



THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NHRC)

National Secretariat, P. O. Box 2858, Kotu (opp. DSTV), The Gambia

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PRESS STATEMENT

6th October 2023

CONCERNS OVER RECENT STATEMENTS OF H.E. PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC AND CURRENT POLITICAL INTOLERANCE IN THE COUNTRY

As the State institution mandated to promote and ensure respect for human rights, democratic principles, and the strengthening of the rule of law in all circumstances and without exception, the NHRC continually monitors the national landscape to stay informed of prevailing issues in the country. Following recent developments, the NHRC is deeply concerned with the widening political divide in the nation.

Of grave concern to us are recent statements of H.E. the President made on different occasions. Particularly disturbing were remarks made during a political rally in Bansang on September 29th and subsequent statements at the opening of the NPP Regional Bureau in Jarra Soma on October 3rd. In these addresses, H.E. the President described the United Democratic Party (UDP) as the 'biggest threat to national security,' sternly rebuked the Kerr Fatou online media platform and Mengbekering Radio Station and threatened to rearrest individuals alleged to have committed an offence even on bail granted by Gambian Courts of competent jurisdiction. These statements have the potential to undermine the democratic progress made by our country since 2017. They encourage open defiance and disobedience to court orders thereby undermining the authority of the Judiciary and places the lives of media professionals at heightened risk.

According to reports reaching the NHRC, the President's comments were in response to a barrage of criticism against the Government by the Leader of the UDP and some of his supporters. However, the responses of H.E. the President have generated widespread concern from various quarters owing to their severity and implications.

We acknowledge the positive strides made by the Government since coming into Office, including efforts to restore respect for human rights and the rule of law in The Gambia. Nevertheless, we remind the Government of its responsibility to uphold its human rights obligations, as guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia and other regional and international human rights instruments that The Gambia has ratified. We urge the Government to commit to upholding and safeguarding the human rights and freedoms of every individual in the country.

While we call on the media to be responsible and ethical in its reporting, we emphasize that the right to freedom of speech and expression, including that of the media, is fundamental to holding power accountable. Threats against the media stifle criticism of Government action or inaction on matters of public concern. They echo the censorship and hostile environment that the media endured in the former regime.

Upholding good governance, respect for the rule of law, and honouring decisions, judgments, and rulings of the Judiciary and recommendations by the NHRC are fundamental to a functioning

Commissioners Chair: Mr Emmanuel Daniel Joof **Vice Chair:** Mrs Jainaba Johm **Members:** Imam Baba Leigh / Mr Njundu Drammeh / Mrs Halimatou Dibba

Executive Secretary: Dr Saikou Kawsu Gassama



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democracy. Thus, safeguarding and strengthening the independence of the Judiciary should be of paramount importance to everyone in the country.

We urge all political stakeholders, especially our leaders, to redirect their focus and energy towards pressing economic, social, environmental, legal, and political issues facing the country. Collaboration is necessary to find lasting solutions that improve the lives and livelihoods of the people and contribute to the development and progress of the nation. The TRRC Report emphasizes the need for collective action to realize the 'Never Again' mantra.

We remind the Government, especially the Executive, of its primary obligation to guarantee the freedom of the media within the bounds of the law, ensure the security of journalists, create an environment for a robust opposition, and maintain the independence of the Judiciary. Building a New Gambia demands respect for and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, adherence to the rule of law, obedience to Court orders, allowance of diverse opinions in the 'marketplace of ideas' and promotion of meaningful citizen participation in national dialogues and development initiatives.

Similarly, the Commission is gravely concerned about the deafening silence from authorities, political, and opinion leaders regarding attempts to reverse laws against Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, the rise in hate speech and bigotry of all sorts and kinds, and statements made by certain religious and opinion leaders against human and women's rights defenders that have the potential to further polarise our communities, undermine national unity and peace and put lives of individuals in the country at serious risk.

The Commission remains committed to fostering a democratic society where human rights are respected and protected, the rule of law prevails, independence of the Judiciary is guaranteed and all individuals are able to contribute to the progress of the nation without discrimination. In the fulfilment of its mandate, the Commission would not hesitate to hold every institution, organization and individuals accountable for their acts of omission or commission.

The End

Emmanuel Daniel Joof
Chairperson
National Human Rights Commission

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