



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Plenary sitting

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B8-0382/2014

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Mauritania, in particular the case of Biram Dah Arbeid
(2014/2999(RSP))

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on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

**European Parliament resolution on Mauritania, in particular the case of Biram Dah Abeid
(2014/2999(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,

- A. Whereas in Mauritania the problem of slavery persists in practice despite the 2007 law criminalizing slavery;
- B. whereas the Mauritanian authorities instead of enforcing their own anti-slavery law, the government continues to crack down on the anti-slavery activists where several members of the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA) were arrested in a Nouakchott on 13 November, a few days after Biram Dah Abeid's, the president of IRA was arrested;
- C. Whereas Biram Dah Abeid is a leading Mauritanian anti-slavery activist who founded the abolitionist organization IRA-Mauritania in 2008; whereas the anti-slavery activists are continuously subject to harassment, intimidation in Mauritania and their actions are either prohibited or severely repressed;
- D. whereas Mr Abeid was arrested and detained by the Mauritanian authorities in 2010 and 2012 for his peaceful protests against the Government's failure to tackle blatant cases of slavery; whereas he was found guilty in 2012 of apostasy by a tribunal and sentenced to the death penalty, which has not been annulled by the judicial authorities;
- E. Whereas Mr Abeid has been charged with inciting violence, disturbing public order, offending a member of the authorities and being a member of an unregistered organization; whereas he and the other detainees have been refused bail; whereas the police have closed down the headquarters of IRA-Mauritania;
- F. Whereas Mr Abeid emerged as runner-up in the 2014 Mauritanian presidential elections, and won the UN Human Rights Prize in 2013; whereas his reputation has made him a prime target for the Mauritanian authorities; whereas his arrest, and those of his colleagues, thus represents a crackdown on political opposition as well as civil society;
- G. Whereas the Global Slavery Index of November 2014 confirms that Mauritania has the highest proportion of its population enslaved in the world; whereas some figures estimate the prevalence of slavery at up to 20%;

- H. Whereas slavery in Mauritania is explicitly racialized, with slaves almost universally drawn from the (black) Haratin community, which comprises between 40-60% of the Mauritanian population; whereas the Haratin, even those not in slavery, are systematically denied access to higher-status work or prominent positions in public life;
- I. Whereas slavery is usually hereditary, and babies born to enslaved women are frequently considered the property of a master's family for their whole lives; whereas most slaves are denied a formal education and are taught that their destiny is to belong to their masters, thus perpetuating so-called psychological slavery; whereas women slaves are routinely subjected to sexual violence and require their masters' permission to marry; whereas many slaves are born as the product of rape; whereas even slaves who have been released have few opportunities to find meaningful employment;
- J. Whereas ownership of slaves transcends almost all sections of Mauritania's elites; whereas religious elites consolidate their grip on society by linking slavery with their own interpretations of Islam, and teach that to oppose slavery is to oppose the religion itself;
- K. Whereas Mauritania has ratified such conventions as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement;
1. Condemns the arrest and ongoing detention of anti-slavery activist Biram Dah Abeid and his fellow campaigners, and calls for their immediate release; calls upon the authorities to provide clear evidence for the charges against them, and to follow strict due process; expresses concern about reports of the violence used against some of the activists, and urges the Mauritanian authorities to investigate such reports without delay;
 2. Calls upon the Mauritanian Government to cease its crackdown on civil society and political opposition, and to permit anti-slavery activists to pursue their non-violent work without fear of harassment and intimidation; urges the Mauritanian authorities to allow freedom of speech and assembly, in accordance with international conventions and its own domestic law;
 3. Expresses grave and renewed concern about the prevalence of slavery within Mauritania; urges the Mauritanian Government to demonstrate a concrete commitment to eradicating this practice, specifically by implementing its own legislation and road map; welcomes the existence of a Special Court for slavery, but echoes the concern of

civil society that it is designed mainly to appease the international community and has executed little work;

4. Strongly encourages the Mauritanian authorities to help change social attitudes about race and slavery, particularly regarding the Haratin population; stresses that discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, especially in the realms of education and employment, should be outlawed;
5. Urges the prioritization of universal formal education, so that current and former slaves, as well as their children, can improve their literacy and become equipped with the tools to find meaningful employment; calls upon the Mauritanian Government, in this regard, to publicize to all the population that slavery has been abolished and that harsh penalties await those who insist upon keeping slaves;
6. Recalls that the issue of land is central to the continuing cycle of slavery; notes with concern that the inability of the Haratin to own land perpetuates their systemic marginalization in society and gravely impedes their meaningful emancipation; insists, therefore, that all Mauritanian citizens should be entitled to own the land that they have occupied and cultivated for generations, as a crucial means to facilitate the full abolition of slavery; encourages the Mauritanian Government, in this regard, to ratify the ILO Convention 169, which guarantees land rights for indigenous communities;
7. Calls upon international companies operating in Mauritania to ensure that they are not using child labour or forced labour, and that they are targeting their corporate social responsibility policies to develop the labour market ethically; notes that the fisheries and mining sector represent key elements of the Mauritanian economy and export market, as well as the trading relationship with the EU; recalls, in this regard, the recent renegotiation of the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Partnership Protocol; emphasizes, therefore, the need for the EU to ensure that it in no way associates itself with slave labour in its trading relationship with Mauritania;
8. Urges the Vice President/High Representative, EEAS and Member States to increase their efforts to address slavery in Mauritania, specifically by ensuring a clear and workable foreign affairs and human rights policy in line with the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, and by promoting a human rights dimension as part of the EU Sahel Strategy, and in dialogues with the Mauritanian Government, including formal bilateral agreements;
9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Mauritania, the African Union Chair and Secretary-General of the Commission, the Secretary-General of the Arab

League, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, and President of the Pan-African Parliament.