

UA 496/90

Fear of Torture/Legal Concern

11 December 1990

MAURITANIA: Sy Aboulaye MALIKEL )  
 Ly MOUSSA ) former prisoners of conscience  
 Diallo ALASSANE )

Lieutenant Kane HAMEDINE, Gendarme in Nouakchott  
 Lieutenant de vaisseau Kane Amadou RACINE  
 Commandant Dia ALIOU, customs inspector in Nouadhibou  
 Sarr IBRAHIMA, worker at Nouadhibou's oil installations  
 Ba MOCTAR, Director of Oceanic Centre  
 Gaye SAIDOU, Navy petty officer  
 Thierno Yacoub BA, former governor of Rosso-Mauritanie  
 Dieng DIOULDE, teacher, Nouakchott  
 Oumar DJOL, aged 33, army sergeant, Boghe  
 + at least 1000 other black Mauritians

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Amnesty International has learnt that at least 1000 people, all members of the black Hal-pulaar ethnic group, have been arrested since mid-November 1990 and remain held without charge in connection with their racial and ethnic origin. The 1000 include the 50 about whom Amnesty International received information initially, as reported in UA 490/90 (AFR 38/14/90, 4 December), of which the three named are still held.

They also include three former prisoners of conscience, named above, who were released in December 1989 after three years in Oualata and Aioun prisons.

Most of the arrests have taken place in Mauritania's two largest towns, Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Some have been released uncharged but others are still held in military custody in Nouakchott, either at the headquarters of the 6ème région militaire (6th region barracks), located 12 kilometres from Nouakchott on the Akjoujt road, or at J'Reida army barracks at some 30kms from Nouakchott. Those arrested in Nouadhibou were moved to Nouakchott by military planes without their relatives being informed of their whereabouts.

Reports indicate that many of the detainees have been subjected to torture. In the past political detainees, particularly those held in military custody, have been tortured as a matter of routine: torture methods including inflicting burns and the "jaguar" (where the victim's wrists and feet are bound and the victim is suspended upside down from a bar and beaten on the soles of his feet). Although it has not yet been possible to establish what has happened to all those arrested, it seems that as many as 15 detainees may have died as a result of torture, including Gaye Saïdou, a Navy petty officer who is said to have died under torture in the army's 6th region barracks. On 5 December 1990, Thierno Yacoub Bâ, a former governor of the town of Rosso-Mauritanie in southern Mauritania, aged 36, was beaten with an iron bar at the time of his arrest by gendarmes in his house in the El Mina district of Nouakchott. He was bleeding heavily and did not receive medical care. He was taken away and his whereabouts are unknown. There are fears that others are still being tortured and that many may be suffering serious ill-health as a result of torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

The government has responded to publicity about these mass arrests by claiming that all those detained were involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the government on 28 November, the 30th anniversary of the country's independence. However, unofficial sources have suggested that the current arrests are in fact connected to local elections in which members of various different black ethnic groups have

backed black candidates belonging to the Haratine community, headed by a former government minister, Messaoud Ould Boulkheir.

No formal charges have been announced against any of the detainees despite some releases. Hundreds are believed to be still held. Amnesty International is concerned at this new escalation of human rights violations in Mauritania, particularly as it is the Hal-pulaar population which is once again the main target. This group has been a regular target for arrests, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions over the past one-and-a-half years, particularly in the south of the country.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:**

- expressing concern at reports that at least 1000 members of the Hal-pulaar have been arrested since mid-November 1990 (citing some names) and are being held incommunicado without charge, in military custody;
- inquiring as to the reasons and legal basis for their detention, and urging that they should not be detained unlawfully outside the framework of the law;
- expressing concern at reports that many of those arrested have been tortured and that some have died as a result - draw attention in particular to the reported death of as many as 15 people, including Gaye Saïdou and Djol Oumar, and call for an open and impartial investigation into his treatment in custody, to be followed by the prosecution of any members of security forces found to have used torture;
- requesting an assurance that detainees are not being held outside the terms of the law and are not being subjected to ill-treatment or torture;
- urging the authorities to allow all the detainees arrested in recent weeks immediate access to legal counsel, to relatives and medical facilities;
- expressing concern that those held may be imprisoned on account of their ethnic origin in the absence of any evidence that they have committed crimes, and urging that if this is the case they should be released unconditionally and immediately.

**APPEALS TO:**

Son Excellence Monsieur le Colonel Maaouiya Ould Sid'Ahmed TAYA  
Président du Comité militaire de salut national, et Chef de l'Etat  
La Présidence  
B.P. 184  
Nouakchott  
République Islamique de Mauritanie

Faxes: + 222 2 52636  
Telegrams: President Ould Taya, Nouakchott, Mauritania  
Telexes: 580 PRIM MTN

Monsieur Adama Samba Sow  
Ministre de la Justice  
Ministère de la Justice  
Nouakchott, MAURITANIE

Faxes: + 222 2 52860 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)  
Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Nouakchott, Mauritania  
Telexes: 585 MINAF MTN (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Monsieur le Lieutenant-Colonel Mohamed Lemine Ould N'Diayane  
Secrétaire permanent du Comité militaire de salut national  
La Présidence  
BP 184  
Nouakchott, MAURITANIE

Telegrams: Sec. Comite militaire Ould N'Diayane, Nouakchott, Mauritania  
Telexes: 566 MINDEF MTN (via Ministry of Defence)

**COPIES TO:**

Son Excellence Monsieur Hasni Ould Didi  
Ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la Coopération  
Ministère des Affaires étrangères  
BP 230  
Nouakchott, MAURITANIE

and to diplomatic representatives of MAURITANIA in your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 January 1991.