

INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

STATEMENT ON WORLD REFUGEE DAY SATURDAY, 20 JUNE 2009

In marking World Refugee Day 2009, the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) wishes to express its solidarity with African refugees forced to flee their homes and abandon their property and livelihoods. IHRDA also welcomes the progress realised in finding lasting solutions to the refugee problem in Africa.

IHRDA welcomes further, the voluntary repatriation process for Mauritanian refugees in conformity with the 2000 decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. This brings to an end the forced exile in Senegal and Mali of those deported en masse by Mauritanian authorities in 1989.

Since the arrival of the first returnees on Mauritanian soil on 29th January 2008, more than 11,394 refugees have been rapatriated from Senegal. These repatriations continued despite the worrisome political situation occasioned by the overthrow of President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdellahi on 6th August 2008. The economic effects of this military coup organised by General Abdel Aziz, have been adversely felt by the resettlement programmes aimed at the returnees.

Having undertaken regular monitoring missions together with its partners in Mauritania, IHRDA notes that there is still much to be done for the voluntary return, which is in but its first phase, to fulfil the requirements for a dignified repatriation.

Reissuance of citizenship and other civil status documents is unacceptably slow. With a few exceptions, the Mauritanian government has not effected the restitution of lands confiscated during the expulsions. Equally slow has been the reintegration of unduly dismissed or forcibly retired civil servants as well as reparations for widows and beneficiaries of those tortured and summarily executed between 1989 and 1991.

IHRDA reiterates that the reissuance of citizenship documents, restitution of confiscated property and reintegration of unduly dismissed or forcibly retired civil servants as well as compensation for the tortured and executed or their beneficiaries are indispensable elements of a dignified return for these Mauritanian citizens.

IHRDA therefore urges the Mauritanian government to double its efforts towards commitment to the above mentioned African Commission decision and the Tripartite Agreement signed by Mauritania, Senegal and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 12 November 2007.



IHRDA renews its commitment to Mauritanian refugees and returnees who have been patient in exile and despite the difficult living conditions they currently face in the repatriation sites.

IHRDA will continue to work towards an egalitarian, inclusive and just Mauritanian society, fully conscious that this will only come to pass through a sincere and exhaustive consideration of the wounds of the past.

