

## Norwegian NGO Warns Seismic Industry Over Western Sahara

A Norwegian human rights group has warned the global seismic industry not to conduct operations in the disputed region of Western Sahara.

In a letter to 51 seismic survey companies worldwide, the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara said companies signing deals with foreign oil companies and Morocco should prepare for legal action, bad publicity and shareholder sellouts.

The warning comes after the group succeeded in stopping compatriot company, TGS-NOPEC, from engaging in any further contracts in the area.

NSC said initial seismic surveys conducted by TGS-NOPEC for French and US oil companies on behalf of the Morocco government, triggered a massive protest campaign that resulted in the company stopping the operations.

"Although TGS-NOPEC completed their initial contracts, they admit that increased knowledge about the controversies in the area now prevent them from entering into new contracts", said Erik Hagen, a spokesman for the group.

"Meanwhile, TGS-NOPEC had been subject to massive negative PR through more than one hundred Norwegian and international news articles and substantial shareholder sell-outs."

Hagen said seismic mapping is the first step towards exploitation of Western Sahara's oil and gas, which would clearly be illegal according to international law. "Supporting Morocco's theft of Western Sahara's hydrocarbons would be both immoral and dangerous", he said.

Hagen added that the reconnaissance contracts have served to raise the tension in the conflict and harden Morocco's uncompromising attitude toward the Saharawi's right to self-determination.

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Morocco virtually annexed the northern two-thirds of Western Sahara (formerly Spanish Sahara) in 1976, and the rest of the territory in 1979, following Mauritania's withdrawal.

A guerrilla war with the Polisario Front contesting Rabat's sovereignty ended in a 1991 cease-fire; a referendum on final status has been repeatedly postponed. ■

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