

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 30/01/97

UA 26/97

Fear of ill-treatment / possible prisoners  
of conscience

27 January 1997

**MAURITANIA** Messoud Ould Boulkheir, member of political opposition  
Mohammed H. Ould Ismael, member of political opposition  
Abdallahi Ould Iyahi, member of political opposition  
Hamoud Ould Abdi, former student union leader and ruling party member  
El Kory Ould Hmeity, former trade union leader

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On the evening of 22 January 1997 three leading opposition political party members, a member of the ruling party and a former trade unionist were arrested in the capital Nouakchott. They have been interrogated by security personnel at the *Direction générale de la sécurité nationale*, the headquarters of the national security services.

Those arrested are Messoud Ould Boulkheir, of the main opposition party, *Action pour le changement*, (ACP), Action for Change; Mohammed H. Ould Ismael, secretary general of the *Alliance populaire progressive*, (APP), Progressive Popular Alliance; Abdallahi Ould Iyahi, a prominent member of the APP; Hamoud Ould Abdi, former secretary general of *L'Union des étudiants de Mauritanie* and a member of the ruling *Parti républicain démocratique* (PRD), Democratic Republican Party; and El Kory Ould Hmeity, former secretary general of *L'Union des travailleurs du Mauritanie*, Mauritanian Workers' Union.

All five have been accused of having made political contacts with Libya with whom the Mauritanian Government has a strained relationship. No charges are known to have been brought against them. Amnesty International believes that they may have been arrested and detained because of their high profile advocacy for an end to the practice of slavery in Mauritania.

Details of their treatment since their detention and interrogation at the headquarters of the national security service are not known. Their families and lawyers have been denied access to them so far. There are fears that they may be ill-treated while held in incommunicado detention.

Amnesty International is concerned that the five may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully carrying out their political activities and because of the non-violent expression of their opinions.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Slavery is still widespread in Mauritania. In spite of its formal abolition by government legislation in 1905, 1960 and 1980, there has never been any concrete official program to end it. In the last four years, there has been a concerted effort by some opposition politicians, trade unionists, students and human rights activists to once again expose slavery practices to the international community. The campaign has had some success in drawing international attention to the issue of slavery in Mauritania.

The President of Mauritania, Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, in a speech delivered on 10 January 1997, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan condemned those campaigners against slavery as enemies of his government who want to tarnish the image of the country.

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

- expressing concern at the reported arrests of Messoud Ould Boulkheir, Mohammed H. Ould Ismael, Abdallahi Ould Iyahi, Hamoud Ould Abdi and El Kory Ould Hmeity;
- urging that they be allowed immediate access to lawyers and their families and requesting assurances that they are being humanely treated;
- requesting clarification of the reasons for their arrest and detention;
- urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released unless they are to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence and granted a prompt and fair trial in accordance with international standards.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

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 President / Dear Mr President**

Minister of Interior

Monsieur Dah Ould Abdel Jelil,

Ministre de L'Intérieur, Des Postes

et Des Telecommunications

Ministère de L'Intérieur, Des Postes

et Des Télécommunications - BP 195

Nouakchott, MAURITANIA

**Telegrams: Ministre de L'Intérieur, Nouakchott, Mauritania**

**Salutation: Monsieur Le Ministre / Dear Minister**

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Mohammed Lemine Salem Ould Dah,

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

Monsieur Le Rédacteur en chef, *Le Calame*, Nouakchott, Mauritania

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

Monsieur le Rédacteur, *Sud Quotidien*

Immeuble Fahd, BP 4130, Dakar, Senegal

**Faxes: +221 22 52 90**

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 10 March 1997.