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The African Union has learnt with satisfaction the release of **404** Moroccan prisoners of war by the Frente POLISARIO, and welcomes the initiative as humanitarian gesture that should serve to help improve the state of confidence between the two parties in the dispute over the territory of Western Sahara, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO.

While the Commission commends the Frente POLISARIO for its decision to release all the Moroccan prisoners of war, it calls on the Kingdom of Morocco to likewise reciprocate with respect to the Sahrawi prisoners and those that disappeared, during the conflict.

The African Union hopes that the international community as a whole would seize the opportunity provided and encourage the parties to the dispute to exert greater efforts to facilitate the search for a definitive solution to the long-outstanding dispute, based on the many decisions of the United Nations and, in particular, resolution 1495, unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council, in July 2003.

Addis Ababa, 19 August 2005