

# Amnesty International Annual Report 2013 - Mauritania

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Head of state: **General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz**

Head of government: **Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf**

**The authorities severely restricted freedom of expression, assembly and association. Protesters marched throughout the year, demanding the departure of President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. The authorities continued to threaten anti-slavery activists. Former Libyan intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi was arrested and extradited to Libya, where he could face the death penalty. At least six people were sentenced to death.**

## Background

President Aziz was shot by soldiers from an army unit in October. The authorities declared it a mistake. The President was transferred to France for medical treatment as coup rumours started circulating. Several demonstrations in November challenged the political and legal vacuum resulting from the President's absence.

In October, Mauritania ratified the International Convention against enforced disappearance, and the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture.

## Enforced disappearances

The authorities failed to disclose the whereabouts of 14 prisoners sentenced for terrorism-related offences and abducted from the central prison in the capital, Nouakchott, in May 2011. They included Mohamed Ould Chabarnou, Sidi Ould Sidina, Maarouf Ould Heiba, Khadim Ould

Semane, Mohamed Ould Abdou, Abderrahmane Ould Arede and Mohamed Ould Chbih. The authorities maintained that their transfer to a secret location was a temporary measure for security reasons.

### **Freedom of expression**

At least 36 people were arrested following peaceful demonstrations.

- In February, peaceful demonstrations organized by University of Nouakchott students were violently repressed. More than 30 students were arrested. Some were released after a few days, while others were detained for more than a week without charge or trial.

### **Prisoners of conscience and political prisoners**

- In April, 11 members of an anti-slavery organization, Initiative pour la Résurgence du Mouvement Abolitionniste en Mauritanie (IRA-Mauritanie) were arrested, including Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid, Yacoub Diarra, Ahmed Hamdy Ould Hamat Fall, Abidine Ould Salem, El Id Ould Lemlih, Oubeid Ould Imijine and Boumediene Ould Bata. The men had protested against Islamic scholars' writings, considered by IRA-Mauritanie to justify slavery. The men were charged with threatening state security, affronts to common decency and administration of an unauthorized organization. IRA-Mauritanie's president was also charged with apostasy. All were provisionally released in September after four months in detention. Their trial had not taken place by the end of the year.
- Lemine Ould Dadde, former Commissioner for Human Rights, was provisionally released in December.

### **Counter-terrorism and security**

At least 17 men were tried and imprisoned or sentenced to death for terrorism-related offences. Some trials did not comply with international fair trial standards.

- At least three detainees convicted on terrorism-related charges, including Assad Abdel Khader Mohamed Ali, remained in detention despite being due for release. They were finally released after delays of four, 10 and 12 months.

### **Torture and other ill-treatment**

Torture and other ill-treatment continued to be widely reported in detention centres, including in Ksar and Tevragh-Zeina police stations and in Nouakchott women's prison.

- A student detained at Ksar police station following the February student demonstrations had his hands and feet tied together with a rope, and was beaten and stamped on during interrogation.
- Two women detained at the women's prison reported being severely beaten when they were arrested in 2010, and during interrogation at a police station.

No investigations were opened into allegations of torture and ill-treatment in police custody and during interrogation.

## **Extradition**

In March, former Libyan intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi was arrested as he arrived from Morocco. In July, the authorities stated that he had entered the country illegally and that they were considering different options for his extradition, including a request by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC had issued an arrest warrant for alleged crimes against humanity in Libya. Mauritania's authorities finally extradited him to Libya in September, where he could face the death penalty.

## **Death penalty**

- At least six people were sentenced to death during the year.
- In April, at least three people, Mohamed Saleck Ould Cheikh, Yousseuf Galissa and Mohamed Lemine Ould Mballé, were sentenced to death. They were charged with attempting to commit a terrorist offence and being members of a terrorist group.
- Mohamed Abdellahi Ould Ahmednah Ould Mohamed Salem's 2011 death sentence was confirmed in April after a Nouakchott Criminal Court appeal hearing. He was accused of being a member of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb and of responsibility for the murder of a US national.

## **Slavery**

- Four IRA-Mauritanie activists were arrested on 11 January and detained for four days after they complained about a slavery case in Ayoun, a town in southern Mauritania. They were accused of attempting to resist law enforcement and to provoke a rebellion.

## **Migrants' rights**

Migrants – mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular Mali, Guinea and Senegal – continued to be arbitrarily arrested and detained on suspicion of trying to reach Europe. At least 4,000 migrants were arrested and sent to either Mali or Senegal.

- In April, armed security forces arrested between 400 and 800 migrants, mostly from West Africa, in Nouadhibou. They were held for days in immigration detention centres in Nouadhibou and Nouakchott, and most were sent back to Mali and Senegal. They had no opportunity to challenge the legality of their detention or their collective expulsion.

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