



FREEDOM NOW



JOINT ORAL STATEMENT

UN Human Rights Council, 38th Session (18th June – 6th July 2018) General Debate on Item 4: Human Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention

On 27 April 2018, Mauritania's National Assembly adopted an amendment to the Penal Code which makes the death penalty mandatory for anyone convicted of "blasphemous speech" and "sacrilegious acts." The new law also provides for a sentence of up to two years in prison and a fine for "offending public indecency and Islamic values" and for "breaching Allah's prohibitions" or assisting in their breach.

The mandatory death penalty constitutes a direct violation of the ICCPR, of which Mauritania is a signatory, and an arbitrary deprivation of life.

As UN Experts have recently noted, this law will "further muzzle the right to freedom of expression in Mauritania and set the stage for incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence against persons on the basis of religion or belief."¹

One prominent case of concern which appears to be related to the timing of the new law is that of anti-slavery writer and journalist Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mkheitir.

Mkheitir was convicted of apostasy and sentenced to death in December 2014 before a court reduced his punishment to two years imprisonment in November 2017. Although his sentence has expired, the authorities continue to detain him. Throughout his stay in prison he has continued to receive death threats. His health has badly deteriorated recently².

Those who speak out against slavery and discrimination in Mauritania risk reprisals, including arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, bans on their activities or their organizations.

We call on Mauritania to end the arbitrary detention of Mkheitir and ensure his safety. We also urge Mauritania not to promulgate the revised article 306 of the Penal Code, and instead bring the law in line with Mauritania's human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

ACAT

Center for Inquiry

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM)

Freedom Now

International Humanists and Ethical Union (IHEU)

Minority Rights Group

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23186&LangID=E>

² According to his lawyers

PEN America

Raif Badawi Foundation for Freedom

SOS-Eslaves