

PUBLIC

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28 March 2006

UA 69/06 Incommunicado detention/fear of torture or ill-treatment

GAMBIA

Major Sang Pierre Mendy (m)
Captain Muhammed Jah (m)
Captain Bunja Darboe (m)
Lt Wassa Camara (m)
Famara Jammeh (m)
Alpha Bah (m), sergeant-major
Sgt Abdoulie Sanyang (m)
Mamadou Cadi Cham (m), former minister
Antouman A. B. Gaye (m), lawyer
Ramzia Diab (f), former MP of the ruling APRC party
Musa Seydikam (m), Chief Editor of *The Independent*
Madi Cisey (m), *Independent* administrator
At least 16 others

At least 28 people, including those named above, have been arrested in connection with an attempted coup that allegedly took place on 21 March. All were detained in the capital, Banjul, and are now held incommunicado. The authorities have not disclosed where they are held, and relatives and lawyers have been turned away from the prisons where some are believed/known to be in custody. They are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

On 22 March the office of the president announced that "all those involved [in the attempted coup] are presently in custody and helping the security forces in their investigation, except the leader who is still at large." President Alhaji Yahya Jammeh declared on national radio and television on 25 March that "any attempts to unconstitutionally overthrow this government will be crushed without mercy," and that he "will set an example that would put an end to ... treachery and sabotage."

The soldiers named above were reportedly arrested on 22 March. Of the other detainees, Mamadou Cadi Cham had been a minister in the government of Sir Dawda Jawara, who was himself deposed by Alhaji Yahya Jammeh in a bloodless coup in 1994. He was arrested at his home on 24 March. Lawyer Antouman A. B. Gaye was arrested by the security forces at the High Court in Banjul on 27 March. Late in the evening of the following day, security forces came to the house of Musa Seydikam, Chief Editor of *The Independent* newspaper and arrested him without giving any reason. His family does not know where he has been taken. *The Independent*, which is published twice a week, has been critical of the government, and has been regularly harassed by the authorities. The newspaper's administrator, Madi Cisey, was arrested on the morning of 28 March. Since then soldiers have prevented anyone from going into the office, effectively shutting the newspaper down.

On 28 March, some of the detainees were shown on national television reading a statement confirming that they had been involved in an attempted coup. None of them is known to have been formally charged or produced before a judge.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Presidential elections are due to take place this year and President Jammeh has announced that he will be running for a third consecutive term in office at the head of the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and

Construction (APRC). Repression of journalists and members of opposition political parties have been reported over the last few years. In November 2005 three members of a newly formed opposition coalition were arrested for what the authorities called "subversive activities". The arrests followed by-elections in which the opposition coalition won three of the four seats that were contested.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that at least 28 people are detained incommunicado for their supposed involvement in an attempted coup, including those named above (naming them), and urging the authorities to reveal where they are detained;
- seeking assurances that they are not being tortured or ill-treated, and urging the authorities to give them regular access to their families, lawyers and any medical attention they may require;
- urging the authorities to release the detainees immediately, unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- if they are to be charged, asking for details of the charges against them and when they are to be put on trial.

APPEALS TO:

President and Minister of Defence
Captain (retd.) Alhaji Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh
Office of the President
State House, Banjul
Republic of the Gambia
Fax: + 220 4227 034
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior
M. Baboucarr Jatta
Ministry of Interior
71 Dobson Street, Banjul
Gambia
Fax: + 220 420 1320
Salutation: Dear Minister

Attorney General and Secretary of State for Justice
M. Sheikh Tijan Hydera
Department of State for Justice and Attorney General's Chambers
Marina Parade
Banjul
Republic of the Gambia
Faxes: + 220 4225 352
Salutation: Dear Secretary of State

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Gambia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 May 2006.