

MAURITANIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mauritania is a highly centralized Islamic republic with a president as head of state. The legislative function is exercised by the Senate and National Assembly, the former consisting of representatives chosen indirectly by municipal councilors and the latter directly elected by the voters. The legislative bodies were weak relative to the executive. The election of Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz as president in 2009 ended a political crisis caused by Aziz's 2008 coup d'état against then president Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. International observers declared the 2009 presidential election to be generally free and fair. In 2009 the majority party, Union for the Republic (UPR), won most of the seats in the indirect election to refill one-third of the Senate seats. The government indefinitely postponed new Senate, National Assembly, and municipal elections scheduled to take place during the year in accordance with the opposition's initial request, although controversy over the constitutionality of the election timetable continued throughout the year. Security forces reported to civilian authorities.

Continuing slavery, slavery-related practices, and trafficking in persons were central human rights problems. Popular concern over control of the security forces was highlighted when police clashed with demonstrators protesting social, political, and economic problems, resulting in at least one death attributed to police. Prison conditions remained far below acceptable standards.

Other reported human rights problems were the use of torture by police to extract confessions, arbitrary arrests, lengthy pretrial detention, government influence over the judiciary, limits on freedom of the press and assembly, restrictions on religious freedom for non-Muslims, corruption, discrimination against women, female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, political marginalization of southern-based ethnic groups, racial and ethnic discrimination, child labor, and inadequate enforcement of labor laws.

The government took some steps to punish officials who committed abuses and prosecuted a number of them. Civil society organizations objected to the small number indicted and alleged that some of the prosecutions, particularly those involving official corruption, were politically motivated.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

On September 27, a gendarme who fired on demonstrators in Maghama reportedly shot and killed one person and wounded eight others. The demonstrators were protesting a national registration campaign, which the government launched in May and which they believed would discriminate against Afro-Mauritians due to an alleged lack of ethnic balance among officials evaluating nationality. Demonstrators demanded greater Afro-Mauritanian representation and an unbiased nationality verification procedure. On September 27, Minister of the Interior Mohamed Ould Boilil publically confirmed the reports and declared that the government would not permit disturbances of the peace. There was no reported investigation of the death by year's end.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, and according to the governmental Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society, there were no documented cases of torture during the year. Independent human rights observers, however, stated that security personnel tortured detainees to extract confessions. Torture methods reportedly included electric shocks, burning, beating, pulling out of hair, and sexual violence. For example, one person involved in ethnically motivated protests in Kaedi reported being so severely beaten while held in a government building that he had to be evacuated to Nouakchott for medical treatment and lost jaw function.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh, and the government's capacity to administer detention facilities remained poor. There were credible reports of torture, beating, and abuse in police detention centers, several prisons throughout the country, and gendarmerie and military facilities.

A new prison facility was opened in Aleg on November 28, and another prison facility neared completion in Nouadhibou, but the government failed to allocate sufficient funds for improving prison conditions in the existing facilities during the

year, and overcrowding, violence among inmates, and poor medical care in prisons continued. Many prisoners were unable to leave their extremely crowded cells or breathe fresh air for months or years at a time. Sanitation conditions were poor due to the lack of hygienic products such as soap and detergent and prison management's inability to dispose of waste properly. Malnutrition was a more serious problem, affecting vulnerable members of the prison population, particularly foreign inmates, prisoners without familial support, and individuals suffering from untreated diseases. The government did not respond robustly to allegations of inhumane conditions, although some progress was made in improving the quality of health care.

Serious overcrowding and a lack of running water contributed to the spread of diseases. Prisoners with health problems received little or no care, and medical supplies remained insufficient. For example, the Dar Naim Prison, built to hold 300 prisoners, held approximately 1,200. Reports continued of malnutrition, poor health, and deficient hygiene in that institution. There were reports that one Dar Naim prisoner was accidentally electrocuted during the year. On May 21, local media reported that another prisoner, Mohamed Ould Ahmed Salem Ould Amail, died at the National Hospital after authorities transferred him from Dar Naim because of his deteriorating health.

The holding areas in police stations were also reportedly overcrowded, unsanitary, and poorly ventilated.

There are no ombudsmen at the prison level. Regulations allowed the inmates in an institution to choose one of their number to represent them in dealings with management, and inmates occasionally did so during the year.

Steps were been taken to improve recordkeeping: the EU purchased 28 computers and at year's end was training the penitentiary administration on database management to improve recordkeeping and the integrity of each prisoner's file.

According to the penitentiary administration directorate, the women's prison is less crowded and therefore more comfortable than the men's. On the other hand, male guards participated in monitoring female inmates, who risked becoming victims of sexual violence.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to denounce overcrowding and long pretrial detention. The large number of pretrial detainees exacerbated prison overcrowding. On March 5, four inmates at the Dar Naim prison reportedly

reacted to their detention conditions by sewing their mouths closed to initiate a hunger strike, and on July 8, 17 individuals escaped from the detention center in Kaedi.

Pretrial detainees were frequently housed with convicted and often dangerous prisoners. On May 23, authorities removed a reported 13-14 suspected terrorists awaiting trial from Nouakchott Central Prison to an undisclosed location in order to improve prison security and disrupt illicit activity. The prisoners protested their removal.

Due to poor security conditions and the fact that dangerous prisoners shared cells with less dangerous ones, prisoners lived in a climate of violence, and some had to pay bribes to other prisoners to avoid being brutalized and harassed. As of October 19, according to Ministry of Justice statistics, the prison population totaled 1,695, of whom 861 were convicts and 834 were unconvicted detainees. A full breakdown of the prison population by gender was unavailable. Of the 54 children in detention, 34 were in a segregated courtyard of the Nouakchott Central Prison at year's end after a juvenile detention center in Beyla suffered structural damage. Seventeen were being held in a detention center for the "reception and insertion" of youth in conflict with the law. The center's goal is to facilitate the social reintegration of children and youth. During the year officials released 30 children from this center and monitored their subsequent activities.

Women and female minors under 18 years of age were housed together in a separate location from the men and male minors. Sexual violence reportedly occurred in the women's prison, which employed both male and female guards. Children of female prisoners remained with their mothers, or the Ministry of Justice gave temporary custody of the children to another family member. International NGOs, such as the Noura Foundation, Caritas, and Terre des Hommes, provided educational and economic opportunities to current and former juvenile and female detainees.

Prisoners had access to visitors. There were no reports that men were denied the right to observe Muslim prayer obligations individually, but the penitentiary administration confirmed that inmates did not have regular access to imams. In January 16 imams visited the prisons to meet with inmates for religious discussion and mental health counseling.

The government permitted prison visits by NGOs, diplomats, and international human rights observers. The International Committee of the Red Cross had access

to prisons and conducted multiple prison visits, including visits to terrorism suspects, in accordance with its standard modalities. They distributed hygiene items and books.

The Ministry of Justice estimated that approximately 200 inmates benefited from a 10-day campaign begun on July 5 by the National Association of Dental Surgeons in partnership with the penitentiary authorities to provide free dental care to adult and juvenile inmates across the Nouakchott prison system. According to the Directorate of Prisons and Penitentiaries, a larger budget allowed the directorate to purchase more medical supplies and increase the number of medical consultations from three to approximately 50 each day. During the year the government completed construction of a new prison in Aleg, designed to accommodate 300 inmates, and a new prison in Nouadhibou with a capacity for 600 inmates was nearing completion.

The Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society continued to supply detention centers with medical staff, as well as medications, hygiene products, and foodstuffs.

There were reports that police did not inform family members or friends of the location and condition of detainees in a timely manner, preventing them from receiving adequate food.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, but authorities did not observe these prohibitions.

In some cases authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained protesters and journalists (see section 2.a.).

Human rights and other observers accused the government of exceeding the legal limits for pretrial detention. Security forces at times arrested demonstrators engaged in sit-ins, marches, or rallies, and held them longer than the regulations allow. On September 29, the media reported that following a violent protest in Nouakchott against the national registration initiative, security forces entered private residences without warrants and arrested approximately 20 individuals (see section 1.f. and section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

On September 27, the Mauritanian Association for Human Rights criticized the continued detention of former human rights commissioner Mohamed Lemine Ould Daddeh in violation of a one-year maximum pretrial detention period. The government's Human Rights Directorate contended that Ould Daddeh's detention could last a maximum of two years because the limits on length of detention were different for the economic crimes with which he was charged. He remained in detention awaiting trial at year's end.

By law a minor may not be held for more than six months while awaiting trial. Nevertheless there were reports that a large number of individuals, including minors, remained in pretrial detention for extended periods due to judicial ineptitude.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The National Police, under the Ministry of the Interior, are responsible for law enforcement and maintaining order in urban areas. The National Guard, also under the Ministry of the Interior, performs limited police functions in keeping with its peacetime role as security support at government facilities. The National Guard may also be called on by regional authorities to restore civil order during large-scale disturbances such as rioting. The gendarmerie, a specialized paramilitary group under the Ministry of Defense, is responsible for maintaining civil order within and outside of metropolitan areas, as well as providing law enforcement services in rural areas. On October 11, a new police force, the General Group for Road Safety, began operations under the Ministry of the Interior.

The police were poorly paid, trained, and equipped. Corruption and impunity were serious problems (see section 4).

The government rarely held security officials accountable or prosecuted them for abuses. The Ethics Police operates as an internal affairs division and as a mechanism to investigate security force abuses. In practice this unit did not publicly review security force abuses.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

The application of constitutional safeguards continued to vary widely from case to case. The law requires duly authorized arrest warrants, but they were not commonly used. The law requires that in most cases courts review the legality of a person's detention within 48 hours of arrest, but police may extend the period for

an additional 48 hours, and a prosecutor or court can detain persons for up to 15 days in national security cases. Authorities generally respected the two-week deadline for formally arraiging or releasing terrorism suspects in national security cases. Only after the prosecutor submits charges does a suspect have the right to contact an attorney. By law indigent defendants are entitled to attorneys at state expense, but in practice attorneys were not provided. There was a bail system, but sometimes judges arbitrarily refused lawyers' requests for bail or set inordinately high bail amounts.

Pretrial Detention: Lawyers highlighted the lengthy incarceration of detainees and delays in organizing court hearings, but no statistics on the average length of detention or length of pretrial procedures were available.

Amnesty: During the year President Aziz pardoned 269 prisoners, including eight women sentenced for "zina," or sexual relations outside marriage. Human rights activists and individuals associated with drug trafficking were also among those released.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, but it was not independent in practice. The executive branch continued to exercise significant influence over the judiciary through its ability to appoint and remove judges. On September 12, the Mauritanian Bar Association criticized the executive branch for removing Magistrate Mohamed Lemine Ould Moctar on disciplinary grounds for his role in acquitting the defendants in a drug-related case. The association described the removal as a clear example of government interference in the justice system. There was no government response by year's end. The government generally respected court orders.

Poorly educated and trained judges were susceptible to social, financial, and tribal pressures that limited judicial fairness. For example, on May 15, three juveniles received the death penalty, in violation of national legislation and ratified international conventions, for their role in the death of another minor. Observers suggested that the court was influenced by tribal and social factors. On December 12, the sentences were reduced to 12 years in prison and a combined 1.2 million ouguiya (\$4,130) fine.

During the year, international donors, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank, funded training for prosecutors and judges with the aim of increasing judicial professionalism.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for due process. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence. They have a right to a public trial. Juries are not used. Defendants have the right to be present during their trial. By law all defendants, regardless of the court or their ability to pay, have the legal right to representation by counsel during proceedings. Although the court should appoint an attorney free of charge to represent defendants lacking the ability to pay, this measure was rarely enforced during the year. Defendants have the right of appeal. Defendants can confront or question witnesses and present witnesses and evidence in both civil and criminal cases. By law defendants have access to government-held evidence, but access was difficult in practice. These rights were extended to minorities. The foregoing rights generally were observed in practice for men but did not extend equally to women.

Sharia provides the legal principles upon which the law and legal procedure are based; the courts did not treat women equally in all cases. Lawyers also reported that in some cases, the unequal treatment of women was based on such considerations as a woman's caste or nationality.

A special court hears cases involving persons under the age of 18. Children who appeared before the court received more lenient sentences than adults, and extenuating circumstances received greater consideration in juvenile cases. The minimum age for children to be tried is 12 years old. Children between the ages of 12 and 18 who are convicted of a crime are sentenced to detention centers for minors.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Complaints of human rights violations are within the jurisdiction of the Administrative Court. Individuals or organizations can appeal decisions to international regional courts. NGO representatives stated they collaborated with

the court, but the court was not impartial in practice. There are administrative and judiciary remedies through the social chamber of the Court of Appeals and through the Supreme Court.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. However, there were reports that after a violent protest against national registration in Nouakchott on September 29, security forces entered private residences without warrants and arrested approximately 20 individuals (see section 1.d. and section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

Status of Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech, and the government generally respected this right in practice. Individuals could criticize the government publicly or privately. Two daily newspapers and all broadcast media were government-owned, but several independent daily publications were active and generally expressed a wide variety of views with limited restrictions.

Violence and Harassment: The independent media outlet Agence Nouakchott d'Information reported that police arrested and beat journalist Cheikh Ould Nouah, a reporter for the Web site Al-Hurriya when he was covering clashes between police and protesters in Kaedi on September 24. Djibril Diallo, a journalist and member of the unauthorized Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA), was reportedly detained for his coverage of protests.

Censorship and Content Restrictions: Some journalists practiced self-censorship when covering topics deemed sensitive, including the military forces, corruption, and the application of Sharia, and there were reports that police detained and questioned journalists during the year in connection with their coverage of such topics as protests and slavery. Some opposition leaders asserted that they had no effective access to official media.

Independent media remained the principal source of information for most citizens, followed by government media. Government media focused primarily on official

news but provided some coverage of opposition activities and views through the year. The government-owned TV Mauritania occasionally broadcast programs covering opposition activities. During the national political dialogue in September and October, government media maintained balanced coverage of opposition and progovernment statements.

Actions to Expand Press Freedom

On October 5, the legislative branch adopted amendments to the 2006 Press Freedom Law that abolished prison sentences for slander and defamation of individuals, including heads of state and accredited ambassadors. Fines for these offenses remain in effect. Some journalists continued to object to the “elastic” application of the law, which they assert could be interpreted loosely to penalize journalists for their reporting.

Signaling the end of the government’s 51-year monopoly of the broadcast media, on September 18, the High Press and Audiovisual Authority (HAPA) began taking applications for five new radio stations and five new television channels to be owned by nongovernmental entities. HAPA received 17 applications for radio stations and nine applications for television channels. On November 20, HAPA announced that two independent television stations and five independent radio stations received permission to broadcast. Some members of the opposition asserted that the permits issued favored progovernment interests.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly: The constitution provides for freedom of assembly. The law requires that organizers apply to the local prefect (hakim) for permission to hold large meetings or assemblies. Authorities generally granted permission but

on some occasions denied it in circumstances that suggested the application of political criteria.

Security forces on several occasions forcefully dispersed unauthorized demonstrations organized by the Youth of February 25, a group seeking political, social, and economic reforms, and the Do Not Touch My Nationality movement, which was protesting the registration drive. During protests organized in March and April by the Youth of February 25, police responded to stone-throwing protesters with tear gas and batons. Police also violently dispersed a demonstration organized by the Do Not Touch My Nationality movement in Kaedi on September 24, after protesters set fire to a government building. On September 27, police violently dispersed a Do Not Touch My Nationality protest in Maghama, resulting in the fatal shooting of one protester. Following the death in Maghama, demonstrators burned tires and a vehicle in Nouakchott on September 29, before being violently dispersed by police. A subsequent demonstration on October 8 was authorized and took place peacefully. Two protesters were reportedly injured in a clash with police during a November 28 demonstration in Nouakchott, authorized for a certain area, when protesters attempted to assemble in an unauthorized location near the presidency.

On August 4, according to Amnesty International, authorities arrested four antislavery activists, members of the IRA, for participating in a protest against the alleged enslavement of a 10-year-old girl. The four men were charged with “unauthorized gathering” and “rebellion” and were given six-month suspended sentences by a Nouakchott court. Another participant whom police detained alleged that police kicked and punched him.

Freedom of Association: The law provides for freedom of association, and the government generally respected this right.

All political parties and local NGOs must register with the Ministry of the Interior. The government encouraged local NGOs to join the government-sponsored Civil Society Platform during the year. The approximately 300 NGOs that are members of the platform do not receive government funding.

There were approximately 78 accredited political parties and NGOs, and they generally functioned openly, issuing public statements, and choosing their own leadership. The government generally did not prevent unrecognized political parties or NGOs from functioning. However, in July 2010 the Ministry of the Interior ordered the international NGO, National Democratic Institute (NDI), to

suspend its operations because it lacked formal accreditation, although NDI had attempted to obtain accreditation since 2005. NDI resumed some of its activities later in 2010 but had not received formal accreditation at the end of 2011.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/rpt.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The constitution and law provide for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government generally respected these rights, but there were exceptions.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the IOM, and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern. In practice resources provided by the government were inadequate.

In-country Movement: Persons lacking identity cards could not travel freely in some regions. During the year, in response to what it described as an increased terrorist threat, the government set up mobile roadblocks where gendarmerie, police, or customs officials checked the papers of travelers. These roadblocks often provided the occasion for officials to demand bribes.

Foreign Travel: Unlike in the previous year, authorities did not restrict international travel of some opposition members.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. The National Consultative Commission for Refugees (CNCR) is the national body for determining refugee status. The UNHCR carries out refugee status determinations under its mandate and presents cases to the CNCR for recognition.

In practice the government provided protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedoms would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The government provided protection to approximately 500 refugees during the year.

In accordance with agreements with the Economic Community of West African States on freedom of movement, the government allowed West African migrants to remain in the country, deporting only those found illegally seeking to reach the Canary Islands. According to Interior Ministry statistics, 2,001 migrants were returned to their country of origin during the year.

The decree that sets forth the procedures for implementation of international refugee conventions adopts the principles set forth in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of the Refugee Problem in Africa.

Employment: Legislation provides refugees with access to the job market and basic services. The UNHCR provided assistance to refugees with revenue-generating activities throughout the year.

Access to Basic Services: By law refugees had access to basic services, including health care and education.

Durable Solutions: Under an official multiyear repatriation agreement with Senegal that originally ended in January, 20,484 refugees from that country returned to Mauritania. On August 21, the government informed the UNHCR of its willingness to repatriate a further 5,460 individuals who remained in Dakar. Under the new agreement, approximately 1,300 individuals were repatriated in November and December, and the remaining 4,160 were scheduled to return in 2012.

The National Agency for the Welcome and Reintegration of Refugees (ANAIR) is responsible for overseeing the reintegration of repatriated refugees, providing administration and identification support, and contributing to the social and economic development of resettlement areas. Reintegration of returnees into communities was challenging due to inefficient sanitation, health, and education infrastructure, and land disputes. Initially the majority of Afro-Mauritanian returnees were unable to obtain identity cards and birth certificates, but according

to ANAIR, all returnees are included, or scheduled to be included, in the new national registration database that was launched on May 6.

During the year the government worked with the European Commission, the Mauritanian Red Crescent, and the Spanish Red Cross at the migrant reception center in the Nouadhibou region to process returned migrants and to provide nutritional and medical care during detention and repatriation.

During the year ANAIR constructed 83 school classrooms for repatriated children and delivered 110 pounds of rice and 44 pounds of cooking oil to each family. Nevertheless, returnee associations complained that reintegration efforts were slow, as was the settlement of land disputes.

Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and the country accomplished a peaceful transition from military rule with the presidential election of 2009, followed the same year by the indirect election of one-third of the seats in the Senate. However, the government indefinitely postponed scheduled elections of municipal councilors, the members of the National Assembly, and another third of Senate seats, due to inability to reach agreement with opposition parties.

Elections and Political Participation

The country returned to constitutional rule in 2009 following the Dakar Accord, which resulted in the agreement of president Abdallahi to resign and the formation of a Transitional Government of National Unity.

Recent Elections: In an election held in 2009, former High State Council leader General Aziz won 53 percent of the vote. Although some opposition groups claimed the election was fraudulent and requested an investigation, the Constitutional Council certified the election.

Elections by municipal councils to fill one-third of the seats in the Senate, also in 2009, resulted in a large win for the UPR. Opposition and independent candidates denounced what they characterized as heavy pressure on the municipal councilors to vote for majority party candidates and on independent candidates to withdraw. Authorities did not investigate these complaints.

Indirect elections for another one third of the Senate seats were originally scheduled for April 24, but they were postponed twice due to the inability of the government and a coalition of opposition parties to agree on the opposition's demand that the electoral code be rewritten, the ruling coalition dissolved, and laws regulating the media reformed. The opposition coalition indicated it would not participate in elections until its demands were met. The majority and opposition parties engaged in a national dialogue from September 17 to October 19 to resolve their political impasse, but no timetable for Senate, National Assembly, or municipal elections had been established at year's end. The Constitutional Council subsequently ruled that a delay of parliamentary elections through May 2012 would be legal.

Participation of Women and Minorities: There were 18 women in the National Assembly and six in the 56-seat Senate. The 27-member cabinet included three women, three Black Moors, and five Afro-Mauritanians.

The law requires that women make up at least 20 percent of candidates on legislative candidate lists. It was observed in practice.

Section 4. Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but authorities did not enforce the law effectively, and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Corrupt practices were widely believed to exist at all levels of government, and the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators reflected that corruption was a severe problem.

There were reports that government officials frequently used their power to obtain such favors as unauthorized exemption from taxes, special grants of land, and preferential treatment during bidding on government projects. Corruption was most pervasive in government procurement, bank loans, fishing-license distribution, land distribution, and tax payments.

The Ministry of the Interior's Economic Crimes Brigade and the Office of the Inspector General were responsible for investigating corruption. On January 16, the Judiciary Council created the Criminal Division for Economic and Financial Crimes, a special chamber responsible for economic crimes, to reinforce the legal efforts against corruption. During the year this body completed seven investigations resulting in the dismissal of several government officials.

President Aziz's government placed fighting corruption at the top of its agenda and made high-profile arrests during the year such as that of Moulaye El Arbi Ould Moulaye Mohamed for his alleged involvement in the misappropriation of \$49 million from the parastatal import-export firm SONIMEX in 2008. A 2008 corruption dispute involving the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria was resolved after the government reimbursed the Global Fund and agreed to implement new procedures.

Corruption and impunity were also serious problems in the police force, and the government rarely held security officials accountable or prosecuted them for abuses. Police regularly demanded bribes at nightly roadblocks in Nouakchott and at checkpoints between cities. There were numerous reports that police arbitrarily detained individuals for several hours or overnight at roadblocks in Nouakchott or other towns. According to these reports, police detained motorists or passengers without asking for identity papers or vehicle registration, and without searching the vehicles. Judicial corruption was also a problem.

The government implemented anticorruption measures. A Procurement Regulation Authority was created in July with membership from the Office of the Inspector General, the private sector, and civil society to monitor independent regulation of the public tender and procurement system. The government also enforced laws prohibiting the use of government vehicles outside working hours and eliminated benefits such as free housing for high-level government officials.

The government enforced the requirement that senior officials, including the president, file a declaration of their personal assets at the beginning and end of their service. Senior officials reportedly disclose their assets through an internal procedure, but the information is not released to the public. President Aziz publicly declared his assets in October 2010 due to popular pressure.

The law provides for public access to government information, and the government granted such access to citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media, during the year.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Several domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights

cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views.

An independent ombudsman organization, the National Commission on Human Rights, includes government and civil society representatives. It actively monitored human rights and advocated for government action to correct violations.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution and law provide for the equality for all citizens regardless of race, national origin, sex, or social status and prohibits racial or ethnic propaganda, but the government often favored individuals on the basis of racial and tribal affiliation, social status, and political ties. Societal discrimination against women, trafficking in persons, and racial and ethnic discrimination were problems.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: According to NGOs the incidence of both reported and unreported rape continued to be high, and rape was considered a serious problem. Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal. In practice the government did not enforce the law effectively. According to the penal code, rapists who are single men faced penalties of forced labor and flagellation. Married rapists could be subject to the death penalty. In practice rape cases rarely went to trial. In several cases wealthy rape suspects reportedly avoided prosecution or, if prosecuted, avoided prison. Families of the victim commonly reached an agreement with the rapist for monetary compensation. National statistics on arrests, prosecutions, and convictions for rape were unavailable. Human rights activists and lawyers reported that rape victims were stigmatized, persecuted, and even imprisoned. Since rape was tied to the concept of adultery, judges could hold the victim responsible for the rape. During the year the local NGO, Mauritanian Association for the Health of Mothers and Children (AMSME), provided assistance to 127 girls and six adult women who were victims of sexual violence. There were no convictions for rape during the year.

Domestic violence was considered a serious problem. Spousal abuse and domestic violence are illegal, but the government did not enforce the law effectively, and most cases went unreported. There are no specific penalties for domestic violence, and convictions were very rare. No reliable government statistics on prosecutions, convictions, and sentences for domestic violence were available. In 2010 the

Association of Female Heads of Families (AFCF) provided legal assistance to 1,753 domestic violence victims.

Police and the judiciary occasionally intervened in domestic abuse cases, but women rarely sought legal redress, relying instead on family, NGOs, and community leaders to resolve domestic disputes. Many domestic violence cases are handled by a traditional judge under Sharia outside the secular system. NGOs reported that in certain cases they had turned directly to police for help to protect victims of domestic violence, but police declined to investigate. The AFCF and other women's NGOs provided psychologists and shelter to some victims.

Female Genital Mutilation: FGM is practiced primarily on young girls (see section 6, Children).

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Traditional forms of mistreatment of women appeared to decline during the year. One of these is the forced feeding of adolescent girls (gavage) prior to marriage practiced only among White Moor tribal groups. Increased government, media, and civil society attention to the problem, including the health risks associated with excessive body weight, led to a marked decline in the traditional encouragement of female obesity. Nevertheless, overeating to conform to cultural standards remained a problem; it was practiced primarily in rural areas, but many urban women endangered their health by taking pills to gain weight or increase their appetite.

Sexual Harassment: There are no laws against sexual harassment. Women's NGOs reported that it was a common problem in the workplace.

Reproductive Rights: The government recognized the right of individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so free from discrimination, violence, or coercion. Reproductive issues were a sensitive topic and a focus of some women's groups. Government health centers did not provide unmarried women with access to contraception, and did so for married women only with the consent of the husband. Contraception was available at private health centers for those who could afford it.

In 2008 the World Health Organization estimated the rate of maternal mortality to be 550 per 100,000 live births, due to lack of appropriately equipped medical facilities, low participation in programs to promote prenatal care, births without the

assistance of health professionals, poor sanitary conditions during birth, and maternal malnutrition.

The AFCF stressed that these deficiencies applied in particular to poor women and women from traditionally lower castes such as slaves and former slaves, who also often lacked access to contraception, obstetric and postpartum care, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. The AMSME, which operated a center for rape victims, provided emergency contraception to victims.

Discrimination: Women have legal rights to property and child custody, and these rights were recognized among the more educated and urbanized members of the population. However, women's legal rights were restricted in comparison with those of men. Divorced women could potentially lose child custody if they remarried. By local tradition a woman's first marriage requires parental consent. In accordance with the personal status code, men can marry up to four women but are required to obtain the consent of their existing spouse or spouses before marrying again. Government awareness programs encouraged women to obtain a contractual agreement at the time of marriage stipulating that the marriage ends if the husband marries a second wife. This practice was common in Moor society. Nevertheless, women who did not establish a solid contract remained unprotected. In addition the validity of and right to establish prenuptial agreements were not always respected. Polygamy continued to be rare among Moors but was gaining in popularity. It was common among other ethnic groups. Arranged marriages were increasingly rare, particularly among the Moor population. Cultural resistance to marriages among members of different castes persisted, and NGOs reported that powerful individuals used the judicial system to intimidate and persecute members of their families who married below their social rank.

Women still faced legal discrimination, and they were considered minors in the eyes of the law. According to Sharia as applied in Mauritania, the testimony of two women was necessary to equal that of one man. The courts granted only half as large an indemnity to the family of a woman who was killed as to the family of a man. Formulas for property distribution varied widely from case to case. Human rights lawyers reported that judges treated differently cases concerning White Moor women, female slaves or other lower-caste women, and foreign women. The personal status code provides a framework for the consistent application of secular law and Sharia-based family law, but it is not uniformly employed.

Women did not face legal discrimination in areas not addressed specifically by Sharia. The law provides that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work. The two largest employers, the civil service and the state mining company, observed this law, although most employers in the private sector did not apply it in practice. In the modern wage sector women also received family benefits, including three months of maternity leave.

The government sought to open new employment opportunities for women in areas traditionally filled by men, such as diplomacy, health care, communications, police, and customs services.

Women's groups and national and international NGOs organized meetings, seminars, and workshops throughout the year to publicize women's rights.

Children

Birth Registration: By law citizenship is derived from one's father. Citizenship can be derived from one's mother under the following two conditions: if the mother is a citizen and the father's nationality is unknown, or if the child was born in the country to a citizen mother and repudiates the father's nationality a year before reaching majority. Children born abroad to citizens can acquire citizenship one year before reaching majority. Minor children of parents who have become naturalized citizens are also eligible for citizenship.

In most of the country, the government generally registered births immediately, but in the South many citizens reported not having birth certificates or national identity papers. In addition some slaves did not have birth certificates. There was no official data about the number of unregistered births.

The law makes special provision for children's welfare, and there were government programs to care for abandoned children, but inadequate funding hampered the effectiveness of these programs.

Education: The law mandates six years of school attendance for all children, but the law was not effectively enforced. Many children, particularly girls, did not attend school for six years. Children of slave-caste families often did not receive an education.

Public education was tuition-free through university level. Classes were fully integrated, including both boys and girls and students from all social and ethnic groups.

In addition to public schools, almost all children, regardless of gender or ethnic group, attended Qur'anic school between the ages of five and seven and gained at least rudimentary skills in reading and writing Arabic.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was reported, but no data was available to indicate its prevalence.

Child Marriage: The legal marriage age is 18, but the law was rarely enforced, and reports of child marriage were widespread. Since consensual sex outside of marriage is illegal, a "weli" (tutor) can present a case to local authorities requesting permission for a girl younger than 18 years old to marry. In practice authorities frequently granted this permission.

Harmful Traditional Practices: FGM was practiced by all ethnic groups and performed on young girls, often on the seventh day after birth and almost always before the age of six months. The child protection penal code states that any act or attempt to damage a female child's sexual organs is punishable by imprisonment and a 120,000 to 300,000 ouguiya (\$410 to \$1,034) penalty. The most recent statistics on FGM indicated a decrease in incidence from 71 percent in 2001 to 65 percent in 2007, mainly due to a decline in the practice among urban dwellers. Infibulation, the most severe form of excision, was not practiced.

The government and international NGOs continued to coordinate their anti-FGM efforts, which were focused on eradicating the practice in hospitals, discouraging midwives from practicing FGM, and educating the population. The government, the UN Population Fund, the UN Children's Fund, and the national Imams' Association joined other civil society members to emphasize the serious health risks of FGM and correct the widespread belief that the practice was a religious requirement. Government hospitals and licensed medical practitioners were barred from performing FGM, and several government agencies worked to prevent others from perpetrating it. According to several women's rights experts, these efforts appeared to be changing popular attitudes.

The Forum of Islamic Thought and Dialogue between Cultures, whose January 2010 roundtable resulted in a fatwa (Islamic ruling) against FGM in the country, organized an international roundtable on the subject in Nouakchott in cooperation

the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). The roundtable was attended by approximately 60 religious leaders from West Africa and Egypt. On September 13, at the end of the conference, participants issued a regional fatwa against FGM based on the Mauritanian model.

On March 1 and 2, GIZ and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children, and the Family (MASEF) held an event focusing on raising women's awareness of the harmful impact of FGM.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits adult sexual relations with a child, with penalties of six months to two years in prison and a 120,000 to 180,000 ouguiya (\$410 to \$620) fine. The possession of child pornography is also illegal, with penalties of two months to one year in prison and a 160,000 to 300,000 ouguiya (\$550 to \$1,034) fine. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is illegal and conviction carries penalties of two to five years in prison and a fine of 200,000 to 2 million ouguiya (\$690 to \$6,900). In some instances men from the Middle East contracted "temporary marriages" as a means to traffic and exploit young Mauritanian girls and women in the Middle East.

Displaced Children: Although MASEF monitored 900 of the estimated 1,200 street children in Nouakchott through its youth insertion centers in Dar Naim and El Mina, government assistance to street children was limited. During the year the local NGO Infancy and Development in Mauritania monitored 760 children in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou who lived on the streets largely as the result of poverty and the urbanization of formerly nomadic families.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

Anti-Semitism

A very small number of expatriates practiced Judaism. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical disabilities in education, employment, or the provision of other state services, and there were no reports of governmental discrimination against persons with disabilities. However, persons with disabilities generally did not have access to buildings, information, and communications, and there were no government programs to provide such access. The government did not mandate preference in employment, education, or public accessibility for persons with disabilities, although it did provide some rehabilitation and other assistance for such persons. MASEF oversees social reinsertion programs for persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic minorities faced governmental discrimination. The inconsistent issuance of national identification cards, which were required for voting, effectively disenfranchised many members of southern minority groups. Racial and cultural tension and discrimination also arose from the geographic and cultural divides between Moors and Afro-Mauritians. The Moors are divided among numerous ethnolinguistic tribal and clan groups and further distinguished as either White Moor or Black Moor, although it was often difficult to distinguish between the two by skin color. White Moor tribes and clans, many of whom are dark-skinned after centuries of intermarriage with Berbers and sub-Saharan African groups, dominated positions in government and business. The Black Moors (also called haratines or freed slaves) remained politically and economically weaker than White Moors. Afro-Mauritanian ethnic groups, which include the Halpulaar (the largest non-Moor group), Wolof, and Soninke, are concentrated in the South and urban areas. Afro-Mauritians were underrepresented in the government and military.

The constitution designates Arabic as the official language and Arabic, Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof as the country's national languages. The government continued to encourage French and Arabic bilingualism within the school system, as opposed to earlier efforts at "arabization." Neither the Afro-Mauritanian national languages nor the local Hassaniya Arabic dialect were used as languages of instruction. On April 20, a riot between Afro-Mauritanian and Moor students broke out at Nouakchott University over allegations of fraud during a student union vote that was split mainly along ethnic lines.

Ethnic rivalry contributed to political divisions and tensions. Some political parties tended to have readily identifiable ethnic bases, although political coalitions

among parties were increasingly important. Black Moors and Afro-Mauritanians continued to be underrepresented in mid- to high-level public and private sector jobs.

There were numerous reports of land disputes between former slaves, Afro-Mauritanians, and Moors. According to human rights activists and press reports, local authorities allowed Moors to expropriate land occupied by former slaves and Afro-Mauritanians or to obstruct access to water and pastures.

Human rights NGOs reported numerous cases of inheritance disputes between slaves or former slaves and their masters. Traditionally, slave masters inherited their slaves' possessions.

The government's Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery, begun in 2009, continued during the year. Its goals were to reduce poverty among the 44,750 former slaves in the Assaba, Brakna, Gorgol, and Hodh Chargui regions and improve their access to water, health, education, and income-generating opportunities. However, the program's activities were reduced during the year after former human rights commissioner Ould Daddeh was arrested along with and senior-level staff, including its coordinator and its financial director, on findings of corruption in a government inspection. NGOs maintained that the commissioner was arrested for political reasons.

The government also continued its collaborative program with the UN on conflict prevention aimed at promoting democratic values and the rights of marginalized populations, including former slaves. According to the NGO SOS Esclaves, these programs focused on fighting poverty and the effects of slavery rather than the practice of slavery itself.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Under Sharia, as applied in the country, consensual same-sex sexual activity between men is punishable by death if witnessed by four individuals, and such activity between women is punishable by three months to two years in prison and a 5,000 to 60,000 ouguiya (\$17 to \$207) fine. There were no criminal prosecutions during the year. There was no evidence of societal violence, societal discrimination, or systematic government discrimination based on sexual orientation. There were no organizations advocating for sexual orientation or

gender-identity rights, but there were no legal impediments to the operation of such groups.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

There was no evidence of governmental discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS, but societal taboos and beliefs associated with the disease in some areas caused infected persons to face isolation or exclusion.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law allows workers to form and join independent unions of their choice and provides the right to conduct legal strikes and to bargain collectively, although long and complex procedures must be followed before a legal strike can be called. Under the law all workers except members of the armed forces and police were free to associate in and establish unions at the local and national levels.

Laws prohibit antiunion discrimination. Nearly 90 percent of industrial and commercial workers were unionized. However, only 25 percent of workers were employed in regularly paid positions. A majority worked in the informal sector, primarily subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry.

To be legally recognized, a union must have the authorization of the public prosecutor, who can provisionally suspend a trade union at the request of the Ministry of the Interior if the ministry believes that the union has not complied with the law. Workers and unions organized several strikes during the year. International labor observers reported that authorities also repressed a number of strikes. For example, in May, during a protest by dockworkers in Nouakchott, riot police used violence against the demonstrators and many were injured. The International Trade Union Forum reported that the National Local Authorities' Workers Union had applied unsuccessfully for authorization for the demonstration several times.

The law provides for the right to strike, but long and complex procedures must be followed before a legal strike can be called. The government can also dissolve a union for what it considers an illegal or politically motivated strike, but it did not dissolve any unions during the year. Workers must provide advance notice of at

least 10 working days for any strike. Workers are not allowed to hold sit-ins or to block nonstriking workers from entering work premises.

Unions exercised their right to organize workers during the year. However, the head of government decides how negotiations are to be conducted once the Ministry for the Civil Service agrees on negotiations.

While antiunion discrimination is illegal, national human rights groups and unions reported that authorities did not actively investigate alleged antiunion practices in some private firms owned by very wealthy citizens.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children. The law criminalizes the practice of slavery and imposes penalties on government officials who do not take action on reported cases. The law includes criminal penalties also for contracting to benefit from forced labor and for exploiting forced labor as part of an organized criminal network. Although significant advances were made during the year, government efforts to enforce the antislavery law were widely acknowledged to be inadequate when compared with the dimensions of the problem.

There were reports of forced child labor.

Slavery-like practices, typically flowing from ancestral master-slave relationships and involving both adults and children, continued. Former slaves and their descendants were impelled to remain in a dependent status in part of the lack of marketable skills, poverty, and persistent drought. Such practices occurred primarily in areas where educational levels were generally low or a barter economy still prevailed, and in urban centers, including Nouakchott, where slavery-like domestic service existed. The practices commonly occurred where there was a need for workers to herd livestock, tend fields, and do other manual labor. Some former slaves and descendants of slaves were pushed into working for their old masters in exchange for some combination of money, lodging, food, and medical care. Individuals in these subservient circumstances were vulnerable to mistreatment. Women with children faced particular difficulties and could be compelled to remain in a condition of servitude, performing domestic duties, tending fields, or herding animals without remuneration.

Some former slaves reportedly continued to work for their former masters or others without remuneration in order to retain access to land they traditionally farmed. Although the law provides for distribution of land to the landless, including to former slaves, authorities have enforced it in only a few cases. NGO observers suggested that deeply embedded psychological and tribal bonds also made it difficult for many individuals whose forbearers had been slaves for generations, to break their bonds with former masters or their tribes. Some persons continued to link themselves to former masters because they believed their slave status had been divinely ordained and they feared religious punishment if that bond were broken. Former slaves were often subjected to social discrimination and limited to performing manual labor in markets, ports, and airports.

Forced labor also occurred in urban centers where young children, often girls, were retained as unpaid household servants. Some individuals self-identified as slaves or masters and claimed with varying degrees of plausibility that they were unaware that slavery had been abolished. Human rights groups reported that persons in slave-like relationships were persuaded by their masters to deny the relationship to activists.

Men, women, and children were trafficked for and subjected to domestic service, street begging for unscrupulous religious teachers, and slave-like relationships as domestic servants or herders. The law criminalizes the practice of slavery and imposes penalties on government officials who do not take action on reported cases.

The government organized training workshops about the antislavery law for administrative authorities and judges. The Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery continued to provide one billion ouguiya (\$3.4 million) per year in development assistance to communities of former slaves. These funds were focused on development assistance, not on the social and legal enforcement of the antislavery law.

On April 13, the government tried its first case under this law. The defendants were acquitted the same day. On November 20, the first conviction for slavery was obtained in the case of two enslaved youths. The master received a sentence of two years' imprisonment and his family members received suspended sentences. They were also ordered to pay a fine of 1.35 million ouguiya (\$4,655). The mother of the two youths received a one-year suspended sentence.

The government also prosecuted an alleged slaveholder using the lesser charge of child exploitation, and on January 16, a court convicted her and prescribed a jail sentence. In March, however, the Nouakchott Court of Appeals acquitted her.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits employment of children under the age of 12. Those under age 13 may not be employed in the agricultural sector unless the minister of labor grants an exception due to local circumstances. Those younger than 14 may be employed in most forms of family enterprise with authorization from the Ministry of Labor as long as the work does not affect the child's health, exceed two hours per day, or occur during school hours or holidays. The law states that employed children 14 to 16 should receive 70 percent of the minimum wage and those 17 to 18 should receive 90 percent of the minimum wage. Children should not work more than eight hours a day with one or several one-hour breaks, and they are prohibited from engaging in night work. The law prohibits employing or inciting a child to beg with penalties ranging from one to eight months imprisonment and a fine of 180,000 to 300,000 ouguiya (\$620 to \$1,034)

MASEF is the main governmental body responsible for enforcing all laws relating to children. The Office of Childhood promotes and protects children's rights, elaborates and executes child welfare programs, coordinates actions in favor of childhood educational development, and elaborates and executes a national policy. The Ministry of Justice is involved through the Direction of the Judiciary for Protection of Children and the Ministry of the Interior through the Special Police Brigade for Minors. The Ministry of Labor also collaborates through its Labor Office and Inspection Office.

Enforcement of laws was inadequate. No mechanisms existed for exchanging information among agencies or to assess effectiveness. There was no specific mechanism for making complaints other than labor inspectors or the Special Police Brigade for Minors. NGOs were the only organizations that handle cases of child victims, refer them to the Special Brigade for Minors, and pressure the government to adjudicate the cases or integrate the victims in social centers or in schools.

During the first six months of the year, there were only 21 inspectors to receive and investigate complaints; during the year the government recruited 46 inspectors

who were trained at the National School of Administration, and 60 inspectors were on duty at year's end. None of them, however, were dedicated to investing compliance with child labor regulations. The 2011 budget provided 10.4 million ouguiya (\$35,700) to the Office of Childhood, but nothing was specified for investigations. As a consequence no child labor investigations took place during the year.

An unknown number of "talibes" (young students), nearly all from Halpulaar tribes, begged in the streets and gave the proceeds to their "marabouts" (religious teachers) as payment for religious instruction. There were reliable reports that a small number of marabouts forced their talibes to beg for more than 12 hours a day and provided them with insufficient food and shelter. The government continued a program to reduce the number of talibes and partnered with NGOs to provide talibes with basic medical and nutritional care.

Child labor in the informal sector was common and a significant problem, particularly within poorer inner city areas. Several reports suggested that young girls, as young as the age of seven, from remote regions, and possibly from western Mali, continued to be forced to work as unpaid housemaids in some wealthy urban homes.

Street gang leaders forced children to steal, beg, and sell drugs in the streets of the capital. Children were reportedly forced to work in agriculture, construction, and livestock herding.

Young children in the countryside were commonly engaged in herding; cultivation of subsistence crops, such as rice, millet, and sorghum; fishing; and other significant labor in support of their families' activities. Young children in urban areas often drove donkey carts and delivered water and building materials. In keeping with longstanding tradition, many children served apprenticeships in small industries, such as metalworking, carpentry, vehicle repair, masonry, and the informal sector. Reporting by some human rights NGOs, including SOS Esclaves, strongly suggested that domestic employment of girls as young as the age of seven, often unpaid, continued to be a problem.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/programs/ocft/tda.htm.

d. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The nationally mandated minimum monthly wage for adults, which was not enforced, was 30,000 ouguiya (\$103), increased from 21,000 ouguiya (\$72) on September 24. The poverty level for 2008 was an annual income of 129,600 ouguiya (\$447) and the extreme poverty level for 2008 was an annual income of 96,400 ouguiya (\$332).

The law provides that the standard legal nonagricultural workweek must not exceed either 40 hours or six days without overtime compensation, which was to be paid at rates that were graduated according to the number of supplemental hours worked. Domestic workers and certain other categories could work 56 hours per week. All employees must be given at least one 24-hour period of rest per week. There are no legal provisions regarding compulsory overtime. The Labor Directorate of the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcement of the labor laws, but there was a lack of effective enforcement due to inadequate funding. The government sets health and safety standards. Workers have the right to remove themselves from hazardous conditions without risking loss of employment. The law applies to all workers in the formal economy.

According to the General Confederation of Workers of Mauritania, the National Agency of Social Security registered 501 workplace fatalities or injuries during the year, 189 of them at the national mining company, SNIM. It is likely that the number of accidents was greater because many accidents in the informal economy were unreported.

The Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing these standards but did so inconsistently due to inadequate funding. In principle workers could remove themselves from hazardous conditions without risking loss of employment, but in practice they could not.

Despite the law, labor unions pointed to conditions approaching modern slavery in several sectors, including the food processing industry. In these sectors, workers do not have contracts or receive pay stubs. Their salaries were below the official minimum wage, and they worked in very unfavorable conditions. Sometimes they were not paid for several months.

Despite the law, workers could not remove themselves from hazardous conditions without risking loss of employment.