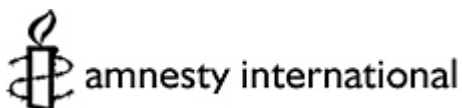


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Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Mauritania

Head of state: **General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz**
 Head of government: **Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf**
 Death penalty: **abolitionist in practice**
 Population: **3.5 million**
 Life expectancy: **58.6 years**
 Under-5 mortality: **117.1 per 1,000**
 Adult literacy: **57.5 per cent**

Security forces used excessive and lethal force, including against protesters; one youth was killed by gunfire. Amid marches against the national census, protesters were arrested and sentenced to prison terms. The government clamped down heavily on suspected acts of terrorism. The whereabouts of 14 prisoners remained unknown after they disappeared from a prison in the capital, Nouakchott. Eight people were sentenced to death, including three minors.

Background

A census of the population, begun in April, was feared to be discriminatory by some human rights organizations. Protests took place in Nouakchott, Kaedi and Maghama. The President of the National Assembly urged that the process be suspended.

Frequent clashes between the army and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) caused losses on both sides. The army also carried out operations against AQIM in Mali. In December, a member of the security forces was kidnapped by AQIM members.

In January, Mauritania's human rights record was assessed under the Universal Periodic Review. The government committed to ending the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and to end the use of excessive force by the police and security forces. It also committed to developing a national strategy for the eradication of slavery in all its forms.

There were questions surrounding the independence of the judiciary after a judge was dismissed in September.

Prisoners of conscience and other political prisoners

The authorities placed restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association.

- Aliyine Ould Mbareck, Biram Dah Ould Abeid and Cheikh Ould Abidine, three members of the anti-slavery organization Initiative pour la Résurgence du Mouvement Abolitionniste en Mauritanie (IRA Mauritanie), were sentenced in January to one year's imprisonment. They were arrested with six other activists 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.
- On 23 August, four IRA Mauritanie members, including Tourad Ould Zein, were given six months' suspended imprisonment for unauthorized gathering and rebellion. They had protested against the lack of judicial action in the case of a 10-year-old girl held in slavery.
- In October, more than 50 demonstrators were arrested following protest marches against the census organized by the human rights organization "Touche pas à ma nationalité" in Nouakchott and in other parts of the country. Most were released within hours and days. Others were tried for demonstrating with the intention of theft and looting. Four demonstrators, including Brahim Diop and Mohamed Boubacar, were sentenced to three months' imprisonment and held for 13 days at Dar Naïm prison before being pardoned.
- Lemine Ould Dadde, former Commissioner for Human Rights, remained in arbitrary detention, charged with embezzlement, after his provisional detention expired in September.

Counter-terror and security

Throughout the year at least 12 people, including Mohamed Lemine Ould Mballe, were arrested on suspicion of being members of AQIM. Most spent more than 40 days in police custody.

At least 18 people were tried and sentenced to prison terms or to death. Although the detainees alleged that they had been tortured, the court did not order any inquiry.

- In March, Aderrahmane Ould Meddou, a Malian national and suspected member of AQIM, was sentenced by the Nouakchott Criminal Court to five years' imprisonment and hard labour for kidnapping an Italian couple in December 2010.
- In October, four people, including Lemrabott Ould Mohamed Mahmoud, were sentenced by the Nouakchott Criminal Court to between three and five years in prison for terrorist acts. Mohamed Lemine Ag Maleck was acquitted but remained in detention pending an appeal by the prosecutor. He was released in December.
- Two detainees, Assad Abdel Khader Mohamed Ali and Khalil Ould Ahmed Salem Ould N'Tahah, remained in detention although they had served their prison terms.

Enforced disappearances

In May, 14 prisoners who had been sentenced for terrorism activities were taken at night from a Nouakchott central prison to an unknown location. In June, some of their belongings were returned to their families without any explanation. The whereabouts of the 14, including Sidi Ould Sidina and Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Sebty, remained unknown at the end of the year. The authorities told an Amnesty International delegation in November that they had been transferred for security reasons.

Excessive use of force

Security forces used excessive force against peaceful demonstrators in several towns including Kaedi, Maghama and Nouakchott. The arbitrary and indiscriminate use of tear gas injured scores of protesters. One person was killed.

- Lamine Mangane, aged 19, died on 28 September after security forces fired live ammunition during a demonstration organized by "Touche pas à ma nationalité" in

Maghama. At least 10 people were injured. The authorities stated that a judicial investigation had been opened.

Discrimination – lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

Individuals faced arbitrary arrest, harassment and discrimination because of their suspected homosexual activity. In November, 14 men were arrested and accused of being homosexuals; they remained held in Dar Naïm prison.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment continued to be widely reported in detention centres, including police stations and Dar Naïm prison. Methods included kicking, beating, suspension by the arms, shackling in painful positions and deprivation of sleep and food.

Death penalty

In November, the death sentences of seven people convicted of murder during the last decade were commuted.

Throughout the year at least eight people were sentenced to death by the Criminal Court in Nouakchott, including three aged under 18 when the crimes were committed. Following an appeal by the prosecutor, on 8 December the Court of Appeal of Nouakchott commuted the death sentences of the three aged under 18 to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine.

Slavery

Seven people, a woman and six children, escaped from slavery with the help of human rights organizations. Among the six children were Yarg and Saïd, two brothers aged 11 and 14, who escaped slavery in August. In November, the Nouakchott Criminal Court convicted six people for enslaving Yarg and Saïd and ordered that compensation be paid to their families.

Migrants' rights

At least 3,000 migrants, mostly from Senegal, Mali and Guinea, were arbitrarily arrested. They were held in detention centres in Mauritania for several days before being returned to Senegal or Mali.

In October, migrants from Mali and Senegal were arrested and charged with unauthorized assembly and threatening national security. They were each given a suspended prison sentence of one year and detained for more than 10 days at Dar Naïm prison before being sent to Senegal.

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