

URGENT ACTION

THIRTEEN ACTIVISTS CHARGED, HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Four more activists from the anti-slavery organization Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania (IRA) were arrested on 8 and 9 July, just days after the arrest of nine others. All 13 activists have been charged and are being detained at the prison of Nouakchott. However, none of them has had access to their families or lawyers.

Mohamed Daty (general secretary of IRA Nouakchott) was arrested on 8 July at his workplace. **Ousmane Lô** (board member) and **Ousmane Anne** (President of IRA section Tevrah Zeina) were arrested separately on the street on the same day. **Abdallahi Abou Diop** (IRA member) was arrested on 9 July at his work place.

The four were arrested just days after the arrest of nine other IRA anti-slavery activists. **Amadou Tijane Diop** (third vice president of IRA-Mauritania) and **Abdallahi Maatalla Seck** (Coordinator of IRA Section Sebkhya) were arrested on 30 June at their home in Nouakchott. According to Amadou Tijane Diop's family, he suffers from a heart condition for which he may not be receiving adequate medical treatment while in detention. **Balla Touré** (external relations officer) and IRA members **Jemal Beylil**, **Salem Vall**, and **Moussa Biram** were arrested on 1 July while at work and others at home. **Hamady Lehbouss** (spokesperson), **Khatri Rahel Mbarkek** (President of IRA peace committee) and **Ahmed Hamady** (treasurer) were arrested on 3 July after organising a press conference calling for the release of their colleagues.

Their arrest came after communities who were living in a slum in the area of Gazra in Nouakchott for at least 20 years resisted being forcefully moved to another neighbourhood. None of the activists arrested participated in the organisation of the protest neither were they present at the event.

All 13 activists were transferred to the prison of Nouakchott on 12 July after being charged with rebellion, use of violence, attack against the police and agents of justice and membership of an unorganized organization. None of them has been allowed access to their lawyers or families since their arrest.

Please write immediately in French or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the 13 prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their peaceful work on human rights;
- Urging them to ensure that, during their detention, the 13 are not subject to torture or other ill-treatment and have continuous access to a lawyer of their choice, to medical attention, to family visits and to all basic necessities;
- Urging them to guarantee that anti-slavery activists in Mauritania are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 SEPTEMBER 2016 TO:

President

General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz
President of the Islamic Republic of
Mauritania
Presidency BP 184 Nouakchott
Mauritania
Fax: +222 45 25 98 01

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister for Justice

Me. Brahim Ould Daddah
Ministry of Justice
BP 350 Nouakchott
Mauritania
Fax: +222 25 25 70 02

Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Carlyle House, 235-237 Vauxhall Bridge Road SW1V 1EJ, 020 7233 615

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 159/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr38/4403/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Slavery in Mauritania was officially abolished in 1981 and has been recognized as a crime in domestic law since 2007. However, the practice remains and IRA-Mauritania and other organizations, including SOS-Esclaves, have been reporting and denouncing cases of slavery. The Mauritanian authorities often restrict the freedom of expression of human rights defenders, activists and organizations that campaign against slavery.

In January 2015, the Court of Rosso sentenced two members of IRA, Brahim Bilal Ramdane and Biram Dah Abeid, a former presidential candidate and president of the IRA-Mauritania, to two years in prison for belonging to an unrecognized organization, participating in an unauthorized assembly and assaulting security officers. IRA members have been requesting authorization for their organization since 2008 and it is still not recognized by Mauritanian authorities. The activists were campaigning against slavery and raising awareness among the local population of the land rights of people of slave descent. Their sentences were upheld by the Appeal Court of Aleg in August 2015. The Supreme Court released the anti-slavery activists on 17 May 2016 after 18 months in jail.

In the past five years, Biram Dah Abeid (anti-slavery activist) has been imprisoned three times.

Further information on UA: 159/16 Index: AFR 38/4504/2016 Issue Date: 22 July 2016