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In August the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Gulnara Shahinian, reported that 'de facto slavery continues to exist in certain remote parts of Mauritania', despite the legal abolition of the practice in 1980 and its criminalization in 2007. She indicated that Haratine, or 'Black Moors', are the ethnic group most at risk. In this situation, she reported, women suffer 'triple discrimination: firstly as women, secondly as mothers and thirdly as slaves. They are viewed by their masters firstly as labour and secondly as producers of a labour force.' Among other violations, they are systematically denied the right to a family life, and have no rights in their children.

In December up to eight activists from the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania (Initiative pour la Résurgence du Mouvement Abolitionniste en Mauritanie), were said to have been arrested on public order charges, in the course of a police investigation into a case of possible slavery that they had reported.

The UNHCR repatriation programme for Mauritanian refugees in Senegal, begun in 2008, resumed in October after a 10-month break. Most of the refugees are black Africans from the Peuhl ethnic group. They were forced to flee in April 1989 following ethnic violence sparked by the alleged killing of two Senegalese farmers in a dispute over grazing rights with Mauritanian herders in the Senegal River valley border region. Returnees face a number of obstacles. Disputes over ownership of property are frequent, as other families have often occupied lands left vacant by the fleeing refugees. Some children of returnee families, born in Senegal, do not speak local languages.

In January a group of 34 Muslim clerics and scholars in Mauritania signed a *fatwa*, or religious decree, banning FGM. In 2009 the UN CRC reported that some 70 per cent of girls in Mauritania undergo the procedure, and all ethnic groups are affected; it is more prevalent in rural areas.

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