



## PRESS RELEASE

### UNPO Calls For Immediate Release of Biram Dah Abeid

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) condemns the arrest of Biram Dah Abeid and five other anti-slavery campaigners by the Mauritanian gendarmerie, and the gendarmerie's use of violence against these peaceful activists, on Tuesday 11 November 2014.

The activists were campaigning with the Caravan of Liberty in the town of Chgara when the Mauritanian gendarmerie, on the orders of the local Wali, used tear gas and stun grenades to stop them. The six activists were harmed by the police before being arrested and taken to prison in the regional capital Rosso.

The Caravan of Liberty is an initiative of the IRA-Mauritania (Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement), of which Biram Dah Abeid is President. It consists of a convoy of activists who travel from town to town, holding marches and public gatherings to press the Mauritanian Government and international community to combat slavery, highlight landowners' exploitation of the Haratin and other marginalized sections of society, and push for much-needed land reforms.

The Mauritanian Government has a deeply inadequate track record in fighting modern-day slavery. Despite having outlawed the practice three times, most recently in 2007, slavery remains institutionalized and the legislation appears to have been wilfully ignored. According to the Global Slavery Index, up to 20% of the Mauritanian population is currently enslaved.

Biram Dah Abeid was previously arrested in 2010 and 2012, and the death sentence he received in 2012 for burning the 'Abrégé de Khilil' (a non-sacred interpretation of Islam) is still pending. Despite such judicial harassment, Biram Dah Abeid has been consistently recognized by the international community for his brave campaigning, and in 2013 was awarded the UN Human Rights Prize and the Front Line Defenders Award.

**UNPO calls upon the Mauritanian Government to release Biram Dah Abeid and the other anti-slavery activists immediately and unconditionally, and to permit them to assemble or protest freely.**

**UNPO also calls upon the international community to act now. Mauritania's attendance at this week's G20 summit in Brisbane** – in its capacity as chairing the Assembly of the African Union – is an excellent opportunity to raise the broader issues of slavery, racism and exploitation at the highest level. There must be a full and open dialogue with the Mauritanian Government about its human rights commitments, and the Government must know that the international community is serious in its stated objective of ridding the world of slavery wherever it is encountered.

**UNPO, through its links with the Haratin people, and its International Campaign Against Slavery (iCAS), will continue to press the international community to raise this matter with the Mauritanian Government at every opportunity** until we see concrete signs that the authorities are meeting their national and international commitments, and actively tackling the prevalence of slavery – not least by enforcing their own legislation. They must similarly abandon their current strategy of harassing and arresting the civil society activists in Mauritania who are working so hard to tackle this grotesque abuse of human rights.

**The Mauritanian Government must stop attempting to silence its critics, and for the sake of all its people, make the abolition of slavery a reality.**

**Marino Busdachin**

UNPO General Secretary

Brussels • 12 November 2014

UNPO Advocacy Office

Avenue Louise 52 • 1050 Brussels • Belgium

+32 251 31459 • unpo.brussels@unpo.org