

Sahara Marathon



- A documentary about a marathon into the Sahara desert which symbolizes a human tragedy of 250,000 Saharawí refugees in Algeria -

Sahara Marathon

- 42 and 27 -

42 are the kilometres that the participants of the marathon will have to run through the desert.

27 are the years that the Saharawi people have been living in the desert. Twenty-seven years in one of the more inhospitable places of the world. Living in tents, with no electricity, no water supply, no fresh food. With barely any infrastructure at all.



When the Spanish colony ended 27 years ago, freedom for the Saharawi people seemed closer. But the Western Sahara is a very wealthy land, and a very unequal war began. The Moroccan army started a huge napalm bombing campaign and more than 200,000 people were evacuated into the deep desert. In the 80's, the Moroccan government built a 2600-kilometre wall across the desert to keep the Saharawi people away from their own land; to keep them in the refugee camps in Algeria, where they still are.

"It's really hard to live here. The weather is always bad, sand is everywhere, the land is incredibly dry, there is not much water, it's impossible to

produce crops... living here wouldn't be possible without the humanitarian aid. We don't have anything to do here".

-The Documentary -

Abdula wants to be in top shape for the international marathon coming up soon in the refugee camp. Last year he finished in third position. But Abdula is ambitious and he wants to win the race this year. He is moved by his people, the Saharawi people. That is why he goes out running every morning as the first rays of sun light up the refugee camps in the Sahara desert (Algeria). He knows that being placed high in the marathon would brighten up the faces of the people of Western Sahara, even if for only a few hours.

"I am not running only for myself. I am running for all of my country", states Abdula, who best expresses himself not by words but by running.



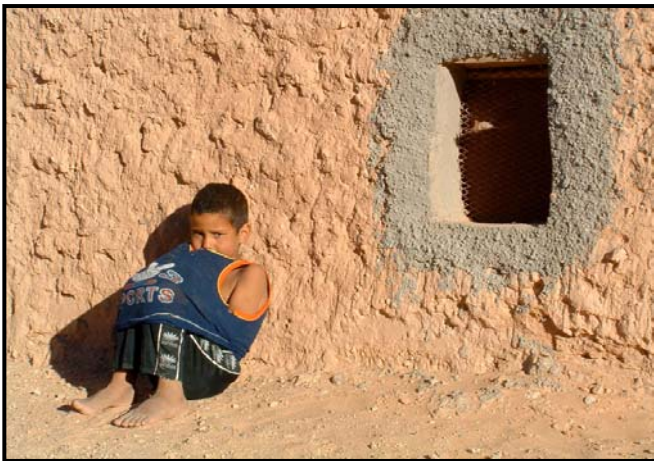
The backbone of this documentary is the marathon which was run through the Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria in February of this year. The large number of participants, whether well known or not, felt that just by participating they were supporting the claims of the Saharawi people. Despite appearances, this was not

simply a sporting event. Above all its main purpose was to bring attention to the desperate situation in which the Saharawi people live.

“The reason why we organised this marathon was to symbolically show people that living in a desert could be very difficult. This marathon does not intend to be the hardest marathon, it just turned out that way because of the conditions and circumstances here” says Jeff Carnahan, chairman of the Sahara Marathon organization.

We focus the documentary in the same way. The marathon is for us a metaphor which is used to portray the difficult situation the Saharawies have to face, 42 kilometres that represent the 27 years of exile.

The documentary starts out with the preparations for the marathon. The arrival of the runners from the West, the training sessions, the inscriptions, the transformation of the camps for the most important event of the year, etc. Everything has to be right for the “big day”: the day of the marathon.



And the big day arrived. Abdula begins the race strongly despite running with old heavy boots, but the leading group sets up an intense pace. Halfway Abdula starts to get exhausted, he is close to giving up. The finish line is too far. However, he knows he must carry on and reach it.

Therefore, Abdula will symbolize the suffering of a nation. Through him, the points in common between a 42-kms race and 27 years of exile will be shown.

Our Saharawi runner is the main character, but not the only one. As the race passes through each of the four camps, some new characters will be introduced. They won't be politicians or historians. We will portray anonymous people telling their personal story. They will be painted to help understand the mixture of feelings

experienced by the Saharawi people: their rage at the injustice and humiliation they suffer; their daily struggle to be who they are, their fight to get back their own land.

These refugees, as well as people around the organization of the marathon, will tell us their personal stories and points of view of the conflict, at the same time we observe them working in their jobs or business. This will help us to understand better the situation in the camps. We will see their reality; how they live and how people around them live as well. Through them we will sense the wider human drama which surrounds the marathon.

→ **Ahmed Fadel:** He is a war veteran. He speaks about the war, about the 12-year ceasefire, about the referendum that United Nations promised to hold for the autonomy of the Western Sahara and never did, about the historic affair, about the situation in the occupied land, about the Moroccan wall that divides the Saharawi families into two realities, etc. He will show us the Museum of War, where he is working at present.



“It has been 27 years now without seeing my family. I can’t pass through the Moroccan wall to see them” says Ahmed, and he adds: *“Although most Saharawi people live here, in the refugee camps, some Saharawi people still live in the occupied land. It’s estimated that 80,000 of Saharawi live there, completely oppressed*

by the 250,000 Moroccan who live in our country, in the Western Sahara” .

→ **Mariam Abdalahi Breca:** While men were fighting against Moroccans, women organized the life in the camps. They built hospitals, schools, houses, etc. Mariam is one of them. She helped to build schools and she will guide us through the school she currently directs. She speaks mainly about two pillars in the camps that she

knows from first-hand experience: The role of women in the camps and the importance of the education.

“The Saharawi women have done a lot for this country, a lot. While our husbands were fighting the war, we created a nation”.

→ **Mueimnin Said Luali Elimnin:** She is a 27-year-old female doctor. She represents the new generation, those who were born in the camps and went to study abroad. She studied for 14 years in Cuba to become a doctor. Currently she is working in the regional hospital as a doctor in the refugee camp of Smara. She decided to be a doctor because she thought that it was the best way to help her people. When she was 23, she returned and had to assume the responsibility of caring for lives, without any practise. At any rate, she was lucky. There are some other youngsters who are very well trained (telecommunication engineers for example), who cannot work in their speciality because of the lack of infrastructure in the camps.



“My mother doesn’t understand why I still don’t get married and have children. I usually argue with her, telling her that things have changed now. We are a different generation, and we think in a very different way”.

→ **Mohamed Lagdaf:** He is a well prepared teacher. He was studying in the Canary Islands when the conflict against Morocco began. Since then, because he is considered a Saharawi activist by the Moroccan government, he has never gone back to the Western Sahara. His declarations are a mixture between reason and emotion.

“We suffered with Spaniards, with Moroccans,... I don’t know why Saharawi people always have to put up with life’s calamities”.

→ **Marathon organisation members:** The Sahara Marathon Foundation is organized by people from different nationalities. As they say, they just help the

Saharawi people in the organisation of the marathon. At the same time they provide an out-reaching vision of the problem.

“It is not a well known problem, nobody knows what is going on here. That’s way we decided to organize the Marathon. Our main intention with the marathon is to be in the media, to show people what happens here”



The will of the marathon will provide the film with a dramatic structure. What matters is the athletic trial as a symbol of a people who despite being ready for the best are forced to put up with the worst: living and suffering in one of the most inhospitable places on earth for years and years. 27 years in fact, without any doubt a long marathon with an unknown finish line.

“We have been waiting for so long that... We are a peaceful country, we have shown it in the last 12 years with the ceasefire. But in the last few years we have lost rights we won before and maybe there is no other solution but war”.