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UA 21/94 Legal Concern/Prisoner of Conscience

21 January 1994

**MAURITANIA Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara, human rights activist, Professor of
Sociology at the University of Nouakchott**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned by the arrest of human rights activist, Professor Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara, in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, on 20 January 1994. The organization believes that he has been arrested solely on account of his human rights activities, and that he should be immediately and unconditionally released as a prisoner of conscience, unless he is to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence. He is currently held incommunicado at Police Headquarters (*la Sûreté Nationale*) in Nouakchott.

Professor Kamara is the Vice-President of an independent human rights organization, *l'Association Mauritanienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH)*, which has not been legalized by the government although it has applied for legal status. He was arrested at home by plainclothes police on 20 January, at which time his house was searched and papers relating to his human rights activities were confiscated. The police reportedly did not have a warrant for his arrest.

In the days preceding his arrest, Professor Kamara had met with members of a joint international human rights delegation comprising representatives of the *Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH)*, International Human Rights Federation and *Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme*, Act Together for Human Rights. This delegation visited Mauritania from 11 to 16 January 1994 to investigate the human rights situation and hold discussions with human rights activists, foreign diplomats and some members of the government. Professor Kamara was arrested four days after escorting the FIDH and *Agir Ensemble* delegates to the airport when they left Mauritania on 16 January.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1993 there was concern about apparent attempts by the Mauritanian government to cover up past human rights violations by the security forces. A law passed in May 1993 granted a total amnesty to members of the security forces for all offences during a three-year period from 1989 to 1992. During that time, more than 400 black Mauritanians were executed extrajudicially, thousands were detained for lengthy periods without charge or trial and many others "disappeared". The authorities presented the amnesty law as a sign of national reconciliation, but it also seemed to be an attempt to prevent national human rights groups publicizing their concerns at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (See Amnesty International News Service Item, 4 June 1993, AI Index: AFR 38/WU 01/93).

Earlier in 1993, human rights activists, in conjunction with *Agir Ensemble*, a human rights group based in France, protested that an army colonel who had often been named by torture victims as responsible for their ill-treatment had been allowed to travel to France for further military training and called on the French authorities to bring him to justice. He returned to Mauritania in March, apparently earlier than originally planned, but no investigations into the torture allegations or other legal proceedings were started against him in either France or Mauritania.

During the recent visit by the international human rights delegates, members of the Mauritanian government reportedly declined to meet with members of *Agir Ensemble*, apparently because of their work on behalf of the widows of the victims of extrajudicial execution. An *Agir Ensemble* report - believed to be the Rapport de mission Mauritanie, 2/15 décembre 1992, which raised concern about extrajudicial executions and torture in Mauritania - was reportedly described by the government as "inaccurate".

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

- expressing concern at the arrest of Professor Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara in Nouakchott on 20 January 1994 and the confiscation of papers relating to his human rights work;
- expressing concern that he is being held incommunicado and urging that he be allowed immediate access to his family and legal representatives;
- stating that if he has been arrested solely on account of his human rights activities, Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

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

Monsieur Sidi 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

Monsieur Lemrabott Sidi Mahmoud Ould Cheikh Ahmed

Ministre de l'Intérieur, des Postes

et des Télécommunications

Ministère de l'Intérieur, des Postes

et des Télécommunications

BP 195, NOUAKCHOTT - Mauritania

Telegrams: Minister Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Nouakchott, Mauritania

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

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Ely Ould Mohammed Vall, Directeur de la Sûreté Nationale, NOUAKCHOTT
Mauritania

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 4 March 1994.