

EXTRA 84/00 Fear for safety / ill-treatment

14 November 1999

MAURITANIA *Members of l'Union des forces démocratiques/Ere nouvelle*
(UFD/EN):
Ahmed Ould Lafdal, UDF/EN External Relations Committee Chair
Mohamed Ould Haroun
Ahmed Ould Wediaa, journalist
Ahmed Ould Bah
Sidi Ould Salem, university professor
Marième Mint Saiga (f), UFD/EN women coordinator in Almina
Benina Mint Chedad (f), UFD/EN women coordinator in Riadh
Six other female UFD/EN members

At least 13 members of an opposition party, *l'Union des forces démocratiques/Ere nouvelle* (UFD/EN), Union of Democratic Forces-New Era have been arrested, and at least five of them appear to be held incommunicado. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

Ahmed Ould Lafdal, Mohamed Ould Haroun, Ahmed Ould Wediaa and Ahmed Ould Bah, who are leading opposition politicians and senior members of the UFD/EN, were arrested by the police in Nouakchott, the capital, on 9 November. Reports suggest that they have been held incommunicado since. Sidi Ould Salem, another senior UFD/EN member, was arrested in Nouakchott on 11 November and is also reported to be held incommunicado. It is not known where any of the five men are detained.

It has also been reported that 8 women, including Marième Mint Saiga and Benina Mint Chedad, who are active members of the UFD/EN, were arrested by the police in Nouakchott on 13 November. It is not known where they are held.

Amnesty International fears the detainees might be ill-treated in custody. In the past few months, the Mauritanian security forces have arbitrarily arrested and detained scores of opposition supporters. Some were severely beaten at the time of arrest and while in custody.

The latest arrests follow the government banning of the UFD/EN on 28 October, and appear to aim at silencing the UFD/EN and at preventing its members from demonstrating.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the beginning of October, political tension has increased in Mauritania as a result of the renewed fighting in Israel and the Occupied Territories. The authorities have forbidden and violently suppressed several opposition demonstrations organized to protest against a 1999 government decision to establish diplomatic links with Israel. The situation worsened after the government decided to dissolve the UFD/EN on 28 October, accusing the party of "inciting violence". The accusations have been rejected by the UFD/EN, whose Secretary General, Ahmed Ould Daddah, described the government's decision as void and illegitimate.

Opposition parties, human rights organizations and the media operate with great difficulty in Mauritania amidst a climate of increasing political repression and arbitrary arrests. Press freedom is severely curtailed and human rights organizations are forced to operate without government

authorization, leaving human rights defenders liable to prosecution and imprisonment under Mauritanian law for "administer[ing] associations which are functioning without authorization".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in French or your own language:

- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of the thirteen UDF/EN members detained since 9 November, and to ensure that they are treated in accordance with international standards;
- urging that they are given immediate access to their families, lawyers and medical care as appropriate;
- expressing concern that the UDF/EN members have been arrested solely because of their political activities;
- urging the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

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 2 52636 (attention of Président de la République)

Salutation: Son Excellence / Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior

Monsieur Dah Ould Abdel Jelil

Ministre de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des Télécommunications

Ministère de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des Télécommunications

BP 195 Nouakchott

Mauritania

Faxes: + 222 2 53661

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Lemrabott Sidi Mahmoud Ould Cheikh Ahmed

Ministre de la Justice

Ministère de la Justice

BP 350 Nouakchott

Mauritania

Faxes: + 222 2 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 26 December 2000.