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Mauritania

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Introduction and preparation of the report

1. This report has been submitted by the Government of Mauritania for the third review cycle of the universal periodic review. It is the result of consultation between the Government, the National Assembly, local elected officials, judges, the National Human Rights Commission, the national mechanism for the prevention of torture, civil society organizations and the United Nations system.
2. It was drafted in accordance with the guidelines set out in Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and Council decision 17/119 on general guidelines for the preparation of information under the universal periodic review. It was drawn up against the backdrop of the constraints imposed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is a reflection of the Government's determination to fulfil its international commitments.
3. Mauritania accepted 140 of the recommendations made at the close of the second cycle on 3 November 2015. In 2016, the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society conducted a campaign to raise awareness about these recommendations.
4. In March 2018, the Office of the Commissioner, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), developed a national action plan for the implementation of the recommendations made in 2015, which was validated during a consultation workshop that brought together representatives of the various ministries concerned and civil society organizations.
5. On 30 October 2019, a midpoint review workshop on the implementation of the action plan was organized in partnership with OHCHR, with the participation of all stakeholders.
6. The present report was prepared in stages, as follows:
 - Consultations with stakeholders to collect data and other information to be provided on the implementation of the recommendations
 - Drafting of the national report by the Technical Committee for the Preparation of Reports
 - Organization of a series of consultations with representatives of State institutions, the National Assembly, the National Commission on Human Rights, the national preventive mechanism and civil society organizations for the validation of the report
 - Submission of the draft report to the Government for adoption
7. The report is structured around the following main themes: (I) development of the legal and institutional framework; (II) developments in the promotion and protection of human rights; (III) status of implementation of accepted recommendations; (IV) achievements, best practices, difficulties and constraints; (V) priorities, initiatives and commitments; and, finally, (VI) expectations and needs in terms of technical and financial assistance.

I. Development of the legal and institutional framework

A. Legal framework

8. The legal framework for the promotion and protection of human rights has progressed in terms of the number and quality of laws adopted, including:
 - Constitutional Referendum Acts No. 2017-021 and No. 2017-022, amending the 1991 Constitution
 - Organic Act No. 2018-008 on the Promotion of Women's Access to Electoral Mandates and Elective Office
 - Organic Act No. 2017-016 on the Composition, Organization and Functioning of the National Human Rights Commission

- Organic Act No. 2018-005 amending certain provisions of the Organic Act establishing the Independent National Electoral Commission
- Organic Act No. 2018-006 amending certain provisions of the Organic Act on the Election of Deputies to the National Assembly
- Organic Act No. 2018-007 on the Election of Deputies Representing Mauritians Residing Abroad
- Organic Act No. 2018-009 amending certain provisions of the Organic Act on the Establishment of Communes
- Organic Act No. 2018-010 on Regions
- Act No. 2018-023, the Criminalization of Discrimination Act
- Act No. 2017-020, the Personal Data Protection Act
- Act No. 2016-014, the Anti-Corruption Act
- Act No. 2017-025, the Reproductive Health Act
- Act No. 2018-024, the General Child Protection Code Act
- Act No. 2018-033, the National Police Regulations Act
- Act No. 2020-016 on the Organization of the Legal Profession
- Act No. 2020-007, the Consumer Protection Act
- Act on the Punishment of Information Manipulation
- Act on the Prevention and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons and the Protection of Victims
- Act on Combating Smuggling of Migrants
- Act No. 2016-006 outlining the general principles of the information society
- Act No. 2016-007, the Cybercrime Prevention Act
- Decree No. 2016-002 establishing the seat and jurisdiction of criminal courts that specialize in combating slavery
- Decree No. 2016-077 establishing a National Day against Slavery-Like Practices
- Decree No. 027-2019 establishing a National Day against Discriminatory Practices
- Decree No. 2017-051 establishing the National Council on Children
- Decree establishing the National Monitoring Commission on Women's and Girls' Rights

9. Other laws are currently being reviewed, including one on combating violence against women and girls, which was approved by the Government on 6 May 2020 and is awaiting adoption by the National Assembly.

10. Mauritania has ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), and the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144). It has also ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

11. Under its constitutional system, which gives priority to the rule of international law over domestic laws, these conventions are systematically incorporated into the national legal order and apply as soon as they are published.

B. Institutional framework

12. The institutional framework for human rights has undergone several changes that have involved reform of the main State institutions, such as the National Assembly, the

Constitutional Council, the High Council for Fatwas and Administrative Appeals and the National Human Rights Commission, and the institution of the region, the national preventive mechanism and the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour).

13. New institutions have come into being in the judicial sphere, including three criminal courts specializing in the fight against slavery and slavery-like practices, three *moughataa* (departmental) courts, the specialized anti-corruption (prosecution and investigation) offices, the criminal court specializing in the fight against corruption and the Office for the Management of Frozen, Seized or Confiscated Property and Recovery of the Proceeds of Crime.

1. National Assembly

14. Following the constitutional reform of 2017, the parliament moved to a unicameral system: the National Assembly. The number of deputies increased from 94 to 157, distributed across all constituencies, based on the size of the population and in close keeping with the proportionality rule, with the candidates standing for election on behalf of political parties. This new institution now reflects diversity and the multiparty system through its composition, which groups together 22 political parties.

2. Constitutional Council

15. The Constitutional Council, following its reform, was enlarged to enable the Institution nationale de l'opposition démocratique (national coalition of opposition parties) and the two opposition parties that took the second and third largest number of seats in the National Assembly, respectively, to participate in the Council. Furthermore, the Council holds session, with its most senior member acting as presiding officer, when it is called on to declare a vacancy or prolonged absence of power.

3. Economic, Social and Environmental Council

16. The sphere of activity of the Economic and Social Council has been broadened to take on an environmental dimension.

4. The High Council for Fatwas and Administrative Appeals

17. The High Council for Fatwas and Administrative Appeals, created through a merger of the Office of the Ombudsman, the High Islamic Council and the High Council for Fatwas and Administrative Appeals, is charged with the task of issuing fatwas and settling disputes between citizens and the administration through mediation.

5. General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour)

18. The main missions of the General Delegation are to ensure that disadvantaged segments of the population are integrated into the development process, to coordinate the implementation of the national strategy on social protection, to identify, design, implement and monitor solidarity and social inclusion programmes and to facilitate access to basic services and ownership of land in poverty-stricken areas.

6. National preventive mechanism on torture

19. The mission of the national preventive mechanism, an independent institution established in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, is to prevent torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in places of deprivation of liberty. It thus makes regular visits, scheduled or unannounced, to such places. Established in 2015, its mandate was renewed in 2020.

7. National Human Rights Commission

20. The Commission, an independent and autonomous advisory institution with a broad membership, is responsible for advice, observation, warning, mediation and evaluation with

regard to respect for human rights. It provides opinions on matters relating to the promotion and protection of human rights and respect for individual and collective freedoms.

21. Its new status as a constitutional institution strengthens its rootedness and independence within the Mauritanian institutional framework and the selection criteria of its members take into account professionalism, competence and pluralism, in accordance with the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Accreditation of national human rights institutions and the requirements of the Paris Principles.

8. Regions

22. The mission of the regions is land-use planning and development, the promotion of investment, the design and implementation of regional development projects, plans and schemes. The regions, in accordance with the constitutional principle of free regional administration, is an administrative area with legal personality and financial autonomy.

II. Developments in the promotion and protection of human rights

23. Mauritania has been a member of the Human Rights Council since October 2019.

A. Civil and political rights

24. Since it was last up for the second cycle of the universal periodic review, Mauritania carried out constitutional reform in 2017 and organized legislative, regional and municipal elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019. These elections are distinguished by the democratic and peaceful changeover of power between two elected presidents.

25. These elections were supervised and organized by the Independent National Electoral Commission.

26. The number of civil society organizations has exceeded 6,000 national associations, 62 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 18,000 cooperatives, 34 groups of affiliated trade unions, the largest of which is headed by a woman, and more than 400 trade unions.

27. The number of political parties has been reduced from 103 to 25 as a result of the enforcement of the Political Parties Act, which provides for the automatic dissolution of political parties that do not obtain 1 per cent of the votes cast in two general municipal elections or abstain from participating in two consecutive elections.

28. The Code of Criminal Procedure and Code of Civil, Commercial and Administrative Procedure have been amended to provide greater protection of human rights through the abolition of civil imprisonment in civil cases and restrictions on such imprisonment in criminal cases.

29. The commitment of Mauritania to upholding the right of peoples to peace and security at the national and international levels is reflected by the country's participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Central Africa and the counter-terrorism and anti-crime efforts made within the framework of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

30. Support for the long-term maintenance of freedom of the press and the development and professionalization of public media was bolstered through the following:

- Extension of rural radio stations and FM service and the establishment of regional stations of Mauritania National Television
- Creation of a parliamentary television channel
- Public backing of the private press through subsidies and coverage of 85 per cent of the printing costs by the Government Printing House for newspapers that meet the required ethical and technical profession criteria

- Establishment of an authority responsible for the organization and regulation of advertising space

31. The revitalization of decentralization efforts has registered significant progress through the following:

- Adoption of a national strategy for decentralization and local development
- Launch of the Local Economic Development and Community Initiative Programme, which aims to improve the living conditions of the population
- Strengthening action in the area of civil status through the removal of technical obstacles that prevent access by all Mauritians to civil status documents. In this context, missions to enrol persons and issue civil status documents have been organized for the entire diaspora.

32. As part of the fight against corruption, the Anti-Corruption Act punishes embezzlement and ensures transparent and balanced management of public resources. The establishment of a first-ever parliamentary committee of inquiry was an important tool of parliamentary action and shows the active role that deputies play in monitoring government action.

33. A minimum quota of places for women on electoral lists for legislative, regional and municipal elections has been introduced in such a way that constituencies with three seats must have at least one female candidate, ranked either first or second. In constituencies with more than three seats, with the exception of the national list of women deputies, each list must be composed alternately of one candidate of each sex, provided that the difference between the number of candidates of each sex is not more than one. For regional elections, women are now entitled to a minimum quota of two to five places on electoral lists.

34. The number of women deputies in the National Assembly has risen to 30. The number of female council members is 1,184, or 31 per cent. The number of regional council members who are women is 101, or 35.2 per cent. The Regional Council of Nouakchott is presided over by a woman.

35. The bill to combat violence against women and girls aims to prevent violence against them, establish legal procedures to protect victims, make reparation for the injury and punish the perpetrators.

36. The National Programme for the Promotion of the Family and Its Stability (Ravah) and multisectoral platforms to combat violence against women have contributed to strengthening the measures to protect the rights of women.

37. The General Child Protection Code criminalizes child marriage and female genital mutilation.

38. The implementation of the road map for the eradication of contemporary forms of slavery was completed within a framework of dialogue between the public authorities, partners and civil society organizations. It has been the subject of three reviews organized in partnership with OHCHR. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, took part in the last review. These reviews led to the conclusion that all the relevant recommendations have been implemented.

39. Legal aid is granted to persons with limited income. Legal aid offices have been set up and introduced to the wilaya (regional) courts.

40. The appropriations for the care of prisoners has increased significantly since 2016. The operating budget of the prison administration has increased from 35,161,000 ouguiyas (UM) in 2016 to UM 64,115,418 in 2020, an increase of more than 82 per cent.

41. Health and hygiene in the establishments have been improved, particularly in the context of COVID-19. A facility specifically dedicated to new arrivals has been built, with systematic testing and placement in isolation for observation during the requisite period. The prison population has also decreased. Since 2016, more than 559 people have received pardons or reduced sentences.

42. Physical conditions of life in detention have been improved in all prisons. The rehabilitation of some prisons and the construction of new ones in Bir Moghrein, Nouakchott Sud and Nbeika have helped to curb prison overcrowding.

43. Programmes aimed at the social and vocational reintegration of prisoners have been implemented. For example, several vocational training activities and workshops and apprenticeships have been organized in trades such as welding and metalwork, plumbing, building electrics, text processing and computer maintenance, brickmaking, market gardening, hairdressing, artisanal bakery and others.

44. In 2019, 75 young inmates, aged between 18 and 30 years, were referred to the Vocational Training Centre in Rosso, where they received training leading to a qualification in various trades. At the end of the training, they received equipment and funding and were fully integrated into working life.

B. Economic, social and cultural rights

45. The Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity, adopted in 2016, constitutes the framework for public policy on development. This strategy aims to achieve strong, diversified, sustainable and inclusive economic growth by 2030.

46. The economic situation was characterized by the implementation of the public investment programme, inflation control and improvements in the internal and external balance. Gross domestic product per capita grew by 3.6 per cent in 2019.

47. As part of the implementation of the “Taahoudaty” (My Commitments) programme, in January 2020, the Government launched a social programme called “Ewlewiyyatt” (First Priorities), comprising the largest number of simultaneous projects in the country’s history, in response to the most pressing needs of the people. This programme, which is financed by the State, is aimed, among other things, at:

- Drop in electricity prices by 20 per cent for 2020, reaching 60 per cent of the poorest households
- Construction of 42 secondary schools, 79 primary schools and more than 400 classrooms
- Implementation of a national programme for the development of agricultural lands and the construction and rehabilitation of dams
- Development of microfinance in rural areas aiming at providing access to basic financial services at a lower cost to rural populations
- Promotion of women’s entrepreneurship through capacity-building in the areas of leadership and business development and management for women and girls
- Economic inclusion of persons with disabilities through the financing of income- and employment-generating microprojects for economic empowerment
- Extension of cash transfer programmes to reach 70,000 households in extreme poverty in 2020
- Promotion of food security through the free distribution of food in built-up areas and areas with significant rainfall deficits
- Intensification of the fight against malnutrition among women and children through the opening of 350 outpatient nutritional recovery and education centres, which will reach 4,200 pregnant and nursing women and 16,800 children with acute and moderate malnutrition

48. The implementation rate of this programme, as of 28 August 2020, reached 54.05 per cent.

49. In order to meet the new economic and social challenges and challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has had to reorder its priorities. Three major

programmes have been initiated and implemented: Priority Programme No. 1, the Special Pastoral Programme and the National Solidarity and Pandemic Response Plan.

50. A set of coherent actions with an immediate and significant impact on the well-being of the populations have been initiated in the form of the Priority Programme. This programme, which is aimed at increasing purchasing power, access to basic services and job creation, has reached nearly 2 million people and has created more than 6,000 jobs, both casual and permanent, at a total cost of more than UM 4.1 billion.

51. The Special Pastoral Programme has been set up to help herders cope with the rainfall deficit for the 2019 winter feeding. This programme, which received funding of UM 1 billion, constituted a rapid and effective response to the basic and urgent needs of hundreds of thousands of stockbreeders.

52. From the very outbreak of COVID-19, the Government quickly took the necessary measures. Thus, a response plan was put in place on 25 March 2020, including the following key measures:

- Implementation of preventive measures through border closures, curfews and lockdown
- Launch of public awareness campaigns throughout the country
- Creation of a national solidarity fund
- Purchase of equipment and medicines
- Direct financial and food support to tens of thousands of poor families
- Abolition of taxes and customs duties on essential products and municipal taxes on small-scale fishery products
- Coverage of water and electricity bills for poor and rural households
- Organization of the repatriation of nationals stranded abroad
- Deployment of 88 rapid response health teams
- Establishment of three testing centres in Nouakchott and two laboratories specialized in the diagnosis of COVID-19
- Establishment of two specialized critical care centres
- Establishment of an isolation centre with a capacity of 1,120 beds

53. The response plan and the management of the health crisis made it possible to considerably limit the impact of the pandemic on the economy and public finances.

54. The creation of the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion contributes significantly to the improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of disadvantaged populations. In addition to the Tekavoul cash transfer and Emel (Hope) food security programmes, the fight against discrimination and the achievement of equality between men and women are ensured through the following three flagship programmes:

- Cheyla programme for the modernization of communes and *adwabas* (former slave settlements)
- Dari programme for the construction of 10,000 social housing units
- Elbaraka programme for economic activities, income-generating activities, entrepreneurship and microfinance

55. With a view to optimizing women's empowerment and active participation, a programme for the creation of women's microenterprises in aid of 6,000 women has been set up to ensure that women's skills are given due visibility and women are better represented in decision-making bodies.

56. The Government has covered the health insurance contributions of 2,000 persons with disabilities, which has enabled them to receive quality care. It has also set up an economic

integration programme for 5,300 persons with disabilities, including 3,800 in Nouakchott and 1,500 in the interior of the country.

57. In 2019, the Government adopted the national employment promotion strategy, making youth employment a priority.

III. Status of implementation of accepted recommendations

A. Recommendations on the strengthening of the legal and institutional human rights framework

1. Ratification of international human rights instruments (recommendations 127.1, 128.1 and 128.2)

58. At the recommendation of ILO and on the occasion of the celebration of the Organization's centenary, the Government ratified ILO Conventions No. 143 and No. 144 relating to the protection of migrants as a matter of priority.

59. The process of ratifying the Conventions referred to in the recommendations is under way.

2. Harmonization of domestic legislation with international instruments (recommendations 126.1, 126.2, 126.8, 126.36, 127.4, 128.3, 128.4)

60. The main human rights treaties to which Mauritania has acceded have all been published in the official gazette. The following laws have been adopted to ensure consistency in the domestic legal framework by transposing the treaty provisions that are binding on the country into them:

- Criminalization of Discrimination Act
- General Child Protection Code Act
- Act on Combating Smuggling of Migrants
- Act on the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons
- Reproductive Health Act
- Code of Criminal Procedure and the Code of Civil, Commercial and Administrative Procedure
- Anti-Corruption Act

61. The Criminalization of Torture Act has reproduced the definition of torture used in the Convention against Torture word for word. The national preventive mechanism was put in place.

62. The acquisition, possession and use of firearms by civilians are governed by Act No. 63-106, as amended by Acts No. 69-067, No. 74-177 and No. 76-024.

3. Strengthening national human rights institutions (recommendations 126.6, 126.7, 126.9, 126.10, 126.11, 126.13, 127.2, 127.5, 127.6, 127.7, 127.9, 127.10, 127.11, 127.12, 127.13)

63. The independence of the National Human Rights Commission has been strengthened in accordance with the Paris Principles. This institution has been elevated to the status of a constitutional institution with administrative and financial autonomy. It has also been given the necessary human and financial resources for its operating activities.

64. The Commission's mandate covers, inter alia, the promotion and protection of women's rights. The Commission has its headquarters at the National Committee to Combat Gender-based Violence, including Female Genital Mutilation.

65. The Commission, the national preventive mechanism and civil society organizations enjoy technical and financial support from OHCHR, the German Agency for International Cooperation, the European Union and other partners.

66. The national preventive mechanism was established in 2016. It has been given the necessary resources for its operating activities. It benefits from a budget line of more than UM 12 million, which is included in the general State budget. The Commission's independence is guaranteed by law and its articles of association and rules of procedure, which come from the deliberations of its own members.

67. The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society is responsible for the preparation of State reports and monitoring the implementation of international human rights obligations, in accordance with Decree No. 263-2018 of 7 August 2018. An interministerial technical committee, composed of representatives of the departments concerned, assists the Office in this mission. The National Human Rights Commission and OHCHR sit on this committee as observers.

68. The National Agency for the Elimination of the Legacy of Slavery, Social Integration and the Eradication of Poverty, Tadamoun, established pursuant to Decree No. 048-2013 of 28 March 2013, has been given the power to go to court and bring criminal indemnification proceedings in cases of slavery. It has brought such proceedings in 17 slavery cases. Following its dissolution, this mandate now falls to the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society.

69. In addition, the Agency had developed and implemented socioeconomic programmes targeting vulnerable groups, including descendants of former slaves. Within this framework, it has built schools and school cafeterias, health centres, social housing, mosques and schools (*mahadras*), dams and dykes. It has completed drinking water supply, borehole and agricultural development projects and implemented income-generating activities and cash transfer programmes in target areas. In order to facilitate access to these basic services, villages and camps of nomads and returnees have been grouped together on a voluntary basis.

70. Within the framework of the "My Commitments" programme, the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion, Taazour, has inherited most of the missions of the former Tadamoun Agency. The new institution is based on the social register of all households. A budget of UM 20 billion is being mobilized for this institution in order to strengthen the means of production, the purchasing power of poor persons and their access to education, health, drinking water, decent housing and energy.

71. A participatory process of consultation and dialogue aimed at improving the legal framework for associations led to the approval by the Council of Ministers of a bill on associations, networks and foundations.

72. Furthermore, there have been many support activities to increase the involvement of civil society in the national campaign to stop the spread of COVID-19. Examples of projects supported by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society include:

- Campaign for peace, social cohesion and development in Hodh ech Chargui and Guidimaka
- Project to improve the conditions of prisoners by providing support in the form of food and hygiene kits
- Support project for persons with disabilities
- Support project for migrants
- Support project for persons with albinism and persons living with HIV

73. A study on the review of the Non-State Actors Platform is being carried out. This review will allow for the necessary adjustments to be made in order to come up with the best possible umbrella organization to fulfil the objective of involving civil society in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

74. The process of developing a national strategy for the promotion and protection of human rights has begun, in collaboration with OHCHR.

75. Members of the Technical Committee for the Preparation of Reports have received training in drafting reports for treaty bodies, including the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The training has also been extended to representatives of certain human rights civil society organizations.

76. All activities for the promotion and protection of human rights, including community outreach caravans and public awareness campaigns, were carried out in consultation and close collaboration with civil society organizations.

4. Capacity-building for judicial staff (recommendations 126.22, 126.23, 126.31)

77. As part of the capacity-building of judicial and law enforcement personnel in the area of human rights, 31 training and awareness-raising workshops were organized from 2016 to 2019 for 491 persons, involving judges, clerks, criminal investigation officers, lawyers and administrators in the areas of legal aid, the fight against slavery and torture, prison management, trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants and social and legal support for children.

78. Some 22 training workshops for defenders of the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities were provided to 660 people, including 382 women.

5. Promotion of cooperation with human rights mechanisms (recommendations 126.5, 126.28, 126.29, 126.30)

79. Mauritania has accepted and organized the visits of the Special Rapporteurs on torture, in 2016, on human rights and extreme poverty, in 2016, and on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, in 2017. It has also received missions from the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, the International Labour Office, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Arab Commission for Human Rights and a joint mission of the European Union and the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States. Furthermore, international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have carried out working missions to Mauritania.

80. Most recently, Mauritania accepted requests for visits from two special procedures mandate holders to conduct missions, namely the Chair of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences.

81. Since the last review, reports have been submitted to the following treaty bodies: the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee against Torture, the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Committee on Migrant Workers, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

82. There was close interaction with international and regional human rights mechanisms, through the hosting and organizing of conferences and forums, including the twenty-seventh summit of the League of Arab States, in 2016, the thirty-first summit of the Heads of State of the African Union, in 2018, the sixty-second session of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, in 2018, and the preparatory forums relating to national human rights institutions and NGOs. In addition, Mauritania regularly participates in all international and regional human rights events, such as those of the Human Rights Council, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

83. On 1 January 2020, Mauritania once again became a member of the Human Rights Council. In 2020, it organized two summits of Heads of State of the Group of Five for the Sahel, which has its permanent headquarters in Nouakchott.

84. With regard to the maintenance of peace and security, Mauritania participates in peacekeeping efforts in the Central African Republic and in the fight against terrorism and organized crime within the framework of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. It set up the Women's Platform of the Group of Five for the Sahel and adopted its action plan. It has been hosting Malian refugees since 2012.

B. Combating trafficking in persons (legacy of slavery, torture, discrimination)

1. Eliminate the legacy of slavery (recommendations 126.21, 126.53–126.59, 127.3, 127.20, 127.24–127.59, 127.62)

85. As part of the implementation of the recommendations of the consensus-based road map to combat contemporary forms of slavery, Act No. 2007-048 was repealed and replaced by Act No. 2015-031. The new Act introduces a set of definitions to facilitate its application. It incorporates the offences provided for in the international conventions against slavery and makes them offences to which the statute of limitations does not apply. It requires the introduction of anti-slavery education in the curricula of initial and in-service training courses for the civilian and military personnel responsible for its implementation.

86. It also establishes specialized courts and provides victims with legal and judicial assistance, free legal proceedings and support from civil society organizations. Moreover, it provides for the enforcement of decisions, notwithstanding the lodging of an appeal.

87. The Act requires officers and agents of the criminal investigation service to follow up on reports of offences brought to their attention and to carry out the necessary investigations; it requires judges, on pain of civil action, to act with urgency by adopting all appropriate measures to guarantee the rights of victims.

88. As part of the implementation of this law, circulars from the Prosecutor General attached to the Supreme Court instruct members of the public prosecutor's office to pay special attention to investigations, prosecutions and the enforcement of decisions relating to slavery.¹

89. Adjudications in this respect have been intensified. Comprehensive jurisprudence is now available. Trials have been held and judgments handed down at all judicial levels. Since the advent of Act No. 2015-031, the criminal courts have set about deciding cases brought under the previous 2007 Act and have shown such concern that they have gone so far as to impose sentences for simple slavery-like insults. Eleven cases relating to slavery-like practices were tried. Penalties ranged from 1 to 20 years' imprisonment and substantial fines and there were two acquittals as well. The cases judged involved 15 perpetrators and accomplices. The offences committed relate to traditional slavery (9 cases), slavery-like insults (4) and contemporary forms of slavery (2).

90. In order to overcome the problems inherited from slavery in all its forms, socioeconomic programmes targeting the *adwabas* (former slave settlements) have been implemented. These programs include the construction and opening of primary and secondary schools, health centres, running water systems, dams and agricultural development projects and funding for income-generating activities.²

91. As part of the implementation of the road map for the eradication of contemporary forms of slavery, specialized courses have been introduced and provided with the necessary human, financial and material resources, and awareness-raising campaigns have been mounted.³

92. A project to combat forced labour has been launched with the support of ILO and the United States Department of Labor. Several training, awareness-raising and capacity-building activities for judges and court officials, law enforcement and security forces, civil

society actors and target populations have been carried out under this project, known as the Bridge Project.

93. In order to eliminate forced child labour, the Government had adopted a National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Child Labour, which seeks to improve the legal and institutional framework, strengthen the technical and operational capacities of the actors concerned and raise awareness about child labour and its worst forms.⁴ This plan is financed from the State's own resources and with the assistance of ILO through the Bridge Project.

94. The Government has established a National Commission to End Forced Marriage and Child Marriage. This commission has developed and implemented an action plan based on awareness-raising and the production of training aids. In addition to the provisions of the General Code for the Protection of Children, the Ordinance on Judicial Protection of Children and the Act on the Criminalization and Punishment of Slavery, the phenomenon of forced and early marriage is dealt with under the bill on combating violence against women and girls.

95. To combat trafficking in persons, the Government has adopted the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons. This action plan addresses all aspects related to the problem of trafficking. It provides the Government with an integrated planning tool to effectively put an end to this scourge in the long term.

96. The objectives of this plan are to prevent trafficking in persons by raising awareness, documenting the phenomenon, building the capacity of relevant actors, improving the legal framework for trafficking, ensuring all offenders are prosecuted in court, protecting victims and witnesses, assisting victims through social reintegration and voluntary return and promoting regional and international coordination and cooperation.

97. The plan of action is being implemented pursuant to laws on the prevention and punishment of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims and the fight against the smuggling of migrants.

2. Elimination of torture (recommendations 126.35, 126.37, 127.14)

98. Acts No. 2015-033 and No. 2015-034 have been adopted. The national preventive mechanism has been set up and provided with the necessary human and financial resources for its operating activities. It routinely makes regular and unannounced visits to all places of deprivation of liberty. During its first term, which has come to an end, the national preventive mechanism organized several capacity-building, training and awareness-raising sessions with the actors concerned, particularly judges, prosecutors, criminal investigation officers and members of civil society organizations. It has set up a complaints and reporting mechanism through mailboxes that it has installed in places of deprivation of liberty.

99. Under Act No. 2015-033, investigations into allegations of torture are now systematic. Whether or not to bring a prosecution depends on the results of an administrative or judicial investigation.⁵

3. Elimination of racial discrimination (recommendations 126.16–126.17)

100. The Criminalization of Discrimination Act was adopted in 2018. It incorporates the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination into the national legal system and introduces a National Day against Discriminatory Practices. This national day is celebrated on 9 January each year with the active participation of civil society.

101. The draft national plan of action against racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is being taken into account within the framework of the national strategy for strengthening social cohesion currently in the process of adoption.

102. Pending the implementation of this strategy, actions to combat discrimination have been undertaken by various departments in order to build the capacity of criminal justice actors and raise awareness among civil society organizations and the general public. This is the case with the training workshop for judges, public officials and representatives of civil society, organized by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian

Action and Relations with Civil Society in April 2019, on the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Criminalization of Discrimination Act.

C. Protection of the rights of specific groups (women, children, human rights defenders)

1. Promotion of women's rights (recommendations 126.3, 126.4, 126.12–126.15, 126.33, 126.34, 126.38–126.45, 126.47, 126.60, 127.56, 127.16–127.18, 127.21, 127.22)

103. The mechanism for implementing the National Strategy for Gender Mainstreaming was put in place in 2017. It comprises a national committee chaired by the Prime Minister and a gender monitoring group that brings together all departmental gender focal points and sector-based gender units established in the various ministries. The heads of these units and some NGOs have been trained on the National Strategy and gender-sensitive budgeting.

104. Women's political and public participation has been improved through the establishment of a national list of women deputies and a parity list at the Nouakchott level, the increase in the number of electoral constituencies to three seats, at least one of which is to be held by a woman, and the enlargement of other constituencies to four parity seats.

105. Women account for 19.6 per cent of deputies, 31 per cent of municipal councillors and 35 per cent of regional councillors. They account for 34.6 per cent of the public service workforce.

106. With a view to enhancing women's economic empowerment, the Government has implemented programmes to finance women's economic development in both urban and rural areas. These programmes include:

- Empowerment programme for 7,900 women under the "Ewlewiyyat" programme, including 1,900 women with disabilities
- Three women's savings and loan associations, in Ayoun, Tintane and Nouakchott
- Regional Union of Women's Banks of Gorgol, which includes the banks of Kaédi, Mbout, Monguel and Maghama
- Seventeen microfinance institutions in disadvantaged rural and peri-urban areas, bringing together nearly 90,000 women. The net lending of these institutions reached UM 223 million in loans. The resources of these institutions come from funds raised from women or granted by the State and its development partners, in particular the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the African Development Bank and the Oxford Famine Relief Organization (Oxfam)

107. The Agency for the Promotion of Savings and Loan Associations contribute to the empowerment of women with financing in the agriculture, crafts, tourism and service sectors.

108. Women's participation in the savings and microfinance credit sector is estimated at 70 per cent. There are also dozens of informal actors in the sector, including rotating savings and loan associations at the neighbourhood and village levels.

109. The bill to combat violence against women and girls has been approved by the Council of Ministers and brought before the National Assembly for adoption. It aims to prevent violence against women and girls, establish legal procedures to protect victims, redress the harm and punish the perpetrators.

110. The Reproductive Health Act prohibits and punishes all forms of sexual violence and harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation.

111. The General Child Protection Code classes excision and any other similar practices that are performed on girls and negative customary, cultural or social practices that violate a child's physical integrity, health or dignity as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

112. Several awareness-raising and training activities have been carried out as part of the implementation of the national strategy to combat female genital mutilation and have led

hundreds of communities where female genital mutilation is very widespread to make public declarations that they would abandon the practice.

113. Access to justice is guaranteed by law. Women victims of violence enjoy legal aid as a matter of course, which entitles them, according to the circumstances, to free legal advice or the assistance of a lawyer or other representative of the law provided by the public authorities so that they may exercise their rights.

2. Promotion of children's rights (recommendations 126.18, 126.32, 126.46, 126.48–126.52, 127.15, 127.19, 127.20, 127.23, 127.52, 127.53)

114. The National Strategy for the Protection of Children, along with its action plan, was updated and adopted in 2019. The principal aim of this strategy is to take a holistic, non-discriminatory approach to handling child protection cases and creating a protective environment for children.

115. In order to make the registration of children at birth systematic, the National Population and Secure Documents Register Agency has brought its citizen reception centres closer to the people it serves. These centres are being extended to all rural communes, with the aim of extending them to all villages. In the meantime, mobile centres have been set up. Furthermore, an institutional child protection system has been established in all wilayas and some communes with a view to promoting and facilitating birth registration.

116. The prohibition of child labour is enshrined in the Labour Code. The General Child Protection Code reinforces this prohibition by treating any employment of children that is in violation of labour law, that deprives them of an education or that may harm their health, safety or physical and mental integrity as an offence.

117. In accordance with the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), 1999, and the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), 1973, and within the framework of the National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Child Labour, support from the International Labour Office and the United States Department of Labor has made it possible to carry out some of the activities under this plan. Thus, the legal framework on child labour has been harmonized with ILO standards. Awareness-raising and capacity-building workshops for stakeholders have been organized.

118. The Centre for the Protection and Social Integration of Children and its branches provide protection for street children. They work to locate, identify, support and care for these children. The branches have been rehabilitated and equipped by the International Organization for Migration and Save the Children, with support from the United States Embassy and the European Union.

119. A programme has been launched to tackle the practice of begging, and a project for the integration and education of child beggars that is helping to put an end to this practice is under way.

120. As part of the African Union campaign to combat child marriage, the Government has set up a multisectoral commission. This commission has developed and implemented a national plan of action to combat child marriage.

121. The Government has conducted a study to update the Personal Status Code to close gaps in the implementation of the plan and bring the Code into line with international commitments in this area.

122. Minors are now kept separate from adults in penal establishments with the opening of reception and social reintegration centre for children in conflict with the law and the detention centre for children in conflict with the law, and the development of wings or cells reserved for minors.

3. Protection of the rights of human rights defenders (127.54 and 127.55)

123. Freedom of association and demonstration is guaranteed in accordance with the law. There have been no objections to calls for demonstrations from political parties, trade unions, associations, private persons and others, which have all been provided with the necessary security assistance. Hundreds of public demonstrations were thus organized between 2016

and 2019. The Government has developed a partnership with human rights organizations, which play an active role in fostering a culture of citizenship and democratic consolidation.

124. With regard to improving the legal framework for associations and the protection of human rights defenders, a participatory consultation process has been initiated, which led to the drafting of a bill on associations, networks and foundations. The bill, adopted by the Council of Ministers, is currently being examined by the National Assembly. Under the bill, associations would be required only to declare their establishment rather than obtain prior authorization.

D. Fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights

1. Fight against poverty (recommendations 126.61–126.64, 127.57, 127.59, 127.60)

125. The third action plan for the poverty reduction strategy framework has been implemented.⁶ It has been replaced by the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity. The National Food Security Strategy is being implemented.

126. The realization of economic, social and cultural rights is among the priority objectives of the first action plan for the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (2016–2020). The Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity is reviewed on an annual basis,⁷ with an analysis of the main achievements, including reforms, funding provided by sector, prospects and recommendations for facing constraints and challenges. The analysis of development outcomes is done in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals.

127. The Sectoral Strategy for the Rural Sector for 2012–2025 was developed within the framework of the National Food Security Strategy. It deals with issues related to the development of agriculture and livestock. National plans on agricultural development and on livestock development fall within the scope these two strategies and also the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity. The implementation of these plans has led to a quantitative and qualitative improvement in agricultural production and optimal use of animal resources.

2. Promotion of access to health (recommendations 126.65, 126.66, 126.70)

128. Act No. 2010-018 of 3 February 2010 extends health insurance coverage to employees and pensioners of public institutions, publicly owned companies and public law corporations. Act. No. 2012-007 of 7 February 2012 extended this coverage to employees of local authorities, persons exercising an independent profession, employees and pensioners in the private sector, associations under private law and civil society organizations and own-account workers.

129. With a view to improving health insurance coverage for the most vulnerable groups, the Government has enrolled 2,000 persons with disabilities in national health insurance services and has begun to enrol poor households listed in the social registers in health insurance.

130. In the area of health, significant improvements have been recorded with a view to achieving universal health care. The efforts made have led to a significant improvement in the provision of health care and access to medicines.

131. There have been significant advances in disease prevention and control and in the management of public health emergencies. Unremitting efforts have been made with respect to the recruitment, refresher training and planning of human resources. Considerable investments have been made in infrastructure and equipment.⁸

132. Interventions in the areas of reproductive health, maternal and infant mortality, birth spacing and communicable and non-communicable diseases have been made with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, measures have been taken to improve the health of mothers and children, such as bringing into general use an all-inclusive price for obstetric care, auditing of maternal mortality, free maternal and child health care and coverage of the transport costs incurred for medical evacuations. This has had a positive impact on the quality of emergency obstetric and neonatal care, prevention of mother-to-child

transmission, family planning, skilled birth assistance, use of contraception and coverage of prenatal care.

3. Promotion of access to education (recommendations 126.67, 126.68, 126.69, 126.71, 126.72, 127.63, 127.61, 127.62)

133. The implementation of education policy has made it possible to extend the right to basic education to everyone, broaden access to lower secondary education and regulate access to vocational training and higher education, while improving the quality of apprenticeships and the relevance of training. It has also optimized the running and governing of the sector through better human and financial resource management.

134. The Government has implemented a national education strategy, whose main objective is to guarantee all children in Mauritania, without distinction of any kind, a complete and quality education. These efforts include improving educational opportunities, eliminating disparities of all kinds, strengthening the quality of education and introducing a results-based management approach.

135. The following measures have been taken to improve educational provision and promote the enrolment of girls in school:

- Urbanization of rural populations through village clusters (Nbeiket el Ahouach, Oum Sfeya, Termesse, Bourat, Saboualla and Boulahrath)
- Significant increase in the budget allocated to education, which rose from UM 3,765,646,699 in 2016 to UM 7,179,420,453 in 2019, i.e. an increase of more than 190 per cent
- Expansion of the network of primary schools, particularly in rural areas
- Increase in the number of teachers and improvements in their level of qualifications
- Introduction of nutrition programmes (school cafeterias)
- Installation of latrines, running water and toilets specifically for girls
- Provision of school buses for female students in rural areas
- Creation of priority education zones in rural areas
- Mounting of campaigns to end child marriage
- Granting of cash transfers to poor families, subject to sending their children to school
- Granting of monthly scholarships to nearly 2,400 girls from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Provision of tutoring in basic subjects
- Establishment of facilities with free Internet access for girls in school
- The enrolment of 426 children with disabilities in special education

136. The Tekavoul programme has enabled 30,512 disadvantaged households to benefit from cash transfers, subject to children's enrolment in school, and awareness-raising and social advancement sessions aimed at changing behaviours.

4. Human rights education (recommendations 126.19, 126.20, 126.24–126.27)

137. In addition to capacity-building activities for judges and law enforcement officers on the various human rights-related topics mentioned above, human rights training modules have been introduced into the curricula of initial training schools for civil servants and State officials, including the National Police Academy, the National School of Administration, Journalism and the Judiciary, the Higher Teacher Training College (École normale supérieure) and the training centres of the gendarmerie and the National Guard.

138. A Master's programme in human rights was also opened at the University of Nouakchott Al Asriya.

139. As part of the dissemination and popularization of the culture of human rights, collections of legal instruments relating to human rights have been prepared, published and widely distributed to judges, civil servants and public officials. Boxed sets containing the main international human rights instruments have been widely distributed. Several awareness-raising campaigns on various human rights issues have been organized by various departments. These actions were carried out with the assistance of the German Agency for International Cooperation.

140. Audiovisual messages and sketches are regularly broadcast on public and private radio and television stations to instil respect for others and raise awareness about the danger of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, racism, discrimination, hatred, xenophobia, domestic and family violence, etc.

141. The Ministry of National Education has organized a consultation forum on the introduction of human rights education into school curricula. It was attended by representatives of the public departments concerned, technical and financial partners and civil society. A civic education course is already implemented in primary and secondary schools.

142. The teaching of human rights is an integral part of the training curriculum at the Sahel Defence College of the Group of Five for the Sahel, the first war college in the country, based in Nouakchott.

5. Introduce a human rights-based approach to all climate change policies and programmes, including in disaster risk reduction measures (recommendation 126.73)

143. The protection of the environment and the prevention of climate change, in accordance with human rights, are at the heart of government policies on the development and exploitation of natural resources. The Government sees to it that penalties are imposed in cases of non-compliance with the environmental clauses of extractive and mining contracts, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Mining Code, the Act laying down the general principles of environmental legislation and the Act regulating mining agreements and approving the Standard Mining Agreement.

144. Furthermore, the Environmental Management Plan provides for environmental impact assessments of any project and highlights the measures needed to eliminate, reduce and compensate for any adverse consequences for the environment.

145. The environmental assessments take a participatory approach to ensure that the free, prior and informed consent of the populations concerned is obtained in decision-making processes relating to extractive and mining or agricultural projects affecting them. In this regard, it should be noted that the Government has suspended an agricultural project that did not meet this precondition.

IV. Progress, best practices and challenges in implementing the recommendations

A. Achievements and best practices

146. In 2018, the Government set up a technical committee responsible for developing reports and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations made by the treaty bodies and during the country's universal periodic review (Technical Committee for the Preparation of Reports). This Technical Committee comprises all the ministerial departments concerned, with the National Human Rights Commission and the OHCHR country office in Mauritania sitting as observers.

147. This committee validates its annual workplan each year. In this context, it has prepared reports on the status of implementation of the following conventions:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

148. The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society organized several seminars and workshops in partnership with OHCHR and the International Organization of la Francophonie to improve the follow-up to the recommendations made under the universal periodic review process.

149. The seminars and workshops concerned:

- Capacity-building of the members of the Technical Committee, stakeholders and civil society representatives in the preparation of the reports
- Development of a national action plan for the implementation of the recommendations under the universal periodic review

150. The General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion has signed a partnership agreement with the National Human Rights Commission to strengthen mechanisms for cooperation and complementarity and establish a constructive partnership to address the main needs of poor and vulnerable groups. The agreement also aims to develop cooperation between the different actors in the field of human rights to meet the challenges of guaranteeing the social and economic rights of the target groups, in particular as regards access to drinking water, health services and education.

B. Difficulties

151. The implementation of some of the recommendations from the second cycle has proved difficult. The difficulties mainly have to do with the recommendations on the ratification of certain conventions and the slow process of passing certain national laws.

V. Priorities, initiatives, national commitments, constraints and challenges

A. Priorities

152. The national priorities are tied in with strengthening the rule of law, democracy and national unity, security and good governance, promoting education, health and the rights of women and young people, and combating terrorism, poverty, corruption and trafficking in persons.

B. Initiatives and national commitments

153. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Mauritania has demonstrated its support for just causes and issues relating to respect for human dignity in Islamic, Arab, African and international forums.⁹

C. Constraints

154. The health crisis related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the country's budget revenues owing to the economic downturn. Loss of revenue is estimated at UM 10 billion.

155. The situation as a developing country is a major obstacle to the full enjoyment of economic and social rights.

D. Challenges

156. The main challenges to the full enjoyment of human rights that the country continues to face are as follows:

- Inadequate human and financial resources of the institutions and organizations responsible for defending human rights
- Low level of specialization of judges, lawyers and court officials in human rights
- Weak culture of human rights

VI. Expectations and assistance needs

157. OHCHR provides technical assistance to national organizations concerned with the promotion and protection of human rights (Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society, National Human Rights Commission, national preventive mechanism, relevant ministerial departments and other institutions, national courts and civil society organizations). Such assistance must continue through an appeal to donors to support the reforms undertaken in the area of human rights.

158. It should be focused on building the capacity of organizations responsible for human rights, chiefly among them the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family, the Ministry of Labour, the National Human Rights Commission, the national preventive mechanism and the Technical Committee for the Preparation of Reports.

159. The implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons requires substantial support from various partners, especially technical and financial partners.

160. Specific assistance should be provided to improve prison policy in general and to bring prisons up to standard in particular.

161. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania is grateful to all friendly countries and its technical and financial partners for their contribution to the efforts undertaken as part of its national policy for the promotion and protection of human rights and calls upon the international community for greater cooperation with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Notes

¹ Circulars No. 023/2017, No. 111 and No. 226.

² Tadamoun progress report.

³ Completed matrix of the evaluation of the road map.

⁴ Plan of Action for the Elimination of Child Labour.

⁵ National preventive mechanism reports.

⁶ See the evaluation of the 2010–2015 framework.

⁷ See the annual report on the implementation of this strategy for 2016–2019.

⁸ See the annual report on the implementation of this strategy for 2016–2019.

⁹ Voluntary commitments aide-mémoire.