
amnesty international

Mauritania: wave of arrests of political opponents and imams

Subjects of concern: arbitrary arrests/prisoners of conscience/ incommunicado detention /fair trial

Members of opposition parties:

Mohamed Abdallahi Ould Eya (PRN)
Mohamed El Kory Ould El Arby (PRN)
Horma Ould Mohamed Mahmoud (PRN)
Mohamed Radhy Ould Nahah (PRN)
Ahmed Ould Oubeid (PRN)
Ahmedou Ould Brahim (PRN)
Cheikhna Ould Hijbou (PRN)
Mohamed Ould Radhy (PRN)
Ahmed Ould Bah (PRN)
Sidi Ahmed Ould El Kory (PRN)
Brahim Ould Mohamed Saghir (PRN)
Mohamed Jemil Ould Mansour (RFD)

Imams:

Mohamed El-Hacen Salem Ould Dedew
Mohamed Lemine Ould Moustapha
Mohamed Lemine Ould Ismail
Sidina Ould Radhy
Mohamed Ould Doua
Hamoud Ould Dhou Nourayene
Khaled Ould Isselmou
Abdarrahmane Ould Sabar
Sidi Amar Ould Cheikhna

After the wave of arrests of members of the *Parti de la renaissance nationale* (PRN) National Renaissance Party, and of imams that has been taking place in Mauritania since 30 April, Amnesty International is concerned about the repression of political and religious figures.

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INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW, UNITED KINGDOM

Since 30 April 2003, at least ten people close to opposition parties and eight imams have been arrested by the security forces in the capital, Nouakchott, and in Nouadhibou, in the north of the country. PRN militants have been charged after a long period of incommunicado detention, whereas it appears that the imams are being held incommunicado at the Security Police station in Nouakchott. Amnesty International considers these persons to be prisoners of conscience, who are being held for having peacefully exercised their rights to freedom of expression and association.

At least ten members of the PRN, including the Secretary General Mohamed Abdallahi Ould Eya, and his Deputy Secretary General, Mohamed Radhy Ould Nahah, have been held since 30 April and 1 May 2003. Charges have just been brought against them, the principal charge being “*forming an unauthorised association and reorganising a party after it has been disbanded*”. The party was banned after the authorities officially sealed the headquarters premises in Nouakchott on 3 May. The PRN was campaigning for a lifting of the embargo on Iraq and had stated its hostility to the war on Iraq. This party had been conducting political activities for two years and had never received notice of any ban from the Mauritanian authorities.

A member of another opposition party, and mayor of the Arafat district of Nouakchott, Jemil Ould Mensour, of the *Rassemblement des forces démocratiques* (RFD) Rally of Democratic Forces, was also detained. He was arrested after having commented on television on the arrests of members of the PNR, when he also criticised the repression of political opponents by the Mauritanian authorities. Jemil Ould Mensour is also the leader of *Ribat*, a forum which campaigns for the Palestinian cause and against the reestablishment of relations between Mauritania and Israel, opened in 1999.

Since 5 May, arrests have also been made in religious circles. At least nine Imams were arrested by the security forces, either at their homes or in mosques, and have since been held without charge at the Security Police station. According to the Director of the Security Police, these people were arrested for “using mosques to indoctrinate young people for subversive activities”. The former Minister for Islamic Guidance had asked the imams to follow his instructions. These statements had been condemned by the imams in their sermons. Amnesty International considers them to be potential prisoners of conscience.

General information

Since the beginning of 2003, numerous peaceful demonstrations have been organised by the opposition parties to protest against the war in Iraq and to condemn the position of the Mauritanian authorities in the conflict, in particular the participation of Mauritanian officers, experts in telecommunications and topography, in the war in Iraq.

Political repression in Mauritania is widespread. Political opponents are often detained because of their political activities and opposition parties, organisations for the defence of human rights and the independent media often find it difficult to work without restriction. In 1999, the government established diplomatic links with Israel, despite protests from the opposition parties. At the end of 2000, the disturbances in Israel and in the occupied territories led to calls to break off relations with Israel and led to more intense political tension. A series of demonstrations followed and several members of the opposition were detained briefly. Some of them were beaten at the time of their arrest and while they were being held in custody. The government banned two other political parties, accusing them of carrying on subversive activities and action contrary to the national interest.

As far back as 1995, at least 60 Islamic militants had been arrested and imprisoned for around two weeks, some of them having been tortured. The Mauritanian authorities had stated, on the day of their arrest, that they had just uncovered the secret organisations, operating under the cover of Islam, which were training and arming militants with a view to destabilising Mauritania. Those arrested were held incommunicado; some were allegedly beaten during their detention.

Three prisoners of conscience, all members of the opposition party *Front populaire Mauritanian* (FPM) Mauritanian Popular Front – are still being held in prison in Aïoun, approximately 800 km from the capital Nouakchott, where prison conditions are very harsh. In 2001 they were sentenced to five years in prison for “criminal association with a view to committing acts of sabotage and terrorism”.

Recommended action

Write, preferably in French or Arabic, to the Mauritanian authorities:

- call for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience.
- urge the authorities to confirm and make public the place where those being held incommunicado are imprisoned and give permission for them to have immediate contact with their relatives, their lawyers and, if necessary, a doctor;

Appeals to

N.B.: communications with Mauritania are very difficult and faxes cannot always be sent.

Président de la République (President of the Republic)

Maaouya Ould Sidi Mohammed Taya

Présidence de la République

B.P. 184

Nouakchott

Mauritania

Salutation: Monsieur le Président (Dear Mr President)

Ministre de l'Intérieur, des Postes et Télécommunications (Minister for the Interior,
Post and Telecommunications)

Lemrabet Sidi Mahmoud Ould Cheikh Ahmed

B.P. 195

Nouakchott

Mauritania

Fax + 222 525 36 61

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre (Dear Minister)

Ministre de la Justice (Minister of Justice)

M. Deddoud Ould Abdallahi

B.P. 350

Nouakchott

Mauritania

Fax + 222 525 70 02 (when someone answers, say “*je voudrais envoyer un fax, s’il vous plaît*” I’d like to send a fax, please”)

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre (Dear Minister)

Send copies of your letters to the Mauritanian embassy in your country.

