

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, artistic illustration. It features a large, glowing orange sun at the top, partially obscured by a yellow text box. Below the sun, several hands are shown in various shades of blue and purple, reaching upwards as if holding the sun. The hands are rendered in a textured, almost painterly style. The overall color palette is warm and energetic, dominated by oranges, yellows, and blues.

OPPOSITION

IN GAMBIA

The danger of dissent

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



WE NEED PROPER
ELECTORAL



**“OUR MEMBERS
ARE PRONE
TO ARREST,
DETENTION AND
EVEN TORTURE.”**

These were the words of Solo Sandeng, National Organizing Secretary of the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), when interviewed by Amnesty International. What he could not imagine was that a couple of weeks after making this statement, he would pay a very high price for his courage and determination. He died in custody following torture at the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) after being arrested during a peaceful demonstration on 14 April 2016.



*Solo Sandeng during the 14 April 2016 demonstration in Serrekunda, moments before he was arrested.
© United Democratic Party (UDP)*

ELECTIONS IN GAMBIA: A LONG HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

In December 2016, Gambia will hold presidential elections. The run-up period is likely to be a testing time for human rights since previous experiences have shown that opposition members, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society organizations and voters face a high risk of serious human rights violations if they attempt to express dissenting opinions.

During the 22 years of President Jammeh's rule, human rights violations have been systematic in Gambia. Amnesty International has documented consistent patterns of violations, including enforced disappearances, torture, restrictions on freedom of expression, and arbitrary arrests and detention. Before the 2006 election, three UDP supporters were arrested and subjected to enforced disappearance. In 2011, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) refused to monitor that year's presidential election due to "intimidation, an unacceptable level of control of the electronic media by the party in power, the lack of neutrality of state and para-statal institutions, and an opposition and electorate cowed by repression and intimidation".



ANOTHER DANGEROUS YEAR

So far, 2016 is proving to be yet another dangerous year for opposition members, journalists and human rights defenders who have tried to express themselves freely. They have suffered repression, deaths in custody, arbitrary detentions, threats and harassment. History is repeating itself.

“There are always arrests of journalists during the pre-election and election period”, noted one journalist. “Given the current political climate, we fear it could get worse. We are bracing ourselves for the worst.”

The repressive legal framework and the policies put in place by the government of President Jammeh have created a constant state of fear for opposition members, journalists and human rights defenders. The measures constitute serious violations of human rights, including the rights to:

- freedom of opinion and expression
- freedom of peaceful assembly
- freedom of association
- not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention
- not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.



An illustration commissioned by Amnesty International for the Gambia report Dangerous to dissent.
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UDP youth members in Brikama prepare a banner for a rally in July 2016.
© United Democratic Party (UDP)



THE DANGER OF DISSENT

President Jammeh has described opposition members as “evil vermin” who would be “buried nine-feet deep” if they seek to “destabilize the country”. Political parties continue to face severe restrictions to their right to organize peaceful political rallies and demonstrations and their activities are regularly repressed. UDP members have been subjected to arbitrary detentions, excessive use of force and torture on several occasions, especially during a series of protests in April and May 2016.

14 APRIL 2016

On 14 April 2016, a peaceful demonstration in Serrekunda by UDP members and youth groups in favour of electoral reform was dispersed by police who beat protesters with sticks and arrested several people, including a number of UDP members.

Several of those arrested were seriously injured. Among them was businesswoman Nogui Njie, who described in an affidavit filed at the High Court how she was beaten with hosepipes and batons while water was poured over her at the headquarters of

the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) in the capital, Banjul, by men in black hoods and black gloves. She stated that she had seen Solo Sendang, the UDP Organizing Secretary, at the NIA headquarters; his beaten body was swollen and bleeding and she feared he was dead.

On 13 June 2016, the government admitted in their response to a habeas corpus application that Solo Sandeng had died during the process of arrest and detention and that an inquiry had been launched. At the time of writing no additional information had been made publicly available.

Following the demonstration, 25 people were eventually charged and were detained in Banjul’s Mile 2 prison, having been denied bail. Thirteen people were later released and the other 12 were moved to Janjanbureh prison. The torture of detainees is very common in Gambia.

In 2015, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture highlighted in his report that “the practice of torture is prevalent and routine, in particular by the NIA during the initial stages of detention”.

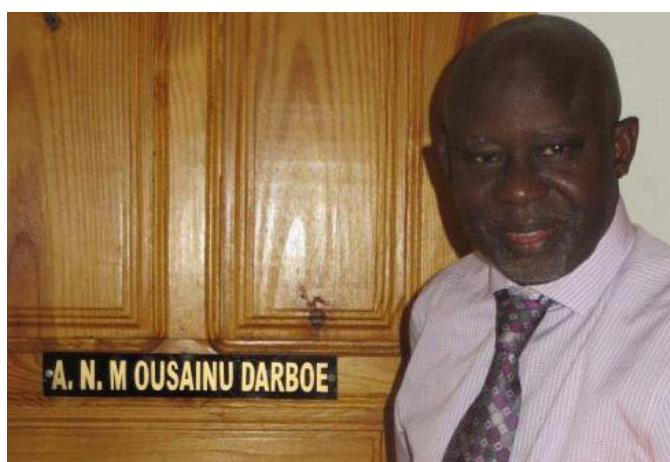


16 APRIL 2016

On 16 April, members of the UDP gathered again at Kairaba Avenue in Banjul, outside the house of UDP leader Ousainou Darboe. They demanded justice for Solo Sandeng's death and the release of other members of their party.

Despite the fact that it was a peaceful gathering, police fired tear gas at the demonstrators and beat them with batons while carrying out arrests. Several UDP executive members, including Ousainou Darboe, were arrested along with a number of other protesters and bystanders.

On 20 July, 19 people, including Ousainou Darboe, were each sentenced to three years' imprisonment. They were found guilty on six counts relating to participating in an unauthorized protest.



9 MAY 2016

On 9 May, around 40 protesters were arrested on the Banjul-Serrekkunda highway as they made their way towards Westfield, a suburb of Banjul, after the court hearing of Ousainou Darboe and others. Protesters were stopped by the Police Intervention Unit (PIU) who started beating them. Some protesters threw stones in reaction and several people, including a PIU officer, were injured. Fifteen people are currently on trial following the protest.

On 21 August, Ebrima Solo Krummah, a senior member of the UDP, died after undergoing an operation at Edward Small teaching hospital. He was one of the protesters arrested on 9 May and had been detained at Mile 2 prison before being taken to hospital. The cause of his death has not been confirmed. As in other cases there have been allegations that he was refused medical care while in detention. There has been a unanimous call for an inquiry into his death.

A PERVASIVE SENSE OF FEAR

People from all walks of life – most notably opposition members, journalists, human rights defenders and members of civil society organizations – have been subjected to systematic human rights violations for more than 20 years and a widespread climate of fear now dominates the whole of Gambian society. This has resulted in a worrying situation of self-censorship, in which people are afraid to openly express critical views against the government or even to speak freely about politics. The widespread practice of unlawful surveillance by the security forces brings more self-censorship and intensifies the pervasive sense of fear which is reinforced by a strong culture of impunity.

People are unable to depend on the state's institutions to defend their rights, whether those enshrined in Gambia's Constitution or among its obligations under international law. Gambia is a country with no guarantees, safeguards or protection for human rights.

STRONGER REACTION NEEDED FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Following the arrests of UDP protesters in April 2016, there has been a significant increase in the engagement of the international community to improve human rights in Gambia, including by ECOWAS, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the UN and the EU. However, the seriousness of the situation now demands a more effective response. Measures should include sending electoral missions to protect opposition members and voters, sanctions, suspension from regional institutions, and commissions of inquiry.



Lawyer Ousainou Darboe, UDP leader, at his law office in Banjul.
© United Democratic Party (UDP)



A rally in Banjul in April 2016. © United Democratic Party (UDP)

The plight of UDP members and other dissenting voices in Gambia cannot be ignored. These people pay a high cost for exercising their basic human rights and are prevented from expressing themselves freely and without fear. This election period is the time to end self-censorship for all Gambians.

Dangerous to dissent is Amnesty International's campaign defending freedom of expression in Gambia and advocating for a more conducive environment and a more open space for dissenting opinions to be freely expressed.

WE ARE ASKING THE GAMBIAN GOVERNMENT TO:

- Immediately release all prisoners of conscience: those detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression.
- Guarantee that opposition members are able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association without fear of arrest, detention, intimidation or harassment.

- Publicly instruct the police not to use excessive force, including tear gas and rubber bullets, to disperse peaceful gatherings.
- Immediately take effective measures to end practices of arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and other ill-treatment.
- Investigate the deaths of Solo Sandeng and Ebrima Solo Krummah, as well as the reports of torture and other ill-treatment in custody of members of the UDP.

Join Amnesty's *Dangerous to dissent* campaign and help defend the right to freedom of expression for UDP members and others in Gambia.

For further information, see *Dangerous to dissent: Human rights under threat in Gambia* (Index: AFR 27/4138/2016).

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE SURE THAT THE RIGHTS OF ALL ARE RESPECTED IN GAMBIA.

Learn more at:

www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/gambia/



Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

Index: AFR 27/4705/2016
English, September 2016



UDP supporters gather at the High Court in Banjul for the trial of Ousainou Darboe and others. 9 May 2016
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