



To: Health Professional Network
From: Health and Human Rights Team
Date: 15 March 2005

Mauritania

Health concern: six inmates in Ouad Naga prison

Summary

Amnesty International is concerned for the physical and mental health of at least four prisoners held, with about 30 others, at Ouad Naga prison, 50 km east of Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. On 3 February 2005, they were sentenced for committing state security offences to prison terms varying from 10 years to life imprisonment, in a trial which did not meet international standards. The six men told the court they were victims of torture and ill-treatment during pre-trial detention, but no sign has been given that action has been or will be taken to investigate these allegations.

Health concerns

At least two of the inmates are sick and are not receiving appropriate medical investigation and treatment. **Commandant Habib Ould Abou Mohamed** has reportedly fainted several times since his arrest in August 2004. He was apparently twice brought to the emergency unit at the military hospital of Nouakchott and was examined by the doctor of the garrison where he is held. He reportedly has been fainting more often since February 2005.

Arafat Ould Ahmed, a civilian, suffers from low blood sugar and needs a special diet as well as regular medical checks. Despite several requests, no doctor has visited him since his arrest in September 2004. The food served twice a day is apparently poor and does not respond to his special needs. He has reportedly lost the use of his left arm as a consequence of the torture and ill-treatment inflicted on him during the pre-trial detention.

Saleh Ould Hannena and **Abdehramane Ould Mini** are being detained in solitary confinement in cells without windows. They have been handcuffed and held in leg irons for 24 hours a day since their arrest last year.

Several detainees went on hunger strike for several days to protest against their condition of detention in November 2004 and again in February 2005. In November 2004 the prison authorities had agreed to remove their chains, but to this day no action has been taken to improve their conditions of detention.

Amnesty International believes that the conditions in which these men are detained amounts to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment contrary to international standards, including the *UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons Under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment* and the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*. The use of leg irons is prohibited as well as solitary confinement for an extended period in a cell without access to natural light and fresh air.

Background information

The men named above were among the approximately 190 men - military officers and civilians - tried by the criminal Court of Ouad Naga for state security offences in connection with the June 2003 failed coup attempt and the alleged further coup attempts of August and September 2004.

On 3 February 2005, the court sentenced about 100 men to sentences varying from 18 months to life imprisonment, some in absentia. The remainder were acquitted. The lawyers have lodged an appeal for those who have been convicted. A total of some 30 convicted prisoners are currently held in Ouad Naga prison.

Many detainees told the court that they had been subjected to torture and ill-treatment. No investigation into these allegations has been initiated.

The right to visit the detainees has regularly been restricted for their families and lawyers.

Recommended action

Please write letters to the Attorney General and Prison Director:

- expressing concern for the health of Habib Ould Abou Mohamed and Arafat Ould Ahmed held in Ouad Naga prison, and asking for them to be given immediate and appropriate medical attention, in accordance with the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*;
- expressing concerns for the mental health of Saleh Ould Hannena and Abdehramane Ould Mini who are held in solitary confinement in cells without windows in Ouad Naga prison, and who have been kept in handcuffs and leg-irons 24 hours a day for a prolonged period;
- stating that the use of leg irons is inherently cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and contrary to international standards including the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*;
- stating that prolonged solitary confinement without access to natural light and fresh air constitutes cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and is contrary to international standards;
- calling on the authorities to immediately bring the conditions of detention in line with international standards, in particular removing the leg irons and handcuffs and placing the prisoners in cells with natural light and fresh air;
- asking that the prisoners have regular access to their families and lawyers;
- calling on the Mauritanian authorities to allow access by independent bodies to inspect the prison and visit the prisoners.

Addresses

Attorney General

Procureur Général près de la Cour suprême

M. Abdelrahman Ould Abdi

Palais de Justice

Nouakchott, Mauritania

Fax: + 222 525 5194: It may be very difficult to send faxes to Mauritania

Salutation: Monsieur le Procureur Général / Dear Attorney General

Director of prison administration

Mr. Sidi Mouloud Ould Brahim

Directeur de l'administration pénitentiaire

Aux bons soins de: Palais de Justice

Nouakchott, Mauritania

Fax : + 222 525 7095: It may be very difficult to send faxes to Mauritania

Salutation: Monsieur le Directeur / Dear Director

Director of Ouad Naga Prison

Mr. El Hadj Ahmed Ould Habib

Régisseur de la prison Ouad Naga

Aux bons soins de: Palais de Justice

Nouakchott, Mauritania

Fax: + 222 525 5194: It may be very difficult to send faxes to Mauritania

Salutation: Monsieur le Directeur / Dear Director

Please also write to diplomatic representatives of Mauritania accredited to your country if applicable.

If you receive no reply within six weeks of sending your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response. Please send copies of any letters you receive to the International Secretariat, attention of Health and Human Rights Team.