

“SOS Esclaves (Mauritania)”

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A member of the National Forum of Human Right, of the World Organization Against Torture and an observer for the African Commission for Human and People Rights, SOS Esclaves is a non-governmental organization, that was founded in Mauritania in February 1995 by former slaves and former slaveholders. Its purpose is to eradicate traditional servitude in Mauritania, to promote human rights, and to inform about ethnical and sexual discriminations, but also to guarantee that the physical well-being of children and prisoners is respected. Initially tolerated by the government, that organization has been outlawed in the aftermath of a trial in 1998, during which its president Boubacar Ould Messaoud and four human rights activists, were sentenced to prison and fined, have since been released thanks to an international campaign of solidarity among human rights activists. Nevertheless, this secular organization continues to publish a report each year on the state of civil liberties in Mauritania and to insist that the government enforce the third abolition decree, inacted in 1981, which officially abolished slavery in Mauritania.

In spite of the repetitive attacks carried out by Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya's regime, SOS Esclaves has exposed the persistence of the practice of slavery in Mauritanian society and highlighted several of the various cases of runaway slaves. The organization has intervened many times on behalf of former slaves who sought to reunite with members of their families or gain access to land or inheritance from their own relatives. SOS Esclaves blames the government for hindering the works of any organizations that raise the question of slavery in Mauritania, while the government accuses the organization of discrediting the image of the country. In agreement with SOS Esclaves' position, Amnesty International published a report in 2002 that stressed the numerous violations of human rights, particularly in cases involving slaves, that have been committed with impunity in Mauritania.

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"See also": 'Abd; Mauritania; Hassaniya-Berbers.

Further Reading:

Cotton, Samuel, *Silent Terror: A Journey into Contemporary African Slavery*, New-York: Harlem River Press, 1998.

Ruf, Urs Peter, *Ending Slavery: Hierarchy, Dependency and Gender in Central Mauritania*, Bielefeld, 1999.