

PUBLIC

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Incommunicado detention /Fear of torture or ill-treatment

23 May 2008

MAURITANIA

Mohamed Ould Semane (m)  
Mohamed Khouna Ould Brahim Salem (m)  
And at least 30 others

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Mohamed Ould Semane, Mohamed Khouna Ould Brahim Salem and at least 30 others are being held incommunicado at unknown locations and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment. They are all believed to be detained in relation to attacks which the authorities blame on terrorists.

Mohamed Ould Semane and Mohamed Khouna Ould Brahim Salem were reportedly arrested at about 5am on 1 May at their homes by police officers. They were taken away, and neither their families nor their lawyers were able to locate them. The officers apparently gave the men no information about the reason for their arrest. Media reports suggest that they were arrested in connection with two attacks in Mauritania in recent months, supposedly the work of terrorists. Some 30 other people have also been arrested in relation to these attacks.

Torture and ill-treatment by security forces is widespread. While visiting Mauritania in February 2008, an Amnesty International delegation documented several cases of people who had been tortured in incommunicado (*garde-à-vue*) detention soon after their arrest. Among the practices recorded by the delegation were beatings of detainees while suspended from a metal bar in a position the security forces call "Jaguar", sleep deprivation and being burned with cigarettes. Mauritania's President, Sidi Mohamed Abdallahi Ould Cheikh, has assured Amnesty International that he had given instructions that such torture should stop.

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure reviewed in 2007 after a new government was put in place, "physical or moral ill treatment" of anyone held in *garde-à-vue* detention is forbidden, and the family of the detainee must be informed of their arrest "without delay". For security offences, the period of incommunicado detention after arrest cannot be longer than 15 days.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In December 2007, four French tourists were shot dead by the armed group al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in southern Mauritania. In early February, three people were wounded in a shooting at the Israeli Embassy in the capital, Nouakchott. Fears of further attacks caused the cancellation of the Dakar car rally, which normally crosses the Sahara desert through Mauritania.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, Arabic or your own language:**

- seeking assurances that Mohamed Ould Semane, Mohamed Khouna Ould Brahim Salem and at least 30 others being held incommunicado are not being tortured or ill-treated;
- calling on the authorities to give them regular access to their family, lawyers and any necessary medical attention;
- urging the authorities to release the detainees immediately, unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- asking for details of any charges against them and for information on any subsequent trial proceedings.

**APPEALS TO: (It may be very difficult to send faxes to Mauritania.)**

President of the Republic  
Président de la République  
Sidi Mohamed Abdallahi Ould Cheikh  
Présidence de la République  
B.P. 184  
Nouakchott, Mauritania

**Fax : +222 525 98 01 (when someone answers, say “je voudrais envoyer un fax, s’il vous plaît I’d like to send a fax, please”)**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear Mr President**

Minister for the Interior, Post and Telecommunications  
Mohamed Yehdih Ould Moctar El Hacem  
Ministre de l’Intérieur, des Postes et Télécommunications  
B.P. 195  
Nouakchott, Mauritania

**Fax : + 222 525 36 61**

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

Minister of Justice  
Yahya Ould Sid’El Moustaph  
Ministre de la Justice  
B.P. 350 Nouakchott, Mauritania

**Fax: +222 529 49 84**

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

**COPIES 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 4 July 2008.