



PRESS RELEASE

UNPO Condemns Verdict Sentencing Biram Dah Abeid to Two Years Imprisonment

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) condemns the verdict of the Mauritanian Court sentencing three of the nine anti-slavery activists that have been detained since 11 November 2014. Mr Biram Dah Abeid is among those sentenced to two years imprisonment despite international pressure on the Mauritanian Government to release all activists. Following the hearings in late December 2014, the court in Rosso announced its verdict on Thursday, 15 January 2015.

The activists had been charged with inciting violence, disturbing public order, offending members of the authorities and being members of an unregistered organization. The Mauritanian gendarmerie had arrested the nine anti-slavery activists during a peaceful protest that was part of the 'Caravan for Liberty' initiative on 11 November 2014. The aim of the initiative is to highlight landowners' exploitation of marginalized sections of society and push for much-needed land reforms. Following the arrests, the Mauritanian Government continued its clampdown on the anti-slavery movement. **These developments illustrate the Mauritanian Government's continued disregard for its human rights obligations.**

The prosecution had requested a sentence of five years imprisonment, a fine of 540,000 UM (USD 1800) and for the confiscation of all property belonging to IRA-Mauritania. While two thirds of the activists were acquitted, Mr Biram Dah Abeid (recipient of the 2013 UN Human Rights Prize and President of the anti-slavery organisation IRA-Mauritania), Brahim Bilal Ramdhane (Vice-President of IRA-Mauritania) and Djibi Sow (President of the anti-slavery organization Kawtal) were sentenced to two years in prison. **During the trial, Mr Abeid accused the Mauritanian Government of targeting political opposition and the Haratin community.** Supporters of IRA-Mauritania remained outside the Tribunal of Rosso calling for the release of the three campaigners under strict surveillance from the security forces. The police later used tear gas to disperse the protesters. While one activist expressed his shock stating that there was no evidence justifying such a conviction, the lawyers of the three campaigners have already vowed to appeal the verdict.

Mr Abeid, who was also the runner-up in the 2014 presidential elections in Mauritania, was previously arrested in 2010. In 2012, he was again arrested and received the death sentence for burning the 'Abrégé de Khilil' (a non-sacred interpretation of Islam that advocates slavery), although this sentence is still pending. Mr. Abeid's status and global prominence, while perhaps contributing to the outcome of this verdict, noticeably influenced the way he was treated in prison. Compared to his colleagues, he was reportedly not maltreated.

UNPO calls upon the Mauritanian Government to release Biram Dah Abeid and the other anti-slavery activists immediately and unconditionally, and to allow them to enjoy their right to peacefully assemble. UNPO will continue to press the international community to raise this matter with the Mauritanian Government at every opportunity.

Marino Busdachin
UNPO General Secretary
Brussels • 15 January 2015