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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human rights defenders in Mauritania

Human rights defenders who denounced ongoing slavery practices were intimidated and deliberately arrested by state authorities in Mauritania in the years 2011 and 2012. Biram Dah Abeid, the President and founder of the independent human rights organisation “Initiative for the resurgence of the abolitionist movement (IRA)”, as well as Cheik Ould Abidine and Aliyine Ould Mbareck Fall were sentenced to 12 months of detention with six months suspended and a fine of 1,300 Euros by the District court in Nouakchott on January 6, 2011. They were declared guilty of assaulting police officers during a demonstration related to an alleged case of slavery in front of a Nouakchott police station on December 13, 2010. We are convinced that they were jailed for simply exercising their right to peaceful protest and that the Mauritanian government is trying to cover up the fact that slavery still persists. The human rights defenders Mouloud Ould Boubi and Bala Touré were condemned to a suspended sentence of six months and a fine of 260 Euros. The IRA-activist Dah Ould Boushab received a six-month suspended prison sentence and a fine of 27 Euros. The human rights activists had gotten information on a new case of alleged slavery and had urged the local police staff to research the case. The human rights defenders were calling for IRA’s leader to attend the questioning of two nine- and 13-year-old girls who allegedly were kept as slaves. After refusing the participation of the human rights activist, an altercation started between several police officers and Biram Dah Abeid who was assaulted and beaten with baton and sticks. The human rights defender was seriously injured on his head and left knee. Due to massive national and international protests the IRA-President and the five human rights activists were released after a presidential pardon on February 15, 2011.

Despite the release the intimidation campaign against anti-slavery activists persisted. Nine IRA members were arrested on August 4, 2011, during a peaceful sit-in front of the brigade investigating crimes against minors in Nouakchott. The human rights defenders denounced an alleged case of slavery of a 10-year old girl and the release of the person held responsible for illegally exploiting the child. On August 3, 2011, the protesters had been attacked by relatives of the person who was accused of slavery, but the police didn’t intervene. Six of these nine arrested human rights defenders were sentenced to up to one year in prison on August 22: Mr. Boulkheir Ould Cheikh Dieng was sentenced to one year in prison, but he stayed only three months in jail because nine months of his prison term were suspended. The four human rights activists Elmouctar Ould Mohamed, Moulaye Abdoukarim Touré, Cheikhna Ould Cheyakh and Tourad Ould Zeide were sentenced to six months in prison, but their prison terms were suspended. Four of the arrested human rights activists were acquitted.

On January 12, 2012, once again four human rights activists of IRA were arrested. After a two-day peaceful sit-in in front of the police station in Ain Farba the anti-slavery activists Abdallah Abou Diop, Lehbouss Ould Omar, Ell Mehdy Ould Lemrabott and Ely Ould Ravaa were taken into custody. The four men were subjected to ill-treatment while in detention and have filed a complaint against the commander of the police brigade Boubott Dieng. However, an investigation into the complaint has not been opened. The Public Prosecutor threatened the four activists with court proceedings if they filed a complaint against the police officer. It is common practice that complaints by anti-slavery activists are ignored by the police. The systematic denial of justice and impunity are inciting more protests. The detainees reported massive abuses in jail. They were forced to strip to their underwear in the cold and were chained and suspended from railings by their hands. Furthermore, they were kicked and punched and confined to a small, cramped cell at night. Due to massive protests the four human rights defenders were released on January 21, 2012.

The national Coordinator of the Mauritanian movement “Ne touche pas à ma Nationalité”, Mr. Abdoul Birane Wane, was on February 4, 2012. The human rights defender who is actively lobbying for the rights of the discriminated Black-African community was released five days later after a long interrogation by the Public Prosecutor.

Deliberately the Mauritanian National Security Service has tried to discredit anti-slavery activists. On October 23, 2011, the IRA-Activist Lehbouss Ould Omar was approached by Yahya Ould Cheiguer, an associate of the director of the National Security Service, General Ould Hadi. A few days later a senior security official offered the human rights defender some 280,000 Euros for building up a splinter group to IRA, the IRA New Age, in order to create a split among anti-slavery activists. The human rights defender pretended to accept the plan and received a first sum of 500 Euros to implement the split. After organizing a public assembly of the new organization on November 8, 2011, he was invited to meet General Ould Hadi the next day. He was asked to announce the founding of the new human rights organization at a press conference and to blame IRA-President Biram Dah Abeid for inciting violence. In a press conference on November 11, 2011, Lehbouss Ould Omar revealed the official campaign to discredit IRA.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of Mauritania:

- to stop intimidating and arresting human rights activists;
- to immediately officially register the human rights organization IRA. For several years IRA has tried in vain to get official recognition as an NGO;
- to end impunity for slavery and to guarantee that complaints by anti-slavery activists will no longer be ignored by police, courts and state authorities;
- to ensure the implementation of the 2007 law prohibiting slavery;
- to stop denying the existence of slavery;
- to eradicate slavery;
- to provide more support for released former slaves.