



December 6, 2017

President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz
Islamic Republic of Mauritania
Ministère du Secrétariat Général à la Présidence
B.P.184 Nouakchott, Mauritania
via Fax: +222 525 85 52

Dear President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz,

We, the undersigned international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), ask you to ensure that blogger [Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed](#), also known by the name of Mohamed Cheikh Ould M'kaitir, regains his freedom since he has served his sentence. We also urge you to take steps to guarantee Mohamed's safety upon his release.

A Mauritanian court [sentenced](#) Mohamed to death in December 2014 on apostasy-related charges after he published an article titled "Religion, religiosity, and craftsman," in which he criticized the Mauritanian caste system. The court ruled that the article was blasphemous to the Prophet Muhammad, despite the blogger repenting in court and saying he did not intend to insult the prophet. Based on Mohamed's repentance, an appeals court in the city of Nouadhibou on November 9, 2017, [reduced](#) Mohamed's death sentence to two years in prison and ordered him to pay a fine of 60,000 Mauritanian ouguiya (\$172).

Having spent more than three years in prison, Mohamed was scheduled to be released, yet he remains in custody, according to a November 16 [press statement](#) from the former Justice Minister Ibrahim Ould Daddah. The blogger's relatives told CPJ that they have not been able to visit him or confirm his whereabouts.

Since Mohamed's imprisonment three years ago, preachers have [called](#) for his death. Moreover, your cabinet on November 16 [approved](#) a bill to amend Article 306 of the penal code that would punish "defamation to God, the Prophet Muhammad, Holy Books, angels or prophets" by death. Under the

bill, repentance would not allow authorities to reduce the sentence or drop charges as they had [previously done](#) in Mohamed's case. In his November 16 press statement, then Justice Minister Ibrahim Ould Daddah [said](#) that the law will not be applied retroactively, but Mohamed's continued detention is deeply concerning to us.

In an April 14 interview with *Rcadio France Internationale*, Your Excellency [said](#) that you will ensure Mohamed's safety, just like any other Mauritanian, once the court orders his release. We urge you to ensure his prompt release and safety, regardless of political pressure.

We also urge you, Your Excellency, to reaffirm your vision of Mauritania as you described it in the interview: A country where people can practice democracy and have the freedom to write "whatever they want." Abolishing laws that curtail press freedom, and freedom of speech, would be a step towards this vision.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Sherif Mansour
Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator
Committee to Protect Journalists

Christophe Deloire
Secretary General
Reporters Without Borders

Carles Torner
Executive Director
PEN International

Eric Goldstein
Deputy Director of Middle East and North Africa division
Human Rights Watch

Karin Deutsch Karlekar
Director, Free Expression at Risk Programs
PEN America

Maran Turner
Executive Director
Freedom Now

Stephen Cockburn
Deputy Regional Director Research, West and Central Africa Office
Amnesty International