

18 June 2001

Further information on UA 129/01 (AFR 38/003/2001, 25 May 2001) - Prison conditions / Prisoners of conscience

MAURITANIA **Mohamed Lemine Chbih Ould Cheikh Melainine, president of the *Front populaire mauritanien* (FPM)**
Mokhtar Ould Haïbetna
Bouba Ould Hassena, both FPM members

The three opposition party members named above were sentenced to five years in prison on 14 June, after their conviction of conspiracy to commit acts of sabotage and terrorism. Amnesty International believes that the charges are without foundation and considers all three men to be prisoners of conscience, jailed solely for their non-violent political activities.

Their lawyers are preparing to appeal to the Supreme Court on the grounds of gross errors of law during the trial. These are the only grounds on which they may appeal through the limited cassation procedure which is open to them. They are held in the prison in the provincial town of Aioun, in the far east of the country, where conditions are reportedly very harsh.

The men's trial began on 28 May, at Aioun criminal court. The trial had been moved to Aioun after demonstrations in the capital in support of Mr Chbih. Their lawyers had withdrawn in protest at procedural irregularities, saying they did not believe that Mr Chbih would receive a fair trial, but returned to the case at the request of Mr Chbih. They made public the fact that they did not think the proceedings would be fair, and reported further irregularities once hearings had resumed, and during the court's deliberations before the verdict was announced.

One trial observer from the Senegalese *Rencontre africaine des droits de l'Homme* (RADHO), African Assembly for the Defence of Human Rights was able to attend several hearings. However, two other observers were prevented from attending the trial: they were from the Moroccan Bar Association and the *Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme* (FIDH), International Federation of Human Rights Leagues.

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

- calling for Mohamed Lemine Chbih Ould Cheikh Melainine, Mokhtar Ould Haïbetna and Bouba Ould Hassena to be released immediately and unconditionally;
- saying that Amnesty International believes they are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely because of their non-violent political activities;
- expressing concern at reports that there were serious irregularities in their trial;
- urging the authorities to guarantee that the three men will not be harmed while they are in custody, and to ensure that they are treated in accordance with international standards, including being provided with adequate medical care.

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

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Salutation: Son Excellence / Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior

Monsieur Dah Ould Abdel Jelil

Ministre de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des Télécommunications

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Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

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Ministre de la Justice

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Public Prosecutor

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Procureur de la République

Palais de Justice

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

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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 30 July 2001.