

The Sahel Foundation for the Defense of Human Rights, Support for Education and Social Peace

Presentation

Sadly famous for its numerous droughts and the threat of starvation affecting its population, the Sahel region has also been known over the last decade as a space where terrorism and armed jihadism (Aqmi, Anssar al-Islam, al-Qaida) exist. But many people are not aware that these now endemic problems contribute to another, more devastating problem - slavery and its related social stigma that results in low levels of education among the youth of the region.

In Mauritania, slavery and its legacies especially affect the *Hratine* community which makes up more than half the country's population and more than 90% of those living in poverty. It is common to see four generations of Hratine without one member having attended school which means that there is little hope of changing their social status and improving the well-being of the family.



The Sahel Foundation for the Defense of Human Rights, Support for Education and Social Peace, has set as its primary goal to fight against slavery and its legacies through education and other peaceful means. Created March 3, 2017 with the authorization of the Mauritanian Ministry of Home

Affairs, the Sahel Foundation was founded by experienced anti-slavery activists who chose to devote their bodies and souls to the education of the poorest children, specifically those from Hratine families. The foundation also fights against slavery in all its forms through education programs and by documenting cases of enslavement with the objective of bringing them to trial at court.

The leadership team is led by teacher Brahim Bilal Ramdhane, former Vice-President of the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA) and one of the recipients of the "Traffic in Persons" prize awarded in 2016 by the Secretary of State in the United States of America.

The Sahel Foundation organizes awareness campaigns to survey and identify families with uneducated children, offering to take responsibility of the education of the children in public or private schools where the children can be enrolled. The Foundation has succeeded in encouraging school principals to enroll these children either without charge or at reduced school fees that the Foundation pays. The Foundation distributes school kits (backpacks, notebooks, pens, books) to families where the parents are currently unemployed. The Foundation organizes additional classes to help these students prepare for major exams such as those required to go to middle school or the final high school exam needed for graduation.





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In 2017, the Foundation succeeded in educating more than 700 students. These students were able to go to school primarily by formally registering them with the State, a procedure often neglected by their families who might not have declared their births or have essential documents such birth certificates needed to register them for school.

In the 2018 school year and after only a year of existence, the Sahel Foundation can proudly claim to have enrolled 800 students in Nouakchott, 200 in Nouadhibou and 50 in Boutilimit.

The Foundation works with 160 private institutions in the country which underlines the reputation it has garnered in the realm of education.

The Foundation especially pays attention to issues facing children in villages (*adwaba*) primarily inhabited by former slaves and looks for quick solutions on the ground involving the relevant authorities.

The school fees in participating schools come to roughly 15-20 Euro per month per child over ten months, or roughly 150-200Euro a year per child. The Sahel Foundation aims to cover the entire cost of educating a child through the support of donations that are then given to the school either by the Foundation or directly by the donor. As such, the foundation aims to find sponsors for the schools in the *adwaba* and for the children of the poorest of families.

The Sahel Foundation was established with the financial support of its first members and, today, it needs your help and your support to continue its successful programs. Your donations are welcome and needed. The Sahel Foundation follows up with you through annual reports so you can see the results of your donations and support.

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