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Mauritania – Tier 3  
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Mauritania is a source and destination country for women, men, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Adults and children from traditional slave castes in the Black Moor and Afro-Mauritanian communities are subjected to slavery-related practices rooted in ancestral master-slave relationships. Although reliable data on the total number of slaves does not exist, local and international experts agree that slavery continues to affect a significant portion of the country’s population in both rural and urban settings. Held for generations by slave-holding families, persons subjected to slavery are forced to work without pay as cattle herders and domestic servants. Separately, some boys from within Mauritania and other West African countries who study at Koranic schools—referred to as talibes—are subsequently subjected to forced begging by corrupt imams. Talibe victims live in harsh conditions and do not attend school; many are forced to beg for food and to earn a daily financial quota to pay the imam. Boys from low-income families in the Halpulaar community were most vulnerable to forced begging. Children who lacked birth certificates were generally not permitted to enroll in school and were therefore at increased risk to trafficking. Mauritanian girls, as well as girls from Mali, Senegal, The Gambia, and other West African countries, are forced into domestic servitude in Mauritania. Mauritanian women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking in the country or the Middle East. Some enter into forced marriages, facilitated by brokers and travel agencies in Mauritania, and are subsequently exploited as sex slaves overseas. Men from Middle Eastern and North African countries use legally contracted “temporary marriages” as a means to sexually exploit young girls and women in Mauritania. Civil society representatives continued to criticize law enforcement and judicial officials for a failure to appropriately investigate and prosecute slavery cases brought to their attention. In particular, concerns remained regarding official intervention to suppress action against the alleged perpetrators in the one case investigated during the reporting period.

The Government of Mauritania does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. The government took steps to raise public awareness about human trafficking, including through two televised debates and three symposia on the vestiges of slavery. However, it failed to prosecute or convict any traffickers and did not provide any anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officials. The government did not provide adequate protective services to victims and failed to establish procedures for the proactive identification of victims among persons arrested for prostitution and individuals detained and deported for immigration violations. Additionally, during the reporting period, the government arrested, prosecuted, and convicted several anti-slavery activists, some of whom were sentenced to two years’ imprisonment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAURITANIA:**

Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses—addressing all types of trafficking of adults—and to convict and punish offenders using the 2003 Law Against Trafficking in Persons and the 2007 anti-slavery law; take steps to hold government officials accountable for trafficking-related complicity, including efforts to interfere with criminal investigations; train law enforcement personnel, with an increased focus on measures to identify and refer to protective services trafficking victims from among vulnerable populations, and

institute policies to standardize these procedures; provide support for, and access to, legal assistance for adult and child trafficking victims, including through directly submitting criminal claims on victims' behalf through Tadamoun; amend Law 2007-048 to allow civil society organizations to file complaints on behalf of slaves; provide funding to civil society organizations providing direct services to victims, including former slaves; increase efforts to coordinate with NGOs to arrange protective services for trafficking victims; with input from civil society representatives, develop and implement a plan to provide economic resources—through monetary or property allotment—to empower members of traditional slave castes to live independently, and ensure these resources reach the targeted communities; and increase efforts to raise public awareness about trafficking, including traditional servitude.

## PROSECUTION

The government made negligible anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. All forms of trafficking, except hereditary slavery, are prohibited by the 2003 Law Against Trafficking in Persons, which prescribes penalties of five to 10 years' imprisonment for violations. These penalties are sufficiently stringent and exceed those prescribed for serious crimes, such as rape. Slavery, including hereditary slavery, is prohibited by Law 2007-048, enacted in September 2007; a 2013 law against slavery and torture broadens the 2007 law's 10-year statute of limitations. The 2007 law defines slavery and prescribes a sufficiently stringent penalty of five to 10 years' imprisonment for violations. Its effectiveness is impaired by a requirement that slaves file a legal complaint before prosecution can be pursued, as well as by barring NGOs from filing complaints on behalf of slaves—many of whom are illiterate. Although the National Agency to Fight against the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and the Fight against Poverty, known as Tadamoun, has the authority to submit complaints on behalf of victims, it did not do so during the reporting period.

The government investigated one slavery case identified by an NGO, but did not prosecute or convict any traffickers during the reporting period. In the single investigation conducted, the government initially arrested an alleged slave master, but ultimately did not file charges under the 2007 anti-slavery law and released the slave master; it is unclear whether the government will bring the case to trial. NGOs reported referring approximately 4,000 cases of child labor to the police; however, none resulted in any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions for forced child labor. The government did not provide any specific anti-trafficking training during the reporting period. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking offenses.

The government arrested, prosecuted, and convicted several anti-slavery activists during the reporting period, drawing international attention to the government's attempts to suppress civil society representatives advocating against slavery and systematic discrimination in Mauritania. In November 2014, law enforcement arrested nine prominent anti-slavery activists and charged them for leading unregistered organizations, organizing an unauthorized rally, and resisting arrest; ultimately, the government convicted six of the activists. The government sentenced three activists to one year of prison and a fine of 40,000 ouguiya (\$130); their prison term was ultimately suspended and they were released. However, the government sentenced the other three activists to two years' imprisonment; at the close of the reporting period, the activists were serving their sentences while their cases were under appeal.

## PROTECTION

The government maintained limited efforts to protect victims of human trafficking, including those exploited in traditional slavery. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family continued to operate five public centers for the protection and social integration of children and in November 2014, opened a sixth center in Nouakchott; 321 children in need received services from the centers, but it is unknown how many of these children may have been trafficking victims. The government allocated 35 million ouguiya (\$115,000) to these facilities. These facilities provided only short-term protections and generally returned children to their families or the imams who facilitated their exploitation. NGOs continued to provide the majority of protection services to trafficking victims without financial or in-kind support from the government. One NGO identified and cared for 257 girls rescued from domestic servitude.

Lack of available long-term rehabilitative care in Mauritania made many victims vulnerable to re-trafficking. The absence of measures to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations may have led to victims being punished for acts committed as a result of being subjected to trafficking. For example, in 2014, 6,400 undocumented migrants were detained and deported without screening. In addition, officials often jailed women suspected of prostitution, some of whom may have been trafficking victims. Mauritania does not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they may face hardship or retribution.

## PREVENTION

The government sustained modest efforts to prevent human trafficking. In March 2014, the government adopted a national strategy made up of recommendations from the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery; however, implementation was limited. In October 2014, the government hosted two televised debates on slavery with government officials and anti-slavery activists; however, the panelists were predominantly government officials, and civil society members were underrepresented. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, in collaboration with the National Union of Imams, hosted three symposia to raise awareness about what the government calls “the vestiges of slavery.” The government made no effort to reduce the demand for forced labor or commercial sex acts. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training or guidance for its diplomatic personnel or peacekeeping troops deployed abroad; however, a foreign donor provided Mauritanian peacekeeping troops with anti-trafficking training.

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