

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED RADIO DIRECTOR STANDS TRIAL IN GAMBIA

Gambian radio director Alagie Abdoulie Ceesay has been detained since August 2015 charged with sedition and the publication of false news. He has been in detention at Mile 2 prison for over six months and was recently diagnosed with an enlarged liver.

Alagie Abdoulie Ceesay is on trial accused of having acted with seditious intention and the publication of false news with intent to cause fear and alarm to the public. Amnesty International understands that he shared with two of his friends, who were both working at the office of the President, a picture showing a gun pointing towards President Yahya Jammeh and a comment purporting to make a threat of uprising against him. He sent the material, which he did not originate and was already circulating on the internet, privately to his friends on mobile phone.

In connection with these events, he was arrested and detained on 17 July 2015. He was brought before the Banjul High Court on 25 August 2015 and charged with six counts of sedition, contrary to Section 52 of the Gambian Criminal Code, and publication of false news with intent to cause fear and alarm among the public.

At trial, Fatou Drammeh, the principal state witness, was partly cross-examined by the defence in court but failed to turn up for further cross-examination. She fled from The Gambia and has said that she was forced by Gambian authorities to testify against Alagie. The court ruled against an application submitted by the defence to expunge her evidence from record on 17 December 2015. He remains in custody at Mile 2 and his trial resumed on 28 January.

Alagie Abdoulie Ceesay complained for over a month of stomach ache and difficulties in sleeping before he was brought to the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital in Banjul on 13 January for medical examination. The doctor diagnosed him with an enlarged liver and prescribed some tablets for the pain. He was taken back to prison.

The Gambian law on sedition is a draconian law that gives authorities sweeping powers to arrest and imprison critics and goes beyond the legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression as defined under international law.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately drop these charges and release Alagie Abdoulie Ceesay, or charge him with an offence which is consistent with international standards;
- Pending his release, urging them to ensure immediate and continued access to medical treatment for his enlarged liver, and that he is not subjected to torture or other ill treatment;
- Urging them to amend the provisions of the Criminal Code that unduly restrict freedom of expression in the Gambia, in particular Section 52 on seditious publication, in line with international standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 MARCH 2016 TO:

Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General
Chambers
Marina Parade
Banjul, Gambia

Salutation : Dear Minister

Email : info@moj.gov.gm

And copies to:
Minister of Information and
Communication Infrastructure
Mr. Sheriff Bojang
Ministry of Information and
Communication Infrastructure

Grts Building, MDI Roas, Kanifing,
Gambia
E-mail: info@moici.gov.gm
Fax: + 220 437 8029

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 156/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr27/2155/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Prior to the current case, Alagie Abdoulaye Ceesay, the managing director of the Gambian Radio Station Teranga FM, was originally apprehended on 2 July 2015 by two members of the Gambian security forces. His whereabouts were unknown for 12 days until he was released on 13 July 2015. He was detained at the National Intelligence Agency headquarters in Banjul at the time without charge or access to his family or a lawyer. During his detention he was allegedly tortured.

Journalists, human rights defenders, and real or perceived political opponents in the Gambia face the risk of arbitrary arrest, detention and even enforced disappearances. It is common for journalists to be tried under section 52 of the Gambian Criminal Code which criminalises the publication and distribution of seditious material as well as the mere uttering of seditious words.

The government regularly closes down media outlets deemed critical of government policies. In 2011 and 2012, the independent radio station, Teranga FM, was shut down three times. In 2012, two newspapers, The Standard and Daily News, were ordered to suspend their activities. No court order or document was issued and the editors were given no explanation.

Several journalists have been arrested and detained without charge. Even after their release, the security forces continue to withhold their passports, documents or equipment pending investigations without specifying the details or duration of those investigations. Efforts by journalists to retrieve their documents have failed, and several have had their freedom of movement restricted because the lack of identity documents prevents them from leaving the country.

Name: Alagie Abdoulaye Ceesay
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 156/15 Index: AFR 27/3246/2016 Issue Date: 29 January 2016