



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
24 August 2010

Original: English

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifteenth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Gulnara Shahinian**

### **Addendum**

### **Mission to Mauritania<sup>\*\*</sup>**

#### *Summary*

In accordance with her mandate contained in Human Rights Council resolution 6/14 and at the invitation of the Government of Mauritania, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Gulnara Shahinian, conducted an official mission to Mauritania from 24 October to 4 November 2009. The main objective of the mission was to look at the effectiveness of the Mauritanian policies, laws and specific programmes to combat slavery. The mission also explored the extent to which factors like discrimination, poverty, culture, religion, education and employment policies hinder or contribute to the end of slavery.

Slavery in Mauritania was abolished in 1980 and criminalized in 2007. Despite laws, programmes and difference of opinion with regard to the existence of slavery in Mauritania, the Special Rapporteur concluded that de facto slavery continues to exist in Mauritania.

The Special Rapporteur met with victims of slavery who had been utterly deprived of their basic human rights. These victims had recently fled from their masters and reported that they had left family members behind. The absence of alternative livelihoods and

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\* Late submission.

\*\* The summary is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself, contained in the annex to the summary, is being circulated in English and French only.

protection from high levels of illiteracy, limited information, combined with the separation of families, and methods of control used by masters that include the use of religion have resulted in a deep-rooted acceptance of their inherited slavery status. In addition, there is resistance from masters to change this way of life. Consequently, de facto slavery in Mauritania continues to be a slow, invisible process which results in the “social death” of many thousands of women and men.

Based on her findings, the Special Rapporteur made, among others, the following recommendations: that the 2007 Slavery Act be amended to contain a clearer definition of slavery to aid judicial enforcement, provide for victim assistance and socio-economic programmes to aid victims’ reintegration into society. The Special Rapporteur further recommends that the Government of Mauritania develop a comprehensive and holistic national strategy to combat slavery.

## Annex

### Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, on her mission to Mauritania (24 October–4 November 2009)

#### Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction.....	1–4	5
II. History of slavery in Mauritania .....	5–14	5
A. Slavery in the black African society .....	9–11	6
B. Slavery in the Moor society .....	12–14	6
III. Normative, institutional framework .....	15–31	7
A. The international and regional legal framework .....	15–21	7
B. The national legal and institutional framework .....	22–31	8
IV. Contemporary forms of slavery in Mauritania .....	32–69	10
A. Slavery in Mauritania .....	32–37	10
B. Gender aspects of slavery in Mauritania.....	38–41	11
C. Children as victims of slavery .....	42–47	12
D. Slavery and the elderly .....	48	13
E. Slavery and religion.....	49–50	13
F. Slavery and discrimination .....	51–53	13
G. Slavery and land .....	54–61	14
H. Slavery and inheritance.....	62–63	15
I. Slavery and refugees.....	64–69	15
V. Measures to combat slavery .....	70–83	16
A. Policies to combat slavery .....	70–73	16
B. Programmes to combat slavery.....	74–83	17
VI. Major challenges .....	84–101	18
A. Institutional mechanisms .....	84	18
B. 2007 Slavery Act .....	85–89	18
C. Enforcement of 2007 Slavery Act.....	90–98	19
D. Challenges faced by returnees from Senegal .....	99–101	20

VII.	Conclusions and recommendations .....	102–119	20
A.	Overall strategy.....	102–104	20
B.	Slavery law and policies .....	105	21
C.	Awareness-raising.....	106	22
D.	Programmes .....	107–112	22
E.	Recommendations for returnees from Senegal .....	113–117	23
F.	Recommendations to the international community.....	118	23
G.	Recommendations to businesses.....	119	23

## I. Introduction

1. In accordance with her mandate contained in Human Rights Council resolution 6/14, and at the invitation of the Government of Mauritania, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, its causes and consequences, Gulnara Shahinian, conducted an official mission to Mauritania from 24 October to 4 November 2009. The main objective of the mission was to look at the effectiveness of the Mauritanian policies, laws and dedicated programmes to combat slavery.

2. During her mission, the Special Rapporteur had extensive consultations in Nouakchott with the State President, Prime Minister, President of the National Assembly, other senior Government representatives, civil society organizations, academic institutions, trade unions, the United Nations country team, the donor community, political party representatives and religious leaders. She also obtained the views of former slaves from Bassiknou and Nema through consultations and open discussion forums. She undertook visits to Atar and Rosso where she consulted directly with community members and regional government representatives, in order to gain their views and opinions.

3. The Special Rapporteur takes this opportunity to thank the Government of Mauritania for extending an invitation and for their assistance and cooperation during her mission. She also greatly appreciates the assistance of numerous civil society organizations and institutions within Mauritania and internationally, and the cooperation of the United Nations country team in Mauritania. She is grateful for the information provided to her by victims of slavery.

4. The Special Rapporteur shared her preliminary findings with the Government at the conclusion of the visit. She highly values the established cooperation and underscores her desire and intention to continue her dialogue with the Government.

## II. History of slavery in Mauritania

5. Mauritania is made up of two major cultural and ethno-linguistic groups: the Arab-Berber peoples, commonly referred to as Moors, largely nomadic and inhabiting mostly the north of the country; and the black African population, made up of Pular, Soninke and Wolof, mostly settled and inhabiting the south and east of the country. In addition to these two large groups, there is a Haratine community, also called the black Moors, who are black African by skin colour, but an integral part of the Moorish ethnic group, whose language and culture they share. Islam is the official religion of Mauritania. Arabic is the official language, while Hassaniyan Arabic, Pular, Soninke and Wolof have the status of national languages.

6. Slavery has existed for centuries in all ethnic communities in Mauritania. It is deeply ingrained as part of a hierarchical social structure. Slaves are treated as property and suffer degrading treatment. They work long hours and receive no payment for their work. They are totally dependent on their masters for food, clothing and shelter. In return, the masters feel that they have a paternal relationship with their slaves.

7. It is not known how many people in Mauritania today live in slavery. It is believed to have been in decline due to successive Mauritanian laws and programmes developed to eradicate slavery.

8. The Special Rapporteur found that there are differences of opinion about whether slavery still continues to exist in Mauritania. There are those who deny altogether that slavery exists and state that what remains are “vestiges of slavery”. Some deny it exists in

their community, but point the finger at other ethnic groups; others claim it is limited to the Arab–Berber community; still others say it also exists in the other black African communities such as the Pular, Soninke and Wolof communities, but in the form of a caste–like system.

#### **A. Slavery in the black African society**

9. Mauritanian society is highly stratified along ethnic and racial lines. In the black African communities, noble and freemen are at the top, followed by “casted” groups (usually occupational and endogamous groups such as blacksmiths and musicians), with slaves and their descendants coming at the very bottom.

10. The Special Rapporteur heard reports that the black African slaves, depending on the economic status of their masters, have de facto equal access to basic services such as education, even though when it comes to social ceremonies such as worship, marriage and burial, the black African slaves must keep within their caste. For example, among the Soninke, slaves are not allowed to be in the first row at the mosque and cannot be buried in the same cemeteries as their masters.

11. Slavery in the black African community is less frequently talked about because it takes the form of social stratification. It is also less easy to identify slavery because it occurs within a homogeneous racial group unlike slavery within the Moor community

#### **B. Slavery in the Moor society**

12. The elite white Moors (Berber Arabs) control the economy and the vast majority of the administrative State, including the Government, the military and the police. Historically they raided, enslaved and assimilated people from sedentary black ethnic groups along the Senegal River. Today this assimilated group of people is also called the black Moors. Following the 1905 law abolishing slavery in Mauritania, the black Moors gradually started being freed and were commonly referred to as Haratine. The word “Haratine” is derived from the Arabic word for freedom, as they are perceived by the rest of society as freed slaves. The Haratine continue to suffer discrimination, marginalization and exclusion due to their membership of a “slave caste” and are the ethnic group most associated with slavery in Mauritania today. In many cases, the Haratine, even if freed, continue to serve their masters because they are economically, culturally and psychologically attached to them and they see no other viable option. Whether freed or still enslaved (*abid*), black Moors are referred to as Haratine.

13. In a vast country, much of which is desert, it is extremely difficult for slaves to run away and leave their “families”. The Haratines who flee their masters go and live in *Adwabas*, slave descendant camps, or shanty towns based outside major cities. The former slaves become the poorest in society with limited access to basic services such as education and economic opportunities. They often end up doing service jobs and other lowly jobs in urban centres. In some instances, former female slaves end up working in urban areas as domestic workers for relatives of their former masters or in sex work. In other cases, former female slaves set up some small businesses selling items such as couscous or mint. Former male slaves end up working as porters or night watchmen.

14. The lack of access to basic services and alternative livelihoods for former black African and Haratine slaves serves to propagate the belief that former slaves are still inferior and will always be slaves.

### III. Normative, institutional framework

#### A. The international and regional legal framework

##### 1. International level

15. Mauritania is party to the following international human rights instruments: International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Mauritania has submitted reservations based on Islamic Sharia law to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For the purpose of this report, it is also important to note that Mauritania is party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

16. Mauritania is also party to the following international instruments that expressly prohibit contemporary forms of slavery: 1926 Slavery Convention and Protocol amending the Slavery Convention, the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery of 1956; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment; the ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour; and ILO Convention No. 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour.

##### 2. Treaty bodies observations and recommendations to Mauritania

17. Several treaty bodies<sup>1</sup> have issued observations and recommendations related to slavery in Mauritania, the most recent of which has been the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In its concluding observations, the Committee expressed concerns about the high number of children engaged in labour, particularly in the agricultural sector, and the continued existence of caste-based slavery, which has a particular impact on girls in domestic service and boys forced to beg by *marabouts* (Islamic religious leaders or teachers). The Committee was also concerned about the absence of services to free and reintegrate children who were victims of slavery and over the lack of measures to educate the public about traditional slavery practices in general. The Committee recommended, inter alia, the need for Mauritania to take all necessary measures to eradicate slavery and, in particular, to ensure that perpetrators of such practices are held accountable in accordance with the law. The Committee urged Mauritania to implement a national strategy against

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<sup>1</sup> See concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/MRT/CO/1, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, CERD/C/65/CO/5.

slavery, including an analysis of its root causes, and take effective measures to free victims of slavery and provide them with psychosocial recovery and reintegration measures.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Regional level

18. Mauritania has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which expressly prohibits slavery in its article 5. Following a mission to Mauritania in June 1996, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights "noted that it was still possible to find people considered as slaves in certain parts of the country".<sup>3</sup>

19. The Commission stated that it is the responsibility of Mauritania to ensure the effective application of its national legislation abolishing slavery,<sup>4</sup> and thus ensure the freedom of its citizens, and to carry out inquiries and initiate judicial action against the perpetrators of violations of the national legislation.

20. Between 1986 and 1992, the Commission received communications from human rights groups who claimed that slavery and other related practices continued to exist in Mauritania. In May 2000, the Commission recommended, inter alia, that the Government of Mauritania "carry out an assessment of the status of such practices in the country with a view to identify with precision the deep-rooted causes for their persistence and to put in place a strategy aimed at their total and definitive eradication" and "take appropriate administrative measures for the effective enforcement of Order No. 81-234 of 9 November 1981, on the abolition of slavery in Mauritania".<sup>5</sup>

21. Mauritania has also ratified the following regional agreements: the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

## B. The national legal and institutional framework

### 1. Legislation

22. Over the last century, slavery in Mauritania has theoretically been abolished in law three times; first, in 1905, in a colonial decree implementing the French law adopted in 1848 abolishing slavery in all French colonies. Abolition was reaffirmed at independence by the 1961 Constitution, which incorporated the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1980, following public outcry at the sale of M'Barka, a female black Moor held in slavery, in Atar, President Haidalla issued a statement announcing the abolition of slavery. This statement became Order No. 081-234 of 9 November 1981.

23. Order No. 081-234 of 9 November 1981 to abolish slavery in Mauritania was an extremely important step but it had a few drawbacks. The definition of slavery was too vague, leaving many in slavery-like conditions. For the order to become a living document, it would have needed to be accompanied by effective measures to address root causes, specifically to provide slaves with alternative opportunities and educate them about their rights. Otherwise, freed slaves or their descendents would go back to their masters. In addition, article 1 of the order definitively abolished slavery throughout the national territory but did not impose a criminal penalty for slavery. Article 2 stated that, in conformity with sharia law, compensation for the abolition of slavery would be provided to

<sup>2</sup> See concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/15/Add.159.

<sup>3</sup> *Malawi African Association and Others vs. Mauritania*, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, communication Nos. 54/91, 61/91, 98/93, 164/97 to 196/97 and 210/98 (2000).

<sup>4</sup> Order No. 081-234 of 9 November 1981.

<sup>5</sup> *Malawi African Association and Others vs. Mauritania*.



rightful claimants, i.e., slave-owners. The details of the compensation scheme would be decided by a national commission comprising of ulemas (Islamic scholars), economists and administrators. No implementing measures for the order were adopted, which made the law practically ineffective. Prior to the 1980 statement, disagreement had surrounded whether freeing someone from slavery should be simply obligatory or whether it should be accompanied by some form of compensation for the person responsible for slavery. There is no evidence of a proposal to compensate those subjected to slavery or that a commission was ever set up.<sup>6</sup>

24. The adoption on 3 September 2007 of the Slavery Act criminalizing slavery and punishing slavery-like practices was a crucial moment in the approach to this issue in Mauritania. The Prime Minister, introducing the bill, described it as “a decisive turning point, aimed at the elimination of all the wrongs inherited from the past, the promotion of a culture of equality, tolerance and citizenship and the establishment of favourable conditions for progress and the emancipation of all Mauritians”. That position is in contrast to the past attitude of denial at the highest level of the State.<sup>7</sup>

25. Article 2 of the Act defines slavery as “the exercise of all or some of the rights of property over one or more persons”. Article 3 prohibits “discrimination, in any form, against a person alleged to be a slave”. The crime of slavery is held to occur when “any person reduces another person or a person under their care or responsibility, to slavery or incites them to forfeit their liberty or dignity, for the purpose of enslaving them” and is punishable by 5 to 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine of approximately US\$ 2,000–4000.<sup>8</sup>

26. The law also codifies “offences of slavery” which are punishable with prison sentences of between six months and two years and a fine of between US\$ 200–840. Offences of slavery include appropriating goods, products or earnings resulting from the labour of a slave; prejudicing the physical integrity of a slave or denying the child of a slave access to education.<sup>9</sup>

27. The Act provides for assistance and monetary compensation to those released from slavery or slavery practices and criminalizes practices such as the sexual exploitation of female slaves by their masters and the act of seeking to justify slavery. In addition, those who do not follow up a denunciation of any slavery-like practice brought to their attention, including governors, prefects, local chiefs and police officers, shall be liable to prison sentences and a fine (sect. 12). The Minister of Interior has given instruction to these bodies to enforce the law and the Minister for Justice has told prosecutors to investigate any allegations of slavery reported.<sup>10</sup>

28. Human rights associations are empowered to denounce violations of the Act and to assist victims, with the latter benefiting from free court proceedings (sect. 15).

29. In 2003, Act No. 025–2003 on the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons was adopted. The law criminalizes the recruitment, transport and transfer of persons by threat or force for sexual and economic exploitation.

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *Mauritania: A future free from slavery?* (London, 2002), p. 10

<sup>7</sup> For example, in September 2001, a representative of the Government of Mauritania stated to the Committee on the Rights of the Child that “Mauritanian society had never known servitude, exclusion or discrimination ... and no vestiges of such practices could thus persist” (CRC/C/SR.724, para. 22).

<sup>8</sup> See Slavery Act No. 2007-048 of 3 September 2007 criminalizing slavery and repressing slavery practices.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

30. With regard to racism and discrimination, article 1 of the Mauritanian Constitution “guarantees equality before the law to all of its citizens without distinction as to origin, race, sex, or social condition”, prohibits incitement to acts of racial or ethnic discrimination and contains provisions that criminalize the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination and violence or provocation against another race or a group of a different colour or ethnic origin. Article 15 of the Constitution guarantees the right of property and the right of inheritance to all citizens without distinction. Article 395 of the Mauritania Labour Code provides for equal access to employment and prohibits any discrimination, exclusion or preference based on race, national origin, colour, sex, religion, political opinion or social origin.

## **2. Institutional structure**

31. The Government has set up the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society, headed by a commissioner. This office has been set up to tackle the remnants of slavery. In March 2009, the Commission initiated the Programme for the Eradication of Remnants of Slavery (PESE). PESE focuses on identifying ex-slaves, providing alternative livelihoods for them and offering them basic services such as water, health and education. PESE works with 22 communities in 397 villages. Each community, together with the Government, develops its own five-year action plan.

# **IV. Contemporary forms of slavery in Mauritania**

## **A. Slavery in Mauritania**

32. Most of the officials that met with the Special Rapporteur stated that slavery existed, but only in remote and rural areas. These officials often talked about both the mental and physical aspect of slavery. They recognized the need to go beyond the passing of the Mauritanian laws against slavery, publicizing the laws and addressing the poverty that affected both masters and slaves.

33. Other officials denied the existence of slavery stating that because Mauritania had legally abolished and criminalized slavery, it therefore no longer existed as an institution. These officials talked about the remnants of slavery or vestiges of slavery which exist as a result of poverty.

34. After analysing the interviews conducted with victims of slavery in Atar, in Rosso and from Nema, the Special Rapporteur believes that the situations described to her meet the key elements that define slavery.<sup>11</sup> The victims described situations whereby they were completely controlled by their owner using physical and/or mental threats; could not independently make any decision related to their lives without his or her master’s permission; were treated as commodities – for example, girls being given away as wedding presents; lacked freedom of movement; and were forced to work long hours with very little or no remuneration. In addition, the victims were further denied the right to inherit. These victims had escaped slavery and talked about the relatives that they had left behind who still lived in slavery. The Special Rapporteur therefore concluded that de facto slavery continues to exist in certain remote parts of Mauritania.

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<sup>11</sup> Article 1 of the 1926 Slavery Convention defines slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”.

35. In the rural areas, men, women, boys and girls continue to live in slavery. Slaves who flee often return to their masters because they lack alternative means of supporting themselves. The Special Rapporteur heard reports that some former slaves in rural areas face difficulties in acquiring ownership of land and some are forced to give a percentage of their produce to their former masters. Consequently, although they may be “freed”, former slaves are still treated like slaves.

36. Former slaves from rural areas who flee their masters or who are “freed” are further enslaved in the urban centres. These former slaves find themselves back in slavery as a result of discrimination, lack of education or vocational training and lack of the means to find an alternative livelihood.

37. The Special Rapporteur also heard reports about other slavery-like practices such as: forced early marriages; serfdom; worst forms of child labour, such as children who are forced to beg; trafficking; and domestic servitude, which affects men, women, boys and girls. These forms of slavery affect both former slaves and people who have historically never been in enslaved. However, the Special Rapporteur noted that in majority of her interviews, when she raised these issues, many did not consider these human rights violations as contemporary forms of slavery.

## **B. Gender aspects of slavery in Mauritania**

38. Women are most at risk as they suffer triple discrimination: firstly as women, secondly as mothers and thirdly as slaves. They are viewed by their masters firstly as labour and secondly as producers of a labour force. Female slaves who live in their masters’ homes are rarely allowed out of the master’s camp and generally work from before sunrise to after sunset, caring for the master’s children, fetching water, gathering firewood, pounding millet, moving tents made of heavy animal skin and performing other domestic tasks. Women in slavery are frequently beaten and sometimes raped by their masters who consider them to be their property. Their children are also considered the master’s property and, along with other slaves, can be rented out or loaned or given as gifts in marriage. By giving away the children of a female slave, or another member of her family, the master is able to keep a tighter hold on the female slave. A slave mother is less likely to disobey or attempt to escape when she does not know where her children are and only her master possesses that information. Neither a slave mother nor a slave father has rights to their children.

39. When a slave marries, the dowry may be seized by the master. In addition, a master may allow a marriage but refuse to “free” the slave thereby ensuring that through the marriage, the master gets the female slave’s husband and future children to work for him or his kin. The master can also force separation or divorce between married slaves. In this situation, it is usually the male slave that is forced to leave, often after enduring a series of verbal and physical threats. This male slave is seen as a threat to the master’s household as it is feared that he can influence the departure of the master’s property (the female slave and their children). A slave husband and father is only recognized if the master consented to the marriage, which masters rarely do. Many slaves do not even know their father or grandfather. Generic names that are not the names of their biological parents are usually given to children at birth.

40. Men, women and children who are slaves are denied their right to family life. This is in direct violation of international human rights instruments to which Mauritania is a party.<sup>12</sup>

41. The Special Rapporteur met with women and girls who had fled from slavery in the rural areas and had been forcefully separated from their families as a result of slavery. The women had spent their lives looking for their mothers and their children. In some instances, daughters found their mothers and were able to rescue them from slavery. However in other situations, daughters found their mothers and siblings who refused to leave their masters. This was either because of their religious beliefs or because they did not see any other economic alternatives.

### C. Children as victims of slavery

42. Mauritanian law provides that children can work in the non-agricultural sector from the age of 14 and children under the age of 13 can only work in the agricultural sector if the Minister of Labour grants an exception owing to local circumstances. However, the Special Rapporteur heard reports of children younger than 13 years working in all sectors.

43. There are two ways in which a child becomes a slave in contemporary Mauritania: by birth or when given away as a gift. Such children's right to be born free is violated and their basic rights to identity, family, childhood are denied. Every slave in Mauritania was also a slave as a child. The children grow up not knowing their parents or siblings. Their masters, as social relatives, become the closest thing to family. This makes it even more difficult for enslaved children to escape. In the cases where a master recognizes the children he has fathered with a slave, the children are usually separated from the mother.

44. Enslaved children in the countryside usually work taking care of the livestock, cultivating subsistence crops and performing domestic work and other significant labour in support of their masters' activities.

45. Children in slavery-like conditions in urban areas are often found working in domestic households.

46. The phenomenon of the *talibes* (religious students or followers of specific religious sect or teacher), who are forced by *marabouts* to beg on the streets for the financial benefit of the *marabouts*, also exists. It is widely believed that these children are not Mauritanian and come from Senegal and Mali. Using children for begging is considered a form of slavery.<sup>13</sup> The Special Rapporteur was informed that the Government is working with religious leaders to put an end to this practice. However, in many of the conversations that the Special Rapporteur had in the country, many did not consider forced begging to be a form of slavery.

47. The Special Rapporteur also heard reports of forced early marriages, some of which involved girls trafficked for forced marriages to other countries. This is in direct violation of article 2 of the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, which forbids forced early marriages.

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<sup>12</sup> Art. 10 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; art. 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; arts. 18, paras. 1 and 2, 27, para. 1, and 29, para. 1, of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; art. 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; and art. 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>13</sup> See ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

## **D. Slavery and the elderly**

48. The Special Rapporteur heard that elderly slaves are still expected to work. Their children sometimes stay as slaves as they do not want to leave their parents, usually the mother, because there would be no one to take care of them. The Special Rapporteur heard from a former slave who went back to her master to get her elderly, temporarily blind mother. The mother refused to go with her daughter because having been enslaved for so many years; she could not imagine an alternative way of living especially because she was elderly and unwell. She also believed that to leave her master would result in religious sanction. After the second attempt, the mother left her master. The woman's health and vision have been restored thanks to help from a non-governmental organization (NGO).

## **E. Slavery and religion**

49. For many years, slaves have been told that if they do what the master tells them, they will go to heaven but if they turn their backs on their master, they forsake paradise. This is a powerful mechanism of control which teaches those who are enslaved to follow orders and accept their fate or they will be forsaken by their god. Without access to education or alternative means of subsistence, many believe that it is god's wish for them to be slaves.

50. In meetings with religious scholars and leaders, the Special Rapporteur was told that the misinterpretation of religion is used by masters to keep the slaves in subordination. In addition, the religious leaders reported that some religious leaders use statements from the Koran to justify the existence and persistence of slavery.

## **F. Slavery and discrimination**

51. While the practice of slavery is illegal, deeply embedded discriminatory attitudes form part of the basis of slavery in Mauritania. The country's stratified, caste-based society means that even those who are former slaves or descendants of former slaves still live under the shroud of their "slave class" and are ostracized from society. As a result of discriminatory practices, former slaves often end up in service and manual labour positions in urban areas. When they rise above their strata, former slaves still experience discrimination. The Special Rapporteur heard of a situation where a minister, who happened to be from a lower caste in the Soninke community, was appointed and yet the people from his own community refused to recognize him. This shows that, even where the Government has used positive discrimination, such persons have faced setbacks, as certain communities have refused to let go of old traditional beliefs in caste-based slavery. The person appointed to a senior position is not respected.

52. Socially, people are still stigmatized and ostracized for being slaves or former slaves. This has a huge impact on their psyche. The Special Rapporteur heard cases whereby white Moors actively became obstacles to the development of Haratines; for example, white Moors refused to pay Haratine bricklayers and preferred to pay a higher price for foreigners, in this case Gambians. The Special Rapporteur also heard reports of how white Moors had prevented a group of Haratines who had received money from the World Food Programme from building boreholes by stealing their materials and challenging their occupancy of the land.

53. The Special Rapporteur heard from ex-slaves about the discrimination they face in accessing justice, having equal employment opportunities and accessing basic services, such as education.

## G. Slavery and land

### 1. Mauritanian land legislation

54. On 25 June 2003, the Government adopted Act No. 025/2003 on combating human trafficking. The Act provides for criminal penalties up to hard labour for life for the perpetrators of such crimes.

55. Article 15 of the Mauritanian Constitution ensures the right to own property. In 1983, spurred on by the Government's interest to develop land for agricultural production, the Land Reform Act was enacted. It guarantees private ownership of land. However, it also states that the Government can evict citizens, with compensation, to help meet larger "economic and social development needs". Communities that, in accordance with their customs, oppose the individual ownership and sale of land must create cooperatives and officially register as associations. In rural areas, de facto expropriation of land by powerful agents with connections to high-ranking civil servants is common. Conflicts between Haratine and white Moor masters also broke out in rural areas when the former claimed land ownership on the basis that they were the ones actually working the land.<sup>14</sup>

56. According to the Act, the Government can grant title for parcels of undeveloped land, including fallow land, to whoever pledged to improve it and, at the same time, possessed requisite resources. This resulted in white Moors owning land around the Senegal River which traditionally belonged to black African communities. Such activity was in part responsible for the tensions in the late 1980s between State officials and communities of the Senegal River region, the homeland of the Pular, Soninke, and Wolof. This eventually resulted in the State-sponsored killings and evictions of thousands of black African citizens between 1989 and 1991 to Mali and Senegal. In addition, land left by fleeing black Africans was given to Haratines which further heightened tensions between the two groups when the black Africans returned.<sup>15</sup>

### 2. Findings of the Special Rapporteur

57. Traditionally, land was held by community elders or nobles who were masters (in the white Moors and in the black African communities, it was those who were not from the slave caste). Land ownership was passed on from one generation to the next. Slaves worked pieces of land but never owned them. This then resulted into serfdom<sup>16</sup>. The slaves become serfs as a result of the fact that they share with their masters any profits from the land, thereby giving their masters a percentage of their produce.

58. Today, masters may live in cities but still have legal documents owning the land being worked on by slaves. The Special Rapporteur heard reports of serfdom whereby former Haratines slaves work pieces of land for years but are denied legal ownership of property, whereas the same piece of land is willingly given to white Moors who do not invest in the land. The Moors then either force the former Haratines slaves to give tithes or force them off their land. In this regard, the Special Rapporteur met with a group of former Haratine slaves who are serfs— known as the *Organisation de Sauniers d'Idjil* (Idjil Salt-

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<sup>14</sup> See Cedric Jourdé, "Country report – Mauritania: Countries at the Crossroads 2007" (Washington D.C., Freedom House, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Serfdom is the condition or status of a tenant who is by law, custom or agreement bound to live and labour on land belonging to another person and to render some determinate service to such other person, whether for reward or not, and is not free to change his status. See art. 1 (b) of the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery.

miners Organization) – who extracted salt for many years. They pay the local government tax for exploiting the land and they pay a tax to their master. They have lodged several complaints against their master’s demand for payment, but to no avail. In addition, they have been denied legal title to the land.

59. The Special Rapporteur heard reports of masters evicting slaves from their land if they did not vote for a candidate of the master’s choice. This group of slaves therefore also feels disenfranchised.

60. Slaves who escape or are liberated migrate to urban centres where they live in shanty towns, most often without any official property titles.

61. It is important to address the land tenure system in rural and urban areas. Issues of ownership of land – especially between masters and former slaves – must be addressed. If left unaddressed, they will likely bring about conflict. The Special Rapporteur heard that in some regions, such as Atar, there is a committee that distributes land. This committee is made up of the regional prefect, mayor, municipal counsellors, technical experts and community leaders. It is important that land committees are representational of the various groups in their communities.

## **H. Slavery and inheritance**

62. When slaves die, their property can be claimed by the master or the master’s family. A slave or ex-slave’s children do not enjoy their right to inheritance from their parents. This perpetuates the vicious circle of slavery, as inheritance could serve as material basis for buying future freedom or the freedom of their offspring.

63. The Special Rapporteur heard about an inheritance case that has been pending since 2003 and, despite judgements in favour of the former slave’s family, the man claiming to be the former slave’s master has refused to adhere to the ruling of the courts. It is perceived that the ruling has not been enforced because of the master’s connections with local authorities.

## **I. Slavery and refugees**

64. Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya was President of Mauritania from 1984 to 2005. During President Taya’s reign, there were reports of violent physical and sexual violations against the black African community in Mauritania. There were reports of arbitrary arrests and summary executions of black Africans. Their identity documents were destroyed and their property and land were confiscated. These actions resulted in black African Mauritians seeking refuge or being deported to Senegal and Mali. In addition, Mauritanian white Moors and Haratines in Senegal were executed or expelled to Mauritania as a form of retaliation.

65. This issue is of interest to the Special Rapporteur as, firstly, during the time in which these violations against the black African community occurred, many slaves in the Moor community had either been freed or fled their masters. These former slaves, Haratines, had no place to go or no means to sustain themselves. Consequently, when the black Africans fled, some of their land was given to Haratines. Secondly, as a result of the ethnic violence between 1987 and 1991, tens of thousands of Mauritians fled to Senegal and Mali. The majority who fled were black African, some of whom were slaves. In order to resolve this humanitarian issue, on 12 November 2007, the Governments of Mauritania and Senegal and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed

the Tripartite Agreement on the Voluntary Repatriation of Mauritanian Refugees in Senegal.

66. The agreement sets forth obligations for each party, in order to ensure the satisfactory organization of the voluntary return of refugees to Mauritania, under the supervision of UNHCR.<sup>17</sup>

67. The skills of the refugees are considered when they allocated their new homes. For example, the Special Rapporteur visited returnees in Rosso, the majority of whom had been civil servants and teachers prior to fleeing. They had been placed near an urban centre so as to maximize their opportunities to use their skills. Those with agricultural skills were usually relocated to rural settings. The Government provides returnees with grant of lands (200–500 m<sup>2</sup> of land depending on the size of the family), identification papers and food for three months, as well as non–food items.

68. In addition, several other projects have been implemented to support the reintegration of the returnees, including income–generation projects and quick–impact projects implemented by the National Agency to Assist and Integrate Refugees with United Nations support.

69. The Special Rapporteur heard from UNHCR that there were currently approximately 15,000 returnees, of whom 50 per cent have identification cards and 85 per cent have been given birth certificates. The majority of returnees are Pular. Figures from the Government state that there are currently 19,086 returnees.

## **V. Measures to combat slavery**

### **A. Policies to combat slavery**

70. The Special Rapporteur was impressed by the will of all the people she met – from the President of Mauritania to ex–slaves – to address the issue of slavery, break with the past and help clear the path towards its extinction.

71. The Special Rapporteur commended the enactment of the 2007 Slavery Act criminalizing slavery, which provides a clear message that slavery will not be tolerated in Mauritania.

72. As no cases based on the 2007 Slavery Act have been brought before the courts, the Special Rapporteur was informed that the Ministry of Justice is setting up a commission to review the law and provide suggestions on how to strengthen it.

73. The Government has taken on an affirmative action policy to promote equal opportunity and ethnic diversity. For example, starting from the 1990s, Haratines have progressively been elected or appointed to key decision–making posts, such as the post of Speaker of the National Assembly, which was an appointment made in 2007. A number of Haratines have been elected as members of parliament, including one woman. Furthermore the current President of the Constitutional Court, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Interior are Haratines. This testifies to the emergence of a Haratine elite which is gradually acquiring equal rights to access decision–making in Mauritania.

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<sup>17</sup> See the Tripartite Agreement on the Voluntary Repatriation of Mauritanian Refugees in Senegal.



## B. Programmes to combat slavery

74. The Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society has established a national plan to combat vestiges of slavery. The programme, called Programme for the Eradication of Remnants of Slavery (PESE), provides income-generating activities and access to health and education for former slaves. It is worth mentioning that the Government has allocated approximately US\$ 3,440 or 1 million ouguiyas to the programme. In addition, in 2009, a new a three-year United Nations joint programme on conflict prevention was signed with the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society. The purpose of this programme is to address root causes of social unrest related to the remnants of slavery and support social cohesion.

75. The Minister of Families, Children and Social Affairs informed the Special Rapporteur of the collaboration between her and the Ministry of Interior to address the issue of street children, some of which are *talibes*, in Nouakchott. Children living on the streets are likely to be working on the streets, which makes them vulnerable to slavery-like abuses.<sup>18</sup> There is a specialized police force which is trained to work with children. The Minister of Interior informed the Special Rapporteur that the children were offered education or vocational training and provided with shelter. The Minister of Interior also told the Special Rapporteur that they were monitoring *madrassas* to ensure that children are not encouraged to go begging for their religious teachers.

76. In the past, Mauritanian children of slaves were trafficked to work as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates. The Minister of Families, Children and Social Affairs, informed the Special Rapporteur that, in 2005, those children had been repatriated to Mauritania and, wherever possible, reunited with their families as part of a programme. The programme also focused on ensuring that the children were properly integrated back into communities and received compensation that would help them go to school or provide incoming-generating tools for the older returnees. The Government had developed an action plan and programme steering committee, worked jointly with NGOs and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and monitored progress of their work. The Special Rapporteur was informed that, after two years, the programme had ended because it had met its objectives.

77. The Minister for Employment and Vocational training informed the Special Rapporteur of a programme that started in 2008 to provide microcredit to ex-slaves so that they can set up small businesses. The programme also provides business advice to its beneficiaries.

78. In order to promote positive integration of returnees from Senegal and Mali, on 25 March 2009, a ceremony of national forgiveness, prayer and reconciliation was held on the banks of the Senegal River, with a view to healing the wounds caused by past violations of human rights.<sup>19</sup>

79. The National Commission of Human Rights, established in 2007, has played an important role in advocating the eradication of slavery and promoting the socio-economic reintegration of slaves and their civil rights. In addition, it can also legally respond to

<sup>18</sup> See ILO Convention No. 182; also, United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, *World Report on Violence against Children* (Geneva, United Nations Publishing Services, 2006), p. 250.

<sup>19</sup> See summary record of the 5th meeting of the Durban Review Conference, A/CONF.211/SR.5, para. 11.

allegations of human rights violations, including slavery, by carrying out independent investigations.

80. The fight against slavery in Mauritania recognizes the need to include religious leaders and the 1981 decree abolishing slavery followed extensive consultation within Islamic circles and an announcement by the Government that, as all Muslims were equal before Allah, there could be no justification for perpetuating slavery.<sup>20</sup>

81. The Special Rapporteur met with religious leaders who spoke out clearly against slavery, rejecting the idea that it is in any way associated with Islam. They have worked with their communities to combat slavery and slavery-like practices. However, they acknowledge that there is a need to create awareness and changing peoples' attitudes and beliefs about slavery.

82. In 2007, in order to create awareness of the 2007 Slavery Act, the Government, together with the National Human Rights Commission and civil society organizations, conducted a national awareness-raising campaign.

83. The Special Rapporteur was also informed of the involvement of organizations, such as SOS Esclaves and the Mauritanian Association for Human Rights, which assist slaves who have fled their masters with legal advice, legal assistance to file a case, temporary shelter and, wherever possible, microcredit for small businesses.

## **VI. Major challenges**

### **A. Institutional mechanisms**

84. The Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society set up PESE to tackle the vestiges of slavery but this programme does not tackle existing forms of slavery in Mauritania. Furthermore, PESE limits its focus to addressing poverty. It does not address such factors as discrimination, which would provide an opportunity to change attitudes and beliefs of former slaves and masters by launching a sustainable awareness-raising campaign. Moreover, the Government does not have definitive data on the nature and incidence of slavery in Mauritania, which further exacerbates the problem of properly addressing slavery. Consequently, there is a need for slavery practices in Mauritania to be tackled more comprehensively with sustainable actions.

### **B. 2007 Slavery Act**

85. The Act focuses only on the individual criminal responsibility of slave-owners and thus can only be applied through criminal prosecution, with no possibility for victims to take civil proceedings for reparation or compensation.

86. The Act does not take into account the inextricably related issue of discrimination based on the social status of persons enslaved in the past and their descendants, who continue to be the victims of discrimination before the law, in their place of work and in their social life

87. Although forms of slavery such as serfdom have been reported in Mauritania, the law makes no reference to them.

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<sup>20</sup> See 2007 Slavery Act.

88. The Act does not refer to specific application measures and the resulting lack of genuine supporting measures to publicize the Act on a long-term basis means that a lot remains to be done to change the attitudes and behaviour of the population towards slavery.

89. The Act does not make reference to rehabilitation programmes, which would provide alternative means of livelihood for ex-slaves. Such programmes are essential to ensuring that former slaves do not end up in voluntary servitude whereby they continue working for their master in exchange for cash or payment in kind, e.g., housing, food, etc.

### **C. Enforcement of 2007 Slavery Act**

90. Since its inception, there have been no prosecutions under this Act. The law addresses only the individual criminal liability of slaveholders; it thus relies entirely on the police and prosecution for its enforcement. In interviews with both government officials and civil society representatives, enforcement was raised as a problem that allows slavery to continue.

91. The Special Rapporteur heard of situations where cases of slavery were reported to the relevant authorities. However, either the cases were reclassified and filed under a different name such as “inheritance or land dispute” or were not pursued owing to insufficient documentary evidence, or the person who put forward the claim was put under pressure from her extended family, master or sometimes local authorities to retract her claim. This results in cases never being reported as “slavery” cases and therefore – judicially – slavery cases do not exist.

92. The police and the courts have shown a reluctance to follow up allegations of slavery-like practices brought to their attention, either because of lack of sufficient knowledge of the law or simply pressure from certain communities or groups. Although the law provides for criminal penalties for authorities who fail to act, prosecutions under this provision will likely rest with the same authorities responsible for acting on slavery complaints.

93. The law is difficult to enforce in nomadic communities in rural areas. It is easier to tackle slavery within communities that are more sedentary or live in urban areas. For example, children are not systematically registered, especially in rural areas. It is therefore difficult to monitor children on the move with their masters. Porous borders with Algeria, Mali, Morocco and Senegal mean that it is easy for masters to keep their slaves and difficult to inform slaves and masters that slavery no longer exists. Slaves are also used to this kind of nomadic life, without which they see no other alternative.

94. The Special Rapporteur was informed of the reluctance by judges to take appropriate action to provide for legal remedies to protect victims of slavery. In addition, the Special Rapporteur heard that magistrates sometimes did not apply the 2007 Slavery Act because they did not want to be seen as breaking ranks or ostracized by their kin.

95. The Special Rapporteur was shown documents illustrating the cases that had been brought before courts, but where the claimant (slave) had stopped proceedings and withdrawn their case. Complaints brought before the courts fall into the following three main types.

96. Firstly, cases are initiated by human rights NGOs on behalf of the slaves. In these cases, NGOs get reports from a slave who has fled. The gendarmerie is usually informed and they go to the area to verify the reports made by the claimant. The investigation process is then stopped at different stages: either, the gendarmerie arrive and, as a result of fear and social solidarity, those in the master’s household and of the master’s kin will deny that any

form of slavery exists or the case is filed and brought to court but as a result of social, financial and religious pressure put on the individual, the claimant withdraws her case.

97. Secondly, cases are presented as inheritance complaints. Some Mauritians of slavery descent are economically well-off, having worked the land they have lived on for years. However, when the ex-slave dies, his property is claimed by his former master and his kin, who say that all the property that the ex-slave created belonged to the master. Although the 1981 and 2007 laws forbid slavery, the former master can claim that there were contracts signed between him and his former slave. This verbal claim is usually accepted by the courts.

98. Thirdly, someone is caught in flagrante practising slavery. This is very difficult, as people are aware that slavery has been abolished and is criminalized, and have developed new ways of hiding slavery.

#### **D. Challenges faced by returnees from Senegal**

99. Because of the links that the issue of the returnees has with slavery, the Special Rapporteur is primarily concerned that there was no mention or acknowledgement of the impact that slavery or its remnants may have on the programme for returnees. It is not clear how the Government of Mauritania will prevent or manage tensions between the Haratines and the black African returnees. The Haratines living on the land that once belonged to the black Africans already face discrimination as former slaves and they now face the possibility of further discrimination as a result of land. This further emphasizes the need to address land reform in Mauritania in order to prevent any future conflict. In addition, it is not clear how the Government will prevent caste-based slavery from being practised among the black African community living in the camps.

100. The Special Rapporteur also received information that the repatriation programme has been held up by bureaucracy and lack of human and financial Government capacity. The returnees also informed her about the lack of decent facilities, such as housing and toilets. The returnees articulated their frustrations at being skilled and able, but lacking proper income-generating activities. The returnees are given a piece of land, cows and food for three months, after which they are expected to fend for themselves. As one returnee put it, "we have been given a cow but no means to sustainably feed ourselves or the cow, which will eventually die". There was also concern at the Rosso returnees' sites that there were a lot of young idle males who needed activities such as vocational training to help occupy them and give them skills for employment.

101. The Special Rapporteur was further informed that some of the returnees had experience as teachers and civil servants. The Special Rapporteur noted the returnees' anger at and disillusionment with the lack of proper follow-through in their repatriation. Furthermore, she was told that some inhabitants of Rosso complained that the returnees were much better off than the local population.

### **VII. Conclusions and recommendations**

#### **A. Overall strategy**

**102. The Special Rapporteur highly values the political will and programmes put in place by the Government in order to eradicate slavery. However, although slavery has diminished as a result of Government actions, it is still a reality in modern-day Mauritania – especially in rural remote areas – where human rights violations**

continue to occur. Unaddressed or partially addressed (whereby work only focuses on “vestiges of slavery”), slavery will create an obstacle to the development of the country.

103. A first step towards comprehensive action to combat slavery would be to develop a national strategy for that purpose. The Special Rapporteur was informed of the Government’s willingness to create a national strategy. This strategy can be based on a study of the history and nature of slavery in Mauritania. The Special Rapporteur encourages the Government to start this study, with support from the United Nations Development Programme and the European Community. The strategy can then be developed by various stakeholders, including representatives from the Government, civil society organizations traditionally working on slavery, international NGOs, United Nations agencies and the donor community. These various stakeholders can form an institutional body that will implement and monitor the national strategy to combat slavery.

104. In addition, all Government departments, international agencies and NGOs should consider slavery and the “vestiges of slavery” when developing and implementing programmes in Mauritania.

## **B. Slavery law and policies**

105. As the Minister of Justice reviews the effectiveness of the 2007 Slavery Act, the Special Rapporteur urges him to consider incorporating the following:

- Introduction of a law against discrimination practices based on caste or ethnic slavery;
- A clearer definition of slavery within the law that would include contemporary forms of slavery such as the *talibes*;
- Inclusion in the 2007 Slavery Act of provisions that provide for victims’ assistance and compensation;
- Introduction of a civil cause of action for victims of slavery. This would give victims of slavery and human rights organizations acting in their interests the right to appeal directly to the courts against an act of slavery or discrimination rather than relying on police or other authorities to bring criminal charges in such cases. This could be done by adding a second part to the current law or by introducing a separate, but linked law;
- The establishment of an independent Government-funded mechanism, enshrined in legislation, which can carry out investigations on its own initiative and has the standing to bring civil cases of slavery or discrimination before the courts;
- The 2007 Act should also have a multi-stakeholder committee to develop, implement and monitor a national strategy to combat slavery;
- It should include provisions that provide for rehabilitation programmes that would provide alternative means of livelihood for ex-slaves. This is essential in ensuring that former slaves do not end up in voluntary servitude, whereby they continue working for their master in exchange for cash or payment in kind, e.g. housing, food, etc. These programmes should also provide education for ex-slaves – who are the most marginalized in society – and ensure that they are literate. Existing programmes such as PESE should be enshrined in law to ensure their longevity;

- Inclusion in the law of accompanying measures which outline means to financial and economic means of support, land tenure, microcredit and support to justice for ex-slaves.

### **C. Awareness-raising**

106. Changing the mentality of the population is important at all levels of society. There is a need for a long-term strategy to wipe out slavery, since there is a real need to change attitudes and cultures. Awareness-raising campaigns need to be renewed and sustained in rural and urban areas. The nationwide campaigns need to focus on publicizing the prohibition and criminalization of slavery. The campaign should inform slaves of their rights, who they can bring their complaints to, how they can file their complaints in courts and the kind of support they can get from the Government and NGOs. The cultural dimension for fighting slavery is paramount and it must involve ulemas and imams, especially those in rural areas. The campaign can use newspapers, debates, conferences, television, radio, etc. It should also include obligatory specialized training seminars for judges and representatives of local authorities, gendarmeries, police, the media and NGOs.

### **D. Programmes**

107. To be effective, the amended law and plan of action should be supported by a wide range of programmes that provide, for example, access to basic education, vocational training, income-generating opportunities, microcredit and equal access to employment opportunities. Such programmes must be monitored for effectiveness. The law has liberated slaves, but in order to prevent them from being or feeling subservient, former slaves must be able to have the means to be autonomous and feel empowered as individuals. Providing alternative livelihoods for former slaves will also prevent voluntary servitude.

108. In order for slave labour to be brought to light and regulated, former slaves receiving training should be able to obtain professional qualifications and register through State or non-State labour agencies in order to get legal jobs.

109. There is a need to strengthen and build the capacity of NGOs working to combat slavery. They have been able to liberate slaves but have been unable to provide them with sustainable alternatives once liberated. Strong cooperation should be established between NGOs and Government on protection of liberated slaves and provision of the necessary means to work.

110. Poverty exists in all communities in Mauritania. It is therefore important that those who address the problem of poverty take into consideration the impact that their programmes may have on slavery in the community, e.g., how to address poverty when former masters and slaves live side-by-side in poverty or where the master owns the land that the slaves work on. Those funding or implementing the programmes should be able to consider whether their programmes benefit either the masters or the slaves. The new Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper must include programmes that specifically target slaves.

111. Programmes to restore the rights of children of ex-slaves are crucial. These programmes should focus on providing these children with birth registration with their natural identity, access to schooling and reuniting children with their families.

112. Programmes that address the rights of women who have fled from slavery should be established. Programmes should focus on providing women who have fled slavery with immediate access to basic rights such as food and shelter. The programmes should also focus on empowering female ex-slaves by providing them with basic education and alternative livelihoods so that they can provide for themselves and their families.

#### **E. Recommendation for returnees from Senegal**

113. It is important that the repatriation programme takes into account the impact that slavery or “vestiges of slavery” such as land, can have on the returnees and the communities around them. Awareness-raising campaigns to promote the 2007 Slavery Act should also focus on providing information for the returnees and communities around them.

114. There is a need to launch projects that prevent discrimination against the returnees by highlighting how the returnees will benefit the community.

115. The Government and UNHCR need to ensure that returnees have decent access to basic facilities and are offered training and sustainable income-generating activities.

116. In order to aid successful reintegration of the returnees, their skills, capacities and knowledge should be used to provide them with sustainable livelihoods and contribute to the communities in which they live.

117. Decision-making related to the programmes is currently centralized in Nouakchott, but the programmes need to be decentralized so that Government officials can implement the decisions relevant for each region.

#### **F. Recommendations to the international community**

118. The international community has to play an important role in working with the Government of Mauritania and NGOs in mainstreaming anti-slavery initiatives in its programmes, providing technical expertise and funding projects to combat slavery and the “vestiges of slavery”.

#### **G. Recommendations to businesses**

119. Businesses, including foreign companies investing in Mauritanian should adhere to international standards that prevent the use child labour and forced labour. The companies should develop corporate social responsibility policies that enable them to invest in the development of professional expertise in the Mauritanian labour market.