



The National Human Rights Commission, The Gambia

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Date: 10th November 2023

PRESS STATEMENT

**CALL FOR URGENT GOVERNMENT ACTION TO ADDRESS IRREGULAR
MIGRATION**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is greatly saddened by reports of countless young Gambians losing their lives at the high seas or missing boats full of young Gambians in their attempts to reach Europe in search of ‘greener pasture’ commonly known as the ‘back way’. We extend our sincere condolences to the families of those who have lost family members in this unfortunate venture.

The recent surge in the number of young people embarking on this perilous and deadly journey through the Atlantic or Mediterranean Ocean, or across the Sahara Desert is very alarming and having devastating consequences for families, communities, and the nation at large.

The Commission hereby urges the State, as the primary duty bearer in the promotion and protection of human rights with particular emphasis on the right to life, to urgently devise and put in place robust strategies to curb the dramatic rising trend of irregular migration which may be exploited by traffickers and poses a threat to the lives of those embarking on this journey.

As a country with a very youthful population, it is imperative that the Government capitalises on this dividend, enhances the skills and capacities of youths in various livelihood endeavours, including in entrepreneurship, and work with youths to find durable solutions to issues affecting them. Data from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and other trusted sources show that The Gambia has a per capita migration rate that remains one of the highest in Africa and also accounts for a significant per cent of all arrivals by sea in Italy in the recent years. It is also indicated that most of these arrivals are men between the ages of 15 and 40 years, with the number of minors and young women embarking on this perilous journey also on the rise.

We call on the European Union, especially the Government of Italy, Spain and all other countries to provide all necessary assistance to the migrants to guarantee their safety, security, and health and to always uphold their right to humane treatment, dignity and to seek sustainable livelihoods. While countries have a sovereign right to determine conditions of entry and stay in their territories, they also have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all individuals within their jurisdiction, regardless of nationality, origin or immigration status.

As a State Party to the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, The Gambia has an obligation to enact legislation and put in place measures to deal with issues of smuggling of migrants to curb irregular migration.

The Commission urges the Government to devise, as a matter of national urgency, impactful, holistically coordinated, sector-wide, and well targeted programmes, strategies, and interventions to address, in the short, medium, and long term, the factors that exacerbate or encourage irregular migration; and hereby recommends the following:

1. Conduct a national study to understand the “push” factors or drivers of the ‘back way’ to Europe syndrome and adopt findings and recommendations to put in place efficient strategies to address youth unemployment;
2. Adopt broad-based, holistic, and sector-wide approach to the challenges of irregular migration;
3. Work with the National Youth Council and other youth-led groups to identify and effectively implement sustainable programmes and projects which can contribute to the reduction of youth unemployment;
4. Effectively implement the National Migration Policy 2020-2030 which stipulates the strategies for better migration management and governance;
5. Conduct, in partnership with Civil Society Organisations and youth groups, regular awareness raising programmes through the media and other channels about the dangers of irregular migration to Europe;
6. Support the Navy and the Gambia Immigration Department with the necessary resources to be able to effectively monitor the borders of the country;
7. Prevent, investigate, prosecute and penalize the smuggling of migrants in order to end the impunity of smuggling networks, and also effectively enforce the Trafficking in Persons Act 2007;
8. Domesticate the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime;
9. Effectively implement the constitutional provision which guarantees the right to compulsory basic education, and make higher education more affordable and accessible to all; and
10. Support more investments in the area of vocational and livelihood skills training for youths; and ensure effective implementation of The Gambia Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Roadmap 2020-2024 for the youth across the country.

We urge the Government and all relevant stakeholders, including the youth groups, to work together to find durable solutions to the factors that push our youth (the future of our nation) to embark on the perilous journey to Europe through the ‘back way’.

Let Justice guide our action.



Emmanuel D. Joof
CHAIRPERSON