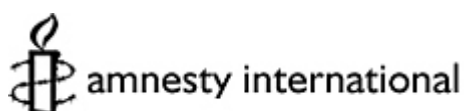


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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Gambia

REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

Head of state and government: Yahya Jammeh

Death penalty: abolitionist in practice

Population: 1.7 million

Life expectancy: 55.7 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f): 123/109 per 1,000

Adult literacy: 42.5 per cent

The government continued to stifle political and social dissent. Members of the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), army and police arbitrarily arrested and detained government opponents, human rights defenders, journalists and former security personnel. Reportedly, President Yahya Jammeh publicly threatened human rights defenders and those who co-operated with them. The authorities threatened to resume executions after more than 20 years.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

The police, NIA and army arrested and detained people in breach of safeguards in national law. Detainees were held in official places of detention such as the Mile 2 Central Prison, the NIA headquarters and police detention centres, as well as in secret detention centres, including military barracks, secret quarters in police stations, police stations in remote areas and warehouses.

- In March, more than 1,000 villagers from Foni Kansala district were taken to secret detention centres by "witch hunters" from Guinea and Burkina Faso dressed in red hooded outfits. The "witch hunters" were allegedly brought in by the President and accompanied by Gambian police, soldiers, NIA agents and the President's personal guards. The villagers were reportedly forced to drink hallucinogenic liquids and confess to "witchcraft". The drinks appeared to cause kidney problems and reportedly led to at least six deaths. Opposition leader Halifa Sallah, who wrote about the "witchcraft campaign" in the opposition newspaper *Foroyaa*, was detained, charged with treason and held in Mile 2 Central Prison until his case was dropped in late March. The "witchcraft

campaign" ceased after it was publicly exposed, but none of those involved in the abuses was brought to justice.

Several people were held in long-term detention without trial. Among them were at least 19 people, including Senegalese and Nigerian nationals, who were held without charge in Mile 2 Central Prison maximum security cell, one for at least 13 years.

- At least two people arrested in connection with a March 2006 coup plot remained in detention. Alieu Lowe was held without charge or trial and Hamadi Sowe, charged with concealment of treason, was held without trial.

Freedom of expression – journalists

Freedom of expression continued to be severely limited. Journalists faced threats and harassment if they were suspected of writing stories unfavourable to the authorities or of providing information to media outlets.

- On 15 June, seven journalists were arrested after criticizing the President for comments he made about the unsolved 2004 murder of Deyda Hydara, former editor of *The Point* newspaper. The seven were charged with defamation and sedition. One was later released on bail and charges subsequently dropped. On 6 August, the remaining six were convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine. Emil Touray, Secretary General of the Gambian Press Union (GPU); Sarata Jabbi Dibba, Vice President of the GPU; Pa Modou Faal, Treasurer of the GPU; Pap Saine and Ebrima Sawaneh, respectively publisher and editor of *The Point* newspaper; and Sam Sarr, editor of *Foroyaa* newspaper, were prisoners of conscience. They were released under a presidential pardon on 3 September.

Enforced disappearances

The fate and whereabouts of at least eight people arrested in previous years, including opposition supporters and journalists, remained unknown.

- *Daily Observer* journalist Chief Ebrima Manneh, who was arrested in 2006, remained disappeared despite a 2008 ruling by the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice demanding his release and damages for his family. In October, the government denied any knowledge of his whereabouts.
- The government continued to deny knowledge of the whereabouts of Kanyiba Kanyie, an opposition supporter arrested in September 2006.

Unlawful killings

In April, a team established by ECOWAS and the UN reported on the killing in July 2005 of more than 50 foreign nationals, most from Ghana, who were intercepted by Gambian security forces in the sea off Gambia. The report established that Gambian security forces were involved but not under government directive. The government contributed towards the funeral expenses of six Ghanaians whose bodies were found, but took no steps to bring those responsible for the killings to justice.

Death penalty

In September, the President announced that executions would resume to counter rising crime; the last known execution was in the 1980s. In October, the Director of Public Prosecutions was reported as saying that all prisoners sentenced to death would be executed by hanging as soon as possible.

One person was sentenced to death and at least 12 people were believed to be on death

row at the end of the year. No executions were reported.

- In August, Kalilou Conteh was sentenced to death by Banjul magistrate's court for murder.

Human rights defenders

On 21 September, the President reportedly threatened to kill anyone wishing to destabilize the country and specifically threatened human rights defenders and those working with them. As a result, international organizations and members of Gambia's civil society boycotted the session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights held in the Gambia in November. Two UN Special Rapporteurs and one Rapporteur serving with the African Commission condemned the President's remarks as unacceptable and in breach of all human rights instruments ratified by Gambia.

Amnesty International visit/reports

- Amnesty International delegates visited Gambia in November to conduct research.
- Gambia: Amnesty International demands freedom for Gambians (AFR 27/005/2009)
- Gambia: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (AFR 27/006/2009)
- Gambia: Amnesty International expresses solidarity with civil society in Gambia (AFR 27/008/2009)
- Gambia: Hundreds accused of "witchcraft" and poisoned in government campaign, 18 March 2009
- Gambia: Six journalists condemned to two years in Mile 2 prison, 7 August 2009

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