

# WORLDWIDE APPEALS

August 2001

## **Mauritania**

### **Opposition leader sentenced to five years in prison**

On 8 April 2001 Mohamed Lemine Chbih Ould Cheikh Melainine (pictured), an opposition leader, was arrested at his home in the capital, Nouakchott, with opposition supporters Mokhtar Ould Haïbetna and Bouba Ould Hassena. On 14 June the three men were sentenced to five years' imprisonment for conspiracy to commit acts of sabotage and terrorism. AI considers them to be prisoners of conscience and believes that their conviction was intended solely to stifle political opposition.

The basis for the accusation against them was not clear and furthermore the defendants' lawyers alleged numerous serious irregularities in the trial. The main evidence against the three men was the testimony of two prosecution witnesses, both of whom were shown to have lied during the trial. Prosecution lawyers also presented in evidence statements the three men had signed, all of which were contested. Mr Chbih alleged his was written while he was drugged and held incommunicado during police interrogation. Mokhtar Ould Haïbetna said he was threatened with ill-treatment and Bouba Ould Hassena's statement was written in French – a language he neither reads nor speaks. Two international observers were prevented from attending the trial.

All three men are now detained in Aïoun prison, where conditions are reported to be particularly harsh. Its location, 800km from Nouakchott, makes it difficult for their lawyers and family members to visit. Mr Chbih has a heart condition which requires constant medication and AI is seriously concerned for his health.

+Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all three prisoners. Send appeals to: Son Excellence, Monsieur Maaouiya Ould Sid 'Ahmed Taya, Président de la République, La Présidence, BP 184 Nouakchott, Mauritania. Fax: +222 2 52636.

## **Cuba**

### **Prisoner of conscience denied freedom of expression**

Secretary General of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Democráticos de Cuba* (CTDC), Cuban Democratic Workers' Union, José Orlando González Bridón, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for "spreading false news against international peace" after a trial in May 2001. AI believes that he is a prisoner of conscience, detained for the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association, and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release. The charge reportedly arose from an article José González wrote in August 2000, blaming police negligence for the death of Yohana González Herrera, national coordinator of the CTDC. She was said to have been killed by her ex-husband, despite repeated requests to have him arrested for beating and threatening her. The article appeared on the website of Cuba Free Press, a press agency located in Miami, USA, and was aired on Radio Martí, a Miami-based radio station funded by the US Government.

The prosecution reportedly accused José González of belonging to a "counter-revolutionary" group, mixing with those who are against the revolutionary process and sending anti-government information to radio stations in Miami. They also reportedly stated that he sent the article with the intention of provoking discontent and public disorder.

In prison he is said to be suffering from weight loss, frequent headaches, nose bleeds, raised blood pressure and insomnia.

+Please write, calling for his immediate and unconditional release, and that he be granted adequate medical care. Send appeals to: Su Excelencia, Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente de los Consejos de Estado y de Ministros, La Habana, Cuba. Fax: (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs) +53 7 335261 or +53 7 333460 and to Dr. Juan Escalona Reguera, Fiscal General de la República, Fiscalía General de la República, San Rafael 3, La Habana, Cuba. Fax: +53 7 669485 or +53 7 333164.

**Russian Federation (Russia)**  
**Journalist faces possible imprisonment**

Olga Kitova (pictured), an investigative journalist and member of the Belgorod regional parliament, is facing detention and possible imprisonment. She has been charged by the police with five different offences: slander, defamation, interference in a criminal investigation, ignoring a summons for questioning and insulting, threatening and using force against an official in the course of his duties. However, it appears that she is being prosecuted because of newspaper articles she wrote alleging official corruption.

She was detained outside her home on 21 March 2001 by 10 police officers, who reportedly beat her, pulled her hair and twisted her arms as they took her to the local prosecutor's office. She was taken from there to hospital to receive treatment for high blood pressure. The hospital registered that she had bruises and other injuries to the head and arms. She discharged herself on 24 March. She was arrested again on 22 May and reportedly suffered a heart attack. She was initially denied access to emergency medical treatment, but was eventually hospitalized under guard without access to her lawyer or family.

The court ruled that her arrest was unlawful on procedural grounds but an appeal against this decision by the prosecutor's office was successful. This means that she could be detained at any moment. AI is concerned that her life would be in danger if she were detained again, and would consider her a possible prisoner of conscience.

+Please write, urging an investigation into these allegations of ill-treatment and expressing concern for Olga Kitova's health and safety should she be detained again. Send appeals to: Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, g. Moskva, Kreml, Prezidentu Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Putinu V.V., Russian Federation. Fax: +7 095 206 85 10 or +7 095 206 51 73 or +7 095 230 24 08.