



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

02 December 2004

MRT43225.FE

Mauritania: Follow-up to MRT43188.FE of 30 November 2004 on honour crimes; the risks facing a woman engaged to be married who has a child with another man and the risks facing that other man; the conditions for honour to be restored to all persons concerned; state protection available (2003-December 2004)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

A resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Mauritania and resident coordinator of the United Nations System (UNS) in Mauritania provided the following information in correspondence dated 1 December 2004.

The general situation of 'honour crimes' in Mauritania

According to the UNDP representative in Mauritania, honour crimes are uncommon in Mauritanian society, even though the country's traditions are generally [translation] "conservative."

The provisions of Islamic Law

The Shari'ah, or Islamic Law, that is applicable in Mauritania, prohibits pre-marital sex and punishes even more severely married individuals who commit adultery. A person found guilty of pre-marital sex risks flogging and social rejection, while a person condemned for adultery may be stoned, a punishment that can be [translation] "commuted by time in prison." However, it is worth noting that Shari'ah law requires evidence that, unless the woman becomes pregnant, [translation] "is considered impossible to obtain."

Risks facing people accused of honour crimes

The UNDP representative stated that, in general, a woman who has a child with a man who is not her fiancé would not be dealt with by the Mauritanian authorities, but rather very discretely by the families concerned. For example, a family might choose to keep [translation] "the scandal" quiet to avoid negative social consequences. On the other hand, it might try to find a father to adopt the child. Nevertheless, a woman caught in such a situation would generally not escape [translation] "public reprobation" and she would risk [translation] "being disowned, pressured, ill-treated and put in confinement by her parents and relatives."

The UNDP representative also stated that cases in which the woman's life would be in danger are [translation] "exceptional." She added that in certain circles (such as in the case of *hratines*, or former slaves, or in communities that are considered liberal), the consequences would be less severe, while in rural areas they would be much more serious. The representative indicated that the social status of the people involved also plays an important role. A person with a modest background may face less risk than someone from the [translation] "traditional aristocracy."

Reputation of the deceived fiancé

The UNDP representative pointed out that the honour of the deceived fiancé in a case like that described

earlier would normally remain untarnished, even if he married the woman in question. The representative also noted that, though the man might threaten his fiancée with physical violence, [translation] "he has another much more convenient and less risky solution-one-sided repudiation" of the woman. In this way, he retains his honour.

State protection available

Various factors contribute to the Mauritanian authorities' lack of participation in cases like that mentioned earlier. First, such matters are rarely reported to the authorities. Information on the fate of an adulterous woman who has cheated on her fiancé does not generally reach as far as the police. The authorities are therefore unaware of the threats or risks facing a woman accused of being unfaithful to her fiancé or husband. According to the UNDP representative, [translation] "legal guarantees are therefore weak, and the adulterous woman cannot really count on any assistance from legal authorities." The woman's fate does not depend on the government, but on the decisions made by her own family, which could choose any of the following, among others: [translation] "to cover up the scandal; to disown the woman and leave her to fend for herself; to beat her; and to lock her up for a long time."

This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection.

Reference

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Mauritania. 1 December 2004. Correspondence from a representative.

[▲
Top of Page](#)

[Important Notices](#)

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.