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Africa - Mauritania

Death sentence

Call for young blogger's death sentence to be quashed on appeal

31 December 2014

Reporters Without Borders calls for the quashing of the death sentence that a court in Nouadhibou imposed on 29-year-old blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed on 24 December after convicting him of apostasy for allegedly blaspheming against the Prophet Mohammed in a blog post.

Posted on the *Aqlame* news website on 2 January 2014 and taken down a few minutes later, the article criticized the inequality of Mauritania's caste system, referring to the Prophet's teachings. **Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed** was arrested in Nouadhibou shortly after it was posted and has been detained ever since. His lawyers appealed against the sentence on 26 December.

"We call on the judicial authorities to overturn this unjust sentence on appeal, Reporters Without Borders programme director Lucie Morillon said. Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed's comments criticizing the caste system are protected by the right to freedom of information and expression, as enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

The prosecution accused Mohamed of *"making flippant references to the Prophet and violating the divine order"* in the article. Although he immediately regretted having posted it, he denied attacking the Prophet or Islam and said he only wanted to defend the lowly "maalemine" (blacksmith) caste, to which he belongs.

In a December 2013 report entitled ["Blasphemy: Information sacrificed on altar of religion"](#), Reporters Without Borders argues that the use of freedom of information and expression cannot be made conditional on agreement with any corpus of religious, ideological, political or philosophical thought.

No one has been executed in Mauritania since 1987 and Mohamed is the first person to be sentenced to death for apostasy since independence in 1960. Mauritania is ranked 60th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
