

21 February 2020

Mauritania: Arbitrary detention of ten human rights defenders

On 18 February 2020, 14 human rights defenders were arrested by the police and taken into custody at the special unit of the judicial police of Nouakchott. Ten of them remain in detention, while four have been released on bail.

[Mekfoula Mint Brahim](#) is a woman human rights defender fighting against religious extremism and discriminatory practices in Mauritania, in particular the discrimination against women and members of the Haratine and sub-Saharan African communities. She is the President of ***Pour une Mauritanie Verte et Démocratique*** (For a Green and Democratic Mauritania), a human rights organisation founded in 2009, leading women's empowerment projects in rural areas. She is also a member of ***Alliance pour la Refondation de l'Etat Mauritanien*** (AREM), an organisation promoting good governance and fighting against impunity.

On 13 February 2020, *Pour une Mauritanie Verte et Démocratique* and AREM held a meeting in a guest house in Nouakchott owned by Mekfoula Mint Brahim. On the same day, the police arrested 14 human rights defenders who attended the meeting, including Mekfoula Mint Brahim, AREM members Mini Brahim, Cheikhani Cheikh, Abderahmane Haddad, Ahmed Mohamed Mokhtar, Ahmeddou Nafee, and Outhmane Boubacar, as well as Ahmed Amar, Mohamed Haida and Mohamed Val Isaac. They were taken into custody at the special unit of the judicial police of Nouakchott. The next day, they were released on bail.

On 17 February, following a request by the police, Mekfoula Mint Brahim presented herself at the special unit of the judicial police of Nouakchott. She was ignored by the police officers and decided to go home after leaving her contact details at the station.

The next day, the 14 human rights defenders were arrested again. Four of them were released on bail on the same day, including Aminetou Mint El Moctar, who is the President of the Association of Female Heads of Household.

The remaining ten are still in detention. They are being held at three different police stations in Nouakchott. After having their mobile phones searched, they have been accused of belonging to a group promoting secularism. However, no formal charges have been filed against them and they have not been brought before a judge.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the arbitrary arrests of 14 human rights defenders and the ongoing detention of ten of them, as it is believed to be directly motivated by their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mauritania to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Mekfoula Mint Brahim, Mini Brahim, Cheikhani Cheikh, Abderahmane Haddad, Ahmed Mohamed Mokhtar, Ahmeddou Nafee, Outhmane Boubacar, Ahmed Amar, Mohamed Haida and Mohamed Val Isaac, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights.
2. Ensure that the treatment of the human rights defenders, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the *'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any*

Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Mauritania are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment and threats.

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