Law Threatens Mauritanian Anti-Slavery Activists

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IRA USA

http://ira-usa.org/threats-to-mauritanian-anti-slavery-activists/

Continuing its crackdown of civil rights and freedoms, the Mauritanian government has proposed a law to further restrict the Mauritanian human rights organizations. The proposed law will impose a stringent review to determine whether organizations are “anti-government”.  Those organizations or proposed organizations that do not pass this review will be denied any right to exist and will be denied the right to organize demonstrations or protests.

The law requires all organizations to go through a process of prior authorization. The existing law, dating to the colonial era, required mere notification of the government of a group’s existence.  According to Maina Kiai, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of freedom of peaceful assembly for the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, the rationale behind prior notification is “to allow State authorities to facilitate the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to take measures to protect public safety.”

The proposed law requiring prior authorization of NGOs greatly threatens civil freedoms because it allows government officials to  prevent any sort of opposition movement from organizing. In Mauritania, the anti-slavery movement is considered an opposition movement.

The law also lays out strict punishments for organizations that act without authorization but fails to be clear in regards to when an organization would be charged with a crime. The Mauritanian government continues to keep IRA leaders in prison. With this law, the Mauritanian government will strengthen its crack down on the defenders of freedom and justice, imprisoning many more.

Maina Kiai and other human rights leaders have condemned Mauritania’s actions and urge the nation to follow international human rights norms and standards. The international community must pressure Mauritania to cease working on this law and to allow freedom of expression for all activists in Mauritania.