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Gambia: Thousands of activists to draw attention to human rights violations

On Wednesday 22 July, thousands of activists from 12 different countries worldwide will demonstrate and speak out to raise awareness on human rights concerns in Gambia during a Global Day of Action.

Demonstrations and public displays of solidarity will take place in Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Benin, Burkino Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Mali as well as the United Kingdom and the United States. The events are organised in conjunction with partners including the Media Foundation for West Africa and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.

"Though Gambia is one of the smallest countries in West Africa, serious human rights violations occur within its borders on a regular basis," said Tania Bernath, Amnesty International's Gambia researcher. "Each year on 22 July, President Yahya Ajj Jammeh celebrates 'Freedom Day'; however this year Amnesty International is aiming to show the lack of freedom in Gambia."

During the Global Day of Action, activists will draw attention to the lack of political freedoms in the country and the widespread human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests, illegal detention, denial of freedom of expression, and excessive use of force by the security forces. The intention of this Global Day of Action is to bring the situation in Gambia to the attention of the international community including the United Nations and the European Union; and to encourage regional bodies such as ECOWAS to increase pressure on the Gambian government to end human rights violations.

Each year thousands of Dutch, Scandinavian and British tourists travel to Gambia unaware of its dire human rights record. The international community has generally turned a blind eye to human rights violations in the country

"Currently in Gambia there is no real opposition, no strong civil society organisations, only one opposition paper and one pressure group," Tania Bernath said. "State repression and violence against activists is so endemic in Gambia that this Day of Action excludes national organisations who fear reprisal attacks. The international community must act now to condemn Gambia's appalling human rights record and its West African neighbours must ensure that Gambia lives up to its international human rights obligations."

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