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## Ambassador Kierscht Op-Ed on Human Rights Day



On Human Rights Day, we reflect on the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), crafted in 1948 on the heels of the most destructive war in the history of the world. World War II was caused and characterized by a cruel disregard for humanity. The UDHR was an appeal to build a better world, and it continues to serve as a catalyst for improving respect for human rights for all, including the most vulnerable.

Today, three-quarters of a century later, the international order that was created following the adoption of the UDHR is in peril. A war of aggression threatens peace and wellbeing in Europe and beyond. Autocracies threaten human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic governance. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, with some governments misusing emergency powers to restrict fundamental freedoms. Il-liberal leaders use populist appeals related to income inequality and nationalism to consolidate power. Weak institutions enable these tactics, supported by newer means of disinformation. In the Sahel region, non-state actors like the Wagner Group and terrorist groups use fear and intimidation to achieve their goals, often harming the very populations they claim to protect.

Human rights defenders, journalists, and other members of civil society are on the frontlines of building a freer and more just world for future generations, working tirelessly to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, advocating for government transparency and accountability, promoting equitable access to justice, and exposing and preventing corruption. Regrettably, they are often subjected to intimidation, threats, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, gender-based violence, and unfair trials for this very work. Repressive governments often issue threats and reprisals when these individuals participate in international dialogues on human rights. Those working on land and environmental issues as well as on the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons, and other members of marginalized and minority groups are especially vulnerable to attacks.

Globally, we are also seeing the expanded use of internet shutdowns or slowdowns, the misuse of surveillance technologies, including spyware, and the application of onerous restrictions on civil society organizations, including the misuse of counterterrorism laws, to stifle civil society voices. In 2021, NGOs report that over 300 human rights defenders (HRDs) and over 50 media workers were killed and several hundreds more unjustly imprisoned for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world.

Against this backdrop, the Biden-Harris Administration has remained resolute in its commitment to respect, promote, and champion human rights for all. Here in Mauritania, the United States will continue to work with both government and civil society to promote respect for human rights by combating trafficking in persons, modern slavery, and restrictions on freedom of expression, among others.

President Biden has made it clear that together with our partners and allies, across multilateral fora and across the world, we must jointly call upon all countries to do more to promote respect for human rights, and protect human rights defenders, journalists, and civic activists on the frontlines of democracy and human rights promotion. All governments should protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction. This concept is basic, but one we must continually reiterate. Respect for the human rights of individuals within states is an essential component of lasting

# Terrorist Expansion in the Sahel: What to Do?

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## Algerian counterterrorism experience

During Algeria's civil war (1992–2002), the Algerian government successfully defeated militant Islamist groups, including the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which was later revived in Mali as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Algeria's more recent counterterrorism activities and initiatives at the domestic level aimed at countering extremist ideology and narratives in the media, schools, and mosques were also highly successful. As such, Algeria's long history of fighting domestic terrorism could prove useful in the Sahel, where the jihadists sowing violence are similar to those Algeria combatted in the early 2000s. Since that time, the political and geographic context has changed, however. In addition to AQIM's exponential growth in size, geographical reach, and operational capacity, terrorist groups have multiplied as nebulous entities, making the Sahel a very different battleground than Algeria was. Signaling a significant uptick in terrorist activity in the region, in late July, a video circulating on social media showed a member of the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) jihadist organization explaining in Bambara, Mali's national language, that the country's capital would shortly be the target of the group's expansionist efforts. After enumerating and claiming a series of terrorist attacks all over Mali in recent months, the video also confirmed that JNIM's end goal is to impose sharia law in the country. Recent battles between JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS) throughout Mali highlight the struggle for leadership that both terrorist organizations are waging in the southern and central parts of Mali and in neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. The increasing intensity of terrorist battles in the Sahel is threatening the very existence of the region's countries, given the weakness of their national armies, the exhaustion of international efforts to assist them, and growing internal political instability.



## France's departure from the Sahel: an opportunity for Algeria?

On Nov. 9, 2022, President Emmanuel Macron announced the official end of Operation Barkhane, an eight-year-old regional military operation based out of Ndjamena, Chad, whose objective was to combat terrorism at a regional level. Since the creation of Barkhane, anti-French sentiment has grown throughout the Sahel because of the former colonial power's inability to defeat the terrorist threat and its perceived interference in local politics. The vacuum created by France's military drawdown could easily be filled by Algeria, which has been reticent to implement a joint strategy alongside other international actors. Algeria could turn France's departure to its advantage and thus solidify its role as a widely respected regional power. Algeria shares close to 3,000 km of borders with Mauritania, Mali, and Niger and has publicly and formally expressed its desire to restore stability in the Sahel region. In 2014, Algeria took on the role of negotiator and facilitator in the peace talks between Mali's government and secessionist rebel groups that had taken up arms in 2012. Following the signing of the Algiers Accords in 2015 – a diplomatic triumph for Algeria – the country was subsequently pigeonholed into ensuring the effective implementation of the deal, while France took the lead on the security front, giving it greater visibility than any other foreign power in the region. Conversely, after the 2020 military coup in Mali, relations between Mali and France soured, reaching a breaking point when the Malian transitional government expelled the French ambassador from Bamako in early 2022, after Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called the Malian junta “illegitimate” and “irresponsible.” In August 2022, at the request of the Malian military government, the French military closed its last base there.

Amid ominous signs of military and diplomatic failure in the region, France redeployed a reduced number of troops to neighboring Niger to demonstrate its continued engagement in the fight to eradicate terrorism from the Sahel.

As Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Chad's former colonial power, France has been deeply involved in the survival and stabilization of an increasingly volatile Sahel region for the past six decades. France's 2013 military intervention in Mali prevented the country from falling into the hands of jihadists, who had taken over major cities and were making their way toward Bamako, Mali's capital. More recently, however, France's strategic, operational, and diplomatic failures in the Sahel have made it an unwanted guest in the region at large. Algeria, by contrast, could be the only regional player whose military is at the same time both respected and misunderstood for not providing direct support to its Sahelian neighbors, even when it is asked to do so.

## Algeria's key role in the Sahel security initiatives

The multiple military and intelligence cooperation initiatives undertaken between the Sahel and the Maghreb in the face of the growing terrorist threat in the former are a testament to the intertwined and interconnected security concerns both regions face. Unfortunately, leadership rivalries and strategic differences have consistently undermined such efforts. It is high time to restructure regional security initiatives in the Sahel and make space for Algeria, an immediate neighbor whose security interests overlap with those of regional states.

Despite its promise as a regional security initiative, the G5's death was solemnly announced by President Mohamed Bazoum of Niger last May, following Mali's withdrawal, which prevented effective coordination and

intelligence sharing between these Sahel partners' military forces. During its eight years of existence, the G5 Sahel struggled to find a sustainable funding mechanism for its operations. Notwithstanding a holistic vision of complementing its military intervention with large-scale development projects to reach the most vulnerable populations, it had limited success on the ground. The membership of the G5 Sahel made perfect sense, yet Algeria's absence may have weakened it considerably. The G5's call for sustainable funding through the United Nations was never answered. Algeria's military and diplomatic savoir-faire could have changed that outcome.

Moving forward, a revised G5 Sahel mandate, mission, and composition, which would now include Algeria, might be an immediate and effective solution to the debilitating terrorist threat facing the Sahel. Leveraging and consolidating the voices of both the Sahel and the Maghreb on the international scene could generate the type of broader global response that Sahelian states have been waiting for.

## Algeria wants to play a stronger diplomatic role. It can begin in the Sahel.

The recent visits to Mali of Algerian Foreign Minister Lamamra and the U.N.-mandated High-Level Panel for Peace and Development in the Sahel may signal Algeria's willingness to resume engaging in the region in a more significant way. Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has paved the way for this through a constitutional amendment allowing Algeria's military to deploy outside the country's borders. While it is unlikely that Algeria will immediately put boots on the ground in the event of an existential attack against a Sahel neighbor, it is now within the realm of possibility.

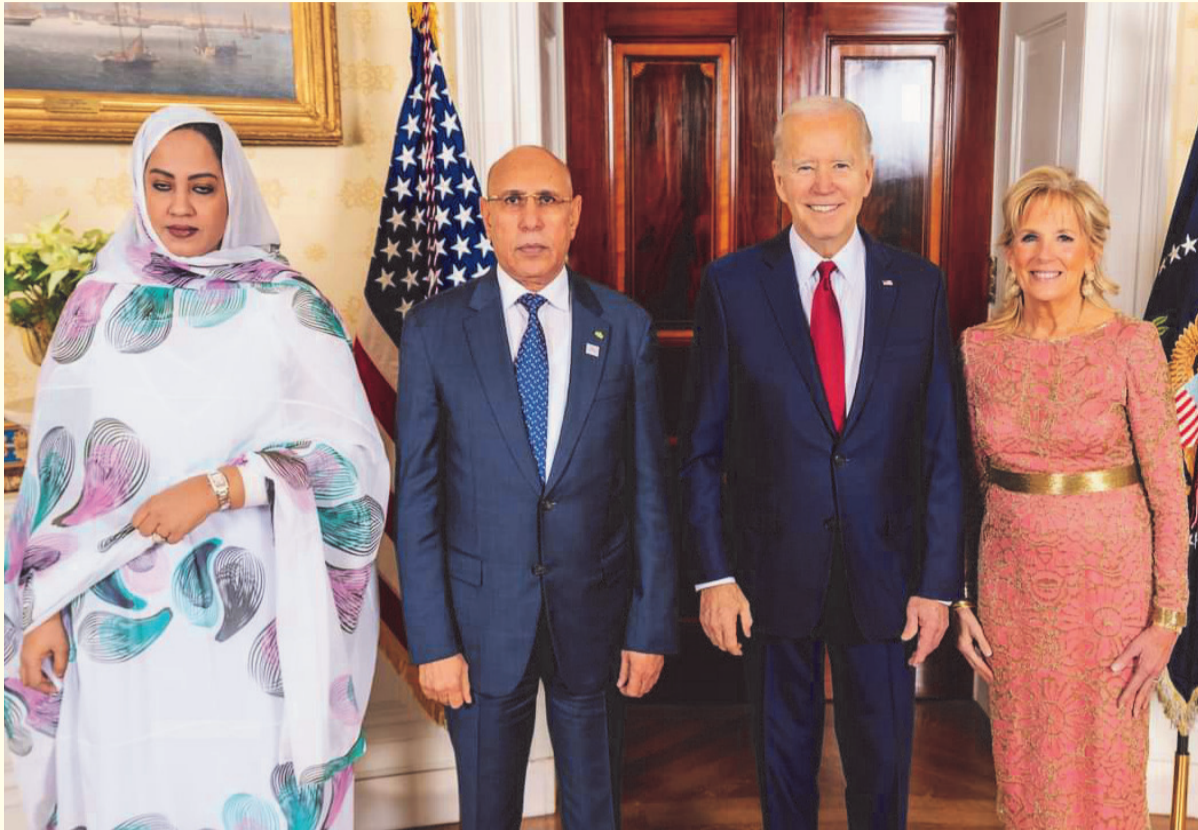
Algeria's relationship with the countries of the Sahel has evolved significantly over the years. Since the 2015 signature of the Algiers Accords between Mali and former armed rebels, Algiers has deepened its involvement in the implementation of the agreement. Its more recent efforts have focused on diversifying its partnerships in the region beyond security to include trade, professional training, energy, mining, and telecommunications. Algeria's most significant investment in the Sahel may be the Trans-Saharan Highway Project, which aims to link Algiers to Lagos. Algiers' \$3 billion investment in the project provides the country with solid regional leverage. But power is nothing without influence. These additional economic tools that reinforce the mutual dependency between Algeria and Sahel states, together with its strategic and military capabilities, will facilitate Algeria's rise as an indispensable actor in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel.

■ By Makha Korera





## President of the Republic Arrives in Washington for African Leaders Summit



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dor to Washington, Sissa Bint al-Sheikh Ould Bedeh, and First Adviser to the Ambassador, Jedu Ould Abdul-Rahman Ould Sadi. The summit – the first since 2008 – was an opportunity to discuss several issues, including development, good governance, democracy, the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, food security and climate change, and mechanisms for

enhancing cooperation in these areas. Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor has stated that the US is designating 55 Billion USD to help African nations over the span of three years. He also emphasized that this funding will not be affected by the nations' positions over the war on Ukraine.

### Ghazouani:

#### Mauritania Grateful for China's Assistance

Mauritania appreciates China's ongoing assistance to the country, according to President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El-Ghazouani. During his attendance at the Arab-Chinese Summit today, Friday, in Riyadh, the President stated that China has supported Mauritania ever since its independence and

their relationship has become stronger in recent years. Ould Cheikh Al-Ghazouani said that it marked a change in the China-Arab Cooperation Forum's strategy as well as a consecration of the political will to build a successful and constructive cooperative model. The President went on to say that

the depth of China's interdependence with the Arab world is reflected in the strengthening of its solidarity in international fora, whether it be through China's support for Arab concerns or the Arab nations' backing for the one-China principle.

## Sahel Foundation Commemorates International Human Rights Day

As part of its activities to commemorate International Human Rights Day, the Sahel Foundation for the Defense of Human Rights and Support for Education organized a conference entitled «The Right to Education, Electoral Participation, and Civil Status Challenges.»

The conference was attended by Professor Yacoub Ould Al-Saif and Vice-Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission, Osman Ould Bejjel. The former discussed the legal issues related to the right to education and civil status. Ould Bejjel discussed suffrage and its link to civil status.

The Sahel Foundation also announced a project, in cooperation



with the Embassy of the United States, to support the right to civil status in some states in the interior

in preparation for upcoming elections.

## US Chooses Mauritania to Benefit from New Funding

The U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) selected Mauritania to be among four African countries to benefit from a new funding program. The program aims to support government reforms aimed at poverty reduction through economic growth. Alongside Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia, and Togo will be supported by the program. In a Facebook post, the U.S. Embassy in Nouakchott explained that the program represented «a great commitment by the United States to the Mauritanian people and an opportunity to support the Mauritanian



Government's positive path toward good governance, human rights, and social investment.” The announcement of Mauritania's selection came on the sidelines of Washington's US-African Leaders Summit, which included President Mohamed Ould al-Sheikh al-Ghazouani.

## HAPA Presidency Announces Appointment of President and Board Members

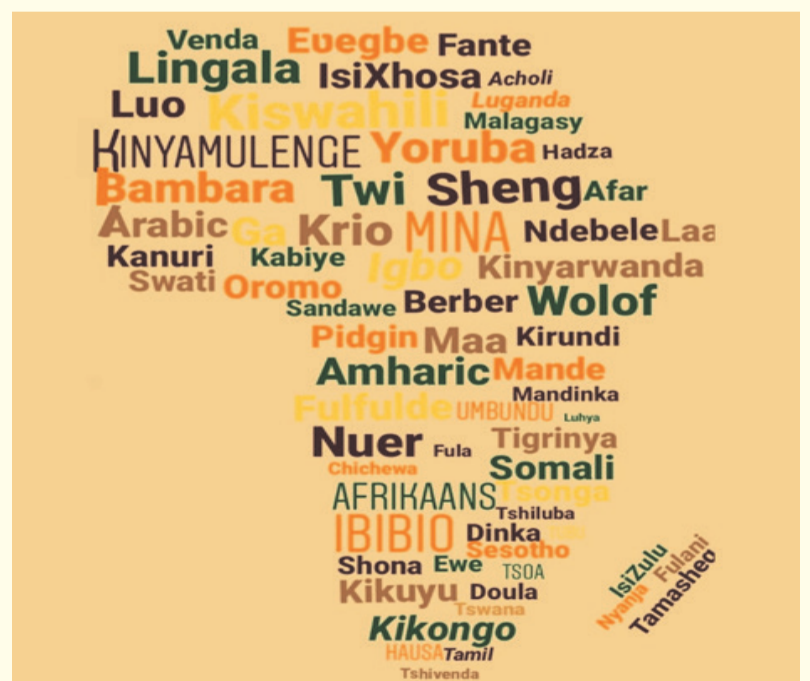


On Saturday, the Presidency announced the appointment of the President and members of the High Authority for Journalism and the Audiovisual.

**President:**  
Hussein Ould Medou

- Members:**
- Abd al-Rahman Harma Babana
  - Cheikh al-Tijjani Ja
  - Houa Bint Miloud
  - Mohamed Bhit
  - Halima Jakana
  - Omar Mokhtar
  - Ahmed Salim Sidi Abdullah
  - Med Bilal

## Mauritania to Launch Local Languages Institute



The government has passed a bill to create an institute to teach local languages. The institute aims at training teachers to teach local languages professionally. This initiative comes as a result of the latest educational reform Act which mandates the inclusion of local languages as part of the compulsory elementary schooling.



## Close up on Germany!



In Germany, people no longer define themselves by God and belonging to a church, but by their nationality. This is also described by the political scientist Benedict Anderson. He describes nations as “imagined communities.” A common language and an origin story bring people together. Although you don’t even know the people at the other end of the country

with newly drawn borders, you identify with them. You could have a completely different culture – but by belonging to the German people one automatically assumes affinity. If you were, for example, to ask someone to name something stereotypically German, they usually answer with silence. They might finally break the silence with something like “Beer, bratwurst, and punctuality.” This

may be due to the fact that memory and collective memory are the most formative parts of national identity. Two world wars, the Holocaust, and the West-East division are etched into German memory. Society is divided on national pride: Some are proud of Germany because that’s how it’s done. Other countries could have two wars and dictatorships behind them but remain very patriotic. Others question the whole concept of national pride. The whole system of the nation and especially national pride is outdated and nobody should be proud of the country in which

they were born.

The nation-state united disparate people and was an advance in contrast to sectarianism. Nevertheless, almost every founding myth has a dark sideshow that is often ignored; unity always means differentiation. Sociologists Verena Scheuble and Michael Wehner recognize this: “Only sport, and in Germany



■ By Makha Korera

almost exclusively the popular sport of soccer, is able to mobilize the ‘national feeling’ in the population in times of peace.” After the nation-state has passed, football allows us to be patriots. We identify with the construct of the nation again and make the world simpler than it actually is for a few weeks.

## After the End of French Aid, China Steps in to Fill the Development Vacuum

This October, the first China-Mali Economic Forum was held in the Malian capital, Bamako, to celebrate the 62nd anniversary of the establishment of relations between the two countries. The forum was intended to develop the building blocks for extending Beijing’s influence into the Sahel, following France’s suspension of development assistance to Mali in November.

At the same time, faced with yet another competitor in the Sahel, fierce economic competition from other Western countries, and the ever-expanding presence of Russia in the region, France has launched a media campaign against Chinese investments in Mali, seeking to highlight the costs of doing business with Beijing.

On November 18, the French Foreign Ministry announced the suspension of Paris’ development aid to Mali, three months after the country’s military withdrawal. Even before this announcement, China was taking steps to expand its assistance efforts in Mali, framed within the broader vision of its «Belt and Road Initiative» in Africa.

### Chinese Aid

The organization of the first China-Mali Cooperation Forum reflects Beijing’s desire to launch a new phase of cooperation with Mali after the 2015 terrorist attacks in the former, which caused a decline in China’s role in the country. The forum also represents a shift away from China’s reluctance to make significant investments in a country that still faces near-existential security challenges.

In 2014, China announced development projects in Mali worth \$11 billion, including the construction of a railway between Mali and Conakry in Guinea, another railway between Bamako and Dakar, and other projects related to infrastructure, fossil-fuel extraction, and iron-ore processing. A 2015 attack by Al-Qaida affiliate Al-Mourabitoun on a hotel in Bamako, however, derailed those plans. The attack killed three executives of



a Chinese railway company and ended China’s involvement in these strategic projects, which could have connected landlocked Mali to the sea through neighboring countries and revitalized the country’s foreign trade relations with China and the global economy. Mali’s place as a link between North, Central, and Western Africa also makes it an essential component of China’s strategy on the continent.

### French Concerns

Following a political break with France and the imposition of sanctions by ECOWAS, Mali has sought out new international partners, first Russia and now China.

Since its military intervention in Mali in 2013, France has never used economic assistance as a weapon against the transitional government in Bamako. After the latter sought increasingly closer relations with the Russian Wagner Group, however, the deterioration of relations between the two countries reached a breaking point, culminating in the suspension of French aid in November.

Days later, Bamako responded by imposing an «immediate ban on all activities of non-governmental organizations operating in the country with French material funding or

technical support, including in the humanitarian field.» The willingness of the military junta, which seized power in Mali in 2020, to defy French pressure, as well as that of the European Union and the United States, is explained by Russia’s military and diplomatic support, as well as its own financial and development assistance.

This support was further demonstrated when Russia, as well as China, used their veto power at the UN Security Council to strike down a French statement of support for ECOWAS sanctions against Mali last January.

Just a week after France’s suspension of its development assistance, Mali announced that it had signed a memorandum of understanding with China to provide \$200 million to build two textile factories in Kotyala and Bamako, respectively, that would provide five thousand jobs. Cotton is Mali’s primary export, and the construction of factories would provide a much-needed source of foreign currency for the country’s economy.

Chinese companies are also involved in gold extraction, whose exports represent the country’s second source of income after cotton, and construction. China has been involved in infrastructure projects such as roads,

airports, public and cultural buildings, stadiums, and medical facilities, according to China Magazine, in its French version.

The Chinese Ambassador to Bamako Chen Jihong noted some of his country’s achievements in Mali, such as «the construction of the Hospital of Mali, Third Bridge in Bamako, the Kabala University campus, and a vocational training center.»

«In the near future, new projects such as a hydropower plant in Gouina, the second phase of the campus of Kabala University, and a pilot project to electrify villages through solar energy will be completed.» Jihong said at the China-Mali Cooperation Forum.

China’s influence in Mali has increased in conjunction with the decline in Paris’ dominance in the country and the broader continent, worrying the Élysée. Last month, French President Emmanuel Macron stated on the sidelines of the Sommet de la Francophonie in Tunisia that, «several forces who want to spread their influence in Africa are doing so to harm France and its language and to sow doubt. They do this in the pursuit of their particular interests.» Macron did not specify which countries were seeking to harm France and its language, but China is undoubtedly one of them.

The French media has focused on highlighting the conflict between Malian farmers, traders, and China, as well as the negative environmental impacts of China’s gold extraction operations, especially as they relate to the fertility of arable land. Although France has withdrawn its military and developed aid from Mali, Paris is now fighting a media battle against Chinese investments, seeking to expose the risks they pose, in a similar vein to the anti-France propaganda spread by Russia over the past half-decade.

Paris’ message to Africans is that, if they believe France is a colonial power, then China and Russia are no less imperialist than it is.

■ By El Arbi Sidi Mahmoud

## El Moutemeyzin Association:

# The Project that Changed the Lives of PK 9 Residents

By: Varha Abd Selam

**O**n December 8, I received an email from Ms. Lilian Wardle, a tutor at the Higher Institute of English (HIE). In her email, Ms. Wardle talked about a charity in PK 9 that two of her students, Djibril Moussa and Zeydane Yarba, are involved. The charity is called El Moutemeyzin Association for Development and Unity. I was intrigued by the project and had to see it for myself. After meeting with Ms. Wardle in a restaurant for breakfast, we headed to PK 9.

The association is located opposite Masjid Adduat. We were greeted by a young man wearing a white medical scrub T-shirt with the logo of the charity printed above the left-side chest pocket.

The two-story building had no sign and seemed rather unassuming. The young man welcomed us and led us to his office on the second floor.

(This interview is edited for clarity and brevity)

### The key: Could you please introduce yourself to our readers?

My name's Sidi Mahmoud Taleb Ahmed, and I'm 32 years old. I studied at Mahdhadra and later obtained a BT (Technician Certificate) in civil engineering.

### The key: What inspired you to create this project?

As teenagers, we've always admired and been involved with NGOs and charities. After moving to Riyadh, we noticed the poor quality of education. We noticed that for years, no one or just one or two people pass national exams like the Baccalauréat, Brevet, and Concours. When we were finally old enough and could do something about it, we did.

### The key: When was the association founded?

On February 2, 2011. We started in a very humble place with a corrugated galvanized zinc sheets rooftop. In 2015, we moved to another small place that was originally meant to be a store. Eventually, we moved to this two-story house which was a bit expensive but we managed to generate a bit of income to pay some of the rent.

For example, we are subletting two rooms to residents, one room is turned into a cyber café, one classroom is rented to a nearby school in



■ From left to right, Sidi Mahmoud Taleb, Djibril Moussa, and Sidi Salem El Haj

the morning, and the students help if they can with a small payment of 200 MRU. However, we're still short of about 4500 MRU almost every month, which we the volunteers pay out of our own pockets.

### The key: How many are currently volunteering at the association?

The association started with ten founders: President Sidi Mahmoud Taleb, Vice-President Fatimetou Habibellah, General Secretary Abdallahi Mahmoud, Financial Secretary Bennahi Mouhamedou, Head of Foreign Affairs Elhoussein Cheikh, Head of Culture and Media Moukhtar Taher, Head of Internal Affairs Sidi Mahamed Bemba, Head of Women and Social Affairs Khadijetou Mohamed Abdou, Head of Membership and Organisations Cheikh Abdel vatah, and Head of Sports Baba Ahmed.

Including the founders, we currently have 176 volunteers divided into 10 executive offices and 50 committees.

### The key: What does your association do?

Our association offers plenty of activities, trainings, and courses. Initially, at its inception, we taught only languages, Arabic, French, and English. These classes were free of charge. Then as we grew and started taking on more and more students, and more and more volunteers as well, we began courses in maths, physics, and biology. As we started to get more bac students, we began teaching philosophy as well to the literary series bac students.

In addition, we offer training in computer skills such as Microsoft Office. We also teach hardware assembly, and even design and Photoshop, despite the old equipment. Furthermore, we offer religion classes, Quran and Hadiths lessons, reading, and writing so children can get into first grade with a headstart.

We also give regular lectures regarding various topics such as religion, culture, society, self-improvement, and health. The lecturers we host are academicians and experts in their fields.

We often help in awareness campaigns. Whenever there is a national health campaign

about a certain disease or epidemic, we also join in helping raise awareness.

Sometimes, a certain NGO request help in a campaign they're leading such as the Red Crescent and the National Program for Volunteers. At times we might run campaigns in the countryside.

We care very much about mother and child health, encouraging vaccinations for both mother and child before and after childbirth, importance of breastfeeding, and importance of good mother and child nutrition.

Moreover, we do a lot of social work. For example, every January 25, we lead a blood donation campaign. Every month, we raise donations to help improve a less fortunate family's life and make it better. And every week we gather charity to give to a poor family to help it throughout the week.

### The key: Where do you see the association in the future?

- We hope to replicate the model in other areas as well. We also hope to improve and provide our services more professionally.



■ The old and low-end PCs in the PC room where students learn MS Office



# From Nouakchott to the American Southern Border

Vadel was a very educated man; he studied in Morocco, earned a Doctorate in data security, and returned to Mauritania to find himself unemployed. He participated in a TV show and blamed the government for the widespread unemployment rate among educated people, attributing it to nepotism and corruption of government. He was arrested the following day and jailed for months.

Vadel was bailed out and fled the country on a long adventurous trip to Latin America. After several weeks of deadly walking trips in forests, he finally reached the US-Mexican border where he was mistakenly accused of terrorism, beaten, and handcuffed. Afterward he filed for asylum. Vadel had a legal battle that ended with being granted political asylum in the United States.

He performed physical labor of all types in various American states, starting in California, then Virginia, and finally to New York where he drove a Yellow Cab, and lived with his wife, Ashley, and three kids. Ashley was an American woman in her thirties, and she was as white as snow with blue eyes.

Vadel did not speak English before coming to the US which caused him so many problems. He was not even linguistically able to share his personal story with Ashley, the closest person to him. It just happened that she loved him unconditionally from first sight as soon as she met him on a cold winter night in a Mexican fast-food place.

At that time, he relied a lot on body language to communicate with Ashley. It was a memorable night for the couple.



was raised in a progressive family that loved immigrants and sympathized with them as people in foreign lands.

In a childhood book, Ashley read about forced migration. The book was written by one of her grandfathers, reflecting on the atrocities that his family went through while fleeing from Nazi Germany. Her grandfather described people fleeing from oppression, hatred, and enemies of humanity in Europe back in the days when the "human person is by nature a wolf to other" as Hobbes put it.

Her grandfather fled Nazi Germany on a canoe to end up in New York, looking for freedom. He was a brilliant writer, documenting the ins and outs of his freedom adventure to the US. Ashley was very much influenced by her grandfather's book, so she became sympathetic with

to stop these atrocities that humans go through. She constantly questioned why leaders of the First World continued to welcome most heartless leaders of the Third World Countries accused of killing and displacing people. She never received a response to that question despite the ongoing revolution of knowledge in such a digital era in which all types of information can be quickly collected from behind keyboards.

After years of marriage with Ashley and taking English classes in various schools, Vadel's language level started to improve. At that time, he was able to further share personal information with his wife, Ashley. For many years, the language barrier prevented him from telling his personal story, sharing details about his own race, childhood, education, jail ex-

Sahara, a proverb from his culture, and so on...

As his language level was improving, Vadel was emphasizing that the language barrier was like a disease that was gradually dooming a migrant's life. Adding that there are so many migrants who never recover from this disease, so their unique human experiences will disappear with them forever. Vadel mentioned that he was tied with language cuffs that made it difficult for him to grow in the new country both socially and culturally. He always repeated that he was lucky in meeting Ashley because she was able to read his personality when he was unable to express himself. Ashley and Vadel symbolized true human bonds; though they were born and raised in two different parts of the world, they did not even speak a common language when they first met.

Vadel was not able to join any American university to obtain a degree that would secure him a professional job, though he has been thinking about it for years. He felt so frustrated each time he remembered that he never used all his college degrees, though he spent his time, money, and energy to finish his education. His last degree was a Ph.D. in data security that he obtained from a Moroccan public university about two decades ago when he was in his thirties.

It was something frustrating to think about. Arabic and French were the languages of his education which made it difficult to access the job market in the United States, he would not be able to pass any job interview in his field, because of language barriers. He still needs to work hard on his English, especially in writing and reading. Looking back, he wishes today that English was the language of his education.

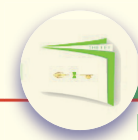
**Extracted from Dr. Mohamed Yahya  
Abdel Wedoud's book  
(From Mauritanian Sahara  
to the Streets of NEW YORK)**



When they first met, Ashley thought that Vadel was a Mexican because of his light skin complexion, stature, and way of talking. She did not think that he was a man who originated from Mauritanian Sahara - which Ashley never even heard of. Her family originally descended from Europe, specifically Germany, so she studied European history in High school, majored in accounting in college, and got a job right away at a global organization. She

migrants in general regardless of their socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. She empathized with all the types of hardships that refugees encounter in their adventurous journeys across continents. Ashley truly believed that world leaders were not doing enough to embrace displaced people. She burst into tears each time she watched the news photos of kids, women, and elderly people fleeing wars and dictatorship regimes across the world. She always felt that the leaders of the First World could have done more

perience, and his adventurous trip from Mauritanian Sahara to Latin America on his way to the Mexican-US border. His wife was eager to know about all those adventures so his kids would know more about their historical roots. Ashley always made jokes about Vadel, saying that he looked like someone who lost memory and began gradually recovering magically from the illness. Vadel kept releasing more information each time his language reservoir improved, such as information about his previous life in



## Palestinian Embassy Commemorates International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People

On December 6, 2022, The Palestinian embassy commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the 18th anniversary of Yasser Arafat's death, and the 34th anniversary of the Palestinian Declaration of Independence at the ambassador's residence.

The ceremony was attended by many authority figures and former and currently serving ministers, most notable of them was Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, the minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad. The event was also attended by several ambassadors representing China, Senegal, Turkey, Mali, Japan, South Africa, Russia, and other embassies in addition to journalists and civil society personalities.



In his speech, Palestinian Ambassador Mohammed Qasem Alasaad, condemned the Israeli actions against the Palestinian people. He also talked about the impor-

tance of Yasser Arafat's Declaration of Independence which "paved the way to a new phase of resistance based on accepting international resolutions and the

joining of Palestine in the international system."

The Ambassador also condemned the double standards of the West when it comes to the Palestinian cause and its bias towards Israel. He also praised the Palestinian-Mauritanian relationships, stating that "the Palestinian cause was and still is a priority to every Mauritanian."

"Mauritanians have always been known for their fondness of immortalizing Palestinian heroism. Mauritanian streets and neighborhoods were given names of Palestinian icons and Poets wrote poems about Palestine."

In the end, the Ambassador thanked the attendees and the Mauritanian government and people.

### From Nouakchott to Doha:

### My Journey to the World Cup Qatar 2022

To be at the heartbeat of a world Cup is an honor, especially when the World Cup is organized in an Arab country for the first time in history. My journey to the World Cup Qatar 2022 started back in March when FIFA released the application for volunteers from around the world to take part in the biggest tournament event that takes place every 4 years in a different continent. I found it interesting to participate so that I could represent my country, Mauritania, have the experience of a lifetime, and sharpen my skills as a reporter. I never thought that I would receive an acceptance email from FIFA to take part in this worldwide event because thousands of people from all over the world competed for it.

However, the dream came true, and, therefore, I became one of 4999 international volunteers alongside 15000 locals to contribute to the success of the remarkable event.

Although I was accepted and I felt over the moon about it, my path to Doha was not easy. I had to make a plan for my journey and determine how to take advantage of this big event. I had never been involved in an international tournament, so I had to make a decision and, thus, reorder my priorities as a master's student who had many responsibilities and duties. My passion for football and my dream to attend a worldwide event both pushed me to take this opportunity, to travel to another continent, and to have the experience.

Being in eight international stadiums, visiting football museums, going to official and unofficial sites, meeting people from countries that I never heard of, meeting celebrities, and watching football stars playing was a fabulous experience. The feelings of joy and sorrow of the audience were unforgettable. In Qatar, many nations claimed to love and unity during the period of the World Cup; one example of this is a 78-year-old man from England who contributed as a volunteer. People from many cultures



came to celebrate these extraordinary moments; many represented their countries by wearing traditional clothes or waving the country's flags in public places, such as Souq Waqif, or Doha Cornich, common places where football fans constantly gathered.

Throughout my stay in Qatar, I did my best to represent my country to the world; I wore my traditional clothes, the Deraa, and I had the national flag on my shoulders. I delivered presentations highlighting my country's culture, tourist places, and religion. People were interested in both my traditional clothes and my flag. They asked, "What flag is that?" or "what traditional clothing is that?" and then I replied with pride and joy. Furthermore, I exchanged my country's currency with other currencies as a way of presenting my country's identity, and now I have collected more than 32 different currencies. I developed a new hobby: collecting currencies; it is an interesting method of representing your country to others.

To me, Qatar has succeeded in organizing the best version of the World Cup ever; this was also the opinion of FIFA President Gianni Infantino and many other international observers. Fans from all over the world had

the excellent opportunity to explore Arab culture, values, and traditions. They were also introduced to Islam via lectures and written posts handed out in different languages, mainly Spanish, and English. Qatar tolerated and promoted peace and unity during the period of the tournament and required observing Islamic rules. It also succeeded in spreading its culture, for instance, the GOAT (Greatest of All Times according to many fans), Messi, was decorated with the beautiful Arabian Bisht the moment he held up the winning trophy.

The great performance that Arab and African teams showed in this tournament again makes it unique. For instance, Senegal became the first African nation to qualify for round 16 since 2014. Moreover, Morocco made history by becoming the first African nation and the first Arab nation to reach the semifinals in the international soccer tournament. In addition, both Tunisia and Saudi Arabia did well by beating Argentina and France, respectively, in the first round of the World Cup. The historical achievements that Qatar and the other Arab and African nations reached in this World Cup should be celebrated for a long time.

■ By Brahim Said

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