

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AFR 38/3691/2016

16 March 2016

Mauritania: Amnesty International calls for an end to slavery and torture and ill-treatment

UN Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Mauritania

Amnesty International welcomes Mauritania's acceptance of a range of recommendations related to slavery, including to strengthen national legislation and its implementation,¹ to train the police and judicial authorities,² to investigate complaints related to slavery,³ and to implement the recommendations by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery.⁴

Amnesty International is concerned however, that there is a significant gap between the letter of the law and its implementation in practice. Despite the 2015 law, which defines slavery as a crime against humanity, there have been long delays in the more than 30 slavery cases that have been brought before the Public Prosecutor.

Mauritania also committed to investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment and excessive use of force by the police;⁵ however, it rejected a recommendation to do so through an independent process and to bring those responsible to justice,⁶ raising doubt as to its genuine commitment to ending torture and ill-treatment. From testimonies collected by Amnesty International it appears that torture takes a number of forms in Mauritania – from cigarette burns and electrical shocks, to sleep deprivation and threats to the families of those detained. These practices are used to extract “confessions” from detainees and facilitated by procedures that allow suspects to be held for up to 45 days. During

¹ Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Mauritania*, A/HRC/31/6, 223 December 2015, recommendations 127.29-127.36 (Poland, South Africa, Switzerland, Uganda, Uruguay, Costa Rica, France, Ireland) and 127.49 (Norway).

² A/HRC/31/6, recommendations 126.21-126.24 (Uganda, Oman, Sierra Leone, Vietnam) and 127.15 (Italy).

³ A/HRC/31/6, recommendations 126.57 (Germany) and 127.39 (Sweden).

⁴ A/HRC/31/6, recommendations 127.40 (Netherlands), 127.51 (Germany).

⁵ A/HRC/31/6, recommendations 126.11 (Ghana), 126.35 (Sweden) and 126.37 (Slovenia).

⁶ A/HRC/31/6, recommendation 129.47 (Switzerland).

a mission to Mauritania in 2015, Amnesty International met detainees, including suspected members of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Magreb, as well as women and children who alleged that they had been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

The organization calls on Mauritania to take immediate measures to end torture and other ill-treatment and to promptly carry out investigations into all such allegations and to hold those responsible to account in fair trials.

Equally shocking is Mauritania's rejection of recommendations to prevent the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defenders,⁷ to release human rights defenders calling for abolition of slavery,⁸ and to create a safe and enabling environment in which human rights defenders can operate freely and safely.⁹

According to Amnesty's information there are currently three prisoners of conscience in Mauritania: two members of the anti-slavery organization, Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (Initiative de Résurgence du Mouvement Abolitionniste-IRA Mauritanie), and a blogger sentenced to death for apostasy. Human rights defenders continue to face harassment and intimidation, including death threats, and the authorities appear to take no action to investigate these threats or to protect the defenders. Amnesty International calls on Mauritania to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience and to ensure that human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society activists can carry out their legitimate activities without intimidation, hindrance or harassment.

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Mauritania on 16 March 2016 during its 31st session. Prior to the adoption of the review outcome, Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above. Amnesty International also submitted information in advance of the review in November 2015:

English version: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr38/1813/2015/en/>

French version: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr38/1813/2015/fr/>

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International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK

www.amnesty.org

⁷ A/HRC/31/6, recommendation 129.58 (Ireland).

⁸ A/HRC/31/6, recommendation 129.50 (Germany).

⁹ A/HRC/31/6, recommendation 129.52 (Belgium).