

AI Index: PRE 01/557/2013  
22 October 2013

## **The Gambia: Release political opponents who made TV 'confessions' under torture**

Sedition charges must be dropped against three political opponents in The Gambia to make way for their immediate release, Amnesty International said, pointing to allegations the three men were tortured to "confess" on national TV.

"In The Gambia, criticizing the government often carries an enormous cost. Forcing political opponents to 'confess' to crimes on national TV seems to be the latest callous strategy by the authorities to prevent anyone from criticizing them," said Lisa Sherman Nikolaus, Amnesty International's The Gambia researcher.

The three men were arrested after one of them attempted to flee the country and claim asylum abroad last month. The men are held incommunicado, have no access to lawyers or their relatives and are believed to have been tortured.

Malang Fatty was arrested at Amdallai Border Post by The Gambia's National Intelligence Agency (NIA) as he tried to leave the country on 19 September 2013. He was in possession of a document provided by the other men in support of his asylum claim.

Amadou Sanneh, National Treasurer of The Gambia's opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), was arrested on 25 September by the NIA.

He had written a letter supporting the asylum application of UDP member Malang Fatty. In the letter, Sanneh claimed Malang Fatty had received death threats from government security services and that the UDP was routinely persecuted by the Gambian government.

The NIA also arrested Malang's brother, Alhagie Sambou Fatty, who asked Sanneh to write the document.

The Commissioner of Oaths who authorized the document, Bakary Baldeh, was also arrested and forced to confess on TV. Bakary Baldeh has not been charged, but continues to be held incommunicado by the NIA as a witness. Amnesty International is also calling for his release.

"Any evidence obtained through torture must not be admitted in court. Allegations of torture should be investigated independently and anyone found responsible should be brought to justice," said Sherman Nikolaus.

Every year journalists, human rights activists and political opponents are harassed, unlawfully arrested, tortured, and put through unfair trials in the Gambia as a way of stopping them from criticizing the authorities.

Last week, President Yahya Jammeh made negative public statements about those engaged in opposition parties.

“Tarnishing the image of this country is treasonable and all those engaged in this would pay a high price. Hating one’s country is ungodly. In any religion mounting a smear campaign against one’s country on behalf of outside powers is TREASON," he said.

“President Jammeh and other authorities in The Gambia should stop being afraid of critics. Instead, they should engage with them in meaningful dialogue,” said Sherman Nikolaus.

“This current case shows that the President and the authorities will do everything in their power to silence the regime’s critics.”