Mauritania

Query:

1) Are homosexuals (in particular, Arab or "White Moor" male homosexuals) at risk of harm in Mauritania?

2) If so, what types of mistreatment do they face?

3) If so, are homosexuals at risk of harm by government actors or others?

4) Can homosexuals avail themselves of the protection of the government?

Response:

Information on specific incidents in Mauritania of the mistreatment of homosexuals, and of White Moors particularly, was not available among the sources consulted by the RIC. Nor were any consulted sources able to provide statistics on punishments carried out for homosexual behavior.

From the information gleaned, the country's attitude toward homosexuality is negative. Discussing sexual matters is taboo. Sexual relations are believed to be the preserve of marriage between a man and a woman (Africa News Bulletin-BIA, 15 March 1999). Because there is no societal recognition of the existence of homosexuality, there is no visible public support for gay rights (The Third Pink Book 1993, 304).

Of the six ethnic groups, White Maure or Moors are considered the socially dominant class. In the White Maure social order, Black Africans are linked with the legend of their servile past and excluded from Maure hierarchy (Mauritania: A Country Study 1990, 52-56). Black Africans, in turn, consider "...Maures (especially white Maures) to be ignorant, lazy, and inefficient...." (Mauritania: A Country Study 1990, 66). They further believe that shari'a law discriminates in favor of white Maures (Mauritania: A Country Study 1990, 131).

Before Mauritanian independence in 1960, punishment for homosexual activity was limited to a maximum of three years in prison and a fine of one million francs (ILGA, 1999). This was superceded by shari'a law which was established after 1980 (Mauritania: A Country Study 1990, 131). In Islamic countries governed by shari'a, sodomy is a crime against the Koran's divine will, subject to divine retribution. (AI 1997, 46) In Mauritania, male Muslims convicted of homosexual acts are eligible for the death sentence under the revised Islamic penal code (AI 1997, 48). Most Mauritians are Sunni Muslims subject to Islamic law.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:


Attachments:


Other Sources Consulted:

Human Rights Watch (HRW). Telephone Interview with Africa Desk Officer. 30 December 1999

International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). Telephone Interview with Researcher. 5 January 2000

Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force (LGIRTF). Telephone Interview with Legal Researcher. 5 January 2000

U.S. Department of State (DOS). Mauritania Country Desk. Telephone Interview with Desk Officer. 3 January 2000