

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS HELD IN UNKNOWN LOCATION

Since 2 May, 11 members of a human rights organization in Mauritania have been detained at an unknown location by the Mauritanian authorities after protesting against the writings of Islamic scholars. Amnesty International believes that they are prisoners of conscience, detained for peacefully expressing their views. They may be at risk of ill-treatment.

Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid, president of the anti-slavery organisation IRA-Mauritanie (*Initiative pour la Résurgence du mouvement Abolitionniste en Mauritanie*, Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania) was arrested on 28 April after he burnt several books written by four Imams in Nouakchott, the capital city of Mauritania. The following day, security forces came to his house and used teargas to overpower him before arresting him. In the following days, ten other members and supporters of IRA-Mauritanie were also arrested, including **Bilal Ould Samba** and Imam **Leid Ould Lemlih**.

On 2 May, the eleven activists were transferred to an unknown location by the Mauritanian authorities. Their families have not been informed of their new place of detention; Amnesty International learned that only Biram Ould Dah's wife was able to see him the following day but it is unclear whether they are all detained in the same location. They have not had access to lawyers since their arrest.

Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid has said that he burned the books because of his concerns at references they made which according to him, offered a justification for slavery.

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Mauritania is a state party, protects freedom of expression, which includes "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds". The United Nations Human Rights Committee has stated that this right "embraces even expression that may be regarded as deeply offensive."

Please write immediately in Arabic, French or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to ensure that the eleven activists are immediately and unconditionally released;
- Calling on the authorities to immediately reveal the whereabouts of the eleven detainees and to ensure that until they are released, they have access to their lawyers, their families and to medical assistance as required.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 JUNE 2012 TO:

President

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

And copies to:

Minister of Justice
Me Abidine Ould El Kheir
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
BP 350 Nouakchott
Mauritania
Fax: +222 45 29 49 84
Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Slavery in Mauritania has officially been abolished in 1981. Since 2007, slavery has been recognized as a crime in Mauritanian law. However, the practice remains and IRA-Mauritanie and other organizations, including SOS-Esclaves, have been reporting and denouncing cases of slavery.

Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid and other members of IRA Mauritanie were sentenced in January 2011 to one year's imprisonment after they were arrested in December 2010 and charged with assaulting police officers and obstructing public order after holding a rally outside a police station in Nouakchott. They were pardoned in March 2011.

The Mauritanian authorities have often placed restrictions on freedom of expression in Mauritania.

Names: Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid, Issa Ould Alioune, Yacoub Diarra, Abidine Ould Maatala, Ahmed Hamdy Ould Hamar Vall, Leid Ould Mbarek, Bilal Ould Samba, Leid Ould Lemlih, Oubeid Ould Imijine, Zeidane Ould Maouloud and Boumediane Ould Batta.

Gender m/f: all male

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