

International Humanist and Ethical Union
UN Human Rights Council: 16th Session (28 February to 25 March 2011)
Item 6: UPR Report on Mauritania
Speaker: IHEU Representative Roy Brown: Friday 18 March 2011

Slavery and the Death Penalty in Mauritania

Mr President

We welcome the acceptance by Mauritania of 88 of the 139 recommendations and their claim that a further 24 recommendations have already been implemented or are in progress. Yet it is clear that despite the law of 2007 there has been little progress regarding slavery and slavery-like practices.

Mr President, the culture of slavery in Mauritania has deep racial and cultural roots, with an estimated 18% of the population held in slavery or slavery-like conditions. Most, if not all, are descendants of black Africans abducted into slavery, the *haratin*. Many face daily beatings and rape; and most of them are brainwashed into believing that disobeying their masters will deny them entry into paradise.

Yet it is clear from the report [para 50] that the government are in denial. We have heard suggestions that since slavery was abolished by law what we are now seeing is a post-slavery phenomenon. We wonder, Mr President, how the slaves can tell the difference?

Merely changing the law – or worse – attempting to redefine the phenomenon – will do nothing to help these people without serious attempts to implement the law, and the introduction of a system of compensation for victims.

We are also dismayed by Mauritania's rejection of the recommendations regarding homosexuality and the death penalty. We urge the government to reconsider its refusal to remove the provisions in the penal code that permit the death penalty for homosexuality, and to ensure that the death penalty is not applied to consensual same-sex relations between adults.

We urge the government of Mauritania, particularly as a member state of this Council, to take a far more pro-active role in educating *all* levels of society in basic human rights and in their responsibilities under international law. .

Thank you, sir.