



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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28 March 2006

### MRT101195.FE

Mauritania: Attitude of the current government authorities toward the people who were close to former president Maaouya Ould Taya, particularly his family, his associates, members of his ethnic group and former members of the government and security forces under his regime, since the 3 August 2005 coup d'état (August 2005 - March 2006)

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The weekly *Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent*, in describing the atmosphere in the Mauritanian presidential palace two months after the 3 August 2005 coup d'état, indicated that [translation] "from protocol to security, senior officials and bodyguards are still at their posts. ... Only the palace host has changed" (2-8 Oct. 2005, 37-38). The same source explained that during the coup d'état [translation] "three or four people were placed under house arrest" but that the restrictions had already been [translation] "lifted" (*Jeune Afrique/L'intelligent* 2-8 Oct. 2005, 38), and that there was [translation] "no sign of a witch hunt" (ibid.; ibid. 14-27 Aug. 2005, 12). *Africa Research Bulletin* noted that amnesty was granted to prisoners immediately following the 3 August 2005 coup; the same source reported that five officers, including the former chief of staff, Colonel Elarbi Ould Sidi Aly, who had been arrested after opposing the coup, were also released (1-30 Sept. 2005, 16367).

*Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent*, in referring to the political change that occurred in Mauritania on 3 August 2005, indicated that none of the [translation] "people in Ould Taya's entourage was under threat, not even his children, who kept their jobs in the banks where they worked" (14-27 Aug. 2005, 12). The same weekly reported in its 7 to 12 August 2005 issue that [translation] "in Nouakchott [capital of Mauritania], the former head of state's brothers, children and wife, Aicha, were never under threat. ... His wife simply left the palace with her luggage and moved to a private residence" (*Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent* 7-13 August 2005, 12). The former Mauritanian president's wife currently lives with him, their four children, two governesses, and a cleric, the reader of the Koran appointed by the former head of state (ibid. 28 Aug.-3 Sept. 2005, 6); the former president's cabinet leader has returned to Mauritania (ibid.).

With regard to members of the former government, *Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent* indicated that none of them is part of the current government, unlike some members of the former president's Democratic and Social Republican Party (Parti républicain démocratique et social, PRDS) (14-27 Aug. 2005, 11; see also *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 Aug. 2005, 16309). *Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent* described the current Mauritanian leaders and the public support they receive as follows:

[Translation]

The men in power today are all products of the Ould Taya regime. Although none of the 24 members of the government formed on 10 August belonged to the winning team, many are originally from the ranks of the PRDS. Be that as it may, this bloodless palace revolution triggered significant excitement in Nouakchott. Politicians-including members of the PRDS-almost unanimously supported the reform program proposed by the Military Council. And the population of Attat, Ould Taya's stronghold, were not the only ones to have demonstrated in support of the new regime. (14-

27 Aug. 2005, 11)

With regard to the members of the deposed president's ethnic group, the Smassid (*Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent* 2-8 Aug. 2005, 43; *ibid.* 14-27 Aug. 2005, 12; *ibid.* 7-13 Aug. 2005, 12), the Secretary for Foreign Relations at SOS Esclaves Mauritanie, an anti-slavery human rights organization in Mauritania that is a member of the Forum of National Human Rights Organizations (Forum des organisations nationales des droits de l'homme, FONADH) and the World Organization Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT) and is an observer with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (SOS Esclaves Mauritanie n.d.), provided the following information in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 21 March 2006:

[Translation]

The former head of state, Colonel Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, is a member of the Smassid tribe. Although very small, the tribe is one of the wealthiest, after 20 years of nepotism, and is part of the White Moors, an Arab-Berber ethnic group which is also a minority but produces most of the country's leaders. At no time during or after the 3 August 2005 coup d'état were Ould Taya's tribe, family or relatives threatened. Some, such as known torturers, were simply dismissed or demoted. Moreover, the clemency that the transition regime showed for the former head of state's relatives ignited the indignation of the former opposition parties and human rights associations. An anecdote: on the day after the coup, the Military Council permitted Ould Taya's wife to collect her personal belongings and money from inside the presidential palace; she will also receive a large cash payment and the means to return to her husband with her children.

The Secretary for Foreign Relations at SOS Esclaves Mauritanie was of the opinion that [translation] "there is no risk of 'persecution' for [the Smassid] at this time" (21 Mar. 2006).

However, some sources indicated that the current Mauritanian president, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, has been replacing all the provincial governors (*Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 Dec. 2005, 16466; *Africa Confidential* 6 Jan. 2006, 8), as well as other senior officials appointed by former president Maaouya Ould Sid's Ahmed Taya in order to increase his power (*ibid.*). The same sources did not, however, provide any information on what happened to the dismissed leaders.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

*Africa Confidential* [London]. 6 January 2006. Vol. 47, No. 1. "Mauritania."

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*Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent* [Paris]. 20-25 November 2005. No. 2341. Abdallah Ben Ali. "Mauritanie : L'ancien parti-État dans la tourmente."

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SOS Esclaves Mauritanie. 21 March 2006. Correspondence from the Secretary for Foreign Relations.

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### Additional Sources Consulted

**Publications:** *Africa Confidential*, *Africa Research Bulletin*, *Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent*, *Keesing's Record of World Events*, *West Africa*, Resource Centre country file.

**Internet sites, including:** AllAfrica, Amnesty International, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Africa, *Europa*, European Country of Origin Information Network (Ecoi.net), Factiva, Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group (ICG), Missionary International Service News Agency (MISNA), *Mondes rebelles*, *Political Parties of the World*, United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), United States Department of State.

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