German city of Duisburg maintains entry ban against “The Mauritanian” Mohamedou Ould Slahi

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Mohamedou Ould Slahi underwent 14 years of abuse and torture at the hands of the US military and CIA.

Through the film *The Mauritanian* (2021, Kevin Macdonald), Slahi became one of the public faces of the horrors at the US prison camp in Guantánamo, Cuba, where he was imprisoned and brutally mistreated. But despite his being released 10 years ago, and his innocence proven beyond a doubt, he is still not allowed to travel to Duisburg. German authorities continue to treat him as a “terrorist.”

Such actions express clearly the support of the German ruling elite for the dictatorial methods of rule employed by Donald Trump, who is expanding the notorious Guantánamo torture prison into a concentration camp for 30,000 inmates and is setting up similar camps for migrants everywhere in the US modelled on it.

Slahi became known internationally because he recorded the story of his suffering in diary entries, initially published with many redactions under the title *Guantánamo Diary*. It formed the basis for the screenplay of the film *The Mauritanian* featuring Jodie Foster as a human rights lawyer and Benedict Cumberbatch as an investigator, seen by around 3.8 million viewers.

The film was also shown on German television. A documentary entitled “Slahi and his torturers” can be seen in the ARD media library.

But despite his rehabilitation, Slahi, who now works as a writer, is still not allowed to travel to Germany. He has been repeatedly denied entry.

In 2021, he was not allowed to come to the Berlinale for the German premiere of *The Mauritanian*. In 2023, following publication of his first novel, *The True Story of Ahmed and Zarga*, he was invited to Berlin to head the African Book Festival. This triggered a fierce campaign against him, whereupon his entry was prohibited. “An Israel-hater should not be allowed to direct a book festival,” wrote Alan Posener in *Die Welt.*

Once caught in the clutches of the intelligence services, Slahi faces being pursued as a suspect for life. Especially now, when everything is being done to maintain the “Islamic bogeyman” image, intended to nip any resistance against the imperialist wars in the Middle East, and elsewhere, in the bud. Slahi’s entry ban is part of the political attacks on artists and authors who express solidarity with the Palestinians and reject the imperialist war policy.

Slahi is still not allowed to come to Duisburg, even though the Düsseldorf Higher Administrative Court declared the city’s justification for the entry ban to be no longer legally relevant on February 2. Because the Duisburg authorities appealed to the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig, and maintain there exists a suspicion of terrorism against Slahi, he is still not permitted to enter Germany, to attend premieres of his plays or award ceremonies, nor to visit his wife and son, who live in Germany.

Duisburg bases its suspicion of terrorism on information from the US Department of Justice. And this despite the fact that the Federal Criminal Police Office has found no evidence that Slahi had anything to do with the 9/11 attacks.

The WSWS has reported on Slahi’s story several times and also interviewed him. Therefore, only the most important facts will be outlined here.

Slahi came under suspicion because he travelled to Afghanistan as a devout Muslim in 1990 to prepare in

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an al-Qaeda camp for the jihad against the Soviet-backed regime of Najibullah. At that time, al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups were supported and promoted by the CIA to weaken Soviet influence in Central Asia.

After a second trip to Afghanistan in 1992, Slahi returned to Germany to complete his studies in electrical engineering. At this point, according to his own statements, he broke off all ties to al-Qaeda.

However, he came under the suspicion of the Verfassungsschutz (German secret service) in 1998 after US intelligence services intercepted a telephone call to his cousin Mahfouz Ould al-Walid, which the latter made from Osama bin Laden's telephone. However, this call only concerned his cousin asking Slahi to send money to his sick father.

The CIA subsequently falsely considered Slahi to be the chief recruiter for al-Qaeda in Germany. In addition, one of his relatives had been a member of the al-Qaeda leadership and had headed the organisation's religious advisory body. However, he had left the organisation in protest against the planned attacks of September 11, 2001. From this point on, Slahi was apparently permanently in the crosshairs of the intelligence services.

In 2001, he was arrested in Mauritania, where he had been living for a year and working as an electrical engineer. At the instigation of US security forces, he was interrogated for several weeks by Mauritanian officials and American intelligence agents. The interrogations were continued in Jordan and Afghanistan. From 2002 to 2016 he was then imprisoned in Guantánamo and subjected to cruel interrogations and torture.

The US intelligence services chose to view him as one of the masterminds of the 2001 September 11 attacks and sought to obtain non-existent information from him. He was tortured with solitary confinement, waterboarding, exposed to continuous noise, sexual harassment, sleep deprivation, bodily harm and threats of violence against his mother. Eventually he confessed to deeds he had never committed.

After his release, Slahi faced an odyssey between various German authorities. The foreign ministry approved a visa application, not least because he spoke fluent German and was a welcome guest at the German embassy in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, and was able to give lectures there. However, the federal interior ministry intervened against this.

Nevertheless, the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) has no findings indicating that Slahi poses a terrorist threat, that he spread Islamist ideology after his release or that he has been active in the Islamist scene in Germany over the past 20 years. The Administrative Court in Düsseldorf had obtained corresponding information from the BKA for the trial.

The city of Duisburg issued an indefinite entry ban against Slahi in 1999 for alleged benefit fraud. After his studies, he had applied for unemployment benefit and later founded a company without reporting this—erroneously, as he explained—to the Federal Employment Agency. A court then assessed this not as an administrative offence, but as an intentional criminal offence and imposed a six-month suspended prison sentence. Slahi was deported from Germany.

When he applied to the city of Duisburg in 2020, after more than 20 years, for a time limit to be set on the entry ban, the city ordered a further ban for 20 years. It justified this with the allegedly continuing threat of terrorism.

Slahi is now a Dutch and thus European Union citizen. He works as an author and wanted to travel to Duisburg for the premieres of his plays and award ceremonies. He also wanted to visit his wife, an American human rights lawyer, and his son living in Germany. But his application for family reunification was also rejected.

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