

Mauritania

Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In 1999, the Government of Mauritania announced its current educational plan, which is intended to run for 15 years and aims to provide all children with 10 years of basic schooling (elementary plus the first secondary level), followed by training opportunities tailored to the requirements of the labor market. New emphasis will be placed on pre-school education that prepares children for basic education and on creating incentives to encourage private education.¹⁶¹⁰ The goals for elementary school education are to achieve universal access by 2005, raise the retention rate by 2010, eliminate gender and regional disparities, improve the quality and relevance of education, and lower the pupil-teacher ratio.¹⁶¹¹ Mauritania is also aiming to raise the share of education spending to 5.4 percent of GDP by 2015.¹⁶¹² A French-funded ILO program is currently charged with investigating the extent of slavery practices in Mauritania and recommending possible actions.¹⁶¹³

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 1999, the ILO estimated that 22.4 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Mauritania were working.¹⁶¹⁴ Young children in rural areas regularly work in herding, farming, fishing, and other activities.¹⁶¹⁵ Many children serve as apprentices in small industries and in the informal sector.¹⁶¹⁶ Mauritania abolished slavery in 1980 but there are persistent allegations that vestiges of slavery and slavery-like practices continue to exist.¹⁶¹⁷ According to the *Washington*

¹⁶¹⁰ Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), “Mauritania: Debt Relief Will Facilitate Implementation of the Ambitious Ten-Year Program for Education,” *ADEA Newsletter*, vol. 13, no. 2 (April-June 2001), at <http://www.adeanet.org/newsletter/latest/06.html> on December 3, 2001.

¹⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹² *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹³ ILO, *Stopping Forced Labor: Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, International Labour Conference, 89th Session, Report I (B), Geneva, 2001.

¹⁶¹⁴ *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001) [hereinafter *World Development Indicators 2001*].

¹⁶¹⁵ *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000—Mauritania* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2001) [hereinafter *Country Reports 2000*], Section 6d, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/index.cfm?docid=855>.

¹⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹⁷ Kevin Bales, *Disposable People* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), Chapter 3, “World: Africa Award for Mauritanian Anti-Slavery Activist,” *BBC News Online*, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_216000/216539.stm. See also Douglas Farah, “Despite Legal Ban, Slavery Persists in Mauritania,” *Washington Post*, October 21, 2001 [hereinafter “Despite

Post, however, anti-slavery activists estimate that the number of persons living in these conditions has fallen to a few thousand in recent years.¹⁶¹⁸

Mauritania made school attendance compulsory in July 2001.¹⁶¹⁹ In 1996, the gross primary enrollment rate was 79 percent.¹⁶²⁰ Low enrollment and dropout rates among girls are caused by extreme poverty, lack of school infrastructure, traditionally low priority placed on girls' education, unequal treatment in class, and discriminatory stereotypes conveyed by teachers and instruction materials.¹⁶²¹ Spending on education has declined from 5 percent of GDP in 1985 to 3.5 percent in 1998.¹⁶²²

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

Labor law specifies that no child under the age of 13 may be employed in the agricultural sector without the permission of the Minister of Labor, nor under the age of 14 in the nonagricultural sector.¹⁶²³ Forced and bonded labor by children is prohibited.¹⁶²⁴ The government reportedly lacks the resources to effectively enforce child labor laws.¹⁶²⁵ Mauritania ratified both ILO Convention 138 and ILO Convention 182 on December 3, 2001.¹⁶²⁶

Legal Ban, Slavery Persists in Mauritania”]; National Public Radio, “Slavery Lives on in Mauritania: Tradition Thrives Thanks to a Confluence of Cultures,” August 21, 2001, at <http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/racism/010828.mauritania.html>, as cited December 4, 2001; Kendall Wilson, “Slavery Thrives in African Nation,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 25, 1999, 1A.; “Mauritania: Paradise under the Master’s Foot: An 800-Year-Old System of Black Chattel Slavery Thrives in Mauritania,” as cited December 4, 2001; and *Country Reports 2000*.

¹⁶¹⁸ “Despite Legal Ban, Slavery Persists in Mauritania.”

¹⁶¹⁹ UNDP, “Mauritania Helps Girls by Making Education Compulsory,” July 25, 2001 [hereinafter “Mauritania Helps Girls by Making Education Compulsory”], as cited in Human Rights Internet (HRI) at <http://www.hri.ca/children/texts/mauritiana25july.html> on December 3, 2001.

¹⁶²⁰ *World Development Indicators 2001*.

¹⁶²¹ “Mauritania Helps Girls by Making Education Compulsory.”

¹⁶²² World Bank, *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit*, Report No. 22529-MAU, September 26, 2001, at 4.

¹⁶²³ *Country Reports 2000*.

¹⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶²⁶ ILO, Table of Ratifications and Information Concerning the Fundamental Conventions of the ILO, at http://www.ilo.org/public/french/standards/norm/sources/rats_pri.htm.

NOTE: Hard copies of all Web citations are on file.