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TWO GAMBIAN JOURNALISTS RECEIVE DEATH THREATS

On 25 October, two Gambian journalists received chilling death threats. The threats were delivered via email to Baboucarr Ceesay, first Vice President of The Gambia Press Union (GPU), and Abubacarr Saidykhan, an independent freelance journalist. The email said: "You choose to live or die. You must take one...you are stubborn fucking guys who want to destroy the image of the APRC Government and our affectionate President Yahya Jammeh... The police are not the best guys to deal with you....I will come with my team of patriotic killers who kill for the love of our country and our president...for the fact that your stupid colleagues who called themselves Journalists give me your email addresses shows that you are easy to finish...we will come for you without further information." The threat also stated the exact location of each journalist's home.

The death threat came just two days after charges of sedition against Baboucarr Ceesay and Abubacarr Saidykhan were dropped by the police. They had been charged with sedition following an attempt to hold a peaceful demonstration.

On 26 October, the journalists reported the threats to the Inspector General of Police who said the police would investigate.

While the commitment to investigate the threats is welcome, Amnesty International remains deeply concerned for the safety of Baboucarr Ceesay and Abubacarr Saidykhan,

Journalists, human rights activists and political opponents in the Gambia are routinely subjected to human rights violations such as unlawful arrests and detentions, torture, unfair trials, harassment, assaults and death threats, making it extremely difficult for them to do their work. The Gambian government must ensure that journalists and human rights defenders can carry out their work without interference, obstacles, discrimination or fear of retaliation.

The two journalists were arrested on 6 September, following a request to hold a peaceful demonstration against the executions in the Gambia of nine death row inmates in August. They were released on bail and charges of sedition were later added. However, all charges were finally dropped on 23 October, reportedly on the orders of President Yahya Jammeh.

Background:

On the evening of 23 August, nine death row inmates – one woman and eight men – were taken out of their cells and by 24 August they had been executed by firing squad. The executions were carried out in secret and without informing the families, lawyers or respective governments of the prisoners before they took place. The prisoners themselves are believed to not have been told until they were taken from their cells. These executions were the first to take place in nearly 30 years.

In December 2004, Deyda Hydara, the former president of GPU and editor of The Point newspaper, was shot and killed in his car while travelling home from work. The murder came on the anniversary of the establishment of The Point, and three days after controversial media legislation had been passed, which Deyda Hydara had vociferously opposed. No investigation has taken place and no one has been brought to justice.

In July 2006, Ebrima Manneh was arrested and was subjected to enforced disappearance. His whereabouts still remain unknown. In 2008 the ECOWAS Court ordered the Gambian government to release him from unlawful detention and pay him compensation, but the judgment has yet to be enforced.

For more information see: *The Gambia: Charges against journalists over executions demo must be dropped* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/gambia-must-drop-charges-against-journalists-over-executions-demo-2012-09-11>)