

# Mauritania



## General statistics

Population: 3,291,000 (2009 estimate)  
Area: 1,030,700 Km<sup>2</sup>  
Independence: 28 November 1960 (France)  
Capital: Nouakchott  
Government: Islamic republic  
Administrative language: Arabic  
Currency= Ouguiya  
GDP: 6,326 billion USD  
GDP per capita: 2,037 USD  
Calling code: +222  
Motto: Honour, Fraternity, Justice



Minerals: iron ore, cement, copper, gold, gypsum, petroleum, salt, and steel

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the west, by Western Sahara in the north, by Algeria in the northeast, by Mali in the east and southeast, and by Senegal in the southwest.

## History

Mauritania was first inhabited by blacks and Berbers, and it was a center for the Berber Almoravid movement in the 11th century, which sought to spread Islam through western Africa. It was first explored by the Portuguese in the 15th century, but by the 19th century the French had gained control. France organized the area into a territory in 1904, and in 1920 it became one of the colonies that constituted French West Africa. In 1946, it was named a French overseas territory.

Mauritania and Morocco divided the territory of Spanish Sahara (later called Western Sahara) between them after the Spanish departed in 1975, with Mauritania controlling the southern third. The Polisario Front, indigenous Saharawi rebels, fought for the territory against both Mauritania and Morocco. Increased military spending and rising casualties in the region helped bring down the civilian government of Ould Daddah in 1978. A succession of military rulers followed. In 1979, Mauritania withdrew from Western Sahara

In 1984, Col. Maaouye Ould Sidi Ahmed Taya took control of the government. He relaxed Islamic law, fought corruption, instituted economic reforms urged by the International Monetary Fund, and held the country's first multiparty parliamentary elections in 1986. Although the 1991 constitution set up a multiparty democracy, politics remain ethnically and racially based. The primary conflict is between blacks, who dominate the southern regions, and the Moorish-Arabic north, which holds political power. Racial tensions reached a peak in 1989 when Mauritania went to war with Senegal in a dispute over

their shared border. As each country repatriated citizens of the other, critics accused Mauritania of taking the opportunity to expel thousands of blacks.

In 1992, Taya won the nation's first multiparty presidential election, which opponents charged was rigged. Taya's attempts to restructure the economy provoked periodic protests, the most serious of which were the bread riots in Nouakchott in 1995

## **Climate**

Mauritania has four climatic zones, although in general it has a dry tropical climate characterized by sparse and sporadic rainfall. (1.) The Chemama zone which has a rainy season from May to September while tornadoes are also common. Average annual precipitation varies from 300 to 600 mm (12 to 24 inches). (2.) The Sahelian zone which has decreasing rainfall northward and an average annual precipitation, in the south, of around 350 mm (14 inches). (3.) The coastal zone which is humid but with a temperate climate, receives less than 25 mm (1 inches) of annual precipitation. (4.) The Saharan zone receives 25 to 127 mm (1 to 5 inches) of annual precipitation with a rainy season from July to September. The Harmattan, which is a dry and dust laden wind from the Sahara Desert, intensifies the conditions. Average temperature ranges in Nouakchott are from 13 to 28 degrees Celsius (55 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit) in December to 24 to 34 degrees Celsius (75 to 97 degrees Fahrenheit) in September.