

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 233 8695

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Mauritania: Arrest and detention of anti-slavery activist and woman human rights defender Warda Ahmed Souleimane

On 31 October 2025, human rights defender and member of the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania (IRA), **Warda Ahmed Souleimane**, was arrested in Nouakchott by unidentified officers following a (Facebook) post calling for peaceful mobilisation against systemic discrimination from local authorities against communities in the country. The woman human rights defender was initially taken to an undisclosed location and later confirmed to be detained at the Cybercrime Unit in Nouakchott, where she is expected to appear before the Regional Court of Nouakchott West on 05 November 2025.

Warda Ahmed Souleimane is a prominent anti-slavery human rights defender, social media blogger and member of IRA-Mauritania, a human rights organisation that campaigns against slavery, racial discrimination, and social exclusion. The organisation advocates for equality and the eradication of practices that perpetuate caste-based discrimination and racial hierarchies in Mauritanian society.

On 31 October 2025, Warda Ahmed Souleimane was reportedly arrested at her home in the karhill neighborhood by unidentified security agents and later confirmed to be in the custody of the Cybercrime Unit in Nouakchott. A colleague of Warda Ahmed Souleimane only discovered the location of her detention when she appeared in front of the prosecutor. The arrest of the woman human rights defender comes days after she participated as an attendee in a side event on apartheid during the NGO Forum preceding the 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) held from 17 to 21 October 2025 in Banjul, The Gambia. The event, organised by the NGO Madre, together with South African and Palestinian activists, focused on systemic discrimination. During her intervention at the event, Warda Ahmed Souleimane denounced what she described as "apartheid à la mauritanienne", an insidious form of marginalisation that limits access to education, employment, and basic rights on the basis of descent and social status. Upon her return to Mauritania, there were calls for her arrest by Ngongos who attended the NGO forum and the ACHPR. She was also subjected to threats and insults by Government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) both on Facebook and on Whatsapp.

The woman human rights defenders participation in the panel and her outspoken criticism against racial discrimination appear to have drawn the attention of the authorities. Once in Mauritania, On 31 October 2025, Warda Ahmed Souleimane posted a message on social media calling for peaceful mobilisation of citizens to take control of their own destiny in the face of the excesses of a government that is both indecisive and incompetent. The woman human rights defender was arrested and is accused of "inciting the population to overthrow the regime" following her Facebook post. She acknowledged being the author of the post but rejected the accusation of promoting violence, stating she only exercised her right to express an opinion.

On 5 November 2025, the Nouakchott West Public Prosecutor's Office charged activist Warda Ahmed Suleymane with undermining state security and referred her case to the investigating judge responsible for terrorism and state security cases, requesting her detention. On 06 November

2025, she appeared before the investigating judge in charge of terrorism and state security in Nouakchott and was placed under judicial control following her hearing without access to a lawyer.

This is not the first time that Warda Ahmed Souleimane has been deprived of her liberty for exercising her right to freedom of expression. She was previously detained from 1 to 17 April 2025 on charges related to her opinions, and transferred to the women's prison in Nouakchott before being released without conviction and after appearing before the investigating judge. Her new

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arrest confirms a broader pattern of judicial harassment targeting human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders believes that the detention of Warda Ahmed Souleimane is directly linked to her peaceful and legitimate work defending of human rights and denouncing racial discrimination in Mauritania. The organisation is also concerned about the increasing use of judicial harassment and restrictive cybercrime frameworks to target human rights defenders and silence critical voices in the country.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Mauritania to:

1. Immediately drop all charges and cease intimidation against Warda Ahmed Souleimane, as her arrest appears to be solely a result of her legitimate human rights work;
2. Guarantee Warda Ahmed Souleimane's physical and psychological integrity and ensure she has full access to legal assistance and family visits while in detention;
3. Cease the use of judicial harassment and arbitrary arrests against human rights defenders, and ensure that all defenders in Mauritania can carry out their peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of reprisals.

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