

Mauritanian blogger freed after being held for nearly six years

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is delighted to report that Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed Mkhaitir, a Mauritanian blogger who had been held for more than five and a half years and who was originally sentenced to death for apostasy, was released at dawn yesterday.



Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed Mkhaitir.

When contacted by RSF after his release, Mkhaitir thanked all the organisations who have been campaigning on his behalf ever since his arrest in January 2014. He was arrested for a Facebook post criticizing the use of religion to justify discriminatory practices against the blacksmith community to which he belongs.

The [death sentence](#) he received in December 2014 on a charge of apostasy was eventually commuted to two years in prison by a Nouadhibou appeal court in November 2017. He should then have been released but many demonstrations calling for his execution had been held during his trial and the [authorities continued to detain him](#) on “[security grounds](#)”, denying him access to his family and lawyers.

“We are deeply relieved that he has finally been freed after being held for more than five and a half years in almost total isolation,” RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire said. “For nothing more than a social network post, he was subjected to a terrible ordeal that violated a decision by his own country’s judicial system. This blogger was Francophone Africa’s longest-held citizen-journalist. We thank all those who contributed to his release.”

Mkhaitir had made formal statements of [repentance](#) on Facebook and TV in the past few weeks. This was the condition that was set for his release after a meeting at the start of July between outgoing President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and several religious officials. The new president, former defence minister Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, is to be sworn in on 1 August.

Mkhaitir’s release was the outcome of a [major international campaign](#) to which RSF, many other NGOs and his lawyers all contributed. RSF co-signed two [open letters](#) to President Aziz urging him to end Mkhaitir’s detention.

Mainly because of Mkhaitir’s arbitrary detention, Mauritania has fallen 46 places in [RSF’s World Press Freedom Index](#) since 2016 and is ranked 94th out of 180 countries in the 2019 Index. Aside from Tanzania, no other country has fallen so sharply in the same period.

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