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Gambia: Detainees must be charged or released

Amnesty International today calls on the Gambian government to immediately charge or release all former government officials detained during a wave of arrests over the past week.

The detained officials, who reportedly include former Inspector General of Police Ensa Badjie and Commander of the Navy Sarjo Fofona, are also being denied visits from lawyers and family. The Gambian Constitution stipulates that people should be charged within 72 hours of arrest.

“Through this latest spate of arbitrary arrests and detentions, Gambian authorities have once again shown its blatant disregard for human rights” said Erwin van der Borgh, Amnesty International’s Africa Programme Director.

Amnesty International has documented many cases where people have been arrested and held without charge, often with no access to their families or lawyers.

The organisation has repeatedly called on Gambian authorities to end the arbitrary arrests and detention of perceived and real opponents of the government that have intensified since the alleged failed coup attempt in March 2006.

In a report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council February this year, the Gambian government itself pointed out that the country’s Constitution protects citizens from arbitrary arrests and detention, also stating that the provision in the Constitution which prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment is non-derogable.

“The many people that remain detained without charge and that in some cases face torture send a very different message,” said Erwin van der Borgh. “It is high time for the government to follow its own Constitution and fulfil its human rights obligations. Those arrested should either be charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released.”

Background

Amnesty International highlighted how people continue to be held in secret detention centres in the country, including in military barracks and secret quarters in remote police stations, in a report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council ahead of this year’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Gambia, which took place on 10 February.

The UPR is an opportunity for UN Human Rights Council to examine the human rights record of all member

states. Each country is reviewed every four years with the aim of ensuring states meet all of their human rights obligations and commitments.

For further information on the human rights situation in Gambia, including Amnesty International's submission for the UPR refer to: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR27/006/2009/en>