

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
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## **Gambia: Six journalists condemned to two years in Mile 2 prison**

Amnesty International today expressed dismay at yesterday's sentencing of six Gambian journalists, including three executive members of the Gambian Press Union, to terms in prison. They were sentenced to a mandatory sentence of two years' imprisonment and fined 250,000 Dalasis (US\$10,000) on two of the six counts. Failure to pay will result in having to serve two extra years for each count.

The journalists were convicted on six counts of sedition and defamation. They have been sent to Mile 2 State Central Prison.

The six convicted journalists are: Emil Touray, Secretary General of the Gambian Press Union (GPU); Sarata Jabbi Dibba, Vice President of the GPU, Pa Modou Faal, Treasurer of the GPU; Pap Saine and Ebou Sawaneh, publisher and editor of Point newspaper; and Sam Sarr, editor of Foroyaa newspaper.

"These journalists are prisoners of conscience, who are being punished for peacefully expressing their views. They should be released immediately and unconditionally," said Erwin van der Borgh, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

### **Background**

Initially, seven Gambian journalists were arrested on 15 June 2009 after publishing a Press Union statement that criticized President Yayha Jammeh for "inappropriate" comments made on state television about the unsolved 2004 murder of Point Editor Deyda Hydera. In an 8 June interview on state-run Gambia Radio and Television Service, President Jammeh said the government investigation into Hydera's slaying had stalled and suggested that interested journalists should "ask Deyda Hydera who killed him", according to media reports.

On 18 June, seven journalists were charged with sedition, one was released on bail and the others were held in Mile 2 Prison. On 22 June the remaining six were all released on bail.

Repression of the media has a long history in The Gambia. The lack of independence of the judiciary in cases involving journalists and human rights defenders is also increasing. In November 2008 Amnesty International released the report *Gambia: Fear Rules* at the 44th Ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, held in Abuja, Nigeria, which highlighted the deteriorating human rights situation in Gambia. On 22 July 2009, Amnesty International, along with civil society groups across Africa, organized a day of action to protest continuing human rights violations in The Gambia, including repression of the media.