



International Institute for Justice and DevelopmentSM

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IIJD Call for Action: Immediate and Unconditional Release of Ms. Fatou Jaw Manneh, journalist at AllGambian.net
April 10, 2007

Crispin Grey-Johnson
Gambian Ambassador to the UN
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Gambia to the UN
800 Second Avenue, Suite 400F
New York, NY 10017

Dear H.E. Crispin Grey-Johnson,

It is with great concern that we are writing to you with the hope that you will use your position and influence as Ambassador to the United Nations for the nation of Gambia to free Fatou Jaw Manneh, a journalist who has been unjustly detained in Gambia since the end of March 2007. Manneh, who has been a US resident for the past ten years while working for the US-based website, *AllGambian.net*, was traveling to Gambia to attend the funeral of her father when she was detained at the airport and put in jail on charges of three counts of sedition as she awaits her trial on **April 11**. The charges against her are based on several articles that she has written on the US-based news website, *AllGambian.net*, that are critical of President Yahyah Jammeh's regime and its practices.

The freedom of speech and freedom of the press are indispensable tenets of democracy. In October 2006, leading experts convened in Boston, Massachusetts, at the IIJD-organized International Conference on the State of Affairs of Africa (ICSAA). The goal of the conference was to make recommendations concerning what must be done by African nations to become thriving democracies. The participants resolved that it is imperative for African governments that the "freedom of information and speech be guaranteed and protected by law in every African country and that governments be held accountable for their behavior toward the media." They also recommended that "Unrestricted, free, and independent media be recognized and protected by law in every African country regardless of the possibility of criticism of the government." The freedom of speech and the press are fundamental human rights that must be upheld for the good of the nation of Gambia.

The US Department of State website cites that US-Gambian relations have not improved due to Gambia's "human rights and freedom of press shortcomings." Moreover, as a binding signatory of the United Nations Charter, Gambia is subject to the rules and regulations regarding fundamental human rights. This current episode of jailing a US-based journalist for expressing her opinions is in clear violation of the democratic tenets of free speech and a free press. It will only serve to further strain US-Gambian relations and tarnish Gambia's standing in the United Nations.

The actions of President Jammeh's regime against Manneh contradict what it says on the Gambian embassy website, where it states that Gambia is a "young and thriving democracy." The actions of Gambia's government should be consistent with what it says.

The IIJD demands an immediate halt to any future harassment of journalists by the Gambian government and urge you, Ambassador, to plea with President Jammeh to immediately and unconditionally release Fatou Jaw Manneh from her unjust detainment and in the process improve the global standing of Gambia with respect to human rights.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue. We trust that you appreciate its importance and that you will help to do what is right. The rest of world is watching.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Ngachoko
President and CEO of the IIJD