



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Senegal and Mauritania: Treatment of Mauritians in Senegal; whether or not Senegal grants permanent residency and/or citizenship to Mauritanian exiles or children of exiled black Mauritians, and procedures involved; whether stateless black Mauritians returning to Mauritania have their nationality status returned (2003 - August 2005)

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### Treatment of Mauritians in Senegal

Sources estimate that as of August 2005, approximately 20,000 refugees from Mauritania are on Senegalese territory, living along the border with Mauritania (UN 5 Aug. 2005; *ibid.* 5 June 2005, 1; USCRI 2004a), in about 280 refugee settlements spread across four departments (subdivisions of regions) (UN June 2005, 1). Since 1996, these refugees have been receiving only minimal support in the form of health care, education and drinking water (USCRI 2004a), from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which "withdrew from the area several years [prior to 2004]" (PANA 2 Jan. 2004). As well, some 2,000 to 3,000 Mauritanian refugees live in the capital, Dakar (UN June 2005, 9).

The Mauritanian refugees "live side-by-side with local residents" with whom they share ethnic and linguistic characteristics (UN 5 Aug. 2005; see also *ibid.* June 2005, 9).

Most do not have access to land, and some women earn money through running small businesses set up with the help of UNHCR loans (*ibid.* 5 Aug. 2005).

The Panafrican News Agency (PANA) stated that Mauritanian refugees organized protests to draw attention to their condition prior to a visit by former Mauritanian president Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya on 17 February 2005 (24 Feb. 2005). According to a UNHCR report, "the quality and security of their livelihoods are extremely varied" (UN June 2005, 1). The UNHCR report indicates that some Mauritanian refugees "integrated into the Senegalese economy" might be reluctant to return to Mauritania knowing they could earn a better income in Senegal (*ibid.*, 10).

### Access to permanent residency or citizenship in Senegal

The 2004 report of the organization U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) cited that, in total, 500 Mauritanian refugees had applied for permanent residency in Senegal "several years ago," without acknowledgement by Senegalese authorities (USCRI 2004a). Sources indicated difficulties for refugees wishing to obtain identification documents: "[i]n 2000, the Senegalese government abruptly halted efforts to register Mauritanian refugees and abandoned plans to provide them with identity cards" (*ibid.*; see also *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005b, Sec. 2d).

According to the UNHCR, 300 Mauritanian refugees have been granted refugee status in Senegal while others have only a [translation] "receipt for the request of a refugee identity card" (*récépissé de dépôt pour une demande de carte d'identité de réfugié*) (UN Feb. 2005).

Two Mauritanian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have asked the Mauritanian government to provide identity cards for refugees and to ensure they can return to Mauritania, and have denounced the fact that only 10 per cent of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal possess identification documents (PANA 24 Feb. 2005).

### Stateless black Mauritanian returnees

Mauritanian refugees were expelled from Mauritania in 1989 and 1990 (USCRI 2004a). Apparently, Mauritanian authorities "claimed that the black and nomadic populations were not citizens" (ibid. 2004b).

*Country Reports 2004* indicated that "unsupervised" and "informal" repatriations have occurred in the absence of an agreement between Senegal and Mauritania (28 Feb. 2005b, Sec. 2d), even though "[r]efugee leaders have regularly asserted that the population will not repatriate until Mauritania guarantees their citizenship and reimburses them for lost property" (USCRI 2004a). Since the late 1990s, between 30,000 and 60,000 refugees have repatriated (ibid. 2004b).

Mauritanian refugee groups issued a declaration in 2000 stating that most refugees who repatriated were denied a citizenship card and that their freedom of movement was also limited within Mauritania (ibid.). On the other hand, the UNHCR reported that "most returnees recovered their land and identity papers" (ibid.). According to the USCRI, this positive assessment followed irregular monitoring by the UNHCR (ibid.).

The possibility of receiving identity papers varied from one region to another: some of the 1995 returnees had not received their identification cards by the end of 2004 (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005a, Sec 2d).

Furthermore, the UNHCR stated that obtaining an identification card is not easy, since one has to provide a [translation] "certificate of nationality," to apply for an identification card, and the certificate of nationality itself requires one's birth certificate as well as the birth or death certificate of one's parent (UN Feb. 2005).

In mid-2005, the Rally for Equality and Development (RED), a Mauritanian NGO, asked the military government to establish an institution that would be in charge of the "return, compensation and reintegration" of Mauritanian refugees from Senegal and Mali (PANA 14 Aug. 2005).

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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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** Africa Confidential, Afrique Express, Afrom News, Fédération internationale des droits de l'homme (FIDH), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project, *Le Soleil* (Dakar), *Sud Quotidien* (Dakar).

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