



## JOINT STATEMENT

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### **Mauritania: the families of 14 prisoners subjected to enforced disappearance for over a year have the right to know their relatives' whereabouts**

It has now been over a year since fourteen men convicted of terrorism and in prison in Nouakchott, Mauritania, have been victims of enforced disappearance. They were transferred from the central prison to an unknown location on 23 May 2011. Since then, their families have not seen them in spite of repeatedly asking the authorities to reveal their place of detention.

Human rights organisations, both in Mauritania and internationally, have called on the authorities to reveal the fourteen men's whereabouts, and allow families to visit them, in accordance with national laws and international obligations to which Mauritania subscribed in various treaties, including the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, signed in September 2011. However, since the fourteen men's transfer, the authorities have refused to reveal their place of detention. They have even refuted the fact that the State was obliged to reveal the fourteen men's place of detention under international law, invoking national security.

Following the abduction of the fourteen prisoners, a Member of Parliament questioned the Minister of Justice at the National Assembly but the latter refused to answer the question in the House of Assembly. Several MPs have often been raising the question since then, but never received an appropriate answer.

A few months ago, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Nouakchott was authorised to visit the fourteen men. In spite of this visit, human rights organisations still consider that these men are victims of enforced disappearances as the authorities continue to refuse to "*acknowledge the whereabouts of the disappeared persons*", and we still do not know where they are held.

In failing to make known the whereabouts of these disappeared persons, the Mauritanian state is violating an essential standard of international human rights law. This provides that the arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, thereby placing such a person outside of the protection of the law, amounts to enforced disappearance and is contrary to international law. Enforced

disappearances, including in the case of individuals accused or convicted of having committed human rights violations, can never be justified.

In addition, we, the undersigned organisations, are really concerned by the medical condition of several of these prisoners and we fear that they may not have access to regular and appropriate medical care. Mohamed Abdellahi Ould Ahmednah's family shared their fears with us. They saw their son, brother and husband for a very short period of time when he was flown to Nouakchott for his appeal hearing in May 2012, and immediately flown back to this secret place of detention straight after the hearing. He was very pale, had lost a lot of weight and had lost hair as well. He seemed extremely weak, which increased the family's distress. We believe that by failing to stop this enforced disappearance, the Mauritanian authorities are making themselves responsible for the deterioration of the health status of these detainees.

The signatory organisations are therefore calling on the Mauritanian authorities to immediately disclose publicly the fourteen prisoners' place of detention, to ensure that they are held in an officially-recognized place of detention, and to allow families to visit them;

### **Background**

The fourteen prisoners victims of enforced disappearance are:

- 1- El Khadim Ould Semane
- 2-Sidi Ould Sidina
- 3-Mohamed Ould Chabarnou
- 4-Maarouf Ould Haiba
- 5-Mohamed Abdellahi Ould Ahmednah Ould Mohamed Salem
- 6-Mohamed Ould Abdou
- 7-Abderrahmane Ould Areda
- 8-Mohamed Ould Chbih
- 9-Amar Ould Mohamed Saleh
- 10-Taghi Ould Youssouf
- 11-Salem Ould Hemmod
- 12-Tiyeb Ould Saleck
- 13- Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Sebty dit Dahoud Sebty
- 14- Mohamed Khaled

**Signatories :**

Amnesty International

Association des Femmes Chef de Famille (AFCF)

Association Mauritanienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH)

Comité de solidarité avec les victimes des violations des droits de l'homme en Mauritanie

Forum des Organisations Nationales des Droits Humains (FONADH)

SOS-Esclaves