

Dear Mr Zubrycki,

I am the Africa Programme Co-ordinator at Anti-Slavery International, and I am writing to you with respect to the documentary 'Born in Captivity' by Violeta Ayala and Dan Fallshaw.

By way of background, as you may know Anti-Slavery International founded in 1839, is the world's oldest international human rights organisation and works exclusively against slavery and related abuses. We work at local, national and international levels to eliminate the system of slavery around the world.

I have been with Anti-Slavery International now for over three years and the focus of my work is descent based slavery, sometimes referred to as chattel slavery. It is practiced across the Sahara, predominantly in Mali, Mauritania and Niger affecting many tens of thousands of people mostly in remote nomadic or semi nomadic environments. This purest form of slavery is characterised by ownership and control practised for the most part by the Toureg and Moor peoples of the Sahara. Residual slavery also found within the Peul and Soninke peoples. Slavery is bound up within a system of caste and ongoing systematic caste based discrimination. We work with local organisations on the continent to assist those leaving slavery as well working for the eradication of slavery in practice through law reform and advocacy at the state and community levels. In January, along with my colleague Mariela Gonzalez, we were very pleased to meet Violet and Dan in Madrid. The purpose of the visit was to discuss and view the footage of interviews claiming slavery in the Tindouf camps and Laayoune, Western Sahara. I was particularly keen to learn more, as I have been assisting a Mauritanian girl in Spain (Saltana - interviewed by Violeta and Dan) who claims she is a slave of a Saharawi family from the Tindouf camps, and because although we have had for a long time, suspicions of slavery continuing to exist we have not been able to verify. I am therefore particularly grateful to the journalists for allowing us to view the footage and to share it with Asim Turkawi my colleague on the Africa Programme responsible for Horn and East Africa with particular expertise on Sudan and also an Arab speaker and therefore able to verify the translation.

Asim and I are of the opinion that the practices described in the interviews are consistent with slavery as it is

practised in neighbouring Mauritania and that the interviewees are credible. Slavery is present when all or any of the powers attached to ownership are exercised over the individual as defined in the UN Convention 1926. In the cases of those interviewed control is exercised particularly with respect to marriage (also reported by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in their recent visit).

I have read with much interest the statement issued by the Saharawi Republic, as you know slavery is a sensitive and particularly thorny issue for States. The denials are regrettably a fairly typical response consistent with those of States including Mauritania (in the past), Niger and Sudan. It is also a common practice for states to put pressure on victims to retract their statements.

I would like to inform you that Anti Slavery International takes the allegations of slavery very seriously; we are currently working with HRW in addressing this problem.

I do hope that you will continue to support the documentary, which we consider will be a useful advocacy tool in raising awareness of the issue on a global level. Please do feel free to contact me at any time should you wish to discuss this further.

For now, best wishes
Romana Cacchioli

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