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COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE - COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

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Mauritania: Leaders of military coup must immediately restore rule of law

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The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today called on the instigators of the military coup in Mauritania immediately to restore respect for the rule of law and Mauritanian Constitution by restoring executive power to the legitimately elected civilian Government of President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi.

On 6 August 2008, soldiers of the presidential guard placed President Abdallahi and other government officials under house arrest. This *coup d'état* was led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and was apparently prompted by the decision of President Abdallahi to dismiss General Ould Abdelaziz and other senior Army officers from their posts.

The military junta that assumed power contended that the *coup* was necessary to address what it considers as "security problems", including "terrorism" and political crises that Mauritania has faced in the last months. General Abdel Aziz and his associates have formed a council of state to lead the country and vowed to hold "free and transparent" presidential elections "in the shortest time possible".

"The rule of law requires that any political disagreement or conflict should be resolved through constitutionally established, legal and democratic channels, not through the unlawful and arbitrary seizure of executive power" said the ICJ. *"This military coup is overthrowing a democratically elected Government. President Abdallahi came to power in March 2007 following free and transparent election that was characterized by most observers as a model for Africa. We want to express our deepest concern about this coup and call on its leaders to restore rule of law and democracy in Mauritania,"* added the ICJ.

The military junta must guarantee respect for human rights of all persons under its jurisdiction in accordance with international law. The rights of President Abdallahi and the other members of his Government to liberty and security must also be respected. *"The Mauritanian military must keep in mind that it bears responsibility for upholding Mauritania's international legal obligations and respecting international human rights standards,"* said the ICJ.

The ICJ called on the international community unequivocally to condemn the *coup* and to take all necessary measures to prevent the deterioration of the human rights situation in Mauritania. *"Neither under national or international law can military invoke political divergences to justify seizure of power. Governments and other representatives of the international community must reject the invocation of political rationales to give cover to military juntas,"* concluded the ICJ.

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The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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