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Mauritania: A political party called "Alliance populaire progressiste" (APP), especially the treatment of its members under the regime of Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, and the party's situation since the coup d'état on 3 August 2005 (12 December 1984 - November 2005)

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The information in the following four paragraphs was provided in a 15 November 2005 telephone interview with the President of SOS Slavery Mauritania (SOS Esclaves Mauritanie). SOS Slavery Mauritania is an anti-slavery human rights organization in Mauritania that is a member of the National Forum for Human Rights (Forum national des droits de l'homme, FONADH) and the World Organization Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT) and has observer status at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (Commission Africaine des droits de l'homme et des peuples, CADHP) (SOS Slavery 25 July 2005).

The People's Progressive Alliance (Alliance populaire progressiste, APP) is a legally recognized political party in Mauritania. It is made up mainly of former members of Action for Change (Action pour le changement, AC), a political party that was dissolved in 2002 after government authorities banned it. The APP is the only political party in Mauritania fighting slavery and advocating for equitable representation of the black population in the various political institutions.

Under the regime of former president Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, the APP was not on good terms with the government because of its anti-slavery protests. As a result, some of its members and leaders, in particular, Secretary General Messaoud Ould Belkheir, were arrested and imprisoned a number of times. The latest arrests were in March 2005, when two female APP members were arrested and detained for a month in the Nouakchott prison for women, primarily because they had accompanied a journalist who was investigating a case of slavery in the village of Maderdra; however, their membership in the APP was a [translation] "aggravating factor".

As for the period after the coup d'état of 3 August 2005, the President of SOS Slavery Mauritania stated that, to his knowledge, no member of any opposition party, including the APP, has been singled out by the new Mauritanian authorities. He explained that on the contrary, the members of the Military Council for Justice and Democracy (Conseil militaire pour la justice et la démocratie, CMJD) currently in power, have declared an amnesty for all political prisoners, including those who had received life sentences for their alleged participation in previous failed coups.

According to the President of SOS Slavery Mauritania, it is too soon to pass judgment on the new leaders. He explained that they have implemented a process of cooperation with all opposition parties, including the APP, and that to date, the political climate is generally [translation] "calm."

According to the *Europa World Year Book 2005*, the APP was founded in 1991 and its Secretary General is Messaoud Boulkhar (2005, 2912). Boulkhar, whose last name sources indicate is written "Boukkehr"

(*Aujourd'hui Le Maroc* Aug. 2005) or "Boukheir" (ANGOP 20 Aug. 2005), is described as [translation] "one of the most virulent opponents of the deposed president ... [and as someone who] has been imprisoned a number of times" (*Aujourd'hui Le Maroc* Aug. 2005). The Angola Press Agency (ANGOP), referring to the new regime in Mauritania since 3 August 2005, states in an article that the leader of the APP met with Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, Chairman of the CMJD and President of Mauritania, to discuss humanitarian issues, and slavery in particular (20 Aug. 2005). According to the same source, "the meeting fell within consultations between the new regime, political parties and the civil society" (ANGOP 20 Aug. 2005).

As for how APP members are treated under the regime of President Ould Taya, a press release from the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) indicates that Aïchetou Mint El Hadar (Aïchetou Mint Abdel Latif according to her official papers) and Moya Mint Boyah, SOS Slavery supporters and members of the APP, were released on 14 April 2005 after being detained for a month in the Nouakchott prison for women (FIDH 19 Apr. 2005). They had been accused of endangering and colluding to endanger state security (*ibid.*; see also SOS Slavery 22 Mar. 2005). In addition, two sources mentioned the January 1997 arrest of a number of opposition party leaders, including APP leaders, because of their [translation] "dubious relationships with Libya" (CEAN n.d.; see also *Political Handbook of the World: 2000-2002* 2003, 714).

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Internet sites, including: AllAfrica, Amnesty International (AI), BBC Africa, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group (ICG), UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Missionary International Service News Agency (MISNA), United States Department of State.


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