

UA 114/02 Incommunicado detention / fear of ill-treatment 15 April 2002

MAURITANIA Mohammed Baba Ould Said (m)
Bechir Ould El Hassen (m), businessperson
Mohammed Fall Oumere (m), Director, La Tribune newspaper

The three men named above were arrested on 12 and 13 April 2002. They are reportedly detained incommunicado at the headquarters of the *Direction de la Sûreté de l'Etat*, State Security Service in Nouakchott, the capital. They are at risk of ill-treatment or torture.

All three men were arrested by the *Direction de la Sûreté de l'Etat* on suspicion of links to *Conscience et Résistance*, a clandestine political movement, the leaders of which are reportedly based outside Mauritania. The movement advocates political change and does not exclude recourse to violence.

Bechir El Hassen, a businessperson, was arrested on 12 April. Mohamed Baba Ould Said, who lives in France and was visiting the country, was arrested the same day. The authorities have apparently accused them of being involved in the creation of a network of *Conscience et Résistance* cells within Mauritania. The basis for the accusation is not known.

Mohammed Fall Ould Oumere, director of the independent newspaper *La Tribune*, was arrested in the early hours of 13 April in the town of Boutilimitt. He was immediately transferred to the capital, Nouakchott, some 150km away. *La Tribune* had recently published an article about a visit to Mauritania by the leader of *Conscience et Résistance*, and his arrest may be linked to this.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There is widespread political repression in Mauritania. Opposition politicians are regularly detained because of their political activities. Mohamed Lemine Chbih Ould Cheikh Melainine, leader of the *Front populaire mauritanien* (FPM), Popular Mauritanian Front, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in June 2001 on charges of conspiracy to commit acts of sabotage and terrorism. The case appeared to be politically motivated and Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

People detained for political reasons, or because of their political activities, are routinely ill-treated or tortured, particularly when they are held incommunicado.

Human rights organizations and the independent media operate with great difficulty. In particular, human rights organizations are forced to operate without government authorization, leaving them vulnerable to arrest and harassment.

In April 2002, scores of demonstrators, many of them students, were reportedly beaten and otherwise ill-treated as the security forces broke up demonstrations against Israeli military intervention in the Occupied Territories. Some students were reportedly beaten in their classrooms. Several people required urgent hospital treatment: one man, Lella Ould Abdatt, sustained severe head injuries and remained in a coma for several

days; another, Moubarak Ould Nih, was apparently hit by a tear gas grenade and suffered severe wounds to his hand.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the three men named above, who were arrested on 12 and 13 April and are reportedly detained incommunicado at the headquarters of the *Direction de la Sûreté de l'Etat* in Nouakchott;
- asking the authorities to protect them from torture and ill-treatment, and to ensure that they are given immediate access to their families, lawyers and medical care, and to humanitarian and human rights organizations;
- asking the authorities to clarify the basis for their arrest, and to release them if they are not to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence for which there is substantiating evidence.

If you are able please also:

- express concern that the security forces have recently used excessive force against demonstrators, including beating students;
- call on the Mauritanian government to ensure that law enforcement officers comply with international standards governing the conduct of law enforcement officials, and publicly remind the security forces of their obligation to respect human rights.

APPEALS TO:

Please note that you may experience problems in sending faxes.

President of the Republic

Son Excellence

Monsieur le Président Maaouiya Ould Sid 'Ahmed Taya

Président de la République

La Présidence

BP 184 Nouakchott

Mauritania

Faxes: + 222 52 52636 (attention of Président de la République)

Salutation: Son Excellence / Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior

Monsieur Lemrabott Sidi Mahmoud

Ministre de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des Télécommunications

Ministère de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des Télécommunications

BP 195 Nouakchott

Mauritania

Faxes: + 222 52 53661

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Sghair Ould Mbareck

Ministre de la Justice

Ministère de la Justice

BP 350 Nouakchott

Mauritania

Faxes: + 222 52 57002

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Public Prosecutor

Mohamed Yeslem Ould Jidimou
Procureur de la République
Palais de Justice
Nouakchott, Mauritania

Telegrams: Procureur République, Nouakchott, Mauritania

Salutation: Monsieur le Procureur de la République / Dear Mr Ould Jidimou

COPIES TO:

Newspaper

Le Calame

email : calame@compunet.mr

La Tribune

BP 6227 Nouakchott

Mauritania

and to diplomatic representatives of Mauritania accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 May 2002.