**End of Mission Statement**

**Introduction**

The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Tomoya Obokata, visited Mauritania between 4th and 13th of May 2022. This was the third visit conducted by this mandate, as predecessors visited the country in 2009 and 2014. He would like to express his gratitude to the Government of Mauritania for extending its invitation once again and facilitating open, frank, and constructive dialogue, as well as for the cooperation extended to the Special Rapporteur by the highest levels of authorities, including the President of the country.

The main purpose of the Special Rapporteur’s visit was to assess the progress Mauritania made in eliminating contemporary forms of slavery since the last visit. Particular reference was made to the implementation of the Roadmap formally adopted by the government in 2014 which contains concrete recommendations proposed by the former Special Rapporteur, Ms. Gulnara Shahinian, in 2009.

In this context, the Special Rapporteur met a large number of stakeholders during his visit. In relation to public authorities, he met with representatives from all three branches of Mauritania (executive, legislative and judiciary): the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, Ministers of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, and Mauritanians Abroad, Interior and Decentralisation, National Education and the Reform of the Educational Sector, Public Function and Labour, Social Action, Family and Childhood , the Commissariat on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society (CDHAHRSC), the Governor (*wali*) of Nouadhibou, the Presidents of the Supreme Court and Special Anti-Slavery Courts, the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, and the National Observatory for the Rights of Women and Girls. . He also met the National Human Rights Commission, victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices, former slaves, civil society organisations, workers’ organisations, International Organisations and Permanent Missions based in Nouakchott.

**Positive Aspects**

Since the last assessment towards elimination of slavery and other slavery-like practices, Mauritania has made important progress. To begin with, the culture of denial of these practices seems to be changing gradually. In this regard, the Special Rapporteur was encouraged by the fact that the President of the Republic clearly acknowledged during his meeting with the Special Rapporteur that the denial of slavery was the wrong approach and did not send a good signal. The President of the Republic stated that slavery could only be addressed by finding and liberating those enslaved, bringing perpetrators of slavery crimes to justice, and supporting the economic and social integration of those formerly enslaved. Some senior officials the Special Rapporteur met during his visit also expressed these views.

It has been working with global partners including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Organisation for Migration, International Labour Organisation as well as a number of foreign aid and governmental agencies to address issues relating to these practices. Mauritania has also ratified a number of international treaties. The most recent example is the ratification of the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention 1930. Mauritania is the second African country to do so and has set a good example for other African States to follow.

In the area of legislation related to slavery and related practices, Mauritania has made a number of important changes to strengthen the criminal justice framework. A clear example is the enactment of Law No. 2015-031 on criminalisation of slavery and the punishment of slavery-like practices. This has replaced the previous legislation on the subject, Law No. 2007-048, which was regarded as not entirely effective.

To begin with, the 2015 Law recognises slavery as a crime against humanity. Offences of slavery and other similar practices like serfdom and debt bondage are defined in line with the Slavery Convention 1926 and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery 1956. It also establishes other offences including appropriation of property and income (Art 12), deprivation of access to education (Art 13), fraudulent deprivation of inheritance (Art 14) and forced marriage (Art 15). Further, the 2015 Law prohibits discrimination against enslaved people (Art 2). All of these are in line with the Roadmap. Another novelty of this law is that it provides a legal basis for establishing specialised criminal courts for slavery and related practice (Art 20), and 3 courts have been subsequently created in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Néma.

For punishment, the sanctions for slavery have been increased from 5 to 10 years in the Law No. 2007-48 to 10 to 20 years imprisonment under the 2015 Law. This sends a clear message to the nation that slavery is a serious offence. It also prescribes punishments of 5-7 years for servitude, debt bondage, appropriation of property/income of slaves, and 5-10 years for deprivation of access to education.

In relation to victims of slavery and slavery-like practices, the 2015 Law allows them to claim damages through civil action (Art 25), and public interest, human rights and anti-slavery organisations can become a civil party (Art 22-23), a power which is also shared by the CDHAHRSC. In addition, victims are entitled to legal aid and are exempt from all expenses relating to bringing legal proceedings (Art 24). These measures are also in line with the Roadmap. Overall, the Special Rapporteur takes a view that the 2015 Law is a major improvement, and this is shared widely among non-governmental stakeholders.

Another important piece of legislation, Law No. 2020-017 on the prevention and suppression of human trafficking and the protection of victims, was enacted in 2020, updating the previous law of 2003. It elaborates the definitions of various offences, such as forced labour and organised crime in line with the international standards including the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons 2000, as well as the Forced Labour Convention 1930. Conditions for aggravated penalties are also defined. Importantly, this law enhances the protection of victims of trafficking, providing for specific measures to be taken such as a recovery period of 6 months, free physical and psychological protection and care, anonymity in criminal investigations and proceedings, accommodation, social protection, and compensation. It is important to highlight here that victims of slavery who have not been trafficked are also covered by this law. These are also in line with the Roadmap.

In 2021, the Ministers of Justice, National Defense, and Interior and Decentralization also issued a joint circular 104-2021, which called on public prosecutors, judicial police, and security forces at all levels to treat cases brought under the 2015 anti-slavery and 2020 anti-trafficking laws with greater seriousness, recalling that penalties for inaction were foreseen in the referenced legislation. Circular 104-2021 also called on these actors to fulfil other aspects of this legislation, including by providing victims with legal aid, preserving their right to reparations, supporting civil society organizations to assist victims, and supporting victims and civil society organizations to act as civil parties.

The Special Rapporteur has also been encouraged by the increased efforts to raise awareness among the local, tribal, and religious leaders as well as the public. In this regard, CDHAHRSC carried out a “caravan campaign” from 2015-2017 throughout the country as well as two workshops for civil society and media on anti-slavery law in Mauritania. It has also organised campaigns to sensitize administrative and judicial authorities as well as the security services and civil society on the legal framework for criminalizing slavery, and a regional conference in 2022 with NGOs from the countries of the G5 Sahel on combating contemporary forms of slavery.

The Ministry of Justice also informed the Special Rapporteur of its efforts to raise awareness of anti-slavery legislation through a series of training workshops for judges, clerks, lawyers, and prosecutors in collaboration with OHCHR and civil society organisations.

In relation to other aspects of the Roadmap, such as mixed marriage, the Special Rapporteur has been informed that anyone can marry someone from different ethnic groups or social status in law. Gender mainstreaming is also promoted through the establishment of the National Observatory for the Rights of Women and Girls in July 2020. The Special Rapporteur met this organisation and was strongly encouraged by its willingness to tackle issues surrounding slavery affecting women and girls and other related violence against them. It should also be mentioned that a bill to tackle violence against women and girls will soon be reintroduced before the National Assembly of Mauritania. In addition, March 6 is designated as a National Day for the fight against slavery.

In addition, the Special Rapporteur is encouraged by the work of non-governmental entities. There is strong presence of anti-slavery and human rights civil society organisations in Mauritania. They work tirelessly to advance the rights of the affected communities, including migrant workers and displaced persons. Many of them file cases of slavery on behalf of victims who may not always have the knowledge and means to do so. The Special Rapporteur was also informed that the process to register as a CSO has been streamlined by the passage of Law 2021-04, which removes the requirement for CSOs to obtain Government approval in order to register; this has facilitated the registration of additional anti-slavery organizations. In addition, advancement of work-related rights is promoted by workers’ organisations and trade unions. They regularly conduct awareness-raining among workers so that they are better informed of their rights and also work closely with employers, including sub-contractors and intermediaries, to protect their rights.

Similarly, the role of the National Human Rights Institution is gaining visibility in Mauritania. It has regained “A” ranking by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in 2019 and the Special Rapporteur learned that it has been intensifying its efforts to tackle slavery and other slavery-like practices. As an example,it carried out its own caravan campaign to investigate allegations of slavery and raise awareness throughout the country in 2020. It also has a dedicated section on slavery in its annual report.

**Remaining Challenges**

Despite the important steps taken by Mauritania, the fact remains that descent-based slavery and other slavery-like practices still exist in Mauritania. It is important to recognise that all ethnic groups are affected by the practice. They happen between different ethnic groups (e.g., Beydans and Haratins) or within the same groups (e.g., Afro-Mauritanians communities such as the Soninke, Fulani, and Wolof). Traditional slavery as defined by the Slavery Convention 1926 has not been completely eradicated in Mauritania, particularly in rural areas. A lack of reliable data makes it difficult to estimate the number of slaves, but the fact that some legal cases on slavery continue to emerge suggests that the problem persists.

While the Haratin community has long suffered from slavery, other communities have also been affected in one way or another. The caste system in the Soninke community is a case in point. Those belonging to historically enslaved castes are economically, socially, and culturally dependent on people from priestly or noble castes. For instance, those from suppressed castes have practiced subsistence agriculture on the same family plots for several generations, but without any formal title to the land, as it had historically belonged to people from dominant castes. If they refute their identity as slaves, they are prevented from accessing plots and in some instances, from accessing basic services such as water and markets, by dominant castes. Many additionally face threats and harassment, or even violence if they report to local authorities or police. They are also excluded from decision-making processes, and segregation in religious establishments has been reported. The elements of strong control, coercion, and dependency therefore are evident in many, if not all, cases.

Equally concerning is the experiences of former slaves and their descendants from the Haratin community. The Special Rapporteur was informed by interlocutors that many of them are still economically, socially, and culturally dependent on their former masters as they are not able to sustain themselves independently. Even where they do not maintain such ties, multiple forms of discrimination based on their race or ethnicity make their life very difficult. One of the key issues raised in this regard is the inability of former slaves and their descendants to legally register with the State, which prevents them from accessing vital services. This is due to stringent documentation requirements in order to register, including the need to produce birth certificates, marriage certificates, and/or death certificates for parents, many of which are never issued to Haratins. Therefore, they are not able to enjoy full citizenship as envisaged in the Roadmap.

Of particular concern is education. Many children from the affected communities, particularly girls, are not able to attend schools because they do not have identity documents, which are generally required to access education beyond the primary level. An additional dimension is the division between private and public schools. Former slaves and their descendants are not able to send their children to private schools due to high fees and have no choice but to go to public schools. As the Government does not collect reliable statistics and data on issues relating to slavery, race, or ethnicity, it is not clear how many children from enslaved background lack access to education. Educational institutions for victims of slavery and their children should be carefully monitored in line with the Roadmap.

In view of the above challenges, the Government has in principle implemented alternative measures to enable access to civil registration and education. All children are able to receive free primary education regardless of documentation status and those without documents can progress to secondary and higher education with an attestation from the Ministry of Education and the Minister of the Interior. They also highlighted that there are ways to seek legal registration through application to the judiciary, which can issue a judgement of eligibility for the civil registry in the absence of necessary documents. There is also in principle a process for single mothers to register children in their own names without listing a father.

While these alternatives are good in theory, a lack of awareness and literacy among the affected communities, strict application criteria, excessive bureaucracy, and language difficulty are preventing them from registering in practice. Despite mandates from the central Government to facilitate civil registration, the Special Rapporteur has received reports of continued discrimination at local level, for example, judges refusing to hold eligibility hearings for those without documents on the basis of their ethnic background, and denial to single mothers of the right to register children in their own names. This aspect of the Roadmap must be strengthened further.

Another issue is ownership and access rights to land they have worked on for generations. While the land has been traditionally controlled or owned by local tribes and dominant caste families, many slaves, former slaves, and their descendants have had difficulties in enjoying the same right despite the fact that many have long worked on their lands. The official position of the government is that all lands belong to the State and collective ownership was abolished in 1983 with the passage of Law 1983-127. However,the Special Rapporteur has been informed that these lands still continue to be *de facto* controlled by tribes and influential families and the Government seems reluctant to intervene in practice. The Special Rapporteur received reports of local officials failing or refusing to act on complaints from persons who had been expelled from their lands for refuting their slave status. This is not in line with the Roadmap, which touches upon the need for reform of land law.

All of these often leave no choice but for the affected individuals to take up jobs which are characterised by casualisation, precariousness, exploitation, and abuse. For instance, according to the information received, including from former slaves and their descendants, many work in agricultural jobs characterized by exploitative working conditions, including low or no pay, no paid annual or sick leave, long working hours, lack of health and safety measures, as well as intimidation, harassment, and in some cases physical and sexual violence. Similar working conditions have been reported in other sectors such as fishery, mining, domestic work, livestock-herding, and construction. It has also been reported that sub-contractors and intermediaries further exploit workers by extracting their salaries.

Foreign migrants, particularly from neighbouring States such as Mali and Senegal, are also affected by forced labour. The Special Rapporteur was informed that the vast majority of migrants work in the informal sector without contracts, and this means they cannot obtain a residence permit, keeping them in limbo as undocumented migrant workers. They are naturally more vulnerable as the Government does not intervene to assist migrants without legal status, and many are unaware of the laws or where to seek help, creating a vicious cycle of exploitation. In addition, human trafficking or smuggling into or through Mauritania have been identified as an issue. As many migrants have to pay high fees for their services, they often fall into debt bondage.

The Special Rapporteur also wishes to highlight slavery and other practices affecting children. To begin with, the status of slavery is passed down by their mothers to children. The Special Rapporteur heard stories of children being treated as property and experiencing harassment and physical violence. The Special Rapporteur heard the testimony of a victim who began working for her mother’s enslaver and his extended family from the age of 5 and was frequently abused. This case was brought before the special anti-slavery court of Néma (Case 110/2015), which imposed a prison sentence of 5 years and a fine of 100,000 MRU. At appeal, the prison sentence was upheld and the fine increased to 600,000 MRU. However, 4 years of the prison sentence were suspended, and the fine has never been paid; the victim has never been compensated.

The Special Rapporteur also received disturbing claims on the treatment of enslaved children from persons with a case currently before the special anti-slavery court of Nouadhibou (Case 21/2013). The facts of this particular case merit further investigation, given their severity and as no definitive judgment has been made; the case has been pending judgement for nearly a decade, since 2013.

Furthermore, enslaved children cannot obtain birth certificates, and this means they cannot enrol in the civil registry. This dramatically reduce their opportunities to access education and consequently, find alternatives to dependence on their enslavers.

Child labour exists in various parts of Mauritania. Poor families, many of whom are former slaves and their descendants, often rely on their children to earn living. The Special Rapporteur is concerned that these children drop out of schools and engage in work, which may amount to worst forms of child labour as defined by the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1982. In this regard, domestic servitude and forced labour in various sectors such as gold mining and auto maintenance are said to exist in Mauritania. Another issue which has been brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur is begging by *talibés* (pupils) in Koranic schools. The reasoning behind this practice is to teach values such as humility, but it has been reported that they are forced to spend more time begging than studying in practice.

It is also important to highlight the gender dimension of slavery and other slavery-like practices in Mauritania. For those still held in slavery, particularly women and girls, instances of sexual abuse and violence, including rape, remain a serious risk, according to information provided to the Special Rapporteur from vetted sources. In addition, when children are born, they are regarded as belonging to masters and face additional hurdles when seeking civil registration if born out of wedlock. This highlights the intersecting forms of discrimination, compounded with physical and sexual violence, which enslaved women face.

For former slaves and their descendants, migrant workers, trafficked victims, as well as some displaced persons, a lack of civil registration, education and decent work means that they engage in work, which amounts to forced labour, servitude or even slavery. In this regard, domestic work for women is common in Mauritania where the working conditions, including harassment and physical and sexual violence, display clear indicators of forced labour and servitude. Decree 2011-1797 requires that employers provide domestic workers with a medical exam prior to employment, a salary no less than the minimum wage, overtime, paid leave, access to social security and a contract, but it is apparent that this is not rigorously enforced in practice

The continued existence of slavery and other slavery-like practices in Mauritania unfortunately demonstrates that relevant laws are not consistently or completely enforced in practice. In this regard, interlocutors noted that the criminal justice processes do not always function effectively. The Special Rapporteur learned that some of the judicial police and prosecution are unwilling to follow up and properly investigate complaints. Despite the fact that the 2015 Law contains a provision for penalising such behaviour, interlocutors have pointed out that it is not systematically enforced.

Another difficulty is lack of knowledge about the processes and of means to raise complaints on the part of the victims. The Special Rapporteur was informed by some of the victims he met that the Government has not provided any assistance in this regard. This suggests that the provision on legal aid and exemption from expenses under the 2015 Law are not properly enforced, which has been confirmed by other interlocutors, including in Government. Because of these factors, victims of slavery are heavily dependent on CSOs to file complaints on their behalf. At the same time, CSOs are not sufficiently empowered to proactively file complaints regarding cases of slavery, as they must wait for victims to seek their representation. It is therefore evident that more needs to be done to provide sufficient information to victims in the languages they understand in line with the Roadmap.

In addition, while the creation of the specialised criminal courts for slavery is a positive development, the number of cases is very low given the potentially large number of victims held in slavery and other slavery like practices. Minority Rights Group reports that only 47 cases have been lodged as of the end of 2021 under the 2007 and 2015 anti-slavery laws combined, of which only 26 were tried. The Ministry of Justice informed the Special Rapporteur that 38 cases are currently pending in the specialised criminal courts, 15 before the Supreme Court, 16 before Appeals Courts, and 7 in courts of first instance. This is partly caused by the lack of human, financial and other resources, which was acknowledged by the Presidents of all three specialised courts.As an example, many victims are located in remote rural areas, and yet the specialised criminal courts are not able to reach out proactively due to lack of resources. It has been pointed out in this regard that they should have the ability to conduct trials in areas where most of the victims are located. In addition to easier access, this would have additional benefits of awareness-raising, deterrence, and education among the affected communities and the general public. However, this is not a possibility at the current moment.

The procedural complexity also leads to prolonged delays in criminal proceedings, with some victims the Special Rapporteur met having to wait for more than 5 years to receive a judgement. In addition, slavery offences are often reclassified as lesser offences, thereby undermining the significance attached to them. Punishments for cases prosecuted under the 2015 Law also do not reflect the gravity of offences as convicted criminals in many cases receive much less than the maximum provided. Prison sentences for offenses under the 2015 Law have ranged from six months to two years, well below the 10- to 20-year sentences enshrined in the law. Fines have ranged from 25,000 to 100,000 MRU, while the 2015 Law allows for penalties up to 700,000 MRU. In addition, little time is often served as punishments can be suspended on appeal and moral guarantors can secure a prisoner’s release, and the Special Rapporteur met victims who still have not received any compensations despite judgements in their favour in this regard.

Some of these problems seem to be caused by the composition of the specialised criminal court (a presiding judge, two additional judges and two lay persons) which can influence the direction of each case. The Special Rapporteur met with the members of the Ministry of Justice and the judiciary during his visit, who acknowledge various issues facing these courts. The members must reach consensus on the verdict in a particular case, and the level of specialisation in slavery issues of the individual members can vary. They are in active discussions about their future, and the Special Rapporteur encourages them to continue this dialogue to find a solution.

In relation to protection of the victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices, the 2015 Law is weak as it does not provide sufficient guidance. This has created a protection gap as it leaves much discretion on the part of the public and law enforcement authorities. This gap has been tightened with the 2020 Law on human trafficking which does provide provisions on protection as noted earlier and it is applicable to victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices who may not have been trafficked. It is too early to assess its effectiveness at this stage, but it is essential that these are enforced rigorously with sufficient resources given.

In addition, there is scope to address the responsibilities of employers and businesses in various sectors. The 2015 Law does not touch upon the liability of legal persons such as private businesses, and the Special Rapporteur regards this to be problematic. The 2020 Law on human trafficking does contain a provision on liability of legal persons but the extent to which it will be enforced is not yet clear. The existence of forced labour also demonstrates that the Government must do much more to address such behaviour from businesses and employers, including sub-contractors, so that they respect the international labour standards and protect the rights of workers. Businesses and employers should also develop a code of conduct in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in order to prevent labour exploitation in their supply chains.

There is also much scope for improvement in relation to labour inspection. Identification of slavery and similar practices is reactive in nature, in that it depends very much on victims coming forward, but they are generally voiceless, disempowered and illiterate. What is needed is effective and regular labour inspection conducted by the Ministry of Labour, which can proactively identify these practices at an earlier stage of victimisation. However, interlocutors stated that this does not happen in Mauritania. While victims can approach their local labour offices, reportedly they do not conduct proper investigations.

The Special Rapporteur has learned that part of the reasons for ineffective implementation of the laws in Mauritania is undue influence exerted by members of local communities and tribes in Mauritania. Interlocutors report that there is a deeply rooted culture of “amiable conciliation” that impacts all legal disputes, including those related to slavery, with parties often seeking to resolve conflicts outside the framework of the formal justice system. While informal conciliation and settlement reached voluntarily and amicably by both parties may be reasonable, a number of interlocutors have stated that sometimes they go further to discourage victims from raising complaints with harassment or threats and also interfere with the criminal justice system so that investigation, prosecution, and punishment are not conducted properly by relevant law enforcement and judicial authorities. In order to avoid undue influence, the Special Rapporteur takes a view that slavery and other slavery-like should be excluded from informal resolution/conciliation processes.

While the Special Rapporteur recognises that strengthening Mauritania’s criminal justice responses to slavery and other slavery-like practices is an important step forward, there is an urgent need for Mauritania to address their causes and consequences. For instance, deep-rooted societal acceptance of slavery, as well as prejudice and discrimination towards slaves and former slaves continue to exist in Mauritania. Various Ministries informed the Special Rapporteur that Mauritania has been strengthening its efforts to change the mindset of local/tribal leaders and the general public by implementing awareness-raising and training for public authorities. However, the fact that investigation, prosecution, and punishment remain ineffective suggests that the Government must do much more in order to meet the international commitments it has made. Additionally, while there appears to be increasing political will to address the issue of slavery in some parts of the central Government, this has not translated into such readiness by authorities at the local level, many of whom reportedly continue to deny the existence of slavery when presented with complaints.

In addition, it is not clear whether economic, social, and political integration of victims of slavery or slavery-like practices are effectively implemented in practice. In 2013, the Government established the National Agency for the Fight Against the Vestiges of Slavery, Inclusion, and the Fight Against Poverty (TADAMOUN) with a broad mandate, including reintegration of Mauritanian refugee returnees displaced during the *passif humanitaire*, general poverty reduction, and the design and implementation of programmes to eradicate the consequences of slavery. However, the operation and effectiveness of this entity has been questioned by the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty who visited Mauritania in 2017, a point supported by various interlocutors. Not only did their programmes appear not to particularly support victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices, but it was also unclear whether they were cost-effective and efficient, as they duplicated the work of other ministries engaged in building infrastructure and appeared to do so at higher-cost.

In 2021, TADAMOUN was replaced by the National Agency for Solidarity and the Struggle Against Exclusion (TAAZOUR). The Special Rapporteur had an opportunity to meet TAAZOUR’s Director and his colleagues, who explained their plan of action in the next 5 years, focusing on issues such as poverty reduction, income generation and better infrastructure. It has already implemented some measures, which are relevant to victims of slavery and similar practices. As an example, cash transfers to victims of child labour have been facilitated so that parents can send their children to school instead of forcing them to work.

As this is a new agency, it is difficult to make a full assessment at this stage, but some preliminary issues should be highlighted. For instance, reference to slavery has been dropped from the agency’s name, and it is not clear whether TAAZOUR can address the needs of affected people. Inputs from civil society organisations are reportedly ignored on a regular basis. The power to become a civil party to slavery cases has been transferred to CDHAHRSC whereas TADAMOUN had this, and TAAZOUR repeatedly insisted in discussions with the Special Rapporteur that it did not have any programmes in the pipeline targeting slavery-affected populations in particular.

The government maintains a policy of equality among all sectors of the nation and therefore does not distinguish between various ethnic groups in compiling statistics or implementing development or poverty reduction programmes. While this approach is reasonable as long as it benefits all populations without discrimination, the Special Rapporteur considers that positive measures specifically targeting people and communities affected by slavery and other slavery-like practices, which sufficiently take their individual needs into consideration, should be implemented in the context of Mauritania. Such measures are designed to address inequality and discrimination they have long suffered and are in line with international human rights standards and the Roadmap.

Relevant areas where positive measures would be beneficial include access to education and training, lands, and decent work. In terms of education, the Special Rapporteur has learned that the government is planning to eliminate private/public divide so that all children can have equal access to quality education. This would be regarded as an example of good practice if implemented. However, this initiative has been pending since 2019, and some interlocutors report that while all students could access private schools, they would still be required to pay associated fees, creating a significant barrier to access in practice. There is also much scope for improvement in relation to land rights and access to decent work, which include affirmative employment in public offices, law enforcement authorities as well as armed forces. The gender dimension must also be taken into consideration in all of these areas.

Further, the Special Rapporteur is of a view that there is scope for the National Human Rights Commission and civil society to establish a closer working relationship to implement more effective action against slavery and slavery-like practices. Despite the fact that it has been intensifying its efforts to eliminate slavery, there seems to be a culture of mistrust among them. More regular dialogue between the two parties, with the assistance from other stakeholders such as international organisations, could gradually alleviate misunderstanding and mistrust. Collaboration will also allow consolidation of resources and reduce duplication of efforts for more effective identification and protection of victims, as well as investigation, prosecution, and punishment of offenders.

In relation to other action points of the Roadmap, the Government has yet to establish a dedicated fund to assist and protect the victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices. While it has established a national body for human trafficking, it is not clear whether there are reception centres and legal clinics for victims. Moreover, an annual review on the implementation of the Roadmap should be conducted in an open and transparent manner with active participation of the National Human Rights Commission, civil society representatives, and other relevant stakeholders.

Finally, the government of Mauritania should do much more to tackle the root causes of slavery in Mauritania: deep-rooted societal and cultural acceptance of slavery and discrimination against victims. While the implementation of awareness-raising campaigns is commendable, they are clearly not enough to achieve sustainable changes at all levels of society and to effectively end descent-based slavery. In this regard, it has been suggested by a number of interlocutors that the first step for clear progress is to recognise the existence of slavery publicly by the Government.

While the culture of denial is gradually changing as noted earlier, the Special Rapporteur noticed simultaneously that it still persists at various levels. What is needed is a full recognition of the existence of slavery and slavery-like practices at the highest level of the government and communicate this clearly to the whole nation. The Special Rapporteur regards this to be an important form of reparations stipulated in the international human rights standards. In the context of Mauritania, this would be an important step towards healing the wounds experienced by the affected communities and uniting the whole nation to move forward for the elimination of slavery and slavery-like practices, thereby implementing the Roadmap more effectively. Full recognition can also set a good example for other countries in the region and beyond to follow.

To conclude, although Mauritania has made, and continues to make important progress in addressing slavery, it is yet to fully implement the Roadmap, as well as Sustainable Development Goal 8, Target 8.7 as there are a number of issues which must be addressed sufficiently and effectively.

**Recommendations**

* Take significant steps to effectively enforce relevant laws, in particular the anti-slavery, anti-trafficking, and labour laws. This should include more resources, rigorous training, capacity building, discussions on the future of the specialised criminal courts, as well as awareness-raising about the moral and legal imperative to eliminate all contemporary forms of slavery, including descent-based slavery.
* Establish dedicated units on slavery within the judicial police and public prosecution with fully trained staff.
* Exclude slavery and slavery-like practices from informal resolution processes.
* Elaborate sentencing guidelines for slavery offences in order to maintain consistency in sentencing, which takes gravity of these offences into consideration.
* Establish a multi-stakeholder national identification mechanism to avoid heavy reliance on victims to come forward.
* Establish an effective early warning system to identify children at risk of child labour and other forms of exploitation, by working closely with parents, teachers, social workers, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders.
* Strengthen labour inspection by conducting effective training on the identification and allocating sufficient resources.
* Provide adequate and accessible information about workers’ rights and complaints mechanisms in case of violation of criminal and labour laws, to all Mauritanians as well as foreign nationals in languages they understand. Work collaboratively with the National Human Rights Institution, civil society organisations as well as local, tribal, and religious leaders for this purpose.
* Ensure the protection of victims of slavery and slavery-like practices, as well as their access to justice, remedies, employment, and livelihood opportunities.
* Establish a dedicated fund for victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices, which can be used for their protection. Conduct effective criminal asset recovery for this purpose.
* Make civil registration easier for those who do not have identity documents, including migrant workers and displaced persons.
* Ensure equal access to education, public services, lands, and decent work for all Mauritanians without discrimination of any kind.
* Prevent and address violence against women and girls by enacting the bill on this issue as soon as possible.
* Ensure equal treatment for foreign workers in terms of the working conditions and access to basic public services such as health and social care, as well as free education for their children.
* Explicitly include the elimination of descent-based slavery and related practices in TAAZOUR’s mandate and allocate adequate resources to the agency, including in terms of means, training, and expertise.
* Promote balanced ethnic and gender representation in public offices, law enforcement and armed forces, particularly at a senior leadership level.
* Implement reasonable and proportionate positive/affirmative measures to facilitate economic, social, and cultural integration of victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices.
* Formalise informal jobs such as domestic work as expeditiously as possible in order to protect the rights of all workers and prevent them from falling into slavery and other slavery-like practices.
* Work with employers and businesses, including sub-contractors, to promote human rights due diligence in the workplace in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
* Encourage the Government and other stakeholders to strengthen their cooperation with the UN system in Mauritania to address all forms of discrimination faced by groups at risks, including victims of slavery and other slavery-like practices in line with Sustainable Development Goals.
* Tackle the deep-rooted culture of denial of slavery by formally recognising its existence by the highest level of the government and communicating this clearly to the whole nation using the specific term “slavery.”
* Collect data on slavery and other slavery like practices, as well as on gender, race, and ethnicity to address inequality and discrimination more effectively.
* Establish a multi-stakeholder body to monitor the progress on the implementation of the Roadmap annually.