



Integrated Country Strategy

Mauritania

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Table of Contents

1. Chief of Mission Priorities 2

2. Mission Strategic Framework 4

3. Mission Goals and Objectives 5

4. Management Objectives..... 10

1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Strengthen Security for Americans and Mauritians

Our chief goal is to enhance security for the citizens of both countries. Over half of U.S. direct-hire personnel in Mauritania are dedicated to that goal (Defense Department, Justice Department, and Diplomatic Security, among others), as is the major portion of our assistance funding. Mauritania sits at the crossroads of the Sahel and Maghreb regions, and both regions are impacted by violent extremist groups, most notably neighboring Mali. The President of Mauritania and other senior officials regularly cite our security cooperation as a major factor in Mauritania's success in preventing domestic terrorist incidents since 2011, following years of attacks against diplomats, tourists, development workers, and security forces. Support for bilateral security cooperation is strong among all Mauritians.

We will continue to provide efficient and vigilant consular services as the first line of homeland defense, as facilitators for legitimate travelers, and as service providers to the growing resident American community. We will continue our excellent collaboration with military, law enforcement, judiciary, and prison officials, focusing on shared priorities and "demand-driven" assistance. We will encourage Mauritania to increase diplomatic and security engagement with regional states and to remain a UN peacekeeping contributor. We will increase our coordination with the G5 Sahel regional organization, in particular through its Permanent Secretariat and the G5 Defense College, both based in Nouakchott, as the G5 works to implement regional solutions to security threats, including improving border security and building economic opportunities.

Our focus areas with the civilian security sector are prison reform, violent crime (including terrorist acts), trafficking of drugs and people (including slavery), corruption, and money laundering. Our efforts at reducing vulnerabilities to extremist appeals, especially among youth in a nation where over half of the population is under the age of 20, center on programs to provide technical and professional training and thought leadership skills to youth. We also collaborate with the government in messaging on tolerance and moderation, and on the need to support rehabilitation and reintegration for former members of violent extremist organizations.

Increase Opportunity, Reduce Poverty, and Improve Health

Greater prosperity and optimal management of the country's strategic resources could ease the processes of strengthening security, achieving a more inclusive society, and furthering democratic governance. Economic proceeds have been highly concentrated among traditional

elites, with the government taking a direct hand in distributing economic benefits to key supporters and patronage networks. Mauritania's economy is highly dependent on resource extraction, historically focused on minerals and fisheries. The discovery of significant offshore hydrocarbon resources creates the possibility for new revenue to spur economic growth and development, and to build bilateral and regional economic ties.

Together with other donors, we continue to make the case that Mauritania's future depends on a more equitable distribution of wealth, greater diversity of the economy, and a more concerted focus on education and development. We will continue efforts to address Mauritania's chronic food insecurity and health challenges. We will seek to use Mauritania's status as a beneficiary under the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) to expand bilateral trade and investment and to incentivize the government to more aggressively address concerns over human and labor rights. We will focus our efforts on the country's youth bulge, using all available programming opportunities to build technical and professional skills, including English language capabilities. We will support the government to better understand its health status through a Demographic Health Survey, and to develop a supportive policy environment for improved maternal and child health outcomes.

Further Democratic Governance, Including Ending Slavery and Promoting an Inclusive Society

Mauritania has never experienced a democratic transition of power from one elected president to another. The 2019 elections mark the end of President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz's constitutionally-limited two terms and are therefore crucial for the country's democratic trajectory. We seek to further Mauritania's enduring democratic governance and internal stability by encouraging the channeling of grievances (over such issues as slavery, discrimination, corruption, and unresponsive public administration) into legitimate political processes, including the upcoming elections. On slavery, we will work with all partners—the business community, local and international NGOs, other donor nations—to provide programs and active encouragement to meet the government's stated intention to address the reality of hereditary slavery in the country as well as the deep social divisions that are the legacy of centuries of slavery. In our discussions with Mauritians, we reference the powerful example of America's ongoing efforts to address the legacy of slavery. We also point out that failure to curb discriminatory practices will inevitably provoke deeper social tensions, with negative implications for the country's peace and stability.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Strengthen Security for Americans and Mauritians

Mission Objective 1.1: Mauritania expands, improves and institutionalizes its countering violent extremism program, incorporating best practices as appropriate, and shares these practices with other countries in the Maghreb-Sahel region and beyond.

Mission Objective 1.2: Mauritanian civilian enforcement agencies increase capacity to address illegal activities in a transparent, efficient, and humane manner.

Mission Objective 1.3: Mauritanian military and security elements improve their ability to detect, deter, degrade, and disrupt security threats on a local and regional level.

Mission Objective 1.4: Consular services strengthen U.S. border security while facilitating legitimate travel.

Mission Goal 2: Increase Opportunity, Reduce Poverty, and Improve Health

Mission Objective 2.1: Mauritania reforms its business climate to increase trade and investment.

Mission Objective 2.2: Mauritania reduces labor deficits and boosts youth employment.

Mission Objective 2.3: Mauritania's institutions are better prepared to provide healthcare and other social services and expand income-generating opportunities.

Mission Goal 3: Further Democratic Governance, Including Ending Slavery and Promoting an Inclusive Society

Mission Objective 3.1: Mauritania preserves civilian governance, respects its constitution (including presidential term limits), and improves democratic freedoms.

Mission Objective 3.2: Mauritania makes significant progress towards eradicating slavery and its vestiges and reduces discrimination.

Management Objective: By 2022, make the Embassy's workforce more reflective of Mauritania's diversity.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1 Strengthen Security for Americans and Mauritians

Description and Linkages: With U.S. support, Mauritania has not suffered a terrorist attack since 2011. Building on a strong record of bilateral cooperation, the embassy will continue to design and implement targeted programs to strengthen Mauritanian security forces, civilian law enforcement and judicial institutions. We will continue to support Mauritania's own efforts to counter violent extremism. With the headquarters of the G5 Sahel in Nouakchott, and a Mauritanian general leading G5 forces, the embassy will work both bilaterally and through the G5 to bolster regional stability. These actions, together with robust consular services as part of broader border security efforts, will help to counter transnational threats and target them at their source, preventing them from reaching our borders or causing harm to the American people.

Mission Objective 1.1 Mauritania expands, improves, and institutionalizes its countering violent extremism programs, incorporating best practices as appropriate, and shares these practices with other countries in the Maghreb-Sahel region and beyond.

Justification: As part of a multifaceted effort to address the wave of terrorist attacks that the country suffered from 2005-11, the government introduced programs designed to counter extremist ideologies and promote the country's tradition moderate form of Islam. These efforts involve work with religious leaders, seminaries, judicial officials and the media to promote moderate Islam. The government welcomes partnership with the United States and other donors in these programs. Countering violent extremism is also a key priority for the G5 Sahel. The success of countering violent extremism programs in Mauritania and in the region will reduce the influence of violent extremist organizations that threaten the stability of countries in the Sahel and pose a threat to U.S. national security.

Mission Objective 1.2 Mauritanian civilian enforcement agencies increase capacity to address illegal activities in a transparent, efficient, and humane manner.

Justification: Mauritania's security institutions, particularly the gendarmerie and the police, struggle to use modern law enforcement techniques to prevent and respond to violent crime, illicit trafficking, and money laundering. Civilian law enforcement, the gendarmerie, and investigating magistrates lack a standardized methodology for collection of evidence that is sufficiently detailed to allow for effective information sharing. There is a lack of formalized cooperation, both among law enforcement, prosecutors, and police, and between Mauritania and its neighbors in the Sahel and Maghreb.

Mauritania's prisons, which generally fail to conform to international standards and norms for correctional institutions, have been identified as potential breeding grounds for extremism. For example, juvenile offenders are housed in the same facility as

condemned terrorists. In order to prevent the spread of violent extremism in prisons and capitalize on gains made in strengthening the justice system, we will pursue civilian security sector programs focusing on prison reform. Increasing the capacity of the Mauritanian Ministries of Justice and Interior to operate and manage correctional institutions in a professional, humane, and accountable manner in conformity with international standards and norms will help to ensure that gains made in the justice sector are not lost during incarceration.

Mission Objective 1.3 Mauritanian military and security elements improve their ability to detect, deter, degrade, and disrupt security threats on a local and regional level.

Justification: The Mauritanian military and security services work together to enforce the country's borders and prevent infiltration from violent extremist organizations and the transnational illicit activities that support them. Building relationships with and strengthening the Mauritanian military addresses significant terrorist threats that threaten U.S. interests. To achieve the best effects, the U.S. government focuses on shared priorities and "demand-driven" assistance across the military services. The embassy seeks to strengthen the Mauritanian military's ability to employ integrated land, sea, and air elements to effectively patrol its vast, under-populated border regions. Reinforcing underlying logistical and educational institutions enhances the Mauritanian military's ability to generate and sustain its forces. Support for the growth of the G5 Sahel Defense College will not only enable the Mauritanian military to benefit from the best practices of others, but also to export experiences to other partners in the sub-region.

Additionally, the Mauritanian military contributes to regional security and stability through participation in multi-national efforts. According to external sources, Mauritania's peacekeepers in the Central African Republic have performed well. Given the paucity of effective peacekeeping contingents, it serves U.S. goals to continue to train Mauritania's forces assigned to peacekeeping duties. Mauritania's participation in the G5 Sahel Joint Force and leadership of its western sector will increase stability in the Sahel.

Mission Objective 1.4 Consular services strengthen U.S. border security and safety of American citizens, while facilitating legitimate travel and growing bilateral economic links.

Justification: Embassy Nouakchott was without a full-time consular officer from July 2017 to September 2018, severely impacting post's ability to serve a growing American community, including growing business ties. The combination of resumption of full consular services and the March 2018 move to a more accessible New Embassy Compound will permit the embassy to fully meet its border security and economic growth objectives.

Mission Goal 2 Increase Opportunity, Reduce Poverty, and Improve Health

Description and Linkages: Greater prosperity and optimal management of the country's strategic resources will ease the processes of strengthening security, addressing slavery, achieving a more inclusive society, and furthering democratic governance. Economic proceeds have been highly concentrated among traditional elites, with the government taking a direct hand in distributing economic benefits to key supporters and their patronage networks. Mauritania's economy is highly dependent on resource extraction, historically focused on minerals and fisheries. The discovery of significant offshore hydrocarbon resources creates the possibility for new revenue to spur economic growth and development and to build bilateral and regional economic ties. This Mission Goal reflects the Joint State/USAID Regional Strategy's Strategic Goals 2, "Increase Mutually Beneficial Economic Growth, Trade and Investment," and 4, "Promote Inclusive Country-led Development."

Mission Objective 2.1 Mauritania reforms its business climate to increase trade and investment.

Justification: Mauritania has significant natural resources, but it has failed to develop industries that will provide wealth and employment to its rapidly growing population. Wealth is highly concentrated among traditional elites. The preferential treatment given to these elites in the political, financial, business, and judicial sectors also serves as a deterrent to potential U.S. and other foreign investors, who are wary of a pattern of government interference in private business decisions on behalf of favored individuals. The lack of effective judicial enforcement of contract law and widespread corruption present further impediments to investment in Mauritania.

Strong government interest in expanding foreign markets for Mauritanian goods, coupled with strong lobbying for the country's continued participation in USG programs such as African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), offers windows of opportunity for U.S. advocacy of measures to improve the business climate. The creation in 2017 of a U.S.-Mauritania Business Forum, along with the arrival of leading U.S. firms active in the oil and gas sector, provides new drivers for reforms that will lead to faster and more equitable economic growth.

Mission Objective 2.2 Mauritania reduces labor deficits and boosts youth employment.

Justification: Over half of Mauritians are under the age of twenty. Mauritania's schools do not adequately prepare youth to enter the workforce or engage productively in civic life. As a result, youth are tempted to be pulled into involvement in illicit activities, making them vulnerable to extremist appeals, or left without sustainable livelihood and in perpetual need of government and international assistance. Of the total youth population, only forty percent complete primary school. The only alternatives for poor Mauritians are the traditional religious schools (mahadras), which focus entirely on Islamic studies. Lacking core skills, approximately 52,000 Mauritanian youth drop out of school each year, and many are unsuccessful in finding employment. For Mauritanian youth unable to pursue a more formal or higher-level

education, Mauritanian vocational education centers offer their only hope for improving their standard of living.

Investments in targeted vocational education reduce unemployment while also addressing severe deficits in skilled labor for business, government, and civil society institutions. Education is a key factor in improving the status of girls and women, promoting their full participation in all aspects of Mauritanian society. It also directly promotes our CVE and broader security goals.

Mission Objective 2.3 Mauritania's institutions are better prepared to provide healthcare and other social services, respond to food security requirements, and expand income-generating opportunities.

Justification: Mauritania has national strategies for reducing poverty and ensuring universal access to basic health services. However, because of delays in implementation and coordination of these strategies, and the fact that drought is cyclical throughout the country, at least a third of the population is affected by chronic food insecurity in any given year. This compels the continuation of humanitarian assistance activities year after year, despite increasing focus by relief organizations on developing the capacity of communities to absorb the shocks of climate change, such as food insecurity, pest invasion, and sporadic rainfall.

The lack of access to water affects both food production and health, with only sixty percent of Mauritians having access to safe drinking water. Rapid desertification threatens the livelihoods of both farmers and pastoralists and could set the stage for accelerated rural-to-urban migration and increasing conflict over dwindling water and land resources. The government lacks both the resources and the will to make the investments in agriculture and basic health systems necessary to alleviate the current levels of suffering. With appropriate government support and donor coordination, income-generating activities can offer an alternative coping mechanism for affected populations.

In addition, at the current fertility rate and population growth, Mauritania's population is projected to double by 2050 with potential adverse consequences on resources, the healthcare system, the environment, and stability. Mauritania's current maternal and child mortality are among the highest in the world. The Mauritanian government is in favor of reproductive health and family planning programs, and is a member of the Ouagadougou Partnership.

Mission Goal 3 Further Democratic Governance, Including Ending Slavery and Promoting an Inclusive Society

Description and Linkages: The 2019 elections mark the end of the president's two constitutionally-mandated terms and are an opportunity for Mauritania's first-ever democratic transition of power from one president to another. We seek to further Mauritania's enduring democratic governance and internal stability by encouraging the channeling of grievances (over such issues as slavery, discrimination, corruption, and unresponsive public administration) into legitimate political processes, including the upcoming elections. On slavery, we will work with all partners—the business community, local and international NGOs, other donor nations—to provide programs and active encouragement to meet the government's stated intention to address the reality of slavery in the country as well as the deep social divisions that stem from the legacy of slavery. Strengthening democracy in Mauritania and ensuring equal opportunity for all citizens will help promote a more stable and prosperous country.

Mission Objective 3.1 Mauritania preserves civilian governance, respects its constitution (including presidential term limits), and improves democratic freedoms.

Justification: With presidential elections due in the spring of 2019, Mauritania has the opportunity to see its first democratic transfer of power, and President Aziz has publically stated his intention to respect the constitutionally-mandated two term limit and turn over the reins of power to a democratically elected successor. Municipal, legislative, and Regional Council elections are scheduled for September 2018, and will be a test of the Mauritanian electoral process. Programming for presidential election support is scheduled to begin in fall 2018. Mauritania's continued stability is threatened by severe societal tensions and injustices. Our advocacy and programming aims to assist Mauritians to channel grievances into political means of achieving positive change.

Mission Objective 3.2 Mauritania makes significant progress towards eradicating slavery and its vestiges and reduces discrimination.

Justification: Mauritania was the last country in the world to abolish slavery, in 1981. While exact numbers are unknown, and while the government insists there is no slavery in the country, cases of heredity slave relationships among family continue to exist, particularly in remote desert regions. More broadly, the government readily accepts that Mauritanian society needs to confront the legacy of its slave history, and has focused efforts on education and employment opportunities.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective By 2022 make the Embassy's workforce more reflective of Mauritania's diversity.

Justification: The ethnic distribution of Embassy local staff does not reflect Mauritania. In particular, we have relatively few staff from the largest ethnic group (the Haratines, or descendants of former slaves), as well as too few speakers of Arabic and the Hassaniya dialect.