

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

MEMO

25th September 2009

GENEVA: Act to end threats and attacks on HRDs in Gambia

The East and Horn of African Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) is particularly concerned by ongoing attacks against human rights defenders (HRDs) in the Gambia. As the statement by the West African Human Rights Defenders Network, copied below, reveals the situation has significantly deteriorated over the course of the last year.

EHAHRDP would therefore like to encourage its members and partners to react to current threats against Gambian HRDs, most particularly journalists, by:

- Calling on African Union leaders to condemn the comments made by the Gambian President Col. AJJ Jammeh and to call for an immediate end to the harassment, assaults, prosecution of HRDs notably in light of the Gambian government's responsibilities under Article 9 of the African Charter of Human Rights that guarantees freedom of expression;
- Encouraging the delegates of the 12th Session of the UN Human Rights Council and the Council President H.E Van Meeuwen to condemn the attacks by Gambian President on HRDs and to take necessary measures notably calling on the Gambian authorities to extend a standing invitation to both the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression;
- Calling on relevant stakeholders to offer support- legal, political and financial- to defenders in Gambia in order to enable them to pursue their vital work.

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PRESS RELEASE ON THE ALARMING SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE GAMBIA

Lome, September 24, 2009. The West African Human Rights Defenders Network for (ROADDH / WARDHN), is closely following the situation of human rights in Gambia and is particularly concerned by the Gambian human rights defenders situation.

Indeed, in recent years, human rights are constantly threatened Gambian in carrying out their activities in Gambian territory. Journalists are particularly targeted with the arrest of six (6) of them on August 6, 2009. Even if they were released, they remain within the scope of arrest and imprisonment at any time.

Worse, Monday, September 21, 2009, President Col. AJJ Jammeh, about human rights defenders publicly stated :

“I will kill anyone, who wants to destabilize this country. If you think that you can collaborate with so called human rights defenders, and get away with it, you must be living in a dream world. I will kill you, and nothing will come out of it. We are not going to condone people posing as human rights defenders to the detriment of the country. If you are affiliated with any human rights group, be rest assured that your security and personal safety would not be guaranteed by my Government. We are ready to kill saboteurs.”

The ROADDH / WARDHN recalls that both the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which the Gambia is a party and the statements of Great Bay, Kigali and Resolutions ACHPR / Res 69 (XXXV) 04, 4 June 2004 and ACHPR / Res.104 (XX) (XI) 07 dated May 30, 2007 devoted an important place in the role of human rights defenders in the promotion and protection of human rights. As such, it is the responsibility of the State to take all necessary measures to ensure and preserve the rights of human rights defenders and any citizen or group of individuals wishing to promote and protect human rights.

The ROADDH / WARDHN also recalls that freedom of expression is a right guaranteed by Article 9 of the African Charter of Human Rights which the government of The Gambia is a party.

To this end, the ROADDH / WAHRDN request:

- The United Nations Human Rights Council which is holding its 12th session in Geneva, the Commission of the African Union and the African Commission on Human Rights and People to publicly condemn this statement and recall the Gambian government its regional and international obligations in matter of human rights and especially the obligation to protect the human rights defenders in the exercise of their work.

- That the Commission of the African Union, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights requires the President Col. AJJ Jammeh and his government to ensure the safety of defenders of human rights and all institutions of human rights established in the territory of Gambia

- To the international community and particularly ECOWAS states, to take necessary measures to assist the Gambian defenders in case of risk