

Speak Sahrawi Youth

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Activists, Dear Listeners,

My name is Khadja Bedati, I am speaking on behalf of the Sahrawi Youth. Today, I am happy to join the global climate strike virtually, and in doing so, I would like to take the opportunity to speak about HeidelbergCement's illegal investment in the Moroccan-occupied territories of Western Sahara. Before I go into more detail on this topic, I would like to use my speech to protest the blatant human rights violations in the occupied territories of Western Sahara and the exploitation of Western Sahara, as well as to express my solidarity with the Sahrawi civil society, human rights activists and political prisoners on the ground. As you may already know, war has been raging in Western Sahara since November 13, 2020, after the Moroccan military violently attacked Sahrawi civilians* who have been peacefully demonstrating for their self-determination and rights in the Guerguerat buffer zone since October 20, 2020. Guerguerat is the trade route for Morocco to Africa, and many things are exported through this buffer zone, including Sahrawi resources. All this is happening under the watch of the passive peacekeeping mission (MINURSO) of the United Nations. In recent years I have attended HeidelbergCement's general meetings and have raised the issue of their cement factory in the Moroccan occupied territories of Western Sahara.

The HeidelbergCement company is building cement plants in occupied Western Sahara - my home country - a country I have never seen. Like so many Sahrawis who fled Morocco's violent invasion and subsequent brutal occupation, I grew up in a refugee camp in Algeria. The entire international community recognizes our right to self-determination - our right to determine the future state of our country and its resources, yet HeidelbergCement completely ignores us. HeidelbergCement has a clear responsibility regarding its subsidiary company Ciment du Maroc, because after all HeidelbergCement is the majority owner. The German government has made it clear that it does not support any economic activities of German companies in Western Sahara, nor does it secure any business through export credit and investment guarantees, but despite this, HeidelbergCement intends to remain the majority shareholder of Ciment du Maroc. I am aware that capitalism is deeply embedded in our society, and for this reason international rights and human rights are violated. However, this is no excuse for HeidelbergCement; they must bear the responsibility for their actions. In prioritizing economic growth, HeidelbergCement disregards both human and international rights and disregards the protection of the environment and climate.

HeidelbergCement strives for access to Africa and has probably chosen to ignore international law regarding the situation of the Moroccan occupied territories of Western Sahara. This kind of commitment violates international law. Thus, HeidelbergCement also ignores all the nice promises made on its websites in the presentation of its own corporate strategy. The International Court of Justice and the Court of Justice of the European Union agree: Western Sahara is not part of Morocco. And as such, the European Court of Justice has emphasized that the people of Western Sahara must be asked for their consent when it comes to the resources of Western Sahara. Every time HeidelbergCement argues that the local Saharawis will benefit from the grinding plants and every time the question comes to my mind, even though their country is rich in resources, how should the Saharawis benefit from something they don't even own? They are oppressed and have no rights according to the Moroccan occupation. How should the Sahrawis benefit when they are in prison for life for standing up for our right to self-determination, or for protesting Morocco's exploitation of our resources, which is an exploitation made even more profitable by HeidelbergCement's cement plants.

HeidelbergCement must stop its operations in the occupied territories of Western Sahara and must face the consequences for its activities.
Thank you for your attention.