

**Africa**

**Morocco's king hails return to AU:** "I am finally home," King Mohammed VI said Tuesday as the African Union readmitted Morocco after a 33-year absence, deferring the issue of Western Sahara for another day.

Morocco's return came a day after 39 of the AU's 54 member states agreed to allow it back in the fold, despite stiff resistance from countries such as South Africa and Algeria over the status of the disputed former Spanish colony.

Faced with the AU's decision, Western Sahara officials appeared to accept the new reality, saying AU membership might help speed up efforts to end a protracted conflict.

"It is a beautiful day when one returns home after too long an absence," Mohammed VI told the closing ceremony of the AU summit in Ethiopia.

His speech came after a long day of feverish speculation in the halls of the AU headquarters over whether he would indeed show up.

Morocco quit the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1984 after the bloc admitted the former Western Sahara as a separate member.

Morocco maintains that the territory under its control — which is home to large reserves of phosphate, a key ingredient in fertilisers, as well as rich fish stocks off its coast — is an integral part of the kingdom.

"From the moment that Morocco did not impose conditions ... we take their word for

it and accept that Morocco be admitted to the African Union," said **Mohamed Salem Ould Salek**, foreign minister of the SADR, which claims sovereignty over the entire territory of Western Sahara. (AFP)

**Strategy for withdrawal from ICC:** African leaders on Tuesday adopted a strategy calling for a collective withdrawal from the International Criminal Court. The non-binding decision came behind closed doors near the end of an African Union summit.

It was the latest expression of impatience by African leaders with the court, which some say has focused too narrowly on Africa while pursuing cases of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Late last year, South Africa, Burundi and Gambia all announced plans to leave the court, leading to concerns that other states would follow.

Desire Assogbavi, head of Oxfam International's liaison office to the AU, confirmed the adoption of the strategy. A source close to the continental body's legal council also confirmed it, saying countries had been divided on whether to call for leaving the court individually or together.

The source said the majority of countries also wanted the meaning of immunity and impunity amended in the Rome Statute, the treaty that set up the court in 2002. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press. (AP)

**2 Russian pilots die:** Two Russian pilots and a Congolese officer died when two army helicopters crashed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the military said Tuesday. The two Russian-built MI-24 choppers



The King of Morocco Mohammed VI delivers a speech in the main plenary of the African Union in Addis Ababa on Jan 31. Morocco's King Mohammed VI took a seat at the African Union headquarters Tuesday for the first time in 33 years after being readmitted by the bloc. Morocco's return to the fold comes a day after 39 of the AU's 54 member states agreed to allow Morocco back in the fold, despite stiff resistance from countries such as South Africa and Algeria over the status of Western Sahara. (AFP)

crashed in mountainous terrain on Friday "because of bad weather," General Leon Mushale, DR Congo's operational commander in North Kivu province, told a press conference in the regional capital of Goma. "Troops found three bodies — an FARDC (Congolese army) officer and two Russian

pilots," he said.

The crashes happened in the unrest-ravaged east of the country during a reconnaissance patrol against the so-called M23 rebel group, which says it has taken another Russian pilot prisoner. Two FARDC officers and three Russian

crew members were also injured, and taken to hospital in Goma by UN troops, he said. (AFP)

**6 killed in Nigeria clashes:** Police say at least six people have been killed in communal violence between mostly Christian farmers and mostly Muslim herdsmen in central Nigeria.

David Misal, a police spokesman for Taraba state, says the violence between Fulani herdsmen and farmers from the Mumuye ethnic group began Friday and continued Tuesday morning in the Lau local government area. He says 80 houses have been burned. Witnesses say Tuesday's violence began when youth from the Mumuye group attacked a Fulani village.

Clashes between farmers and herdsmen over land are common in Nigeria, especially in the Middle Belt region.

Tensions in Taraba state increased earlier this month when governor Darius Ishaku was quoted in local media urging Christian farmers to rise up against "terrorists." (AP)

**Fighters thwart bombings:** Two people were killed as self-defense fighters helped thwart more deadly suicide bombings in Nigeria and Cameroon on Tuesday, officials and witnesses said.

In Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria's biggest city and the birthplace of the Boko Haram insurgency, a lone bomber attempted to attack a mosque near the city's university during morning prayers.

A member of a civilian self-defense force stopped the bomber from reaching the mosque but the bomb killed them both, said police spokesman Victor Isukwu.

The bomber's body was so mangled it was impossible to determine the age or gender, witnesses said. "It took aid workers about an hour to pick up the scattered flesh and bones," said witness Simon Madu. (AP)

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