

Information note on Mauritania

This is a translation of the original information note (in French), which you can find [here](#).

Geneva, 12 December 2014

Following allegations of disproportionate use of force by police forces when dispersing activists during a public meeting that was held on 11 November 2014, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mauritania (OHCHR) sent a team to Rosso to carry out a preliminary fact-finding mission.

The OHCHR team received allegations claiming that the public meeting due to be held was banned without a legitimate reason, that a disproportionate use of force was made to disperse the activists, and that the persons who were arrested and detained were subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The fact-finding team made contact with several sources in Nouakchott and in Rosso so as to clarify the circumstances of the 11 November incident. The team also met with seventeen people, including the persons who were arrested and detained, the agents in charge of the application of the law at the level of the national and local police force, and the representatives of the judiciary in Rosso and Nouakchott. The team also organized phone interviews with direct and indirect witnesses of the event.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights spokesperson, Rupert Colville, stated on Wednesday:

“Following its preliminary mission, the OHCHR did not observe the existence of acts constituting torture from the moment when the detainees were remanded in custody in the offices of the local and national police and then transferred to the civil prison in Rosso.

However, the Office did not obtain sufficient information to determine whether the police forces made a disproportionate use of force, in conformity with the principles of necessity and proportionality. Likewise, it was unable to gather enough information to verify the allegations of ill treatment during the arrest and on the first day of detention in the civil prison in Rosso. Thus, the Office remains concerned by the allegations that were made on this issue.

The OHCHR noted that some measures were taken to improve the detainees' conditions of detention; the access to water and food from the second day of custody in the police station and the police office as well as from the day after their detention in the civil prison in Rosso. The same observation was made

from the third day of detention for the persons that were arrested on 12 November and who are detained at the police office. However, the OHCHR noticed that in general, the conditions of detention in the places that were visited do not comply with the minimum international standards, most particularly the detention units and their ventilation.

Furthermore, the OHCHR also noted that the interpretation of certain articles of the law on association can be a source of conflict between the authorities and civil society.”

In conformity with the mandate of its mission, the OHCHR plans to submit a detailed report on the observations and recommendations of the Office following its fact-finding mission. The OHCHR welcomes the cooperation displayed by the Mauritanian government throughout the mission and encourages it to continue this constructive engagement for the follow-up to the identified recommendations.

Among others, the OHCHR encourages the government to:

1. Launch an official, independent and impartial investigation within an adequate period on the behavior of the local and national police in the framework of their actions linked to peacekeeping and of the dispersion of the public meeting on 11 November;
2. Free any individual detained only for having peacefully expressed its opinions;
3. Ensure that all registers, in all places of detention, including the police offices and brigades, are completed, in conformity with international standards and the articles of the penal procedure, particularly on what concerns the physical and sanitary state of health of the detainees;
4. Ensure that the access to a doctor and medical care be guaranteed to all detainees in Mauritania, including in the civil prison in Rosso and in Dar Naïm and in the woman's prison of Sebkhah and to ensure that all detainees be informed of their right to be examined by a doctor, including when being held in custody.