



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Mauritania: The political situation, including the 2006-2007 elections, the post-election conditions and certain measures taken by the new government regarding the abolition of slavery and the struggle against al-Qaida (August 2006 - June 2008)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to Freedom House, the transition period following the military coup in August 2005 brought about "significant" changes:

[E]lections, the independence of the judiciary, and freedom of the press have been greatly improved. However, it is still unclear whether the new democratic infrastructure will be reflected in practice and help Mauritania move away from its authoritarian past. (2007)

During a session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, the Mauritanian Commissioner for Human Rights and the Struggle Against Poverty (Commissaire aux droits de l'homme et à la lutte contre la pauvreté de la Mauritanie) stated that he believed the transition toward democracy had been successful and that Mauritania had set up an independent national electoral committee and ratified an edict for the creation of an independent national human rights commission (UN 28 Mar. 2007, Para. 45 and 46).

Municipal (EU Mar. 2007, 5) and legislative elections were held on 19 November and 3 December 2006, and presidential elections were held on 11 and 25 March 2007 (ibid.; *PHW 2008* 2008, 844; *Europa 2007* 2007, 3023). The final report of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EOM) to Mauritania indicates that [translation] "the mood was calm and friendly during the election campaigns" and that [translation] "voting proceeded calmly, turnout of Mauritanian voters was high ... and the process was transparent and respected main international standards" (EU Mar. 2007, 7). Likewise, the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) indicates that these were the fairest municipal and legislative elections ever held in Mauritania (UN 12 Mar. 2007). However, the EOM notes that there were [translation] "partisan activities to try and influence voters" near some of the polling stations (EU Mar. 2007, 7). Freedom House reports that the transitional government allowed "Islamist activists" to run in the election as independents and that it also allowed military personnel who had been detained by the former regime for supposedly participating in a failed coup in June 2003 to form their own political party (2007). Mauritania, which had been suspended from the African Union following the August 2005 military coup, was reintegrated into the Union in April 2007 (AI 2008; BuaNews 12 Apr. 2007).

During the March 2007 presidential elections, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi (or Abdellahi) received 52.85 percent of the votes (IPU n.d.; EU Mar. 2007, 104; *Europa 2007* 2007, 3023). He was sworn in as president on 19 April 2007 (ibid.; US 10 June 2008). The following day, the President named Zeine (or Zein) Ould Zeidane prime minister (*Europa 2007* 2007, 3023; *PHW 2008* 2008, 844). However, Zeine Ould Zeidane [translation] "resigned" in May 2008, and the President chose Yahya Ould Ahmed El Waghev (or Waghef, or el-Waghf) to be his successor (Jeuneafrique.com 11 May 2008; APA 8 May 2008; see also US 10 June 2008). Yahya Ould Ahmed El Waghev was minister and secretary-general of the presidency of the republic before

being named prime minister (APA 8 May 2008; Jeuneafrique.com 11 May 2008).

In June 2007, President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi was reportedly in the process of forming a new political party (*PHW 2008* 2008, 845). However, the constitution does not allow the president to lead a political party, so he was going to choose another leader for the new party (*ibid.*). According to an article published in a Mauritanian newspaper in August 2007, a political party with ties to the President was being formed even though the President would not lead the party (*Le Calame* 29 Aug. 2007). According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007*, in October 2007, opposition parties protested the President's decision to form a new political party to unite the legislative majority, because they feared that the new party would become a party of the state (US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 3). Jeuneafrique.com indicates that this party, the National Pact for Democracy and Development (Pacte national pour la démocratie et le développement, PNDD), was formed in January 2008 [translation] "to 'organize politically' (*fixer*) members of parliament and political officials who supported the head of state during his electoral campaign" and that it was led by the Prime Minister (11 May 2008).

In August 2007, the new government enacted anti-slavery legislation (AI 2008; BBC 9 Aug. 2007; US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 6c), which entered into force in February 2008 (US June 2008, 178). Under this new legislation, the punishment prescribed for slavery is a fine and up to 10 years in prison (AI 2008; see also US June 2008, 178). The United States (US) Department of State reports that, although it is a step in the right direction, the government's efforts in enforcing this law are "limited" (*ibid.*). The Agence Nouakchott d'information (ANI) reports that SOS Slaves Mauritania (SOS Esclaves Mauritanie), an anti-slavery organization that has observer status on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (SOS Esclaves Mauritanie n.d.), criticizes the government's lack of initiative in fighting slavery and states that the promulgation of this law, in and of itself, is not enough (ANI 10 June 2008).

Sources report that the Mauritanian government is making efforts to combat al-Qaida (Reuters 30 Apr. 2008; News24 3 June 2008; see also World Analysis 31 May 2008). Mauritania's Delegate Minister for Maghreb Affairs has stated that he is aware of "the existence of terrorists [al-Qaida] in [his] country, but the threat they represent should not be overestimated" (*ibid.*).

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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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