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National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and Immigration Detainees--True Experts--Protest Deportation of Black Mauritians to Torture and Slavery “*Living in Mauritania would be worse than dying*”

Link: <http://bit.ly/IssaQuotes>

Cincinnati, OH - The U.S. Government is preparing to send a deportation charter plane to West Africa on Tuesday, with several Black Mauritians on board. Our government is sending these men, who have lived in the United States for decades and built lives here, back to brutality, slavery, and statelessness.

It's true.

The Reverend Damon Lynch, Jr., board chair of the **National Underground Railroad Freedom Center** and **Dion Brown**, the Center's president, [wrote an op-ed](#) about this problem in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. They want Americans to know that “Slavery still exists,” and they have a simple but profound message for the U.S. government: “No person deserves enslavement. Citizen or not.”

Issa Sao, a family man from Cincinnati, is scheduled to be on that charter plane. He told the [Cincinnati Enquirer](#) that deportation to Mauritania is a literal death sentence: “I will be tortured and killed. That is what they do to us.” Issa's lawyer, Maria Otero with Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE), filed an emergency stay on his behalf weeks ago, and is still awaiting a decision.

Mark Curnutte of the *Enquirer* wrote:

Sao, at the time of his arrest, had a legal work permit and was employed full-time by a pharmaceutical company. He paid taxes and moonlighted as an Uber driver to support his American family. Sao's asylum application was denied in 2004. The BIA denied his appeal in 2009. A final order of deportation was issued, though Sao continued to keep his check-in appointments in Columbus and was granted work permits.

"He was not a fugitive," said his attorney, Maria Otero, of Dayton, Ohio. "He did everything right."

In the five months that Issa has been detained, he has spent time in three immigration jails in Ohio, as well as jails in New York, Louisiana, and Arizona--sometimes more than once. He was shackled for up to twenty hours at a time during transit. Issa is currently detained in Florence, AZ, where the charter is scheduled to take him and others to Africa on Tuesday, October 16.

On Sunday, October 14, immigration detainees from across the US called attorney **Julie Nemecek** in Columbus to express their admiration for Issa, and concern about what will happen to him if he is deported. "It's clear that Issa touched many lives inside some of the bleakest places in America--our nation's immigration jails," said Nemecek. "There are two common themes in what I was hearing from these individuals: one, that Issa is a good man who is constantly helping others; and two, that deporting him to Mauritania would mean torture, slavery, and even death for him. Our government cannot and must not continue sacrificing people's lives just to increase its deportation numbers."

Read on for quotes from some of the men--from Mauritania and other countries--who have gotten to know Issa during his time in detention. **PHOTOS: Issa Sao with his [family](#); with his [stepson](#), outside of the White House; with his [daughter](#).**

Saidu Sow: "I know Issa well. He is such a nice guy - one of the nicest people I know. We have to help him. He cannot go back to Mauritania. There he will be traumatized. Issa will be sent to jail. It may not happen in front of the ICE officer - they will wait until they leave and then take Issa to jail and beat him. He does not have documents. They will use this against him, in Mauritania. He could become a slave because he doesn't have money and he would not have a way out. The reason he does not want to get on a plane is because he knows his future in Mauritania - for him, living there would be worse than dying."

Moussan Diop from [Columbus, Ohio](#): "Issa is a husband and a father. He loves this country so much. When ICE tried to deport him on a commercial flight, the flight attendant told Issa that he was happy because 'Trump is going to clean up this country.' Issa told him, 'I pay taxes and raise children. I am scared to go home. If I go home, they'll kill me. My daughter will lose.' Issa is a very good person. Returning him to Mauritania is his worst nightmare."

Aliou Warr: "I have known Issa since 2002. He is my friend. I do not want ICE to take him to Mauritania, I do not want ICE to take him because they will kill him in Mauritania."

Amadou Sow from Cincinnati: "Issa is a good man. He is a working man, a family man - he is a leader in the Mauritanian community."

Isaac Kakileti: "Issa is a very good person. He has helped everyone here in many different ways. He helped other detainees by using his commissary to buy food for those who did not have money. He also helped with prayer - he made sure the prayer area was clean and organized. He swept and mopped the area and he also sometimes lead prayer. I do not

understand why he is getting deported. He has no criminal record. He has a wife and children. He is a wonderful man - patient and tolerant.”

Abou Diallo of Cincinnati: “I was Issa's roommate for three weeks in Youngstown [at the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center]. He is just a nice and honest man - a good person. He gave me his commissary so I could buy food.”

Mohamed Diaby: “Issa is a good guy - he helps everyone.”

Abdelhaleem Ashqar: “Issa is a very nice guy. To let you know how nice he is - last Tuesday, he left here [the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center]. On Monday, he gave me his commissary to distribute to the needy. He spent three weeks here and never had a problem with anyone - he watched sports, movies - it is stressful here. We spend most of the time inside. We don't go outside. He didn't have problems with anyone. He is from Africa; I am Arab; the rest are Hispanics - he handled himself very well with everyone. Issa had good rapport with everyone. He once told me if he goes back, he will be persecuted, tortured. I can tell you, for someone who has lived in the United States so long, it is very hard for Issa to go back because he is stateless.”

Soulaiman Kamara: “We've been together since April - in Morrow, then in Butler, and then here [the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center]. We've been together almost 4-1/2 months. He's an awesome guy - he's number one. Whenever he can help, he will do it. He helped other people fill out medical requests to see the doctor, fill out commissary papers, locate and call family members. When someone did not have enough money to call family members, he would help them connect.

Khalid Al Temini: “Issa has a very good temperament, Here, we argue a lot, about everything, even things like the microwave - we only have two microwaves to use here. Issa would tell us that is isn't worth it. He is fair with everyone - no matter where they are from - Muslims, Africans, Arabs - I have never seen anything bad from Issa. He laughs and makes the best out of the situation here. I wish he were here with us longer, but they took him. He treats everybody with respect - Hispanic people will say the same thing about Issa.”

Resources:

- **Backgrounder:** Deportations to Mauritania: What You Need to Know
- National Underground Railroad Freedom Center [op-ed](#): “No person deserves enslavement”
- **Cincinnati Enquirer:** “Two more men face deportation to Mauritania from Cincinnati; fear ‘they will kill us all’”
- **Cincinnati Enquirer:** “Does slavery await father of 5 from Lockland fighting deportation back to Mauritania?”
- **The Atlantic:** “How Trump Radicalized ICE”
- **Recording** of 10/11/18 press call

- Reveal News (Center for Investigative Reporting): “A Mauritanian man escaped his country’s ethnic cleansing. ICE deported him anyway”
- UPDATE: “BIA Grants Emergency Stays in Five Mauritanian Cases”

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