

1 July 2016

Mauritania: Human rights defenders Amadou Tidjane Diop and Abdellahi Matalla Saleck arrested and detained in an unknown location

On 30 June 2016, the Mauritanian police arrested two human rights defenders, M. **Amadou Tidjane Diop** and M. **Abdellahi Matalla Saleck**, and brought them to two different detention centres. Amadou Tidjane Diop is currently detained at a police station in a neighbourhood of the capital, Nouakchott. Abdellahi Matalla Saleck's family and colleagues do not yet know where he is detained.

Amadou Tidjane Diop is the third vice-president of the **Initiative pour la Résurgence du Mouvement Abolitionniste – IRA (Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement)**, a Mauritanian organisation that works for the abolition of slavery in the country and that helps victims of slavery rebuild their lives. Abdellahi Matalla Saleck is the leader of the IRA branch in Sebkhia, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Nouakchott.

The morning of 30 June 2016, around 9am, ten members of the Mauritanian police dressed in civilian clothes stormed into Amadou Tidjane Diop's residence and proceeded to search his house and arrest him for unknown reasons. It was reported that the police came to the human rights defender's residence without a warrant, and at the outset did not make it clear where he would be detained. Abdellahi Matalla Saleck was arrested on the same day in Nouakchott. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the two arrests are connected with a youth protest the day before that resulted in a confrontation between the youth protestors and the police who tried to disperse them. However, neither Amadou Tidjane Diop nor Abdellahi Matalla Saleck participated in the organisation of the protest and were not present at the event.

It is reported that Amadou Tidjane Diop suffers from cardiac problems. The human rights defender goes frequently to his cardiologist for medical treatment related to his heart condition and he needs to follow a strict schedule for his medication.

Anti-slavery human rights defenders in Mauritania are subjected to harassment and repeated intimidation from the authorities. Just one month ago, M. [Biram Dah Abeid](#) and M. [Brahim Bilal](#), who are president and first vice-president of IRAMauritanie, respectively, were released after more than a year and a half in prison. They had been arrested and brought to court after participating in a peaceful campaign aimed at sensitising the population to land rights and rights for descendants of slaves. Additionally, there are reports suggesting that a few other members of IRA Mauritania may have been targeted in a wave of arrests from 30 June to 1 July.

Front Line Defenders is concerned at the arrests of Amadou Tidjane Diop and Abdellahi Matalla Saleck and the other members of IRA Mauritania. In light of the repeated harassment of members of IRA Mauritania, Front Line Defenders believe that their arrest may be motivated by their legitimate activities in the defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mauritania to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Amadou Tidjane Diop and Abdellahi Matalla Saleck, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Amadou Tidjane Diop and Abdellahi Matalla Saleck;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Mauritania are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.