Mauritania: Situation of Afro-Mauritanians who left in 1989 and returned from Senegal since 2007; whether Mauritania is accepting the returnees and is granting them citizenship; the situation of those who return (March 2009 - May 2010)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

A United Nations (UN) article states that the tripartite repatriation agreement signed by Senegal, Mauritania and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in November 2007 indicates that repatriated Mauritanians are supposed to obtain their citizenship documents within three months of their return to Mauritania (UN 26 Nov. 2008). However, the United States (US) Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 indicates that "the majority of Afro-Mauritanian returnees were unable to obtain identity cards" (US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 2d). Country Reports 2009 further states:

During the year, the HSC [High State Council] and President Aziz's administration continued the national reconciliation program for the repatriation of Afro-Mauritanian refugees from Senegal and Mali, in coordination with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). On December 31, repatriation operations were successfully ended with the arrival of the last group from Senegal. (US 11 Mar. 2010, Intro.).

According to UNHCR, approximately 17,130 Afro-Mauritanian refugees returned during the year as part of a national repatriation program. These were among the estimated 25,000 to 34,000 Afro-Mauritanians who took refuge in Senegal and Mali during the 1989-91 expulsion. (ibid., Sec. 2d).

The government cooperated with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern; however, the government lacked resources to effectively support these persons. However, reintegration of returnees into communities was challenging due to deficient sanitation, health, and education infrastructure, as well as land disputes. (ibid.)

A *Jeune Afrique* article states that land disputes are numerous and have occurred in regions where the refugees have returned to their villages of origin only to find that their former lands are occupied (*Jeune Afrique* 4 Mar. 2010). In January 2010, in the Fada village in the Trarza region, some of the female returnees who attempted to farm their former lands were arrested by the police (ibid.). The African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (Forces de libération africaines
de Mauritanie, FLAM), an exiled Mauritanian opposition group that advocates for the rights of black Mauritanians (UN 3 Mar. 2006), indicates in a statement obtained by PANApess (PANA) that refugees in Mauritania who were repatriated since January 2008 from Senegal are in "a precarious situation, marked by humiliations and frustrations, while remaining at the outskirts of their villages and (away from) their confiscated properties" (PANA 27 Apr. 2010).

The 4 March 2010 *Jeune Afrique* article states that the returnees also lack sufficient employment and that the language of instruction in their children's schools is partially Arabic, which is not always suitable for the Afro-Mauritanians who are francophones.

Information on whether Mauritania is fulfilling its agreement to grant citizenship to the refugees who left in 1989 and who are returning to Mauritania could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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.

**References**


**Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources**: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nouakchott did not respond to requests for information within the time constraints of this Response.

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