

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 44/00

Fear for safety, prisoner of conscience

26 April 1999

MAURITANIA

Ahmed Ould Daddah, opposition leader

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Opposition leader Ahmed Ould Daddah was arrested on 24 April and has been held incommunicado since. Amnesty International believes he is a prisoner of conscience, and fears he will be ill-treated in detention.

Ahmed Ould Daddah is Secretary General of the opposition party *l'Union des forces démocratiques/Ere nouvelle* (UFC/EN), Union of Democratic Forces-New Era, and President of *Le Front des Partis d'opposition* (FPO), Opposition Parties Front, an umbrella group of opposition parties. He was arrested by plainclothes police, without a warrant, at the UFC/EN offices in the capital, Nouakchott. He is reported to be held at the *Direction de la Sûreté de l'Etat*, State Security Headquarters.

The Mauritanian authorities announced on 25 April that Ahmed Ould Daddah had been arrested for openly inciting violence. Amnesty International believes he was arrested for calling on the population to join a peaceful mass meeting in Nouakchott, organised by the UFC/EN for 26 April, to protest against the government's failure to guarantee the rule of law in Mauritania and investigate the widespread political killings, "disappearances" and torture committed during the late 1980s and early 1990s. There is no evidence that Ahmed Ould Daddah advocated violence. The authorities granted permission for the meeting, but later withdrew it.

Ahmed Ould Daddah was previously arrested in December 1998, together with two other opposition activists, and held without charge or trial for more than a month under armed guard in the town of BOUNDÉID, more than 500km from the capital. The three men were reportedly confined in a room so small that they could not all lie down at the same time. After 17 days in incommunicado detention, during which they were allowed to exercise only once, they were each allowed a visit by one family member, but were not allowed access to lawyers.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Human rights organizations, the media and opposition political parties operate with great difficulty in Mauritania. Press freedom is severely curtailed and human rights organizations operate without government authorization, leaving human rights activists open to prosecution and imprisonment under Mauritanian law for "administer[ing] associations which are functioning without authorization". In 1998, a number of prominent human rights defenders were arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to prison terms under this law. Human rights violations, including political killings, "disappearances" and torture, were widespread during the late 1980s and early 1990s. More than 500 black Mauritians were reportedly killed in military custody in 1990 and 1991. The Mauritanian authorities have consistently prevented investigations into past human rights violations.

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

- expressing serious concern about the incommunicado detention of Ahmed Ould Daddah since 24 April 2000 and urging the authorities to immediately ensure that his family, his lawyers and a doctor can visit him;
- urging that he be treated humanely in detention, in accordance with international standards;
- expressing concern that Ahmed Ould Daddah has been arrested solely because of his non-violent political activities;
- pointing out that Amnesty International considers Ahmed Ould Daddah a prisoner of conscience and urging the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally.

**APPEALS TO:**

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 52406 (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 Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug

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**

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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 24 May 2000.