

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AFR 27/008/2009
13 November 2009

Amnesty International expresses solidarity with civil society in Gambia

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that despite recommendations by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission), Gambian President Yahya Jammeh has refused to withdraw his threats against human rights defenders and other members of civil society in Gambia.

In solidarity with human rights defenders and other members of civil society in Gambia, Amnesty International has decided not to attend the ongoing 46th Ordinary Session of the African Commission in Banjul, Gambia.

On Monday 21 September, President Jammeh reportedly stated on national television that he would kill anyone who threatened to destabilize the country. President Jammeh specifically threatened human rights defenders, and those working with them, by emphasizing that their security and personal safety would not be guaranteed by the government of Gambia.

Several human rights non-governmental organizations have condemned the threats issued by the President and asked the Gambian authorities to guarantee the human rights and safety of human rights defenders and other members of civil society in Gambia.

In October, during the 7th Extraordinary Session in Dakar, Senegal, the African Commission expressed concerns about the threats issued by President Jammeh and asked the Gambian government to withdraw them and guarantee respect for the human rights of human rights defenders and other members of civil society in Gambia. The African Commission called on the African Union (AU) to intervene and ensure that President Jammeh withdrew threats made in his statement.

Amnesty International is concerned that Gambian authorities have failed to withdraw the threats against human rights defenders and other members of civil society in the country.

The African Commission itself has repeatedly condemned the lack of political freedom and the widespread human rights violations in Gambia. The human rights situation has worsened since the alleged attempted coup plot in March 2006. The Gambian government has stifled political and social dissent and the army, National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and police have committed serious human rights violations.

Two cases involving Gambian journalists have been brought to the attention of the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice since 2006: Daily Observer journalist Chief Ebrima Manneh has remained a victim of enforced disappearance for three years despite the Court's ruling demanding he be released and damages be paid to his family. Former editor of The Independent newspaper, Musa Saidykhan's, alleges he was tortured by the NIA in 2006; his case is ongoing.

Amnesty International calls on the Gambian authorities to:

- Immediately retract threats made by President Jammeh against human rights defenders and other members of civil society in Gambia;

- Publicly reaffirm commitments to respect, protect and promote human rights in line with the country's constitution and international human rights obligations and commitments;
- Fully implement the African Commission's resolution at the 7th Extraordinary Session requesting the government to withdraw its threat against human rights defenders;
- Fully comply with the order handed down by the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice in June 2008 to release Chief Ebrima Manneh from detention without further delay;
- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience and to release those unlawfully detained or charge them with a recognizable criminal offence.

Amnesty International calls on the African Union Assembly to:

- Publicly condemn the human rights situation in Gambia and ensure the Gambian government fully respects the human rights of its citizens;
- Ensure the Gambian government implements all of the recommendations by the African Commission, including those calling for an investigation into all allegations of acts of torture in detention and extrajudicial executions;
- Insist that the Gambian government fully complies with its obligations under the African Charter with regard to the right to liberty, freedom from torture, right to fair trial, freedom of expression and of association;
- Discuss at its next ordinary session in January the deteriorating human rights situation in Gambia with a view to finding lasting solutions and holding the Gambian government accountable for its human rights obligations including under the Constitutive Act of the AU and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

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