INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION (IFOR) and CONSCIENCE AND PEACE TAX INTERNATIONAL (CPTI)

Submission to the 107th Session of the Human Rights Committee for the attention of the Country Report Task Force on MAURITANIA

(Military service, conscientious objection and related issues)


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Legislation passed in 1962, shortly after independence, reportedly provided for two years' obligatory military service, but was seemingly never implemented. In 2009, Mauretania confirmed to the Committee on the Rights of the Child that all military recruitment was voluntary. In these circumstances it is unlikely that the absence of any provisions allowing for conscientious objection to military service will ever be an issue in practice, although of course the possibility that a serving member of the armed forces might develop conscientious objections can never be ruled out, and any reporting States could be asked whether any requests for release on this basis had been made and what procedure was or would be followed in such circumstances.

On the wider issue of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, Mauretania might be asked to confirm that the freedoms granted to foreigners in the country, reported in paras 163 and 164 of its Initial Report, are also enjoyed by its own citizens.

The most disturbing issue with regard to military recruitment in Mauretania is the presence of legislation which would exceptionally permit enlistment from an age as young as 16. Mauretania has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, but this question came up when it submitted its Second Periodic Report under the Convention itself. In its replies to the list of issues it stated:

“The minimum age for recruitment to the armed forces is 18 years, according to Act No. 64.130 of 14 July 1964. However, this can be waived by permission of the Minister of Defence, who can recruit soldiers from the age of 16. Under Act No. 62.215 of 18 December 1962 on the armed forces, any Mauritanian citizen aged 18 and over may join the army. Between the ages of 16 and 18, such enrolment is subject to a decision by the Minister of Defence and the consent of the parents or guardians. (...) The age for recruitment to the National Guard is at least 20, according to article 18 of Decree No. 80.286, implementing Order No. 80.174 of 22 July 1980 on the organization and status of the National Guard

The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Mauretania “raise the minimum age of military recruitment to 18 in all circumstances, in accordance with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.”

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2 CRC/C/MRT/Q2/Add.1, 22nd April 2009, Para 17b
3 Ibid
4 CRC/C/MRT/CO/2, 17th June 2009, Para 72a
MAURITANIA: Basic Information

Population (November 2011, estimated\(^5\)) \hspace{1cm} 3,282,000

All military recruitment voluntary.
   Legislation from 1962 which allowed conscription was never implemented.
   No provision ever made for conscientious objection to military service.

Minimum recruitment age\(^6\): \hspace{1cm} 16

Manpower reaching “militarily significant age” in 20107: \hspace{1cm} 36,116
Armed forces active strength, November 20118: \hspace{1cm} 15,870
   as a percentage of the number of men reaching “military age”:\hspace{1cm} 43.9%

Defence budget US $m equivalent, 20109 \hspace{1cm} 107
Per capita \hspace{1cm} $33
As % of GDP \hspace{1cm} 3.0%

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\(^5\) Source: The Military Balance 2012 (International Institute of Strategic Studies, London), which bases its estimate on “demographic statistics taken from the US Census Bureau”.
\(^6\) Source: Child Soldiers International (formerly Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Louder than words: an agenda for action to end state use of child soldiers. London, September 2012.
\(^7\) Source: CIA World Factbook. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html. The male population reaching “militarily significant age” - defined by the source as 16 - is more meaningful than total population in assessing the comparative impact of military recruitment in different countries.
\(^8\) As quoted by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (London) in The Military Balance 2012.
\(^9\) Ibid