



International Federation of Journalists

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H.E President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua
Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and
Government of ECOWAS
Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria

Re: ARREST OF JOURNALISTS IN THE GAMBIA

22 June 2009

Your Excellency,

We write on behalf of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) the world's largest organisation of journalists representing 600,000 journalists in 123 countries, to seek your intervention in the case of the seven Gambian journalists arrested last Monday by the Gambia National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and currently remanded in State Prison.

According to our affiliate, the Gambian Press Union, the seven journalists comprising the GPU General Secretary Emil Touray, Vice President Sarata Jabbi-Dibba, and Treasurer, Pa Modou Faal; together with Pap Saine, Publisher, and Ebrima Sawaneh, Editor of *The Point* newspaper; and Sam Sarr, Editor and Abubcarr Saikyhan Reporter, at the *Foroyaa* newspaper were arrested last Monday 15 June and detained incommunicado until Thursday 18 June when they were charged, without the authorities notifying their lawyers.

We understand that the three charges include (i) conspiracy to publish seditious publication contrary to Section 368 of Criminal Code; (ii) publishing seditious publication contrary to Section 51, sub-section 1 A read together with Section 52, sub-section 1C of Criminal Code, regarding *Foroyaa*, and (iii) publishing seditious publication contrary to Section 51 sub-section 1 A read together with Section 52, sub-section 1C of Criminal Code, regarding *The Point*.

It appears that the arrest of these journalists followed the publication of a statement by the GPU regarding comments made on national television by the Gambian Head of State, President Yahia Jammeh, on the death of Gambian journalist Deyda Hydara and the state of press freedom in the Gambia.

As a representative of the global community of journalists, the International Federation of Journalists has, over many years, protested the serious media abuses in the Gambia, most of which consisting of gross human rights violations.

In the case of Deyda Hydara, the FIJ and its affiliates have, for many years, called for genuine efforts on the part of the Gambian government to arrest his murders and supported the GPU in its campaign and statements.

We are aware that in many ECOWAS countries great progress has been achieved in the field of freedom of expression with respect to fundamental rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human People's Rights to which ECOWAS and its member states are signatories.

Unfortunately, the situation in the Gambia continues to worsen and its record on freedom of expression remains poorly rated by global media monitoring organisations.

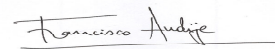
We are very much aware that you have many important issues on the agenda of the ECOWAS summit, but we appeal to you, on behalf of the global community of journalists, to intervene in your capacity as Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government and through you to heads of state and government, to issue a call to the Gambian government to drop the charges against the seven journalists and release them forthwith.

Yours faithfully

Jim Boumelha
President



Paco Audije
Deputy General Secretary



cc Dr. Mohamed Ibn Cambas, President, ECOWAS Commission