

URGENT ACTION

ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISTS ARBITRARILY ARRESTED

Two members of the anti-slavery organization Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA) were arbitrarily arrested on 7 August in Nouakchott, west Mauritania. Biram Dah Abeid, IRA president and candidate to the September parliamentary elections, and Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud have been charged and denied access to legal representation.

On 7 August, **Biram Dah Abeid**, president of the anti-slavery organisation, Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA) and former presidential candidate, was arrested at his home on the day the nominations for parliamentary elections were submitted, to which he was a candidate. No warrant was produced at the time of his arrest, and he was told it was based on “an order that came from above”. The elections took place on 1 September.

On 9 August, **Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud**, also an IRA member, was arrested in Nouakchott, west Mauritania. The two IRA members were arrested following a complaint by a journalist who accused Biram Dah Abeid of threatening him after doing a television documentary about him. Biram Dah Abeid and Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud’s lawyers have repeatedly been prevented from meeting them during their detention at the civil prison of Nouakchott. On 13 August, Biram Dah Abeid was charged with ‘voluntary assault on life and integrity of the person’, ‘incitement to voluntary assault on life’ and ‘threats of violence’. Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud was charged with ‘complicity’. Their lawyers were denied access to the police report and to the incriminating evidence referred to by the prosecution. The proceedings brought against them present many irregularities, including being detained without charge for 6 days and not being able to contact their lawyers.

Amnesty International considers the timing of their detention and the pattern of judicial harassment against members of IRA, suspicious of being politically motivated, happening close to the elections.

Please write immediately in French or your own language:

- Urging the Mauritania authorities to ensure that Biram Dah Abeid and Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud have regular access to their lawyers;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that Biram Dah Abeid and Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud are given adequate time and facilities to communicate with their lawyers, in confidence and to prepare their defence;
- Calling on the authorities to uphold the activists’ right to a fair trial;
- Urging them to ensure that anti-slavery activists, and other human rights defenders, can carry out their human rights activities without any intimidation, harassment and without fear of reprisals.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 OCTOBER 2018 TO:

President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania
General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz
Presidency
BP 184 Nouakchott
Mauritania
Fax: +222 45 25 98 01
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice
DIA Moctar Malal
Ministry of Justice
B. P. 350 Nouakchott
Mauritania
Fax: +222 45 29 49 84
Salutation: Your Excellency

Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action
Mohamed Lamine Ould Sidi
B.P : 1258 Nouakchott – Mauritanie
Fax : +222 45 24 28 49
E-mail : cdhahrsc@gmail.com
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Mr Mohamed Yahya Sidi Haiba *Chargé d’Affaires*, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Carlyle House, 235-237 Vauxhall Bridge Road SW1V 1EJ, 020 7233 615

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Activists and non-governmental organizations campaigning against slavery in Mauritania have long faced restrictions on their attempts to speak and work freely.

In the past years, Biram Dah Abeid has been imprisoned three times. In January 2015, the Court of Rosso sentenced two members of IRA, including Biram Dah Abeid, to two years in prison for “belonging to an unrecognized organization”, “participating in an unauthorized assembly” and “assaulting security officers”. The activists were campaigning against slavery and raising awareness among the local population of the land rights of people of slave descent. Their sentences were upheld by the Appeal Court of Aleg in August 2015. The Supreme Court released the anti-slavery activists on 17 May 2016 after 18 months in prison.

In August 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) concluded that the detention of the activists was arbitrary on the basis that they were arrested for their work as human rights defenders, that they did not enjoy a fair trial and, in the case of Biram Dah Abeid, that he was subjected to discrimination as members of the Haratine community, as they were exposed to longer detentions in different conditions than other detainees.

Apostasy related charges were also used against the IRA President, Biram Dah Abeid, in 2012. Biram Dah Abeid was arrested on 28 April with 11 members of IRA after the burning of several books written by Islamic scholars who were legitimizing slavery on religious grounds. The charges brought against them included: “offence to national security”, “contempt to good morals”, “management of a non-authorized organization” and “crime of apostasy”.

Biram Dah Abeid and other members of IRA-Mauritanie, were also sentenced in January 2011 to one year’s imprisonment for “assaulting police officers” and “obstructing public order” after holding a rally outside a police station in Nouakchott, west Mauritania. They were pardoned in March 2011.

Name: Biram Dah Abeid, Abdellahi el Housein Mesoud
Gender m/f: Male

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