

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

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Gambia: Missed opportunity to promote human rights

Amnesty International expressing its profound disappointment that representatives of the Gambian government failed to attend a session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) in Geneva to discuss the human rights situation in the country.

"Their absence is particularly regrettable in light of systematic attacks on freedom of expression and of the press, harassment of human rights defenders and journalists, long term detention without trial of political detainees, and government inaction to end the widespread practice of female genital mutilation," Amnesty International said.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) since 1979, Gambia is obliged to submit periodic reports on steps taken to implement the ICCPR, which includes such important provisions as the right to life, the right to freedom from torture, the right to liberty and to fair trial and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The Gambian government has failed to submit any such report in the last 17 years.

The Human Rights Committee, which monitors implementation of the ICCPR, had decided to examine the situation in Gambia in the absence of a report. Consequently, government participation was all the more crucial.

The HRC sought final confirmation of Gambia's attendance just half an hour before the meeting was due to start. Only then was the HRC reportedly told that the delegation had not in fact left Gambia due to technical difficulties with the aeroplane. No representative from the permanent mission at the UN was available to step in.

In the absence of a representative, the HRC was procedurally obliged to continue its examination of Gambia in private session, preventing public scrutiny of the human rights situation there.

Gambia has signed up to all major human rights treaties, but has 21 reports outstanding on its implementation of these treaties. Amnesty International believes that the process of preparing and submitting a report to a treaty monitoring body, the public scrutiny of the report, and implementing the recommendations arising as a result of that scrutiny, are crucial elements of the treaty regime as a means of turning commitments into concrete action.

"We hope that the Government of Gambia will implement the concluding recommendations of the Human Rights Committee in full, and will promptly file its overdue reports. At present it is not taking its obligations seriously," Amnesty International said.

Background

The Human Rights Committee is currently holding its 75th session at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

Further information about the Human Rights Committee meeting is available at: www.unhchr.ch, or by contacting the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Palais des Nations, 8-14 Avenue de la Paix, CH-1211 Geneva 10, telephone: ++41 22 9179000.

Public Document

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