the camps, through an interpreter, as corruption-riddled prisons that they were not allowed to leave.

"The Polisario people to us just look like the Mafia people," said Said Abderahman, 28, who said he left a camp with his pregnant wife, Salma Essalek, 25, last fall in what both described as a treacherous escape. "The international agencies are giving plenty of food, and the local population is not getting it."

Another Sahrawi refugee, Brahim al-Selem, 34, said he was a policeman in the camps but had to pay a smuggler last August to flee after being imprisoned for speaking out against the Polisario Front.

But representatives of Human Rights Watch and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said they did not know of any refugees who had been prevented from leaving the camps.

Mouloud Said, who represents the Polisario Front in Washington, went further, denouncing the refugees' statements as hyperbole and contending that they were being used for political purposes by Morocco.

"These people are brought by the Moroccan public relations companies here, so they have to mislead," he said.

There have been various efforts over the years to resolve the Western Sahara question. After the cease-fire was brokered in 1991, a United Nations mission was set up to organize a referendum in the territory to determine Western Sahara's future, but Morocco and the Polisario Front could not agree on who was eligible to vote.

Eric Goldstein, a research director for the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch, said Morocco had encouraged non-Sahrawis to settle in Western Sahara, because of what Morocco views as their historic ties to the land. Sahrawis now form a minority there.

Two years ago, Morocco proposed allowing the region a measure of autonomy, under the purview of Morocco, a proposal that France and the United States backed. But the Polisario Front rejected it.

Morocco also began accusing the Polisario Front of human rights abuses in its camps in Algeria. Some critics say this was largely to distract attention from violations that Morocco itself was accused of inflicting on Sahrawis.

In a May 2008 report, Freedom House, a human rights group based in the United States, described Morocco's treatment of the Sahrawis in Western Sahara as highly repressive and only slightly better than "the worst of the worst."

All of which, some say, casts doubt on some aspects of the accounts provided by the delegation of Sahrawi refugees, who have since returned to Morocco-controlled Western Sahara. Mr. Goldstein and Sergio Calle-Norena, who works with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Morocco, said that while leaving the camps was logistically difficult, freedom of movement was allowed.

"I'm not doubting their individual stories, but it has to be seen in context," Mr. Goldstein said. "The reason Morocco is funding their trip is to try to discredit the Polisario at a moment when they hope that its own proposal for autonomy will prevail."

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Interviewed in a stately conference room in Morocco's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York, the refugees were passionate in telling their stories. But most, when asked, refused to say what should become of their homeland.

'We came here for humanitarian reasons, not to discuss politics,' said Naba Deddah el-Meki, 42, who now lives with her eldest daughter in Western Sahara. She described widespread theft in the camps of aid supplied to the Polisario Front.

The former Polisario police officer, Mr. Selem, was more direct: 'We would like the Western Sahara to remain part of Morocco, of course.'

Robert M. Holley, the executive director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy, the lobbying group that organized the trip, said he selected the delegation from hundreds of refugees who flooded into Morocco from Algeria. Nearly all of them, he said, spoke of repression and corruption in the camps, and of imprisonment for those who tried to leave.

Mr. Holley insisted that his group's decision to bring the delegation to the United States was separate from Morocco's effort to realize its plan for autonomy in Western Sahara. The goal, he said, was simply to expose what he described as severe restrictions and harsh conditions in the camps.

'People can argue about politics, but we want people to understand the human costs,' Mr. Holley said. 'The lives of these people, daily, are being destroyed.'

'These people aren't telling lies,' he said, 'they're telling their lives.'

**URL:** <http://www.nytimes.com>

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO: Refugees at a camp in Western Sahara. Thousands more have fled to Algeria to escape a war that has gone on for three decades. (PHOTOGRAPH BY MOHAMED MESSARA/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY) MAP: Morocco annexed most of Western Sahara in the 1970s. Map details area of WESTERN SAHARA.

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