

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

12 December 2000

MAURITANIA

Lieutenant Colonel Saleh Ould Hananna
Lieutenant Mokhtar Ould Telli
Captain Yarba

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of at least three Mauritanian army officers who have reportedly been arrested and are held incommunicado.

Lieutenant Colonel Saleh Ould Hananna, Lieutenant Mokhtar Ould Telli and Captain Yarba were reportedly arrested on 30 November. They have been transferred from army barracks near the capital Nouakchott to an unknown destination. Their arrest followed the discovery of anti-government leaflets at the Nouakchott army barracks. The three officers are thought to have criticised the diplomatic links established between the Mauritanian and the Israeli governments. It appears that the three are suspected of planning a coup.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that about ten other officers were also arrested around the 40th anniversary of Mauritanian independence on 28 November. On 7 December, the Mauritanian authorities publically acknowledged that a number of army officers had been arrested for "breaching discipline", but they refused to give the number of people arrested or their identity. The Mauritanian authorities have since either refused to speak to Amnesty International, or have told the organization that the officers have been released, but have been unable to give any details about the number of people released, or their identities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Political tension has increased in Mauritania in the last few months in line with growing opposition to a 1999 government decision to establish diplomatic links with Israel. On 28 October the government decided to dissolve the opposition party, *l'Union des forces démocratiques/Ere nouvelle* (UFD/EN), Union of Democratic Forces-New Era, in an attempt to suppress the opposition. Since then many people, including opposition leaders, have been arrested, some of whom remain in detention.

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

- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of Lieutenant Colonel Saleh Ould Hananna, Lieutenant Mokhtar Ould Telli and Captain Yarba, and 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;
- asking to be told where they are detained and why they have been arrested;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release if they are not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence, and urging that if charged, they be given a prompt and fair trial.

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 the Président de la République)

Salutation: Son Excellence / Your Excellency

Minister of Defence

Kaba Ould Elewa

Ministry of Defence

BP 184 Nouakchott

Mauritania

Telegrams: Ministre de la Défense, Nouakchott, Mauritania

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Mr Ould Elewa

COPIES TO:

Newspapers

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 23 January 2001.