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Life on death row: 'They had no idea they were going to be executed'

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/life-death-row-they-had-no-idea-they-were-going-be-executed-2013-04-18>

Social activist and former Minister of Information, Amadou Janneh, was found guilty of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment in January 2012 for printing and distributing T-shirts made by the NGO 'Coalition for Change – The Gambia (CGG),' calling for an end to "dictatorship" in the country. While in prison, he met many people on death row, including the nine who were executed in August 2012 – the first executions in more than three decades in The Gambia.

He shared his story with Amnesty International, from his new home in the USA:

In June 2011 I was arrested, went through a lengthy trial and was convicted for treason and sedition simply because I printed 100 T-shirts with messages saying 'End to Dictatorship Now' and 'Freedom'. I was sentenced to life imprisonment and taken to the security wing of Mile 2 Central Prison near The Gambia's capital city, Banjul, where death row inmates were incarcerated.

Initially I thought this was just a way to intimidate me. I thought they would go through the motions and then set me free. The judge said the death penalty would have been the appropriate sentence but that [he could not sentence me to death as] his hands were tied under new constitutional provisions. It was all very traumatic. I remained very hopeful because since the first day I was picked up, protests were organized.

I was held with death row inmates. We each had a cell to ourselves. It was 1m by 1.5m with very little ventilation.

In mid-August 2012, the President of the Gambia announced that he was going to execute all prisoners on death row. We all got very alarmed. I decided to go around and collect the names of all those on death row. They were 48 individuals, including one woman, two Senegalese nationals, two from Mali and one person from Guinea-Bissau. I put that information together and sent it out quickly and CGG published all the list of names and nationalities.

A flurry of activity started and we were hopeful, but at 9:00pm on August 23, a Thursday, a large number of security personnel entered the prison yard and took eight men and one woman and just executed them.

Nobody figured out how they selected them out of the 48. There was no prior notification. They had no idea they were going to be executed. While they were being taken away, one of them screamed my name saying: "Amadou, I'm going to be executed tonight".

Then the silence came.

After that, every night a security contingence would come in and make a lot of noise, saying they would execute some more people and then they would leave. This was torture.

For four days after the execution the government denied that anything had taken place.

Family members are yet to see the bodies. Authorities have not given any information other than admitting that they've been executed.

With everything I've seen in The Gambia, I'm even more determined in my work.

Related stories

Gambia: Serving life imprisonment for the printing and distribution of T-shirts in The Gambia:
Dr Amadou Scattred Janneh

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR27/004/2012/en>

Gambia: Free activist jailed for life over anti-government T-shirts

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/gambia-free-activist-jailed-life-over-anti-government-t-shirts-2012-07-23>

At a Glance

In August 2012, The Gambia carried out its first executions in three decades.

At least 40 executions were carried out in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa in 2012.

At least 682 people were executed in 21 countries in 2012.

At least 23,286 people were on death row at the end of 2012.

140 countries worldwide, more than two-thirds, are abolitionist in law or practice.

Source: Amnesty International

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