

# Through Saharan sands

26 February 2001:  
Saharan Marathon, Algeria

There is a growing movement in the refugee camps of the Western Sahara near Tindouf in Algeria. Not movement towards the war that has simmered for 25 years while 180,000 refugees awaiting a UN-monitored referendum on self-determination struggle for their desert existence.

It is a movement of runners to take part in the Sahara Marathon. The first race on 26 February attracted 380 runners from 20 countries.

They came on charter flights from Madrid and commercial flights from Algiers to live with

refugee families in Bedouin tents for four days, and to run from the Smara camp through dramatic terrain and difficult conditions to the marathon finish at El Aaiun.

The race is an international humanitarian project of the National Union of Sahrawi Women to increase awareness of the plight of the refugee children who predominate in the camps. The race coincided with the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and was used to launch the Sahrawi National Running Team.

Backed by Sahara Marathon support groups, Team members

will train and compete internationally in pursuit of their bid to participate in the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Already, for this first race, a committed group of volunteers from Sahara Marathon Spain recruited runners, sponsors and media and technical partners to ensure the event's success.

Further support organisations are being formed in Germany,

Portugal and Italy which will recruit runners and 'companion runners', unable to travel to the camps, who will receive documentation and a T-shirt to wear in their own training and races, all of which will increase awareness of the Sahrawi dilemma.

Runners left the Smara camp and headed north over loose and hard-packed sand towards Auserd camp, where there was a half marathon finish line. Those going the full 42.2km then turned north-west towards the El Aaiun camp.

Thousands of Sahrawi celebrated along the way with many riding camels and playing Sahrawi music. Other parades and events with traditional food, music and dancing capped their National Day festivities.

Ouail Rabah, a young man from Algiers, just broke three hours but talked of a personal best of 2:15. Just outran for second place was a Sahrawi, Hanani Brahim. Also taking part was former European marathon champion Ron Hill, who set a personal worst half marathon time of 2:03.

The event was acclaimed a great success and a second running will be held on 26 February 2002. In case of interest check [www.saharamarathon.org](http://www.saharamarathon.org) or email [sahramarathon@aol.com](mailto:sahramarathon@aol.com)



## MARATHON

### MEN

1. Ouail RABAH	ALG	2:59:03
2. J.C. MONTERO-CASTELLANOS	ESP	3:16:56
3. Hanani BRAHIM	SAH	3:16:57

### WOMEN

1. Montserrat CALVO-VALVERFU	ESP	4:55:14
2. Ana Rute SOUSA	POR	5:01:11
3. Karen MITCHELL	USA	5:13:26

## HALF MARATHON

### MEN

1. José Maria FERNANDEZ	ESP	2:02:40
2. Daniel AGUILAR-MORAN	ESP	2:02:42
3. Sergio CAPITAN-HERRAIZ	ESP	2:02:53

### WOMEN

1. Frederica DURLI	ITA	2:20:00
2. Courtney ALEXANDER	USA	2:21:16
3. Carmen SUAREZ-CORUJO	ESP	2:36:47

## 10km

### MEN

1. Marcos RAMOS	ESP	40:04
2. Javier CONDE-PUJAMA	ESP	42:33
3. Joseba LARRINAGA-PEREA	ESP	44:50

### WOMEN

1. Esther LOPEZ PASTOR	ESP	50:26
2. Eva SUAREZ-GARCIA	ESP	52:48
3. Anna GIUSTOLISI-CETERRA	ITA	61:56

