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MAURITANIA

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE SENEGAL RIVER VALLEY

OCTOBER 1990

SUMMARY

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In November 1989 Amnesty International published a 31-page report on human rights violations recorded in Mauritania between 1986 and 1989. This report was entitled Mauritania 1986-1989: Background to a crisis. Three years of political imprisonment, torture and unfair trials (AI Index AFR 38/13/89).

Since the publication of this report the human rights situation in Mauritania has considerably deteriorated. Extrajudicial executions, torture and the cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of villagers have reached a very alarming level in the south of the country.

The targets of government forces and the Haratine militia (Haratines are descendants of freed black slaves who share the language and culture of the Moors or Beidane) are black African villagers who are singled out because they belong to a particular ethnic group, the "Hal-pulaar" (those who speak Pulaar, the Peul language).

The army, security forces and the Haratine militia arrest, torture or kill unarmed villagers without fear of any disciplinary action or legal proceedings. Hundreds of black Mauritians have been arrested, persecuted and often assassinated on a very wide range of pretexts. Many prisoners have been detained for long periods without being charged or tried in complete breach of the terms of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The fate of dozens of people arrested by government forces or the militia is unknown. A curfew whose timing varies in different regions and villages is in force.

Although the government has not officially declared a state of emergency in the Senegal river valley, the security forces behave as though a state of emergency were in force.

On several occasions, Amnesty International has drawn the attention of the press and international public opinion to these serious human rights violations. However, international attention has focused on the dispute between Senegal and Mauritania and the appalling human rights situation within Mauritania has received little comment or criticism from the international community.

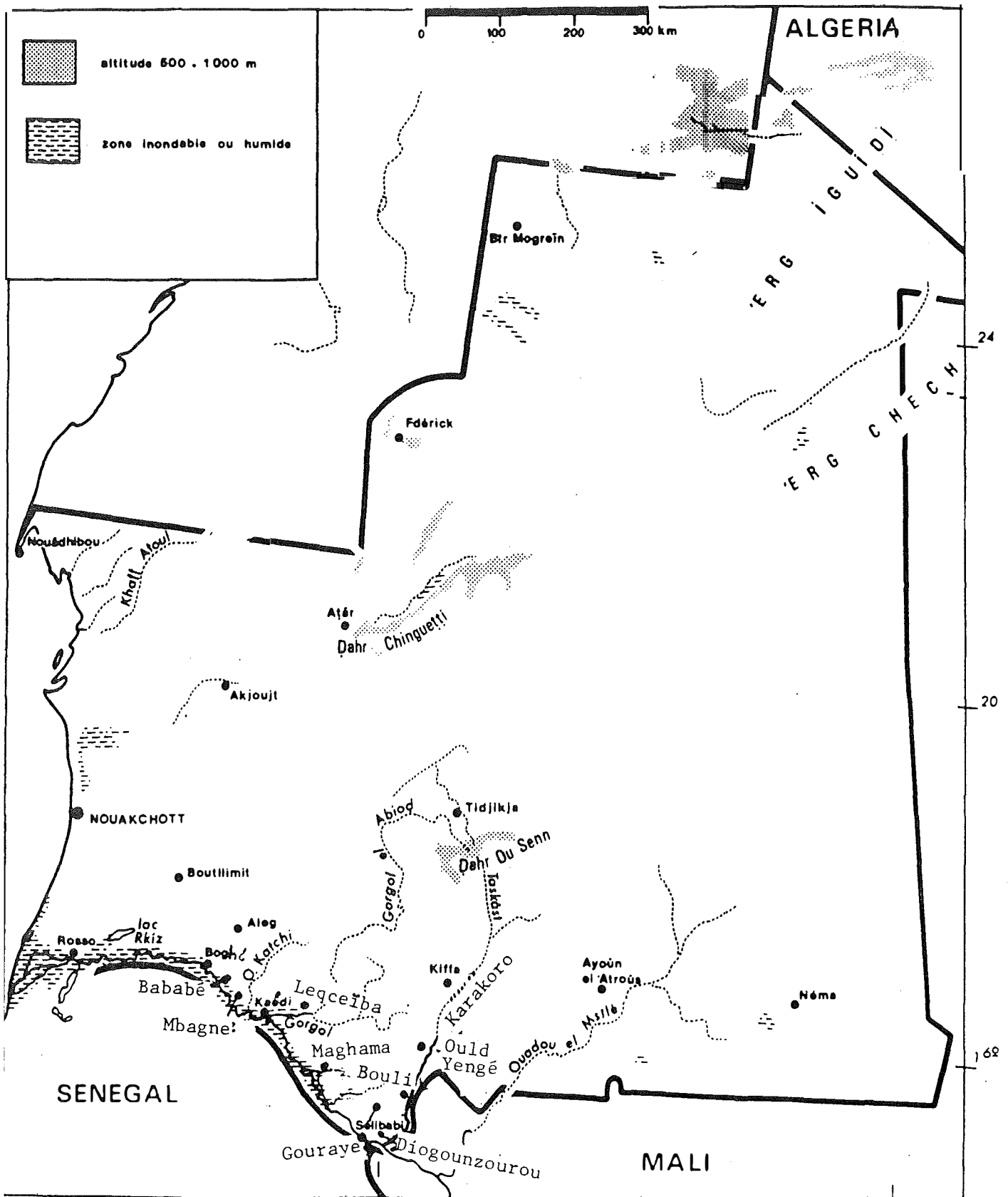
What is taking place in southern Mauritania is, in effect, an undeclared war, in which one community is using the resources and power of the state against another community.

Amnesty International has called on the Mauritanian authorities to put an end to extrajudicial executions, torture, and illegal arrest and detention in the Senegal river valley. It has also called on the government to disarm the irregular Haratine militia and to instruct members of the government security forces and the officially constituted militia to respect human rights.

This summarizes the content of a new 14-page report by Amnesty International entitled Mauritania. Human rights violations in the Senegal river valley. Anyone wanting further details on this issue should consult the full document published by Amnesty International in French, English and Arabic on 2 October 1990 (AI Index AFR 38/10/90).

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MAURITANIA;

Human rights violations in the Senegal river valley

1. INTRODUCTION

In November 1989 Amnesty International published a 31-page report on the human rights abuses recorded in Mauritania between 1986 and 1989. This report was entitled Mauritania 1986-1989: Background to a crisis. Three years of political imprisonment, torture and unfair trials (AI Index AFR 38/13/89).

Although about twenty political prisoners, including some prisoners of conscience, have been released since the publication of the above-named report, the human rights situation in Mauritania has considerably deteriorated. Extrajudicial executions, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, especially of villagers, have reached highly alarming levels in the south of the country.

The targets of government forces and the Haratine militia (Haratines are descendants of freed black slaves who share the language and culture of the Moors or Beidane) are black African villagers belonging in particular to the "Hal-pulaar" ethno-linguistic group (those who speak Pulaar, the Peul language).

There can be little doubt that these victims are singled out because they belong to a particular ethnic group. Villages are patrolled by the army, security forces and the Haratine militia who commit serious violations of human rights without fear of disciplinary action or legal proceedings.

The rate of expulsions, which had fallen at the end of 1989, increased in the first six months of 1990 when several thousand black Mauritians were deported to Senegal and Mali. Thousands of black Mauritians have also fled to Mali and Senegal, where entire villages have taken refuge, to escape this persecution.

Amnesty International has drawn the attention of the press and international public opinion to these serious human rights violations on several occasions. However, international attention has focused on the dispute between Senegal and Mauritania and the appalling human rights situation within Mauritania has received little comment or criticism from the international community.

Amnesty International has expressed its concern to the Mauritanian government on a number of occasions and has called on the government to take steps to curb the continual human rights violations which the security forces have been committing in recent months. The government did not feel the need, however, to respond to Amnesty International's appeals.

Last June, Amnesty International sent a letter to each of the heads of state and government attending the Franco-African summit at La Baule, in France, in order to bring to their attention the abuses of the human rights of unarmed civilians in the south of Mauritania which was one of the countries represented at the summit.

As was the case last year, the reaction of the Mauritanian government has again been to accuse Amnesty International of taking Senegal's side in the conflict between the two countries and ignoring the persecution of Mauritanians in Senegal. In a message sent to the organization at the end of June 1990, the Minister of Justice, Sow Adama Samba, wrote:

"... Yes, it is too much, but hardly surprising when you bear in mind that Amnesty International has continually showed a lack of concern regarding the persecution and slaughter of Mauritanians in all the villages and towns of Senegal and that other Mauritanians continue to live as hostages subject to hard labour throughout the regions of Senegal with the blessing of the Senegalese government ..."

In November 1989, the Minister of Information asked Amnesty International to intervene on behalf of 250 000 Mauritanians alleged by the Mauritanian authorities to be held in concentration camps in Senegal. Amnesty International's investigations failed to confirm these allegations. Independent investigations conducted by other impartial organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross reached the same conclusions as Amnesty International. The Mauritanian authorities would therefore seem to be exploiting their dispute with the Senegalese Government and making unfounded statements concerning alleged violations of the human rights of Mauritanians in Senegal as a way of avoiding any detailed response to the various reports of massacres, arrests and torture which Amnesty International has brought to their attention both in writing and during meetings between representatives of Amnesty International and Mauritanian diplomats in Africa, Europe and America.

Amnesty International's concerns in Mauritania remain:

- extrajudicial executions;
- the use of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;
- illegal arrest and detention.

Concerns about "disappearances" have been added to these long-standing concerns.

2. THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

2.1 Ethnic context

The main communities living in Mauritania are:

The Moors: also called Beidane, a name deriving from the Arabic word meaning "white". This group of Arab and Berber origin speaks Hassanya, a variant of Arabic. The Moors live chiefly in the desert and Sahelian regions of Mauritania.

The Haratines: black-skinned, but sharing the Moorish culture and language. They are descendants of Moorish slaves. They are attached to the tribes of their masters or former masters.

The Wolof: who live in the southwest (around Rosso-Mauritanie) and are farmers.

The Soninké: are non-nomadic and live chiefly in the Sélibaby area, although there are pockets of Soninké people in other southern regions, especially at Kaédi.

The Hal-pulaar: who speak the Peul language (Pulaar). They are also called Peuls. Elsewhere in West Africa they are known as Fula (Mali, Guinea) or Fulani (Nigeria, Cameroon). The Hal-pulaar traditionally live in Fuuta Tooro, a region straddling the frontier between Mauritania and Senegal on either side of the Senegal river. They include settled farmers (known as Toucouleurs) and nomadic stock-breeders (Fulaabé or Fulbé). From west to east, the main regions inhabited by the Mauritanian Hal-pulaar are in the Senegal river area around the towns of Rosso-Mauritanie, Boghé, Kaédi and Sélibaby.

The violations of human rights which have taken place in Mauritania over the last four years have been largely aimed at this black African ethnic group. Members of this group are seen by the authorities as contesting the political, economic and cultural predominance of the Arab-Berber group even though the inequalities between the different communities and the Moorish monopoly of the state apparatus were initially opposed by members of all the black groups.

The river valley in which the Hal-pulaar live contains most of the fertile land of a country which is chiefly desert. Some Hal-pulaar viewed a decree of June 1983 on the re-organization of land ownership as an attempt by the government and the Moorish community to seize the land of the traditional inhabitants of the valley. In recent years, moreover, droughts have led nomads to emigrate to the towns and have placed an increasing demand on land in the Senegal river valley. The dams built under the auspices of the Organisation pour la mise en valeur du fleuve Sénégal (Organization for the Development of the Senegal River) whose members are Mali, Senegal and Mauritania should make it possible, among other things, to irrigate 400 000 hectares in the valley. These development projects have also led to further antagonism between the ethnic groups.

The Mauritanian section of the Senegal river valley is the scene of the abuses described below.

2.2 Political context

Human rights violations are taking place in a context of intensified activity by opposition groups and a pro-government militia.

Following the mass expulsion of tens of thousands of black Mauritians in 1989, the government has settled Haratines, some of whom

were repatriated from Senegal following inter-communal violence in April 1989, in villages in the south and on land belonging to the local population who have been expelled from the country.

According to the information which has been reaching Amnesty International since September 1989 the authorities have distributed arms to those who have recently settled in the villages of the south.

Mauritanians deported to Senegal have set up groups which cross the river forming the border between the two countries to recover the cattle and goods confiscated from them at the time of their expulsion. These groups are known as "Peul Commandos". They began to operate first from Senegal and then from Mali when refugees started to pour into western Mali. They commit acts of violence against government forces and the people who have been settled on their land. They also provide protection for villagers fleeing Mauritania for fear of extrajudicial execution and other abuses by the security forces.

Armed raids into Mauritanian territory are also conducted by other opposition groups which, like the "Peul Commandos" recruit refugees. These include:

- FLAM (Forces de libération africaine de Mauritanie), African Liberation Forces of Mauritania, a front set up in 1983 which was responsible for drawing up Le Manifeste du Nègro-Mauritanien opprimé (The Manifesto of the Oppressed Black Mauritanian) which criticized the government for its marginalization of black Mauritanians. Several FLAM members and sympathizers were imprisoned between 1986 and 1990. A certain number of people arrested in 1989 were accused of being FLAM members. In some cases the authorities have failed to prove these allegations.
- FRUIDEM (Front de résistance pour l'unité, l'indépendance et la démocratie en Mauritanie), Resistance Front for Unity, Independence and Democracy in Mauritania. The aim of this front, set up in August 1989, is to "overthrow the chauvinism of the state, safeguard the existence and unity of Mauritania and find a fair and democratic solution to the disparities among our nationalities". FRUIDEM distributes a quarterly bulletin entitled "Résistances" (Resistance).
- FURAM (Front uni pour la résistance armée en Mauritanie), United Front for Armed Resistance in Mauritania. This front "opts for an armed struggle, which is now the only alternative, for the development of a united and stable country".

There have been several changes within the Mauritanian Government since the beginning of 1990. Colonel Djibril Ould Abdallahi, Minister of the Interior, was replaced in February 1990. His successor, Colonel Mohamed Sidina Ould Sidya, was dismissed at the end of April 1990. Colonel Brahim Ould Ali N'Diaye, chief of staff of the National Guard, the main perpetrators of the massacres and arrests in the south since April 1989, was also dismissed in February 1990.

In contrast, a former political prisoner, Mohamed Yehdih Ould Breidelleil, leader of the pro-Iraqi Ba'ath Arab Socialist party, has been appointed Executive Secretary of the Comité militaire de salut national (Military Committee for National Salvation), the country's ruling body. Ould Breidelleil was sentenced in September 1988 to two years' imprisonment

for his activities as leader of the Mauritanian branch of the pro-Iraqi Ba'ath party. He was released in December 1989 when President Ould Taya reduced the sentences of all political prisoners by one year.

The Ba'ath party advocates the unity and renaissance of the Arab nation. Mauritanian Ba'athists want to establish close links between their country and the Arab world, especially Iraq. In September 1988, at a trial before the State Security Chamber, some Ba'athist leaders criticized the slow pace of the country's "Arabization" and the "excessive immigration" of blacks.

2.3 Legal context

As far as Amnesty International is aware, the government has not declared a state of emergency in the south. The Code of Criminal Procedure which contains specific provisions guaranteeing and protecting human rights is consequently still in force. It follows that the actions of the government forces are therefore contrary to Mauritanian law.

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure, persons arrested by the security forces must be referred to the Parquet (Public Prosecutor's Office) within 48 hours of their arrest so that they can be formally charged and have their cases investigated, or must be released. This period of detention, known as garde à vue, can be renewed once only by written authorization from the local public prosecutor or the presiding judge of the regional court. It may be extended up to 30 days in cases involving the security of the state. The current detention practices of the security forces are illegal. The law also punishes the crimes of deliberate infliction of injury and of murder. No legal proceedings have been brought against the security forces despite their failure to respect these provisions.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania has not ratified the main international treaties adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations to protect human rights throughout the world, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted in 1966) and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (adopted in 1984). On 26 June 1986, however, it ratified the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights adopted by the Organization of African Unity in June 1981. By ratifying this Charter, Mauritania undertook to respect:

- The right to enjoy rights and freedoms without discrimination based on race, origins, colour ... (Article 2);
- The physical and moral integrity of the person (Article 4);
- The right to be tried within a reasonable period by an impartial court (Article 7(d)).

It would appear from some official statements that the repression of black Mauritians is being justified by the authorities as a legitimate fight against insurrection or outside aggression. However, the actions of the security forces seem to be directed at unarmed civilians living in the villages. In effect, one community is using the resources and power of the state to wage war against another community.

The government forces involved in human rights violations are attached to the following bodies:

- The National Guard: this is a paramilitary body responsible for maintaining law and order and patrolling frontier zones which accounts for its activities in the area along the river which is near the Senegal and Mali borders. It is administered by a chief of staff who is separate from the army chief of staff and is answerable to the Ministry of the Interior.
- The Gendarmerie: is normally active in rural areas, in contrast to the police who are stationed in towns.
- The Army: is active in the valley where it has garrisons in some towns. Elite units stationed in the town of Atar are also reported to be active in the south.

The army and security forces organize regular patrols of rural areas from their normal bases. They have quarters in some larger villages.

- The Haratine militia: have not apparently been established with any legal foundation. The Haratines who have been settled on the lands of expelled blacks have been armed by the authorities and asked to organize their own defence. Amnesty International has also been informed that some authorities are profiting from the subordination ties between masters and Haratines to enrol the latter in this militia.

In general this militia does not simply defend itself when attacked, but undertakes punitive expeditions against unarmed civilians living in the villages. In some cases, Haratines who object to this gratuitous violence are threatened with reprisals by the security forces who escort them on these expeditions.

3. PERSECUTION ON A DAILY BASIS

In the villages and rural areas of the south, villagers in general and members of the black Hal-pulaar ethnic group in particular, are the victims of large-scale abuse by the security forces. Identity checks and searches are very common, a curfew is in force and arbitrary arrests, often accompanied by torture or rape, are frequent. The security forces have also carried out numerous massacres. All these abuses are illegal both under Mauritanian law and internationally recognized conventions.

There are frequent identity checks in villages where inhabitants belonging to the "Hal-pulaar" or Peul ethnic group not only have to show their Mauritanian identity cards but also prove their full Mauritanian ancestry. At the beginning of March 1990, all the inhabitants of Toumbou in the Gouraye sub-district of Sélibaby were rounded up by the village cemetery and ill-treated by soldiers who rebuked them for being "Peuls of Abdou Diouf", the President of Senegal.

Some Mauritanian nationals who were born in Senegal during the colonial period, when Saint-Louis in Senegal was the capital of the colony of Mauritania, have been persecuted, arrested and expelled.

The inhabitants of many villages are forced to provide troops stationed there or on patrol with the food which they need. The villagers'

sheep and goats are confiscated for this purpose. During the night of 8 to 9 May 1990, a 34-year-old inhabitant of Sinthiane Padalal (in the Maghama District), Harouna Demba Diallo, known as Hadji, was arrested and accused of being an opponent as he had failed to give the troops stationed in the village any animals despite the herd of cattle which he owned. After being severely beaten and left close to the village he fled across the river to Senegal. His body was covered with wounds (see Photographs 1 and 2).

Several inhabitants of Sinthiane Padalal were arrested and tortured. The authorities have drawn up a list of villagers with relatives in Senegal. They are often arrested and ill-treated. Some people on this list have been bound, beaten and then confined in houses. In order to intimidate the inhabitants, the soldiers leave the village, fire rifle shots into the air and then run back into the village.

A curfew is in force in all the villages of the south. It varies in different regions from 5 to 7 in the evening to the early morning. In these rural areas where people do not necessarily have watches and where the sun's position is used to tell the time, people have been killed for failing to observe the curfew - anyone returning from the fields or pastures after the curfew may be shot on sight by the armed and security forces. Amnesty International considers these assassinations to be extrajudicial executions as there is no evidence to suggest that the people killed were engaged in acts of violence endangering the lives of other people. In the cases reported to Amnesty International none of the victims were involved in any form of violent opposition.

At the beginning of January 1990, Hamady Djoumo Bâ, a 50-year-old fisherman from Djéol near Kaédi, was killed because he had left his house before the curfew was over. In other cases, people have been killed before the start of the curfew. On the afternoon of 5 March 1990, again in the village of Djéol, Abdoul Bouka N'Diaye, aged 30, and Mamadou N'Diaye, aged 19, were killed following their arrest by the national guard as they were going fishing. Guardsmen tied their hands behind their backs with their fishing nets and took them to a place known as "Thiourouyal" where they were executed. These were obviously illegal and extrajudicial executions as the victims were under arrest at the time of their execution.

In some villages members of the Hal-pulaar or Peul ethnic group must obtain authorization from the military authorities before putting their animals out to pasture, fishing or working in the fields. This authorization does not, however, seem to provide any immunity against arrest. In the first two weeks of April 1990, five people from the village of Wothie near Boghé, including Lô Boubacar Amath, a 43-year-old former sailor, were arrested by an army patrol apparently because they were fishing even though they had a fishing permit issued by the Commander of the Bababé Gendarmerie detachment. These people are thought to be among the villagers held at the Azlat military camp between Aleg and Boghé. As far as Amnesty International is aware they had still not been released by the end of July 1990.

Arrests are made on a variety of pretexts. At the end of May 1990 Ciré Djékou Sow, aged 66, was arrested by the National Guard between the town of Kaédi and the village of Djéol following a check during which the invoice for a radio set purchased by his son in Senegal was found among his papers. He was severely tortured by a method known as "jaguar". Ciré

Djékou Sow was transferred to Kaédi prison where he was detained with six other people until 4 August when all seven were released and forced to cross the river to Senegal. They were naked as the security forces had burnt their clothes. Ciré Djékou Sow was kept in chains throughout his detention and was not allowed any visits.

The army and the national guard also round villagers up by force to allow for better surveillance. In February 1990, soldiers burned down the villages of Gourel Pé, Liradji, Marsel and Gourel Manadji in the Sélibaby region and forced their inhabitants to assemble under military supervision in the village of M'Bomé. Between February and May, these villagers were regularly ill-treated: men were beaten with truncheons and whipped and cases of rape were reported among the women.

4. ILLEGAL ARRESTS AND DETENTION

Hundreds of people have been arbitrarily detained in Mauritania, the majority simply because of their race or ethnic origins. Such arrests, both by the security forces (police, gendarmerie) and the army and national guard, have no legal basis: they are contrary to Mauritania's own laws. In many of the cases reported to Amnesty International people have been detained without being charged or tried for as long as several months and in some cases for over a year.

Although it would be impossible to list all the cases of illegal detention reported to Amnesty International in this document, it is possible to distinguish between several categories of detainees about whom the organization is concerned.

4.1 Detention prior to expulsion

Dozens of people have been detained for several weeks prior to their expulsion. A 35-year-old woman was detained, for example, at the Central Police Station in Nouakchott between 17 March and 27 May 1990 when she was deported to Senegal together with 50 other people. The security forces, who had confiscated all their goods before expelling them, forced them to cross the Senegal river naked. In another case, two young women were beaten at the police station in Rosso and had their jewellery confiscated before being expelled in February 1990.

Statements by people who have been expelled reveal that dozens of black Mauritians as well as Senegalese, Malians, Guineans and Ghanaians are being detained in police stations in towns such as Nouakchott and Rosso.

4.2 Detention of alleged government opponents

Alleged government opponents, all black, have been arrested both in Nouakchott and within the country. At Kaédi, teachers from the Ecole nationale de formation et de vulgarisation agricoles (National Agricultural Training and Development College) and from the secondary school and the lycée (senior high school), including Harouna N'Dongo and Oumou Kalsoum Barro, were arrested during October 1989 and held at the security police station at Kaédi. They were suspected of being members of FLAM. They were released on January 1990 without being charged or tried. In Nouakchott,

Ladji Traoré (see photograph 3), an economist and former prisoner of conscience <1>, was also arrested on 18 October 1989 by state security officers; he has been held since then without being charged or tried. No official reason has been given for his arrest. According to unofficial sources, Ladji Traoré, who belongs to the black African Soninké ethnic group, was arrested because of his opposition to the government's policy of expelling black Mauritians. According to information received by Amnesty International, he is being held in Nouakchott at a house used by the police as a detention centre where he is not permitted to receive visits. This detention would seem to be illegal under Mauritania's own laws. Amnesty International believes that Ladji Traoré is a prisoner of conscience detained for the non-violent exercise of his fundamental rights.

4.3 Detention of people who oppose the confiscation of their goods

Villagers who display any opposition to the confiscation of their goods are often detained for long periods. This is particularly true of Yoro Lam, a 45-year-old stock-breeder from Zereyga near Foum Gleita (M'Bout), who has been held in Nouakchott prison without being charged or tried since June 1989. He and his brother Abdramane Lam, aged 43, resisted the expropriation of their cattle by gendarmes who had come to deport them to Senegal. Abdramane Lam was killed by the gendarmes who attempted to hide his body by throwing it into a creek. Yoro Lam was arrested and the members of their family were deported to Senegal (see photographs 4 and 5).

4.4 Arrest and detention following raids by groups of refugees

Villagers have been arrested when the security forces have received reports that refugees living in the north of Senegal or in Mali have returned to recover their goods or take part in armed raids. These arrests seem to be no more than general retaliatory measures since there is no formal proof that the detainees had had any contact with the returning refugees. Retaliation and reprisals of this type are illegal under Mauritanian law and prohibited by international conventions on armed conflicts. The authorities have not, however, taken any steps to punish those members of the security forces responsible for such actions.

On 19 March 1990, three inhabitants of Boghé, including Thierno Alassane N'Diaye, a religious leader living at Boghé-Less, were arrested and accused of sheltering refugees who had returned to Mauritania secretly. They were still being held without charge or trial at Aleg prison at the end of June 1990. Thierno Moussa N'Diaye, Thierno Alassane N'Diaye's brother, was arrested on 24 March by the Kaédi police when he went to ask for news of the detainees. He was released two days later. However, Thierno Alassane N'Diaye's followers, including Alioune Hamadi Bâ, driver for the Société nationale de développement rural (National Rural Development Company), who had protested against his arrest, were detained for questioning and are still being held at Kaédi prison.

Hundreds of black villagers are being illegally detained in Mauritania for various reasons all connected with their ethnic origins.

<1> He was arrested in April 1983 and charged with embezzling public funds. He was tried and acquitted by the Special Court of Justice on 28 January 1985. It would appear that his disagreements with top government officials were the real reason for his imprisonment. Amnesty International considered him to be a prisoner of conscience.

According to information received by Amnesty International these villagers are being held in camps where they are said to be under army or national guard supervision and subject to hard labour. One of these camps is said to be at Azlat between Aleg and Boghé where 350 people are thought to be held. Some detainees were apparently released from Azlat camp at the beginning of July 1990.

5. EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

Information from a number of sources points to an alarming increase in the number of extrajudicial executions carried out by the army and national guard as well as the Haratine militia during the first half of 1990. It is impossible to find out how many black Mauritians belonging to the Hal-pulaar ethnic group have been summarily executed since the commencement of the operation to expel black Mauritians in May 1989. Large numbers of victims have been reported, however, in almost all the towns and villages along the Mauritanian bank of the Senegal river. No village seems to have escaped entirely. The victims are almost all unarmed villagers. The Mauritanian authorities have refused to provide any information about the extent of massacres or to recognize that these executions are illegal. In a statement to Amnesty International in June 1990, the Minister of Justice intimated that the violence being inflicted by the security forces was a legitimate response to the acts of violence committed by groups of armed opponents.

Members of the armed and security forces as well as Haratine militia generally enter villages after raids by armed groups from Senegal or Mali or after villagers have fled to these two countries to escape persecution by the army. Victims are often singled out following routine patrols and searches in villages. In villages inhabited by different ethnic groups, selection is based on ethnic criteria - the Hal-pulaar being the main targets. In some cases people have been killed for no other reason than their ethnic origins.

On 10 April 1990, a patrol of soldiers and armed Haratines entered the village of Moudji near Sélibaby. After searching the houses for arms they arrested seven people including Silly Youmé Bâ, aged 47, and Mamadou Demba Sall, aged 22. While the villagers thought that they had been taken to Sélibaby, the main town of the region, and detained there, the seven men had in fact been taken some kilometres from the village and executed. Three had been shot and the four others killed by crushing their heads with stones. Their thorn-covered bodies were found later by other villagers. The seven men had their hands tied behind their backs, proof that they were prisoners at the time of their death and were the victims of extrajudicial execution.

On 20 April 1990, at Woyndouyoli, seven kilometres from Sélibaby, some 60 armed Haratines, escorted by two soldiers, one of whom was a lance-sergeant of the national guard, arrested 15 people, bound them hand and foot and forced them to remain in the sun for several hours without food or drink. Later that afternoon a firing squad is alleged to have shot four of them including Harouna Ousmane Sow and Adama Souleymane Bâ. The soldiers then took away the remaining 11 prisoners, seven of whom, including Adama Oumar Diallo (see photograph 6), were subsequently executed.

other people. They were chained up, beaten and subjected to the "jaguar" torture by soldiers. Gorel Bâ's 18-year-old son, Moussa, whose nose was bleeding following a violent beating, received no medical attention during his detention which lasted 19 days. These people had been arrested during an army round-up following a raid by a group of refugees from Senegal (see photograph 11).

People in detention are often tortured by fire as well. A 27-year-old refugee originally from Toumbou arrested by the army who were looking for his brother, made the following statement to Amnesty International (see photograph 12):

"... They lit a fire and heated up irons which they placed on my chest and neck. They burned my brother's friend's buttocks... They tied a rope to our necks and attached the rope to a tree. They pulled on the rope until we lost consciousness ..."

Another refugee explained that he was held for 61 days in a prison at Sélibaby with 15 other people. They were regularly beaten by the warders who inflicted cigarette burns on them. After 12 days' detention two people had died and two others are thought to have been taken away and shot.

It would seem that the aim of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is not simply to extract information. Prisoners are deliberately made to suffer solely because of their ethnic origins so that other members of the same group will be intimidated and forced to leave their country.

Numerous reports of rapes of Hal-pulaar girls and women have been received by Amnesty International. In most cases the women are raped by national guardsmen and soldiers while they are in detention. Amnesty International has received detailed information about the rape of two women who were deported to Senegal in February 1990. One of these women, aged 25, was held for three months at the commissariat du 2e arrondissement (Second sub-district police station) in Nouakchott. In February 1990 she was transferred to the security police headquarters at Rosso together with four men and another woman, and then to the military post of the Ould Mogheina area where the deportations take place. She was raped by soldiers for an entire night before being thrown into the river which she crossed to reach Senegal.

7. "DISAPPEARANCES"

Operations by government forces against the Hal-pulaar have led to the arrest of hundreds of villagers. The fate of many of these is unknown. It is impossible for the friends and relatives of prisoners who have not been released to find out what has become of them. There is no authority to which representations can be made without running the risk of being arrested oneself. Several prisoners who are not among those who are known to be dead have "disappeared". Amnesty International fears that they have been the victims of extrajudicial executions. Most are from the Aleg and Sélibaby regions. At Dioudé-Diéry near Boghé (Aleg) 16 people including Kanni Sall and Oumar Thiam, aged 15, were arrested in March 1990 by national guardsmen who were searching houses looking for arms. They were taken to an unknown destination and their fate is still unknown.

On 7 May 1990 at Belendendi near Leqceiba-Gorgol in Kaédi region, Dia Bocar Hamadi, aged 30, was killed by national guardsmen stationed at Talhaya. He was looking for the cattle which had been taken from him by Haratines. When his three brothers went to the police station to protest at his death they were arrested and detained at Kaédi until the beginning of July. Dia Bocar Hamadi was resident in the People's Republic of Congo where he was a trader. He had returned to the village to get married (see photograph 7).

Guardsmen often fire at point blank range at villagers for no apparent reason. On 12 April (15 of the Islamic month of Ramadan, which Muslims devote to fasting) at Ngoral-Guidal near Boghé, Thierno Saibatou Bâ, a 57-year-old religious leader, was killed by national guardsmen in the presence of villagers. According to eye-witness accounts received by Amnesty International, the religious leader had just been bathing in the river as was his practice every day during Ramadan prior to afternoon prayer. He was climbing up the bank to rejoin his talibés (students) when he was accosted by the guardsmen and murdered. He was obviously not involved in any act of violence. His relatives were authorized to bury his body. This is not always the case: in many villages the bodies of victims are left in the open for several days before burial. According to Islamic rules, families must wait for official authorization before a burial can take place. This was the case of Abou Lawal Diallo, from the village of Dabane, who was killed on 20 February 1990 by soldiers based at Sorimalé in the Bababé District.

The armed and security forces and the Haratine militia responsible for these killings apparently benefit from total impunity. In regions where massacres and executions have taken place the rule of law seems to be non-existent. As far as Amnesty International knows the judicial authorities have not investigated any cases of civilians killed by the security forces. Up to now no legal action appears to have been taken against members of the security forces responsible for these executions. The authorities show no intention of ending this appalling situation and the security forces have, or so it would seem, full powers to kill with complete impunity. At present entire Hal-pulaar villages are fleeing Mauritania and taking refuge in Senegal and Mali for fear of persecution and execution (see photograph 8).

In May 1990 an Amnesty International representative met 400 inhabitants of the village of Gourel Mamoudou in the Gouraye sub-district of Sélibaby who had fled from persecution. Two villagers had been executed by guardsmen and others bore the scars of torture inflicted by soldiers.

6. TORTURE

The armed and security forces make intensive and consistent use of the "jaguar" torture (where the victim's wrists and feet are bound, he is suspended upside down from a bar and the soles of his feet are beaten) when interrogating Hal-pulaar villagers (see photographs 9 and 10). Amnesty International has continued to receive numerous accounts of the use of the "jaguar" torture which derives its name from the French combat plane used in Mauritania during the Western Sahara war in which Mauritania was involved between 1975 and 1979.

Gourel Bâ, a 55-year-old farmer from the village of Gourel-Mamoudou, was arrested at M'Bomé at the end of April 1990 together with 10 or so

Whole families have "disappeared" in the Sélibaby region. At Gourel-Amadou Mamadou, near Ould Yengé, Adama N'Diaye, aged 50, his wife Salamatou Sow, known as Boolo, and their nine children were arrested by the security forces and taken into the bush in February 1990. They have not been seen since then. In November 1989, 27 inhabitants of Mouta-Ala near Ould-Yengé, including Harouna Diaw and Djibo Mody Djabou, were arrested by soldiers after Peul stock breeders from the Aftout region had fled to Mali. The fate of these people is unknown as is that of 12 inhabitants of Nébya near Ould Yengé (Sélibaby) who were arrested in the same week by soldiers. In February 1990 soldiers based at Ould Yengé are alleged to have taken away inhabitants of Guéléwol (Ould Yengé). In the Sélibaby region dozens of Hal-pulaar villages have been forcibly evacuated following operations by government forces and militia. Some villagers have been deported, others have fled from persecution. Some villagers who were arrested have simply "disappeared".

8. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT

Amnesty International is calling on the Mauritanian government to take immediate action to:

1) Put an end to the extrajudicial executions of members of the Hal-pulaar ethnic group in the south of the country and in particular:

- to give clear and precise orders to members of the armed and security forces responsible for maintaining law and order in the south, stating that extrajudicial executions and torture are prohibited under any circumstances and will not be tolerated;
- to instruct the judicial authorities to investigate the illegal executions which the security forces and militia are alleged to have committed and to start proceedings against those responsible for violations of human rights. Amnesty International is very seriously concerned by the impunity with which the security forces commit serious violations of human rights without any authority intervening and ordering disciplinary sanctions or commencing legal proceedings.

Amnesty International calls on the government to disband the Haratin militia which has not been officially established by the authorities. The authorities should ensure that officially authorized militia respect human rights.

2) Put an end to the arbitrary detention of members of the Hal-pulaar ethnic group and other ethnic groups:

- Amnesty International calls on the government to release all prisoners of conscience, that is, all persons imprisoned on account of their beliefs or their ethnic origins who have not used or advocated the use of violence;
- Amnesty International calls on the government to set up an independent authority responsible for supplying relatives and non-governmental organizations with information on all detainees, especially in the south. This authority should be promptly informed of the identity, village of origin, place of detention and reasons for the imprisonment of any person arrested. This authority should have free access to villagers, who should be protected from any fear of reprisals, in

order to establish what has become of their relatives and friends who have been arrested or who have "disappeared".

The current breakdown of the rule of law in the south has created a climate of fear which is apparently being deliberately perpetuated to intimidate villagers, especially the Hal-pulaar. If the government genuinely wishes to escape the charge of racial discrimination against one community within its society, which is contrary to Mauritanian law and prohibited by the international treaties to which Mauritania is party (particularly the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 and ratified by Mauritania on 13 December 1988) <1>, it must take steps to calm the fears of the people of the south and put an end to the conditions which have led to the "disappearances" or killings of prisoners.

Steps must be taken to halt the illegal detention of prisoners by the security forces for weeks or months without referring them to a judicial authority: this practice contravenes Mauritanian law and internationally recognized standards. This means in particular that the public prosecutor must carry out his duty of supervising official and unofficial places of detention to ensure that nobody is illegally detained.

Although Mauritania has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, it has not ratified other critically important human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Amnesty International urges Mauritania to ratify or accede to these important human rights treaties. The United Nations General Assembly has urged all states that have not yet done so to become parties to the Covenants and to consider acceding to the Optional Protocol. It has also urged all states to ratify or accede to the Convention against Torture "as a matter of priority".

<1> Mauritania has not ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.



1.



2.

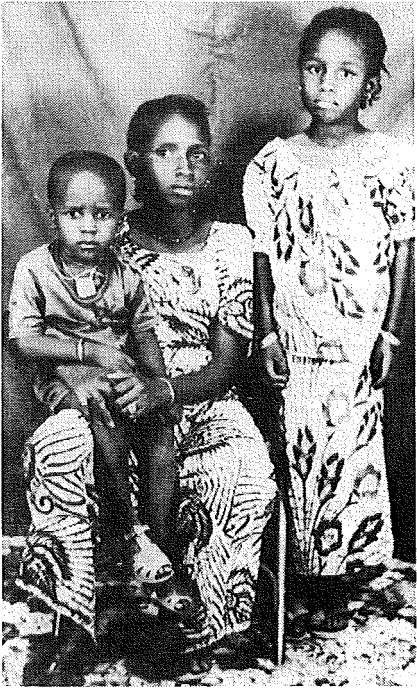
Harouna Demba Diallo (known as Hadji) was arrested and accused of being a government opponent as he had failed to give any of his animals as food to the army unit stationed in his village. He was severely beaten and then left near his village. His body was covered with scars.



3. Ladj Traoré (left):
Arrested in October 1989.
By September 1990 he had
not been formally charged
or brought to trial.

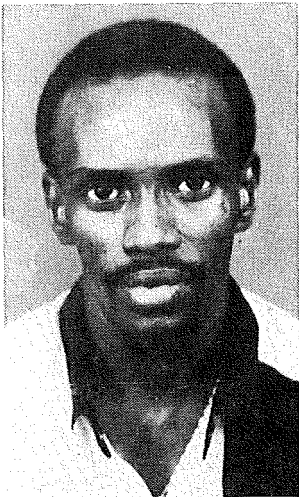


4. Mariam Lam (right),
daughter of Abdramane Lam
who was arbitrarily shot
by the gendarmerie in
June 1989.



5. Yoro Lam's children (left). Yoro Lam was arrested after his brother, Abdramane Lam, was killed, in June 1989. Both had resisted the expropriation of their cattle. Yoro Lam is detained at Nouakchott prison. Members of their family were deported to Senegal.

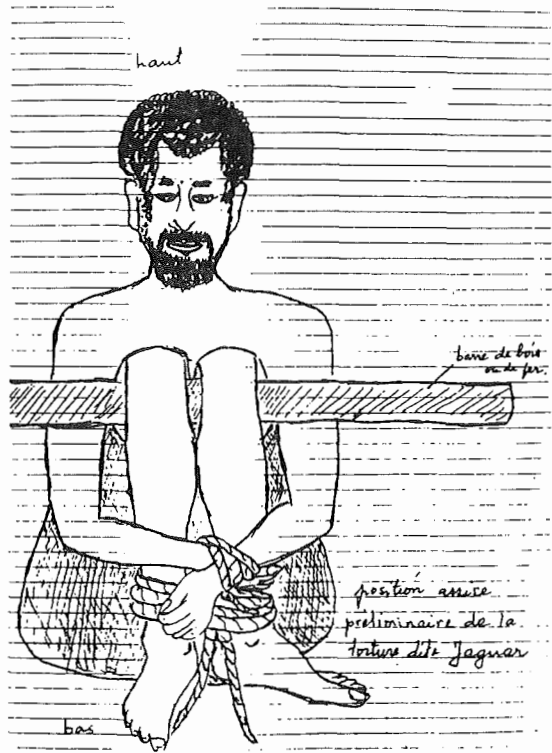
6. Adama Oumar Diallo (right), from Woyndouyoli, who was extrajudicially executed in April 1989.



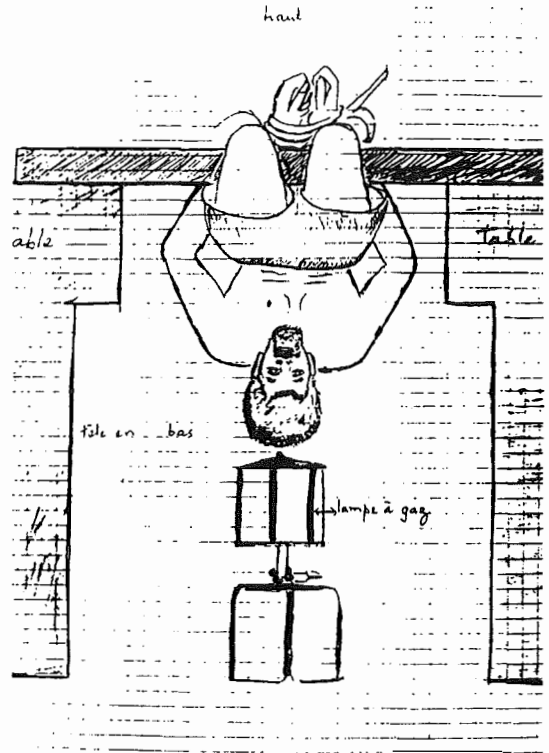
7. Dia Bocar Hamadi (left), from Belendendi, who was extrajudicially executed on 7 May 1990.

8. Hal-pulaar villagers (right) from Gourel-Mamoudou who fled Mauritania for fear of execution in May 1990 to refugee camps in Senegal.





9.

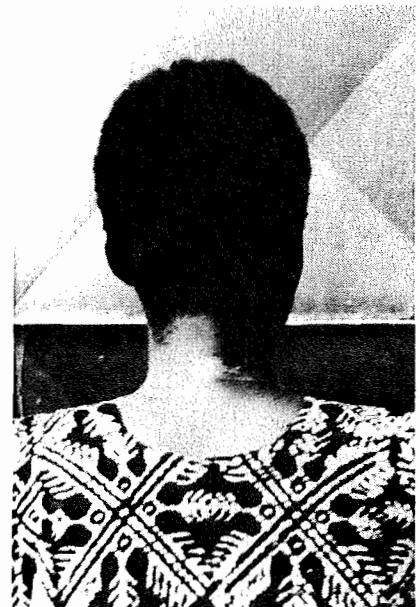


10.

The "jaguar" torture method. The victim's wrists are attached to his feet. He is then suspended by a bar which turns the victim upside down, sometimes over a flame. The soles of the feet are beaten.



11. Villagers from Gourel-Mamoudou who fled to Senegal in May 1990. Among them are Gorel Bâ (centre front) and his son Moussa Bâ (front right) who had been tortured after their arrest in April 1990.



12. This torture victim was burned with iron bars placed across his chest and neck. A rope was then tied around his neck and attached to a tree. The rope was pulled until the victim lost consciousness.

