



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

The Gambia – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

03 July 2023

Conditions in Mile II Central Prison

According to media reports, the parliamentary human rights committee, which most recently criticised the precarious detention conditions in Gambian detention facilities (cf. BN of 26.06.23), stated that 536 people were currently being held in Mile II Central Prison. In October 2022, the committee chair had pointed out that half of the inmates were pre-trial detainees (cf. BN of 11.10.22). Because of the shortage of prison cells, detainees were housed in the pre-trial detention facility or transferred to Janjanbureh prison, he said. The Committee stated that the pre-trial detention wing of Mile II was currently in a very poor condition and "not suitable for housing prisoners". Cells were infested with mosquitoes and stagnant water in the building attracted more mosquitoes. Few prison staff are trained in human rights standards. Neither are there special accommodations for pregnant women and nursing mothers.

On a positive note, the committee said that the prison's medical centre could be improved with the support of the UN Development Programme.

17 July 2023

Compensation for unlawful imprisonment

According to a media report, the High Court in Kanifing awarded a plaintiff suspected of robbery a monetary compensation of GMD 400,000 (approx. EUR 6024, as of 14.07.23) for unlawful detention and ordered his release. The plaintiff had been detained for two years without trial in Mile II Central Prison. The plaintiff claimed to have been a minor at the time of his arrest and to have been remanded in custody in May 2021 without being charged or accused of any crime.

When pronouncing the judgment, the sitting judge also said that unlawful detention in regular prisons was common without trials being held within a reasonable time. Cases of prolonged pre-trial detention are a problem and persistently high pre-trial detention figures in prisons are well known (cf. BN of 26.06.23 and 11.10.22).

24 July 2023

Repression over alleged criticism of president's wife and police chief

Civic activist Madi Jobarteh reported police harassment and intimidation of a young activist and called for an end to the repressions against her. The woman had been temporarily detained, thereafter she was released on bail and given a police registration order, he reported and also said that reports circulated in the media and social networks that the police had revoked her release on bail. According to Jobarteh, in the absence of information to the contrary, the woman had not been guilty of any wrongdoing and had not been charged with or even suspected of any crime.

Jobarteh said that conventional and social media reports indicate that the woman had criticised the president's wife Fatou Bah-Barrow and the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Abdoulie Sanyang. No further information is known.

07 August 2023

Two death sentences for murder, including one in absentia

According to media reports, the High Court in Kanifing has sentenced two defendants to death for murder as sought by the prosecution. In one case, a death sentence was pronounced in absentia because the defendant is at large, the reports said. The Gambia has had a de facto moratorium on executions since February 2018. The formal death penalty was last carried out in 2012 under former president Yahya Jammeh.

NAATIP frees dozens of girls from prostitution

Citing the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (NAATIP), media reported that two Nigerian women were arrested for sex trafficking of dozens of Nigerian minors. Investigations were initiated against them and the accused were later released on bail. According to a senior prosecutor, the offence is not a capital offence and thus, bailable. No details were given on the exact number of girls freed. Some girls were as young as 15 years, he said. The accused had admitted to bringing several girls to The Gambia. However, they had denied the accusations of the victims that they had lured them to The Gambia with false promises of work and once there, forced them into prostitution. Rather, the girls had been fully aware of their intended employment as sex workers, they argued. Dozens of girls had already been repatriated to Nigeria and others had been placed with the president of the Association of Social Workers in The Gambia, the prosecutor said.

Several arrests at Senegal-related protest

According to media reports, on 01.08.23, Senegalese President Macky Sall was attending the opening ceremony of a school financed by the Senegalese state in the capital Banjul. On the fringes of the ceremonial opening several protesting supporters of Senegalese opposition leader Ousmane Sonko clashed with sympathisers of Sall. The Gambian police arrested some of Sonko's supporters and took them into police custody for unauthorised protests, the reports said. However, the fate of a Sall supporter who was also arrested, is not known. Sonko, President Sall's main opponent, was recently remanded in custody in the Senegalese capital Dakar and his party was banned by the Senegalese Interior Ministry, sparking protests and violence in Senegal.

14 August 2023

Charges of Senegal-related unauthorised assembly

According to a media report, the Gambian police confirmed the charges against nine supporters of Senegalese opposition leader Ousmane Sonko for unauthorised assembly. The accused have since been released on bail, the report said. They were arrested and taken into police custody last week when they protested against Sonko's arrest and the banning of his party on the sidelines of the opening of a school financed by the Senegalese state in the presence of Senegalese President Macky Sall, at that time they also clashed with Sall sympathisers (cf. BN of 07.08.23).

Employment and work situation; gender inequality in working life

Citing the Gambian government's Labour Force Survey 2022-2023, media reported that the labour force participation rate of the working age population is around 44%. The labour force participation rate is significantly lower in rural than in urban areas and that of men is higher than that of women across all age groups. Women make up more than half of the inactive population according to the survey, which says that women are inactive, because of their domestic and family duties or the like.

Around 63% of total employment is informal employment. The majority of young people in unspecified age groups works informally (84%), mostly self-employed. Young women are worse off than young men in the informal sector. No further details were given in that respect. The unemployment rate of young people is three times higher than that of adults, and also their employment rate is significantly lower than that of adults. They have difficulties entering the labour market and finding quality jobs. 45% of young people are neither in employment nor in education or training. The labour force survey was conducted in cooperation with development partners and others,

including the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

Prevalence of child labour

This government survey also shows that child labour, irrespective of gender, is almost four times more prevalent in rural areas (around 38%) than in urban areas (around 10%). In Mansakonko, Kuntaur and Janjanbureh, almost half (about 47%) of all children have to work.

Older age groups are more affected by child labour, media reported from the survey. While around 22% of children aged five to 14 years are engaged in child labour, around 29% of children aged 15 to 17 years are doing child labour. More than a third (about 36%) of children aged five to 14 living in rural areas and almost half (about 47%) of children aged 15 to 17 are engaged in child labour, mainly in the agricultural sector. However, the majority of children of all ages who do child labour remain in school. Yet, the rate of children that only work is twice as high in rural areas.

It is reported that child protection regulations are not effectively enforced and that child labour is socially accepted in The Gambia (cf. BN of 12.12.22).

11 September 2023

Reference cases: First convictions for FGM

According to media reports, a magistrate's court found three women guilty of genital mutilation (FGM) of eight girls between four and twelve months of age. Each of them was sentenced to fines of 15,000 Dalasi (about 231 EUR, as of 08.09.23), or alternatively to one year in prison, the reports said. The court thus remained below the legal minimum penalty. The cases represent the first convictions for FGM in The Gambia, which has been banned and criminalised since 2015. The convicts are a traditional circumciser who performed FGM in violation of an oath she took in 2013 (cf. BN of 06.02.23) and the mothers of the genitally mutilated girls. They had been arrested in January 2023 in the eastern part of the Central River Region. No information is available on the ethnicity of the girls and mothers. Nor is there any information on the forms of FGM applied according to the WHO classification.

The Gambia Committee against Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) welcomed the rulings. Related hereto, the NGO pointed out that there are indications that some families are taking their children from the capital region of Banjul to rural areas during the current school holidays in order to subject them to FGM.

Abdullah Fatty, former imam at the State House mosque under former President Yahya Jammeh and a Muslim scholar who is said to remain particularly influential in largely Muslim Gambia, criticised the rulings. He further described the FGM campaigns in the country as an attack on Islam. Fatty and other religious actors again defended the practice of FGM, citing religious reasons (cf. BN of 06.02.23). They also paid the fine for the three convicts. The former vice-president of The Gambia, Isatou Touray, called for Fatty's arrest because of his public statements. According to Touray and the chairperson of the Safe Hands for Girls Foundation and FGM activist Jaha Dukureh, Fatty's statements included calls for violence against FGM activists.

The National Youth Parliament of The Gambia (NYP) expressed concern at the support of religious leaders for maintaining the practice of circumcision in the country and paying the fines imposed. NYP called on the government to continue its efforts to enforce the ban on FGM.

Tear gas used against demonstrators; Popular opposition figure on trial

According to media reports, on 07.09.23 police forces used tear gas against protesters who expressed their solidarity with the accused opposition member Yankuba Darboe outside a court in Banjul. A media outlet reported that the use of tear gas by police was related to an attempt by his supporters to gain access to the court premises. Darboe, a member of the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP) and one of the former leaders of the civil society protest movement 3 Years Jotna, which was banned by the government in 2020 (cf. BN of 15.02.21), has been indicted on charges of sedition and public insults since 2021. His supporters and some political and civil society observers believe the charges are politically motivated. Darboe has been an elected councillor of the Brikama Area Council since the 2023 local government elections and chairs the council. A leading member of the 3 Years Jotna, on the other hand, insinuates a connection with Darboe's activism for the banned opposition movement that protested against President Adama Barrow in late 2019 and early 2020. According to media reports, the trigger for the indictment were Darboe's disparaging and derogatory remarks, for which he later apologised. The indictment states that in February 2021, Darboe allegedly called President Barrow a "stupid and clueless dictator" and also

made derogatory and disrespectful comments about the judiciary. The criminal proceedings against Darboe and the other leaders of the 3 Years Jotna were dropped in 2021 (cf. BN of 10.05.21).

18 September 2023

Several MPs and GSIC call for decriminalisation of FGM

Following the first criminal convictions for female genital mutilation (FGM), several members of parliament, including women, joined Islamic religious leaders in calling for decriminalisation of the widespread traditional practice and for autonomous freedom of choice. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) expressed "deep concern" at the demands and attitudes of some MPs. Recently, the influential, quasi-governmental Supreme Islamic Council (GSIC) had also called for the decriminalisation of FGM. The GSIC expressed concern in light of recent FGM convictions and proposed training for traditional circumcisers in Sunni circumcision. The sentences and the payment of the fines imposed on the convicts by Islamic religious leaders recently triggered an intensive and public discussion between those in favour of and those against FGM (cf. BN of 11.09.23). Abdullah Fatty, former imam of the State House Mosque under former president Yahya Jammeh, who is also responsible for paying these fines, called for a social and economic boycott of all those who support the ban on FGM.

25 September 2023

Assassination of police officers: Arrest and indictment of two UDP members, journalist arrested

According to media reports, the campaign manager of the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), Momodou Sabally, was interrogated by the police on 15.09.23, subsequently arrested and detained for several days. The same applies to UDP member and most recently democratically elected Brikama Area Council (BAC) member Sheriffo Sonko, who had gone on hunger strike in protest against his detention. Both were investigated for Facebook posts. On 19.09.23, they were charged of threatening public officials, but later released on bail and with conditions. Sabally reportedly wrote an opinion piece critical of the Gambian Police Special Operations Unit (PIU). This appeared just days before a deadly attack on police officers on 12.09.23 near the capital Banjul. The government classified this attack, in which two police officers were killed and another seriously injured, as a terrorist attack. The main suspect has since confessed to being a former member of the Senegalese Movement of Democratic Forces in Casamance (MFDC). Sabally denied the allegations and continued to reaffirm his anti-government commitment. Sabally had already been arrested under controversial circumstances and detained for a long time without formal proceedings at the end of 2022 for allegedly foiled coup plans (cf. BN of 02.01.23). UDP party leader Ousainou Darboe has criticised the recent arrests as politically motivated. He also condemned the intensifying police crackdown on the UDP, reminiscent of the Jammeh era. UDP supporters who wanted to visit Sabally were harassed and physically assaulted by the police, he said. One UDP supporter reported that he was pulled out of his car, beaten and detained for 20 hours. Although he is an asthmatic, he was denied access to necessary medication.

The Gambian government spokesperson's statements on the assassination of the police officers caused criticism in some parts of civil society and opposition circles. The criticism related to his statement that the main suspect was a contract killer, working for the BAC as a security guard who had been present at the court hearing of the BAC chairman in the criminal court. The criminal proceedings against the BAC chairperson were recently criticised as being partially politically motivated (cf. BN of 11.09.23).

On 20.09.23, the journalist Bakary Mankajang was arrested. Before his arrest, he wrote on Facebook that the reason for his police summons was probably related to his trip to Jululung (Casamance) - the place of arrest of the main suspect of the attack on the police officers. According to Mankajang, he conducted interviews with eyewitnesses of the arrest there.

16 October 2023

Human rights activist and media representative released on bail; situation regarding freedom of expression and freedom of the press

The human rights activist and national representative of the Westminster Foundation, Madi Jobarteh, was arrested at his home on 09.10.23 and subsequently released on bail after three days in police custody. No official charges

are known. Prior to his arrest, Jobarteh had reported that he had been placed under police surveillance. Jobateh reportedly failed to comply with a summons to present himself to the police a number of days before his arrest. According to official information from the police, the arrest was linked to comments and posts in social media. No further details were provided. Jobarteh recently criticised president Adama Barrow on several occasions, after the president had personally subjected him to verbal intimidation (cf. BN of 09.05.22). Public criticism of various statements by the president has recently been growing. Among other utterances, president Barrow has threatened to re-arrest people suspected of offences, even where they have been released on bail. President Barrow has furthermore described the traditional opposition party, the United Democratic Party (UDP), as the greatest threat to national security. He has also stated that the Kerr Fatou online media portal and the Mengbeking radio station, which are considered to be close to the opposition, would no longer exist if there were no democracy in The Gambia. Meanwhile, Bora Sisawo, a well-known comedian and co-presenter of a programme on Kerr Fatou, was taken into police custody once again in the period from 06.10. to 09.10.23, after his release on bail was revoked. Sisawo was reportedly detained without access to legal counsel and without his relatives being informed as to his whereabouts. A police spokesman later confirmed Sisawo's arrest to the Gambia Press Union (GPU), but was unable to state any grounds for the revocation of his release on bail. He also failed to confirm whether any charges had been brought or would be brought against Sisawo, who was subsequently released on bail once again. Sisawo was originally detained temporarily in August 2023 for criticising president Barrow and the inspector general of the police (IGP), and was subsequently conditionally released on bail.

GPU's president, Muhammed S. Bah, has stated that the GPU is alarmed at the deteriorating situation with regard to freedom of opinion and freedom of the press in the country. Among other things, the GPU has expressed its concern in the face of the frequent interrogations, arrests and detentions of people who criticise the Gambian president or the IGP. Gambian human rights activist Famara Jawneh has told Deutsche Welle (DW) that cases of detention without trial, arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention are reminiscent of the era of former president Yahya Jammeh. DW has reported that critical voices are of the view that the democratic progress achieved under president Barrow is increasingly in jeopardy. Controversial arrests which have recently come to light have sparked concern in areas of civil society and the general public. Most recently, two UDP members were arrested in contentious circumstances and subsequently granted conditional releases on bail (cf. BN of 25.09.23). Following his arrest on 20.09.23, journalist Bakary Mankajang was released from police custody on bail on 23.09.23 (cf. BN of 25.09.23). He was accused of interfering with witnesses. According to Mankajang's own account, he was held by the police in solitary confinement, without access to a lawyer and deprived of food and water.

23 October 2023

Reformed national intelligence service; interim judiciary

The Foroyaa news portal has noted in an article that under Adama Barrow's presidency there have been no reports to date of arrests and imprisonments by the national intelligence service. According to Foroyaa, this suggests that the role of the secret service - which was formerly known as the National Intelligence Service (NIA) before being renamed as State Intelligence Services (SIS) in February 2017 - has altered since the change of government. It is generally agreed that the feared NIA committed serious human rights violations under former president Yahya Jammeh, particularly against individuals who were active in cases with a political dimension. A reform of the secret service was announced after the changeover of power. Following its renaming, it was deprived of its executive powers of arrest and restricted to the core tasks of a classic domestic intelligence service. In July 2022 five former members of the NIA, including the agency's director, were sentenced to death for the murder of the youth leader of the opposition United Democratic Party (cf. BN of 18.07.22). This was the sole criminal trial to take place in the country to date in connection with crimes committed under the previous government headed by Jammeh, apart from a death sentence handed down to ex-minister Yankuba Touray, which was upheld by the court of appeal (cf. BN of 19.12.22).

Progress in combating child marriage and gender-specific educational inequality

According to UNICEF's national agency, the share of girls married off as children fell from 46.5 % in 2010 to around 34 % in 2018. It emerges from various reports, however, that gender-based inequalities and harmful cultural practices such as child marriage increased again during the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. BN of 02.08. and 13.09.21). In June 2022 UNICEF stated that a quarter of all girls are married off before reaching the age of 18 and that child

marriages continue to be widespread, despite a gradual change in attitudes and increasing rejection of the practice (cf. BN of 20.06.22).

UNICEF has followed in the wake of the UN Population Fund's national agency in reporting progress in the area of education for girls (cf. BN of 11.07.22). The scholarship rate for girls has increased in the primary school sector. Never before have so many girls attended primary school – they account for 53 % of all primary school children in the country.

GSIC issues fatwa against ban on genital mutilation; situation for anti-FGM activists

The Supreme Islamic Council (GSIC) has issued a fatwa - an Islamic legal opinion - calling for the banning of female genital mutilation and its classification as a (criminal) offence to be reconsidered. The GSIC asserts that this practice is not only an old cultural custom. "Sunna" circumcision is legitimate in Islam, validated in the normative sources of Islam and part of the fitra. According to the GSIC, removing "only a small, upper part of the clitoris" constitutes a legitimate practice under Islam. The GSIC "strongly condemned" those organisations and persons who criticise the practice of female genital mutilation and who call for those who practice FGM to face criminal prosecution. The first criminal convictions for genital mutilation and payment of the imposed fines by Islamic religious leaders sparked intense public debate, above all between supporters and opponents of FGM (cf. BN of 11.09.23), and a number of MPs recently called for the practice to be decriminalised (cf. BN of 18.09.23). Accusations stirring up sentiment against anti-FGM activists have recently caused alarm. According to Fatou Baldeh, founder of the Gambian NGO Women in Liberation and Leadership, her team has been driven out of three communities in recent weeks. She says they were accused of questioning their own customs, norms and religion.

30 October 2023

Situation for people with disabilities

The chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has stated that people with disabilities continue to be confronted with numerous obstacles when it comes to exercising their fundamental rights and participating fully in life and society, despite all the guarantees and provisions of national law, the constitution and international law. According to a cited publication by the NGO Borgen Project on The Gambia from September 2023, 7.9 % of the population or more than 208,000 people in The Gambia are living with some form of disablement or restriction which makes it difficult for them to participate in everyday life and work or to interact with society. Citizens with disabilities are reported to be disproportionately affected by unemployment: 68 % of people with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed, while the corresponding figure among people without disabilities in the same age group stands at only 50 %. Half of those with disabilities are reportedly neither in training nor employment, compared to 34 % among people without disabilities. The NHRC chairperson states that people with disabilities experience discrimination at home, at school and at the workplace, which has negative effects on their education and work lives. The chairperson of the Gambia Federation for Disabilities asserts that people with disabilities have for too long been considered vulnerable in Gambian society, because they lack opportunities for existence and are denied their fundamental rights. He has called for the 2021 Persons with Disabilities Act to be implemented and enforced with the aim of promoting and protecting the rights of people with disabilities.

06 November 2023

Leader behind plans for coup receives long prison sentence

On 31.10.23 Banjul High Court sentenced non-commissioned officer Sanna Fadera to twelve years' imprisonment for treason. He was found not guilty on all other counts. On the basis of evidence given by witnesses, the court found Fadera guilty of having been the leader behind the foiled plans for a coup against president Adama Barrow's democratic government on 20.12.22. Statements from the government are the sole source of information on the events concerned, with no independent reports available from any agencies or in the press (cf. BN of 02.01.23). Fadera reportedly denied the charges throughout the proceedings. In accordance with Art. 33 of the Gambian criminal code (CC), treason is punishable by death or life imprisonment. With reference to Art. 29 (2) of the criminal code, Fadera received a twelve-year prison sentence, however, as the facts that he was a first-time offender and that no violence occurred were taken into account as mitigating circumstances. Fadera has 30 days to lodge an appeal against the sentence. The court also acquitted three other defendants of all the charges which had been

brought against them (cf. BN of 30.01.23). They were released on bail after the public prosecutor's office announced that it had filed an appeal against the acquittals and the defendants' release from custody.

Further rise in food prices and cost of living

Speaking anonymously to a newspaper, various middle-class people have revealed their fear of slipping into poverty. The previously already high food prices have reportedly risen still further, posing an existential threat to many people. Unemployment is also said to have further increased, because thousands more people are pushing their way onto the strained labour market every year. It is alleged that ordinary members of the public can barely afford three meals a day. According to the newspaper article, poorer segments of the population have yet to benefit from the recovery of the Gambian economy, despite budgetary aid from donors to cushion the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another report in the media highlights further price rises for basic foods and other essential items. Market vendors and customers have told the medium that the rising cost of living is making things increasingly difficult for ordinary members of the population. They appeal to the government to take measures to reduce the cost of living in the country.

13 November 2023

Situation regarding freedom of the press and the safety of media representatives

On the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, the Gambia Press Union (GPU) called on the government to protect and promote freedom and security for journalistic work. The GPU pointed out that reforms have yet to materialise in the area of media legislation, which is still repressive in some respects. The legislation was used by the previous government to persecute media representatives and continues to present obstacles to free journalistic work (cf. BN of 09.05.22). The GPU called once again for an end to impunity and justice for victims (cf. BN of 07.11.22 and 08.05.23), stating that impunity had been instrumental in maintaining the cycle of violence against media representatives for 29 years. The union said that to date no-one responsible for human rights violations and crimes against media representatives under former president Yahya Jammeh or the current incumbent, Adama Barrow, had been brought to justice. It stated that more than 15 physical attacks on media representatives which had gone unpunished had been documented since the change of government, alleging that these attacks were attributable either to the police or to supporters of political parties.

Most recently, media representatives and media companies have been the targets of threats by the Barrow government and media representatives have been arrested and held incommunicado for up to 48 hours. In one case, a media representative was reportedly subjected to physical police violence after his release.

In response to recent statements by president Barrow, which the GPU did not go into in any greater detail and which it described as an attack on the freedom of the press and freedom of speech, supporters of the ruling party allegedly incited violence against individual media representatives and companies online.

Only recently, the GPU's president had expressed his concern at the deteriorating situation with regard to the freedom of the press and freedom of opinion in the country (cf. BN of 16.10.23).

Leading human rights activist charged

According to reports in the press, Madi Jobarteh, the national representative of the Westminster Foundation, who had been arrested on account of online posts and subsequently conditionally released on bail, was charged on 09.11.23 with seditious intent, incitement to violence and spreading false information. Jobarteh, who has suffered harassment in the past and been verbally intimidated personally by president Barrow (cf. BN of 09.05.22), denied all charges. He invoked his constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of opinion, for example, and said that the case against him was purely politically motivated. A human rights activist has expressed concern at Jobarteh's indictment, saying that it was not acceptable for the police – as in the Jammeh era – to be used to intimidate the civilian population and to question people merely for having expressed their opinions. He concluded that no progress of any substance had been achieved in reforming the security sector, noting that civil servants who had served under and complied with the regime under the former president were still serving under the present president. As things stand, it appears that only limited progress has been made so far regarding the announced proceedings to suspend, dismiss and revoke the eligibility for office of civil servants accused of crimes under the previous government headed by Jammeh (cf. BN of 08.05.23).

Compensation for unlawful imprisonment

According to a report in the media, the High Court in Banjul has found the imprisonment of anti-government comedian Bora Sisawo to be unconstitutional and arbitrary, and has awarded him compensation to the sum of GMD 500,000 (approx. EUR 6,952 as per 13.11.23). The competent judge stated that the Gambian constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and imprisonment and grants victims a legally enforceable entitlement to compensation. Sisawo was held in police custody for three days in October 2023 – allegedly without any contact to the outside world (cf. BN of 16.10.23).

20 November 2023

Article 19 sees freedom of speech under threat

In the light of the most recent incidents and developments, the NGO Article 19 (A19) has expressed its concern about setbacks regarding the freedom of speech, which A19 considered to have developed in a positive direction since the change of government from long-time president Yahya Jammeh to president Adama Barrow. A19 has recently observed increasing restrictions on freedom of speech by the government, the suppression of political dissidence and a narrowing of the realm of civil society. The NGO has reported on the cases of the journalists Alhagie Bora Sisawo (cf. BN of 16.10.23) and Bakary Mankajang (cf. BN of 16.09. and 25.09.23), the two opposition figures Momodou Sabally and Sheriffo Bayo Sonko (cf. BN of 25.09.23) and the case of human rights activist Madi Jobarteh (cf. BN of 16.10. and 13.11.23). According to A19, these individuals have all been arrested and held temporarily in custody solely for having shared their opinions in the public or digital domain or for having exercised their journalistic professions. Alfred Nkuru Bulakali, A19's regional director in West Africa, alleges that the prosecution of politically active individuals and journalists is at odds with the Barrow government's promises to break with the era of repression and censorship under Jammeh.

A19 has also expressed its concern at the latest utterances against the press and freedom of speech and corresponding verbal threats by president Barrow, who has also described the main opposition party - the United Democratic Party - as the greatest danger to national security (cf. BN of 16.10.23).

18 Dezember 2023

ECOWAS extends troop mandate by a further year

At the 64th ordinary session of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 10.12.23, the heads of state and government resolved to extend the military mandate for ECOWAS troops (ECOMIG) for a further twelve months. The ECOMIG mission is a contentious issue in some areas of civil society and opposition circles. Since the change of government from long-time president Yahya Jammeh to president Adama Barrow at the end of 2016/beginning of 2017, multinational ECOWAS troops have been in the country to ensure security and stability. According to the final communiqué, the core mission from now on is to support the Gambian government in pushing ahead with the reform of the security and defence sector and implementing the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission as set out in the corresponding white paper (cf. BN of 30.05.22).