

SEND A MESSAGE OF HOPE

THE GAMBIA CHIEF EBRIMA B. MANNEH

Prisoner of conscience, journalist



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JOURNALIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO DESPITE COURT RULING

Journalist Chief Ebrima B. Manneh was arrested in July 2006 and has been held incommunicado and without trial ever since, even though a West African regional court has called for his release.

DETAILED CASE DESCRIPTION

Chief Ebrima B. Manneh was arrested by plainclothes police at the offices of the pro-democracy newspaper, Daily Observer. The police officers were thought to be from the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), though they have since denied any involvement in his arrest.

It is believed that Chief Ebrima Manneh was arrested because he had downloaded a BBC story from the internet that was considered critical of the Gambian government.

After repeated attempts by Chief Manneh's family and many fellow journalists to find out what happened to him, the government issued an official statement on 21 February 2007 denying any involvement in his arrest or any knowledge of his whereabouts.

Nevertheless, in July 2007, a year after his arrest, he was reportedly treated for high blood pressure at a hospital – with an escort from the Police Intervention Unit (a branch of the Gambian Police Force).

In June 2007 the Media Foundation for West Africa filed an application on Chief Manneh's behalf with the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), summoning the

Gambian government to answer for his disappearance.

On 5 June 2008, the court ruled that Chief Manneh's right to liberty and fair trial under Articles 6 and 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights had been violated and that his arrest was illegal. The court ordered that Chief Manneh should be released from unlawful detention without delay and that he should be paid US\$100,000 in damages.

However, the government has ignored the directive and continues to deny that Chief Manneh is in their custody. His family have had no contact with him since the arrest and his whereabouts have never been confirmed – although current reports suggest that he is being held in a secret location in the Banjul area. His mother recently told Amnesty that the family members are very distressed by the lack of information and feel increasingly isolated from the community as others are afraid to associate with them. They are also in financial difficulties because they were dependent on Chief Manneh's salary.

Amnesty is calling for Chief Manneh's immediate and unconditional release.

GAMBIA

GREETINGS CARD CAMPAIGN ACTION

1 November 2008-31 January 2009

Please send a **non-religious** card to the Gambia Press Union, who will then forward it Chief Manneh's family:

Ndey Tapha Sosseh
President of the Gambia Press Union
5 Garba Jahumpa Road
Bakau
PO BOX 1440
Banjul
The Gambia

Email gpu@qanet.gm
Postage zone Rest of world
Language English, Arabic or your own language

Salutation Dear Manneh family

Suggested message Thinking of you at this difficult time and wishing you strength.

Important information For the safety of the recipient, please do not include political comments in your message. Also avoid referring to religion, for example, write 'you are in our thoughts' rather than 'you are in our prayers'. Do not put your full name and address in the card – instead, please sign it with your first name or initials only, and just state the town and country you are writing from.

TAKE FURTHER ACTION

THE GAMBIA CHIEF EBRIMA B. MANNEH

GAMBIA 



APPEAL ACTION

(Subject to change – please see ‘stay informed’ below)

Please write a polite letter to the President of the Gambia:

- Express deep concern that a journalist, Chief Ebrima B. Manneh, has been arrested and detained incommunicado without charge since July 2006.
- Call for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience.
- Remind the authorities that his arrest and detention have been held by the ECOWAS Court of Justice to be in direct violation of provisions in the African Charter, to which the Gambia is a signatory; call for implementation of the court’s ruling that he should be released immediately and awarded damages for his illegal detention.
- Point out that Chief Manneh’s case highlights a wider problem in the Gambia, where a number of journalists have been arbitrarily arrested and held incommunicado and without charge.

Fax 00220 4227034

Salutation Dear Mr President

Language English, Arabic, French or your own language

Postage zone Rest of world

Address

Dr A.J.J. Yahya JAMMEH
President
Private Mail Bag
State House
Banjul
The Gambia

GAMBIAN CRACKDOWN ON PRESS FREEDOM

The human rights situation in the Gambia has deteriorated in the last few years. Journalists, human rights defenders and members of political opposition parties have been arrested arbitrarily and detained without charge. In December 2004 the National Assembly passed legislation that imposed a mandatory prison sentence on owners of print or broadcast media convicted of publishing defamatory or ‘seditious’ material.

A few days later, a prominent journalist, Deyda Hydara, was shot and killed in the capital, Banjul.

Co-founder and editor of The Point, a major independent newspaper, he was a fierce critic of President Jammeh and an advocate of press freedom. His murder has never been investigated.

After an alleged coup plot in late March 2006, more than 70 people were arrested and unlawfully detained. Not only journalists and editors, but also lawyers and other citizens, members of government and the military were rounded up and detained. According to reports, the majority were tortured and many others have been subjected to enforced disappearance and are believed to remain in detention.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

With your support we aim to achieve the following:

- his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience;
- increased public attention on the harassment of the press in the Gambia and a reduction in arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detention;
- recognition and respect for the right to freedom of expression and a fair trial in the Gambia.

MORE CAMPAIGNING IDEAS

- Given Chief Manneh’s occupation and the reason for his arrest, try to involve local and regional press – especially from the BBC - in writing appeals and publicising his case.
- For campaigning tips, see the guidance sheet in this pack.

Members of Amnesty groups might find it helpful to coordinate with other groups in your area. Individuals who want to get more involved may like to join an Amnesty group. Contact activism@amnesty.org.uk or 020 7033 1675.

STAY INFORMED

Our actions for individuals at risk often need to change in response to changes in their circumstances.

For updates, new advice or actions on this case visit www.amnesty.org.uk/manneh or call the Individuals at Risk Programme on 020 7033 1572. Tell us about actions you have taken on this case. Email iar@amnesty.org.uk