



AI Members Only
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! Index: AFR

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To: ! All sections and structures
Campaign Coordinators on Africa
Campaign coordinators Mauritania
Relevant IS staff

From:! Regional Office West and Central Africa

Date: From 30 October to 30 January 2016

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MAURITANIA

Release anti-slavery activists about to mark one year anniversary of their imprisonment.

Action request at a glance!

On 30 October, Amnesty International will be launching a campaign calling for the release of anti-slavery activists, sentenced in Aleg (Mauritania) in January 2015.

Through this Action Circular, the West Africa Francophone Team requests sections – AI France, Spain, Belgium, UK, US ,Senegal, Mali , other EU Sections, Maghreb sections and AI structures to take actions urging the Mauritanian government to: 1) release them immediately and unconditionally and 2) recognize slavery and discrimination based on social category or occupation 3) cease to arrest, charge, prosecute and convict people merely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression 4) allow human rights organizations to register and to carry out their work.

Recommended actions include targeting the Mauritanian government and Mauritanian embassies in key development partners of Mauritania, as well as Maghreb sections, and sending solidarity messages to human rights defenders.

Background

On 15 January 2015, the court of Rosso, a town in southern Mauritania, sentenced three anti-slavery activists and human rights defenders to two years in prison for belonging to and managing an unrecognised organisation, participation in an unauthorised assembly and offenses against the forces of law and order.

Brahim Bilal, Ramdane, Djiby Sow and Biram Dah Abeid, a former presidential candidate and President of the anti-slavery organisation, Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania (IRA), were arrested on 11 November 2014 whilst leading a peaceful campaign against slavery and raising awareness amongst the local population about the land rights of people of slave descent.

The practice of slavery persists in Mauritania. Organisations, such as SOS-Esclaves and IRA, regularly condemn cases of slavery. In addition, many people of slave descent continue to work on lands to which they have been given no rights and so are forced to give part of their crops to their would-be traditional masters.

Slavery was officially abolished in Mauritania in 1981 and this practice has been recognized as a crime under national law since 2007. The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Mauritania is a state party, also proscribes slavery. Despite this, at least 32 cases of slavery have been brought to the Public Prosecutor since 2010, with most investigations subject to long delays. In 2011, the only slave-owner ever prosecuted for the criminal offence of “slavery-like practices against a minor”, received a two-year prison sentence. After only a few months in prison, the convicted person was then granted provisional release pending the appeal hearing. This appeal has still not been held and he remains free to this day.

The Mauritanian authorities often restrict the freedom of expression of human rights defenders and organisations that are campaigning against slavery. Biram Dah Abeid, the President of IRA-Mauritania, was previously arrested in 2010 and 2012. In 2013, he was awarded both the UN Human Rights Prize and the Front Line Defenders Award.

Amnesty International believes that Brahim Bilal Ramdane, Djiby Sow and Biram Dah Abeid are prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their peaceful activities aiming to combat slavery.

In February 2015, Amnesty International and 20 organisations called upon the Mauritanian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release these convicted anti-slavery human rights defenders who are being arbitrarily detained in violation of national Mauritanian law and the international instruments ratified by Mauritania.

The three anti-slavery activists are detained in Aleg which is far (more than 261 kms) from their place of residence in the capital city. They began a hunger strike on Monday 23 February 2015 to protest “squalid conditions” and abuse by the prison authorities.

On 26 June 2015, Mauritanian media announced the provisional release of antislavery activist and President of the NGO Kawtal, Djiby Sow, for health reasons.

In August 2015, an Amnesty International delegation carried a mission to Mauritania. The delegation obtained permission to visit the prisoners of conscience including human rights defenders and anti-slavery activists, Brahim Bilal and Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid.

During the mission, AI's delegation was also able to meet with the authorities including the Minister of Justice, the President of National Assembly and a group of Members of Parliament, and the Commissioner Human Rights and to discuss the release of prisoners of conscience Brahim Bilal Ramdane, Djiby Sow and Biram Dah Abeid.

On 20 August 2015, an appeal court in the south-western town of Aleg confirmed the two year sentences.

Amnesty International is concerned by the Mauritanian government's violations of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Goals and objectives of the campaign

Goals

- The Mauritanian government releases immediately and unconditionally the anti-slavery activists
- The Mauritanian government respects fundamental freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Objectives

- The Mauritanian government ceases to arrest, charge, prosecute and convict people merely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression
- The Mauritanian government recognizes slavery and discrimination based on social categories and occupations
- The Mauritanian government allows human rights organizations to register and carry out their work;
- National, regional and international pressure through campaign and advocacy actions and media work increases the visibility of the detention of the three anti-slavery activists and amplifies calls for their release;
- The international community increases their scrutiny of human rights violations, especially restrictions of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and other civil and political rights

Strategy and key targets

Since an appeal court in the south-western town of Aleg has confirmed the two year sentence on 20 August 2015, we believe that a public campaign and targeted direct advocacy actions has the potential to lead to the release of the anti-slavery activists. Such a campaign has been discussed with the prisoners met and with their families and legal teams who agree with this approach after months of quieter efforts.

The campaign demands the unconditional release of three human rights activists through a series of actions, lobby letters, an online/social media campaign, and protests by sections. This will be reinforced through direct advocacy with national, regional and international political and human rights institutions by the International Secretariat through the Dakar hub at strategic moments.

Key targets for movement actions

The Mauritanian Authorities

With Mauritania's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) approaching, the Mauritanian government seems determined to show to peer countries that they are doing their best to respect human rights. A number of laws including a law on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and on slavery have been adopted in recent months. As observed above, the government used ironically severe measures to repress freedom of expression and assembly despite those laws. Public pressure on the government might encourage Mauritanian officials to reconsider their actions on this case, urge them to free immediately and unconditionally the three prisoners of conscience.

The anti-slavery activist or human rights defenders

Other key targets of this campaign are the national, regional and international organisation and anti-slavery/ human rights activists. Amnesty International seeks, through this campaign, to further engage all national, regional and international organisation to demand the release of the three anti-slavery activists.

Key additional target for International Secretariat actions

The Dakar hub through West Africa Francophone Team, supported by the Africa Advocacy Program, will conduct private advocacy with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), UN Special Mechanisms and Special Envoys on the Region, to call for their support in seeking the release of the jailed anti-slavery activists.

Recommended actions

1. Movement actions

Lobby the Mauritanian government

Write to the Mauritanian Government for the release of anti-slavery activists jailed 2 years

We invite all sections to write to the Mauritanian government calling for their release. Sections in France, Spain, EU sections, Netherlands, UK and US, Maghreb Senegal and Mali following consultation with the West African Francophone team in the Dakar hub, should also write to the Mauritanian Embassy in their country and ask for a meeting with Mauritanian diplomats to discuss this case. Sections such as AIUSA with their history of involvement in trying to address racial discrimination, can play an especially helpful role.

Please write immediately in French, Arabic or your own language:

- Calling on Mauritanian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the three anti-slavery activists who have been detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of association;
- The Mauritanian government ceases to arrest, charge, prosecute and convict people merely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression
- The Mauritanian government recognizes slavery and discrimination based on social categories and occupation
- Mauritanian authorities allows human rights organizations to register and carry out their work;

President of the Republic
Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz
Secrétariat Général de la Présidence
BP 184
Nouakchott
Mauritanie
Fax: +222 45 25 98 01
Salutation: Your Excellency, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

Ministre de la Justice et des Droits de l'Homme, Garde des Sceaux (Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Attorney General)
Me. Brahim Ould Daddah
Ministère de la Justice
BP 350
Nouakchott
Mauritanie
Fax : 00 222 2525 70 02
00 222 45 25 70 02
Salutation : Dear Minister, Monsieur le Ministre de la Justice

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.
Please keep us updated if you request and/or get meetings. Take a photo outside the Mauritanian Embassy before or after your meeting and share that with us!

Send Solidarity Cards to Biram, Brahim and Djiby Sow

Solidarity letters/ cards to support them are highly appreciated, so they will realise that there are not alone. Solidarity letters to POCs can also be sent to them via their organisation IRA. IRA members are in regular touch with POCs and their family and they can convey to them the content of such letters.

Solidarity action contact details

Hamady Lehbouss

IPN

Bp 616

Nouakchott

Mauritanie

To download and print the solidarity cards >>>> <https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/images/assetbox/c3126106-6e22-4270-bb56-80ef785db702/assetbox.html>

Suggested message (French, Arabic or your Language)

Our thoughts are with you and all anti-slavery activists at this difficult time. We admire your courage and hope that you will be released soon.

Biram, Brahim and Djiby, Thank you for standing up for freedom of expression and fighting slavery. You are not alone.

Today and every day, we stand with you.

#FreeAntiSlaveryActivists

Media

Op-ed Letter from Aleg by Brahim and Biram (1 year in jail) or Letter from years of fighting against slavery Boubacar Messaoud will be publish November 11 , as 1 year in jail.

This op-ed will be publish in EU and African medias to inform about the state of human rights in Mauritania and to raised awareness around our campaign.

Online/Social Media Campaign

On 11 November,

1. Share the solidarity postcards – Twitter, Facebook

For 11 November a Thunderclap action start publicising on 30 Oct for blast out on 11 November.

2. Send solidarity messages to Mauritanian anti-slavery activists on social platforms – with hashtags #FreeAntiSlaveryActivists

Suggested messaging:

You are not forgotten + Hasthag

Thank you for standing up for freedom of expression + Hasthag

Tell to Mauritanian authorities @xxxx to free anti-slavery activists NOW ! + hasthag

Biram, Brahim, 1 year in jail, tell the Mauritanian authorities to free anti-slavery activist

You are not alone. We are all with you Biram, Brahim and Djiby

CC Mauritanian diplomats on Twitter

While the social media is a great tool for wide mobilisation and impact, we might face backlash directly from the Mauritanian officials or supporters because of the sensitivity of slavery issue in Mauritania. We highly recommend that you avoid engaging in tense back-and-forth exchanges with these two groups.

In our response, if necessary, we should stay in the framework of the following:

- The Mauritanian authorities must free them
- The Mauritanian authorities must uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly,

Protests

Where possible, sections are encouraged to organize protests in front of Mauritanian Embassies to ramp up international pressure on the Mauritania government to release anti-slavery activists. We would recommend that this takes place in France, (ideally with other organisations who have signed the appeal), in the USA (with the participation of IRA USA) and in Spain. On 28 November, Mauritania will celebrate their Independence Day, we encouraged activists to organise protest around independence vs Slavery/ POC. Example of symbols: people with chains / or cords

Please do remember to notify or request authorization, as required in your country, before holding these events. Please let us know how we might be able to assist you with planning these activities. Don't forget to send us photos that we can tweet to keep up the momentum around this campaign!

Speaking tour

Where possible, sections are encouraged to organize speaker tour with Mauritanian anti-slavery activists. Please contact the West Africa Francophone Team who can rely with member of IRA other HR organization from Mauritania who can participate to meetings with your section members.

2. Advocacy actions by the International Secretariat towards regional and international institutions/countries

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

The West Africa team in Dakar, together with the Africa Advocacy Programme, will work together to:

1. Send calls for action to Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders in Africa, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, and Prison and Condition of Detention in Africa.

Engage with UN Special Procedures on Human Rights Defenders, Peaceful Assembly, and Expression

The West Africa team in Dakar together with our UN team, will call on Special Procedures to take actions for the release of human rights activists and keep them aware of the human rights situation in Mauritania.

Engage with Special Envoys

The West Africa team in Dakar with relevant AI sections, will also encourage Special Envoys from the US, EU, France to keep up pressure on Mauritanian authorities to release anti-slavery activists and keep human rights issues at the top of their agenda when meeting with Mauritanian authorities.

Timeframe

The West Africa team in Dakar, will launch the campaign in October 30, 2015

Key hooks for future action include:

- November 3: UPR Mauritania
- November 11: 1-year detention of activists
- November 28: Mauritania Independence Day

- January 15, 2016: date of the first sentence

Campaign materials

Here are materials we have issued since we opened this case:

Quotes

"I call on the Mauritanian authorities to develop a peaceful dialogue, and to open their doors and hearts to start tackling the slavery issue." Statement by Biram Dah-Abeid, on November 10, 2014

Pictures

<https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/images/assetbox/c3126106-6e22-4270-bb56-80ef785db702/assetbox.html>

Press Release

Mauritania: Anti-slavery activist's harsh sentence upheld on appeal

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/mauritania-anti-slavery-activists-harsh-sentence-upheld-on-appeal/>

Blog – Mauritania the gap between words and actin, by Alioune Tine

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/slavery-in-mauritania-the-gap-between-words-and-actions/>

Mauritania: Jailed presidential candidate and anti-slavery activists must be released

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/01/mauritania-jailed-presidential-candidate-and-anti-slavery-activists-must-be-released/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr38/0001/2015/en/>

UPR Report

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr38/1813/2015/en/>

Film, Le Cercle des Noyés

http://www.allocine.fr/video/player_gen_cmedia=18727624&cfilm=120895.html

AI 2014/2015 Report

Contacts

The West Africa Francophone Team is happy to coordinate with you on actions planned for this campaign. Please feel free to send questions, feedback on your activities and send other inquiries to Kiné-Fatim Diop, West Africa Francophone countries Campaigner, kinefatim.diop@amnesty.org , Gaetan Mootoo, West Africa Francophone countries Researcher and Yvonne Cullen Yvonne.cullen@amnesty.org RCCA