

EXTERNAL

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"Disappearance" / Prisoner of conscience

27 March 1996

THE GAMBIA

Lamin Waa Juwara, former member of parliament

Lamin Waa Juwara has not been seen since he was arrested around 11 February 1996 - his fifth arrest since November 1994. His family was told he was being held at Jangjangbureh prison in Central River Division, but the Commissioner in charge of this division has reportedly denied this.

No reason has been given for most of his previous arrests, but on one occasion - in June 1995 - it was announced publicly that he was being held on account of his political activities. Amnesty International believes that his current detention is due solely to his non-violent political opinions.

When the military seized power in July 1994, they banned all political parties and political activities. Lamin Waa Juwara had been an independent member of parliament under the previous government, but parliament was disbanded when the military came to power and suspended the constitution.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by the "disappearance" of Lamin Waa Juwara, and fears that it may set a dangerous precedent in the current human rights situation in The Gambia. For the protection of human rights, it is essential that prisoners are only held in recognized places of detention where they can receive visits from family, doctors and lawyers. This is especially important when the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), which is directly controlled by the government, the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC), has far-reaching powers of search and arrest and can only be investigated following complaints to the AFPRC.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A bloodless military coup in July 1994 brought an end to the rule of President Jawara, Gambia's president since independence, and brought the AFPRC to power. The AFPRC, led by Lieutenant (now Captain) Yahya Jammeh, pledged to eradicate corruption and set up a number of commissions of inquiry to investigate past government practice. Although the new government also pledged to defend human rights, its decrees have steadily undermined fundamental freedoms and removed human rights safeguards: political activities have been banned, journalists have been harassed or expelled from the country and the NIA has been given wide-ranging powers. Following the removal of the Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms Chapter of the Constitution in April 1995, a Court of Appeal decision in July 1995 stated: "...now there are no human rights laws in this country". On 12 August 1995 the AFPRC issued a decree reinstating the death penalty.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that since his arrest in early February 1996, Lamin Waa Juwara has been held incommunicado in an undisclosed place of detention and urging that his whereabouts be made public immediately;
- urging that he be granted immediate access to his family, a lawyer and doctor of his choice;
- requesting assurances that he is being well treated in custody;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience, held on account of his non-violent political opinions.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
Captain Yahya Jammeh
Chairman of the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council and Head of State
Office of the President
State House
Banjul
Republic of Gambia
Telegrams: Captain Jammeh, State House, Banjul, Gambia
Faxes: +220 227 034
Telexes: 2204
Salutation: Dear Captain Jammeh

Captain Lamin Bajo
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
71 Dobson Street
Banjul
Republic of Gambia
Telegrams: Captain Bajo, Interior Ministry, Banjul, Gambia
Salutation: Dear Captain Lamin Bajo

Mr Musa Bittaye
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's Chambers
Marina Parade
Banjul
Republic of Gambia
Telegrams: Justice Minister Marong, Banjul, Gambia
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The Editor, The Daily Observer, PMB 131, Banjul, Gambia
The Editor, The Gambia Daily, 14 Hagan Street, Banjul, Gambia
The Editor, The Point, 1A Hagan Street, Banjul, Gambia
The Editor, The Nation, People's Press, 3 Boxbar Road, POB 334, Banjul,
Gambia

and 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 15 May 1996.