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## **Seven men at imminent risk of execution in The Gambia**

Seven men are at imminent risk of execution in the Gambia, following today's unanimous decision by the Supreme Court upholding their previous conviction for treason. Amnesty International urges the Gambian authorities to allow time for the prisoners to make the maximum use of appeals available to them, including applying for a review of the Supreme Court decision.

The timing of the announcement of the decision of the Supreme Court – at around midday on Friday – meant the men did not have time to file an application for review of the decision before the court registrars closed for the weekend. They will now have to wait until Monday. Ordinarily, a panel of seven judges can review Supreme Court decisions.

Lucy Freeman, Amnesty International's West Africa Programme Director says: "The Gambian government must not carry out any executions, and commute as a matter of urgency the death sentences of the seven men - and all death row inmates. They must also uphold the moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty."

The seven men – Chief of Defence Staff Lieutenant General Lang Tombong Tamba, Brigadier General Omar Bun Mbye, Major Lamin Bo Badgie, Lieutenant Colonel Kawsu Camara (alias Bombarde), former Deputy Inspector General of Police Momodou B. Gaye, Gibril Ngorr Secka and Abdoulie Joof (alias Lie Joof) – were convicted of treason and sentenced to death in 2010.

The men were sentenced to death for treason, contrary to Gambia's constitution, which only permits the death penalty for crimes "resulting in the death of another person" (Section 18(2)); and international human rights standards which prohibit the imposition of the death penalty for crimes that do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes", crimes other than intentional killing.

Until August 2012, the Gambia had not executed anyone for nearly 30 years however, on the night of 23 August 2012 nine death row inmates, including one woman and eight men, were taken out of their cells and put to death 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.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that further executions of death row inmates may be carried out without notification.

On 14 September 2012, the President of Gambia announced a "conditional" moratorium on executions, following nine executions on 23 August. However, the President stated the moratorium would be "automatically lifted" if crime rates increase.

Amnesty International urges the Gambian authorities to abide by their own Constitution and international law which permits the death penalty for only the 'most serious crimes' and to not carry out these or any other executions. Amnesty International further urges the Gambian authorities to carry out, at the earliest

available opportunity, a review of the use of the death penalty, as required under the Gambian Constitution.

## **BACKGROUND**

The executions are also in stark contrast to the trend, both in West Africa and globally, towards ending the use of the death penalty. Since 2000, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo in West Africa, as well as Burundi, Gabon and Rwanda, have abolished the death penalty for all crimes. In the last few months alone, the government of Ghana accepted the recommendation of a Constitution Review Commission to abolish the death penalty in the new Constitution, and Benin became the 75th state worldwide, and the 10th in Africa, to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

The UN General Assembly adopted three resolutions calling on countries to retain the death penalty to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty. A fourth resolution is due to be considered at the 67th session of the UN General Assembly in late 2012.

**ENDS**