



ATTN:

Hon. Faith Pansy Tlakula
Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
African Union Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

CC:

Mr. David Kaye
UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

2 March 2016

Your Excellency,

The undersigned organisations in Africa and members of IFEX, the global network promoting and defending freedom of expression, join the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) to express our concern about the continued detention of journalist and manager of Taranga FM, Alhagie Abdoulie Ceesay, who is currently in his seventh month of detention at Mile II Prison in Banjul, The Gambia.

Ceesay was first arrested on 2 July 2015, and after being released and rearrested, has been in custody ever since. After an initial [two-week detention](#) in which Ceesay was held incommunicado with no access to a lawyer or his family, he was brought before a Magistrates Court on 4 August 2015 and [charged](#) with a single count of sedition. The prosecution accused him of distributing photos of Gambian President Yahya Jammeh with a gun pointed at him.

On 18 November, while the case was still on going at the Magistrates Court, the state pressed a fresh seven-count charge against the journalist. These charges were a mere duplication of the first charge at the Magistrates court, save for that of 'publication of false news'. The initial single count charge was later dropped.

According to MFWA's partner organisation in The Gambia, the Gambia Press Union, Ceesay has suffered from torture and maltreatment and is in deteriorating health. Despite his ill-health and eligibility for bail under Gambian law, the High Court Judge has denied Ceesay this clemency three times.

Several [appeals](#) to ensure that Ceesay is released have been made by the MFWA, the Gambian Press Union, and other human rights and freedom of expression organisations to the Gambian authorities and to President Jammeh directly. These appeals have fallen on deaf ears as the journalist continues to languish in detention.

According to Abdoulie's brother Amadou Ceesay, the consequences of his arrest have been widely felt. Amadou laments that, "Following his arrest to date, the family has been going through difficult and trying times. He was the family's main breadwinner...Life at the media house he manages is more than difficult at the moment. Some staff left for fear of their life and those that are still there have not been paid since his arrest."

Although there are reasonable limitations to freedom of expression under international law, criminal speech laws like The Gambia's fall outside the scope of legitimate restrictions on this



right. The Gambian laws are overly stringent and gravely undermine freedom of expression. Abdoulie Ceesay's case is but one example of the use of the judiciary to silence criticism of the Gambian president and is part of an ongoing [legacy of rights abuses](#) committed by the regime.

Indeed, these laws are contrary to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, as per the 2014 [landmark ruling](#) of the Court that states, among other things, that imprisonment for defamation violates the right to freedom of expression and that laws that criminalise expression must be repealed. In light of this jurisprudence, The Gambia is demonstrating a complete lack of respect for the decision of the Court.

By this letter, we implore you to apply pressure on President Yahya Jammeh to ensure the release of journalist Alhagie Abdoulie Ceesay in consideration of his long period of detention and failing health, and to end the persistent crackdown on free expression. In the words of Abdoulie's brother, "It's about time the world starts acting or else we fear for the future of the family and the country's most reputable media house Taranga FM."

Signed,

Media Foundation for West Africa
Adil Soz - International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech
Afghanistan Journalists Center
Africa Freedom of Information Centre
ARTICLE 19
Association of Caribbean Media Workers
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
Cartoonists Rights Network International
Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility
Centre for Independent Journalism - Malaysia
Foundation for Press Freedom - FLIP
Freedom Forum
Free Media Movement
Globe International Center
Human Rights Network for Journalists - Uganda
Independent Journalism Center - Moldova
International Federation of Journalists
International Publishers Association
Journalistes en Danger – Democratic Republic of Congo
Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance
Media Institute of Southern Africa
Media Rights Agenda
National Union of Somali Journalists
Pacific Islands News Association
Pakistan Press Foundation
Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms - MADA
PEN American Center
Vigilance pour la Démocratie et l'État Civique
World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters - AMARC
World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers
Convention de Jeunes Reporteurs de Sénégal (CJRS)- Senegal



Gambia Press Union - The Gambia

International Press Centre (IPC) – Nigeria

Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) – Sierra Leone

Regroupement de la Presse Mauritanienne (RPM)- Mauritania

l'Institut des Médias pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (IM2DH) – Togo

l'Observatoire de la Déontologie et de l'Ethique dans les Medias (ODEM) - Benin