

EXTERNAL

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Fear of ill-treatment / Legal concern

26 October 1995

MAURITANIA Memed Ould Ahmed, presidential advisor
Mohamed Yehdih Ould Breidelil, Secretary General to the National Assembly
Mohamed Ould Hamady, former Director General of national television
Abdellahi Ould Mohamedou, Director General of national radio
Hamada Ould Beddy, trade unionist
Mohamed Ould Bowba, Editor in chief of *Akhbar El Ousbou* journal
and many others

At least 50 people, perhaps as many as 300, arrested since 24 October 1995 in the capital, Nouakchott, and other parts of Mauritania, are being held incommunicado in various places, including Jereida barracks and the police training centre (*École de Police*). They include members of the security forces as well as civilians. Amnesty International is concerned for their well-being while held incommunicado, as such detention does not provide them with legal safeguards against torture, ill-treatment and medical neglect. Furthermore, the organization believes that they may be prisoners of conscience arrested solely for their non-violent political sympathies. Arrests are reported to be continuing.

The detainees are alleged by the government to be members of an intelligence network providing information about strategic installations to the Iraqi secret services. On 23 October, the day before the arrests began, Iraq's ambassador to Mauritania had been told to leave on the grounds that a spy ring had been discovered.

Some of those arrested are believed to be or have been members of the Mauritanian branch of the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party, whose headquarters are in Iraq. Others may be members of another political party called *Attali'â* which was formed as a result of a split when some members of the Ba'th party agreed to join the Mauritanian Government. None of the detainees is known to have been charged with any offence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Political parties have been legalised in Mauritania since 1991. Before then, members of the Ba'th party, recruited from Mauritania's Arab and Berber communities, had been arrested in 1981, 1982 and more recently in 1987 and 1988. Some were convicted largely on the basis of confessions extracted under torture. Members of Mauritania's black community have been subjected to human rights violations on a different scale. In the period from 1989 to 1992, more than 400 black Mauritanians were extrajudicially killed, thousands arbitrarily detained for lengthy periods without charge or trial, and many others "disappeared". An amnesty law passed in May 1993 has been used to prevent any investigation into these human rights violations. More recently, in September 1994, some 60 Islamist activists, including foreign nationals, were held for up to 16 days in incommunicado detention and some were beaten in custody.

The arrests followed a government statement that they had discovered secret organizations operating within Mauritania under the guise of Islam.

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

- seeking assurances that the detainees arrested since 24 October 1995 are being treated humanely in accordance with international standards for conditions of detention;

- urging that they be given full access to their lawyers, doctors and families;
- seeking clarification of their legal status, and urging that their places of detention be made public;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release if, as it appears, they have been arrested solely for their non-violent political sympathies;
- if they are to be charged with recognizably criminal offences, urging that they be promptly and fairly tried according to international standards.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence
Monsieur Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya
Président de la République
La Présidence - BP 184
NOUAKCHOTT - Mauritania
Telegrams: Le President, Nouakchott, Mauritania
Telexes: 5580 PRIM MTN
Faxes: +222 2 52636
Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear Mr President

Monsieur Mohamed Lemine Salem Ould Dah
Ministre de l'Intérieur, des Postes
et des Télécommunications
Ministère de l'Intérieur, des Postes
et des Télécommunications
BP 195
NOUAKCHOTT - Mauritania
Telegrams: Ministre de l'Interieur, Nouakchott, Mauritania
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Monsieur Ethmane Sid'Ahmed Yassa
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
NOUAKCHOTT
Mauritania
Telegrams: Minstre de la Justice, Nouakchott, Mauritania
Faxes: +222 2 52860
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Monsieur le Rédacteur en chef, Mauritanie Nouvelles, BP 3901, Nouakchott, Mauritania

Agence Mauritanienne d'Information, BP 371, Nouakchott, Mauritania

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 12 December 1995.