

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 38/03/94
Distr: UA/SC

This is a limited appeal. Please restrict appeals to 20 per section.

UA 360/94

Fear of torture / Legal concern

30 September 1994

MAURITANIA Mohamed Cheick Ould Sidi Yahya, Imam of Sebkha mosque, President of "Umma", unofficial Islamist political party
Aboubekrin Ould Ahmed, former Minister of Culture and Islamic Orientation
Hassan Ould Moulay Ely, municipal councillor, member of the *Union des Forces Démocratiques* (UFD)
Abdallah Ould Reggad, appeal court judge
El Hadj Abdelazziz Sy, Imam of El Mina mosque, Vice-President of "Umma"
Mohamed Moctar Ould Gaguih, former director of Islamic Orientation at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Orientation
Jemil Ould Mansour, journalist
Mohamed Ould Ragel, municipal councillor, and UFD member
Vall Ould Wreg
and at least 25 others

In an apparent round-up of Islamist activists, 34 people were arrested on or around 25 September in the capital Nouakchott and elsewhere, although unofficial sources allege that over 200 have been detained throughout the country. According to reports, some of the detainees were beaten and tortured at the time of their arrest, heightening fears that they may be at risk of further torture or ill-treatment in custody.

Some of the detainees are believed to be held at the *Ecole de Police Nationale* (National Police Academy) in Nouakchott, but they have not been allowed access to their families or legal representatives. One detainee, Vall Ould Wreg, who was reportedly tortured at the time of his arrest, is said to have been transferred to hospital in Nouakchott. The whereabouts of the other detainees is unknown.

The Mauritanian authorities have acknowledged the detention of 34 people whom they accuse of being members of a clandestine organization said to threaten Mauritania's sovereignty.

The Minister of the Interior is quoted in a press statement of 25 September 1994 as saying that "*secret organizations foreign to our customs have sprung up recently in Mauritania*", and described the activities of these organizations as "*a pretext to damage order and security in this country and to attack Mauritanian sovereignty*". He accused the organizations of receiving support from foreign countries and alleged that members were undergoing training on the outskirts of Nouakchott.

Some of the people who have been arrested are apparently members of an organization called "Umma" (meaning "religious community" in Arabic), led by Mohamed Cheick Ould Sidi Yahya. In 1992 the "Umma" deposited its statutes with the government and asked to be recognized as an Islamist political party. This demand was refused by the authorities on the grounds that no political party could claim to be the sole representative of Islam. Some of the detainees are also members of the *Union des Forces Démocratiques* (UFD), Union of Democratic Forces, an officially recognized coalition of opposition political parties. According to unconfirmed reports, several of those arrested are foreign nationals.

Amnesty International has received no information to suggest that any of those arrested were involved in violent acts and fears that they may have been arrested because of their religious and political beliefs.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Islam is the official religion of Mauritania, but islamist political parties are banned. However, some Islamic organizations, such as the *Association Islamique Culturelle* (Islamic Cultural Association), are recognized by the government. Some islamist leaders have been critical of both the government and the opposition; recordings of their speeches are reportedly available on cassette tape in Nouakchott. However, until now, the Mauritanian Government has not taken action to repress islamist political activism. There have been few reported acts of violence associated with islamist activists; in 1993 two priests were reportedly attacked by a young islamist activist and, in a separate incident, an islamist activist was arrested following a disturbance at the *Maison de la Culture* in Nouakchott. However, it is unclear whether these incidents were isolated or organized acts of violence.

In the past Amnesty International has been seriously concerned about the use of torture against suspected government opponents held in incommunicado detention, and about long-term detention without trial. Few arrests of political opponents have been reported since elections in 1992. However, more than 300 political prisoners were killed or tortured to death at the end of 1990 and in early 1991.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in French/Arabic or in your own language:

- noting the arrest, on or around 25 September 1994, of at least 34 islamist activists (give some names), and expressing concern at reports that some were subjected to torture and ill-treatment at the time of their arrest;
- urging that the detainees are granted immediate access to lawyers, relatives and any medical care they may need, and seeking assurances that the detainees are now being treated humanely in accordance with international standards;
- calling for all allegations of torture and ill-treatment to be investigated;
- expressing concern that those detained may have been arrested because of their religious and political beliefs and urging the Mauritanian Government to release them immediately unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought promptly to court in line with international standards.

APPEALS TO

1. Son Excellence

Monsieur Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya

Président de la République

La Présidence - BP 184, Nouakchott - Mauritania

Telegrams: President Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, Nouakchott, Mauritania

Telexes: 5580 PRIM MTN

Faxes: + 222 2 52636

Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Dear Mr President

2. Monsieur Sid Ahmed Ould Boubacar

Premier ministre et chef du gouvernement

La Primature, Nouakchott - Mauritania

Telegrams: Prime Minister Ould Boubacar, Nouakchott, Mauritania

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre/Dear Prime Minister

3. Monsieur Mohamed Lemine Salem Ould Dah
Minister de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des Télécommunications
Ministère de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des Télécommunications
BP 195, Nouakchott - Mauritania

Telegrams: Minister Salem Ould Dah, Nouakchott, Mauritania

Telexes: 5585 MINFA MTN (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Monsieur Sow Abou Demba, Ministre de la Justice, Ministère de la Justice,
Nouakchott - Mauritania

Faxes: + 222 2 52860

and to diplomatic representatives of Mauritania accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 November 1994.