

Roadmap to Where?

Executive Summary

In March 2014, Mauritania, ranked #1 in the Global Slavery Index, promulgated a Roadmap to Combat the Consequences of Slavery. This document was hailed by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, on whose 2010 report on slavery in Mauritania the Roadmap is based, in these terms: “The final formal adoption of the road map is not only symbolic, but also marks a palpable and traceable commitment of the State and is a benchmark against which progress can be measured, impediments to implementation identified and solutions discussed and developed to enable, assist and accelerate anti-slavery action and measures.”

This study assesses whether the Special Rapporteur’s confidence in the Roadmap and Mauritania’s capacity and commitment to fulfill its terms is justified. In 2010, the Special Rapporteur made specific recommendations to Mauritania in the areas of slavery law and policy, awareness-raising and programs for former slaves. While these broad categories are maintained in the Roadmap, the proposed actions do not, in reforming slavery law and policy, correspond to the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur and, in places, lack specificity. Underlying the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations, and confirmed in her follow-up recommendations of 2014, is that Mauritania should adopt a comprehensive and coherent strategy to address all aspects of slavery. What Mauritania has adopted in its Roadmap is a partial and incoherent set of proposed actions, the implementation of which is spread among an alarmingly large number of government departments and agencies.

This study considers the grave defects in the Roadmap, the many criticisms of slavery and slavery-like practices in Mauritania by U.N. human rights treaty bodies and other international organizations, all to a great extent unheeded, and the long-standing and embedded nature of slavery in Mauritanian society. This study concludes that the optimism trumpeted in the Roadmap and endorsed by the Special Rapporteur is misplaced.