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**MAURITANIA: @AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION  
INTO REPORTED DEATHS OF OVER 200 POLITICAL PRISONERS**

Amnesty International today called on the Mauritanian government to investigate reports that as many as 200 political prisoners arrested late last year have died or been killed in military or police custody - some executed without trial and many others after being severely tortured or ill-treated.

Details of the alleged killings have only recently come to light, following the release of some of those arrested in late 1990. In a few cases, prisoners are reported to have been deliberately executed without any trial - the victims are said to have included 33 soldiers imprisoned at Inal barracks, north of Nouadhibou, who were hanged on the night of 27 November.

Most of the reported deaths, however, have been linked to torture or ill-treatment, including extremely harsh prison conditions. Released prisoners have described the torture they were subjected to and some are said to bear scars all over their faces and bodies.

"At first, we heard that some 15 prisoners may have been tortured to death," Amnesty International said, "but since early March we have received the names of around 100 prisoners who were apparently killed this way." Reports from former prisoners and others suggest that more than 200 detainees may have died in total.

The detainees were reportedly tortured in both military barracks and police stations. Many were subjected to the "jaguar" torture, where victims are hung upside down and beaten on the soles of their feet. Others had electric shocks applied to their genitals or were burnt all over their bodies.

In the south of the country, 60 soldiers reportedly died after being imprisoned and tortured, first at an army barracks in Aleg

and later at Akjoujt, where some were buried in sand up to the neck and left to die.

"These reports, shocking as they may be, fit into the pattern of torture in Mauritania which we have recorded since 1986," Amnesty International said, "although torture has never before been used on such a scale in the country. We believe the government must urgently investigate these allegations and bring those responsible to justice."

In November and December 1990, some 3,000 black Mauritians were arrested in the capital, Nouakchott, and in Nouadhibou, the second-largest town. Most of those arrested were members of the armed forces and civil servants, the majority belonging to a single black ethnic group from the south of the country, known as the Hal-Pulaar or Fula. The authorities later alleged that there had been a conspiracy to overthrow the government, dominated by the Moor community, although it appears that most of those arrested were picked up simply because of their ethnic origin. Earlier in 1990, hundreds of Hal-Pulaar had been executed without trial or "disappeared" after being arrested by the security forces in the south of the country.

At the beginning of March 1991, the government announced the release of some convicted political prisoners and also freed some of those detained since late last year. However, more than 70 are known to be still held in military custody in Nouadhibou and others may be held elsewhere.

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