

## What's Next After the TRRC Recommendations? NHRC Participates at 7<sup>th</sup> Stake in The Nation Forum



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The establishment of the TRRC was a significant step towards addressing twenty-two years of gross human rights violations under Yaya Jammeh 's regime. With the TRRC recommendations and the Government White Paper, many people, especially victims and survivors, want to know ' what 's next ' .

The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Stake in The Nation Forum, held at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2024, served as a platform to discuss the progress made since the

submission of the TRRC Report and the publication of the Government White Paper, strategies for more effective implementation and efforts in the ongoing Transitional Justice processes of the country.

In his brief remarks before the start of the panel discussion, Chairperson Joof commended the Diaspora for initiating the Stake in the Nation Forum and the crucial role they played in exposing human rights violations and abuses

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## 7<sup>th</sup> Stake in The Nation Forum

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which contributed significantly to ending dictatorship in The Gambia.



Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof

**“The Gambia could not have been liberated from the jaws of dictatorship without the Diaspora’s efforts. You were and still are champions of our human rights, and you continue to contribute to the ongoing TJ process in The Gambia”,** said Mr. Joof.

One of the key panel discussions was on the topic: **‘Diaspora, Human Rights, and the Implementation of the TRRC Recommendations.’** Each of the panelists, namely, Mr. Emmanuel Joof (NHRC Chairperson), Ms. Priscilla Yagu Ciesay (WAVE Co-founder and Senior Technical Advisor), Yadicone Njie Eribo (TANGO Chairperson), Ms. Ida Persson (Special Adviser to the Ministry of Justice on Transitional Justice) and Pa Samba Jow, a US based Gambian human rights activist, succinctly elaborated on different aspects of the topic. It was moderated by Mr. Salieu Taal, the President of The Gambia Bar Association.



Ms. Ida Persson

The panelists discussed the slow pace of implementation of the Government White Paper on the Report of the TRRC, the death of some of the victims or survivors who could not benefit from the reparation, the perceived lack of Government commitment and political will, and

to accelerate the Transition Justice process and ensure justice for victims, the enactment of the Victims Reparations Act 2023, and the readiness of CSOs under the leadership of TANGO to support the popularisation and monitoring of the White Paper.

The NHRC Chairperson dilated on the efforts being made by the NHRC to effectively monitor the implementation of the Government White Paper on the Report of the TRRC, in particular the development of the online monitoring tool.

**“The TRRC has talked about banning certain people from holding public office. The NHRC as the monitoring body, discovered that some of those people who were banned were still working. When the issue was raised, the government came up with an Act that barred those people from holding office”** Mr. Joof stated.



Ms. Yadicone Njie Eribo



Mr. Pa Samba Jaw



Ms. Priscilla Yagu Ciesay

## 'There is No Health Without Mental Health'



The Gambia, like many other countries, grapples with the complexities of mental health. In recent years, discussions on mental health issues have gained momentum. Nevertheless, the challenges faced by persons suffering from mental health and the institutions providing mental health services still persist.

The National Human Rights Commission, in partnership with Peace of Mind, a mental health organization, held a Stakeholder Orientation on Mental Health in The Gambia in January 2014. The Orientation raised awareness on the prevalence of mental health problems in the workplaces, homes, schools and within the communities and the kinds of support to be given to persons coping with mental health issues. Stakeholders also discussed the status of mental health patients in The Gambia, the challenges they encounter and how to address them.

In his remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the convergence, the Chairperson of NHRC spoke about the broad mandate of the Commission which extends to the promotion and protection of all facets of human rights, including the right to mental health care and services. He stated that mental health is a human right issue, and the NHRC has conducted several monitoring visits and fact-finding missions to the 'Tanka Tanka' Psychiatric Unit, to apprise itself of the conditions of the facility and the patients, and the challenges faced by the staff.



**“The Commission provided some toiletries to the Psychiatric Unit because they needed assistance. We realized that the problem was even bigger, and we started looking at the laws governing mental health in The Gambia. We reviewed the Lunatic Act which is very archaic. Thereafter, we decided to develop an Advisory Note on Mental Health in The Gambia”,** he stated.

The Chairperson also attributed some of the emerging cases of mental health problems to drugs and substance abuse and frustration among young migrant returnees from the 'Backway'.



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## 'There is No Health Without Mental Health'

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Ms. Mam Jarra Marega, a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse and Programme Manager at the Mental Health Programme at the Ministry of Health, gave an overview of the current situation of mental health in The Gambia and the coordinating role of the National Mental Health Programme in respect of all mental health activities in the country, including clinical services, community mental health and administrative services. She reminded the stakeholders that the only national mental health survey conducted in the Gambia in 2004 by the World Health Organisation indicated that 90% of the people who had mental health conditions at the time did not access the required care.



Mam Jarra Marega

**“There is no health without mental health. The only mental health facility ‘Tanka Tanka’, has a capacity to hold only 150 people, and this unfortunately, is to serve a population of over 2.5 million people”** she asserted.

Ms. Marega stated that traditional views often stigmatize mental illness, attributing it to supernatural causes. Consequently, individuals may hesitate to seek professional help.

**“The National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) also tries to include traditional healers, especially the most prominent ones in Busura, Bakindik and Jarra Jappineh. We often have a dialogue with them, access their patients and sometimes we leave our medication with them. But what these traditional healers are not telling the people is that they have been using antipsychotic medications to calm their patients”**, Mam Jarra reaffirmed.



Dr. Sylvia Lorenzi, a Clinical Psychologist working for Peace of Mind, gave a background on the work of Peace of Mind as a mental health organization, raising awareness and offering support in response to psychological issues that affect individuals, families, students in various communities across the country.



Other presenters included Dr. Beryamin A. Olabinitan, Ms. Sainabou Drammeh of Peace of Mind and Mr. Basiru L. Bah, NHRC Senior Legal Officer.



The outcome of the Orientation Workshop would help to forge a way for the effective and comprehensive addressing of mental health issues in The Gambia.



## ‘There Must be Consequences for Those Who Violate the Rights of Children’



In January 2024, the NHRC Chairperson delivered a statement at the official launch of Phase II of the Project to Support the Protection of Children Victims of Rights Violations (PAPEV) and Steering Committee Meeting held at the Senegambia Beach Hotel. Chairperson Joof dilated on the topic: ‘**Overview of Issues of Violations of Children’s Human Rights in The Gambia**’.

and is the primary legislation that stipulates the rights and responsibilities of children, their care, protection and maintenance, and creates a Children’s Court. Chairperson Joof, however, lamented that despite all the laws and Conventions protecting the rights and welfare of children, the current state of children in The Gambia presents some challenges that need to be addressed.



Emmanuel D. Joof

In his deliberation, Chairperson Joof stated that The Gambia has adequate laws and a satisfactory legal framework protecting the rights of children. He indicated that the Children’s Act 2005 consolidates all the laws relating to children

“**Children in The Gambia still faces many challenges and rights violations. Children, especially the girl child, are still at risk of FGM, child marriage, violence and exploitation, and other types of abuse. In addition, children with disabilities continue to be left behind due to the non-operationalization of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021. Sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children remain a challenge in the country. It is still a taboo to talk about these issues and our law enforcement officers are not adequately trained, sensitized and oriented to handle sexual and gender-based violence against children**”, Mr. Joof asserted.

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## ‘There Must be Consequences for Those Who Violate the Rights of Children’

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The Chairperson spoke about the efforts the NHRC is doing to promote and protect the rights of children, including having a designated child rights focal point to enhance its child rights programming, ensure rapid action to resolve child rights violations and support active advocacy for mainstreaming a human right based and child centered approaches in the implementation of the Children Act, 2005.

The Chairperson reminded the gathering about the many forms of abuse, violence, exploitation and rights violations that children are subject to in the country, including child labour, Commercial Sexual Exploitation and domestic service, and the prevalence of child begging in major towns. He called for stricter enforcement of the laws on child abusers, hold frontline protectors of children and duty bearers accountable if they fail to protect children, and work together to create a Gambia where every child enjoys their fundamental rights and freedoms.



Participants at the opening ceremony

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## “If the Slogan is ‘Never Again’, then such actions should never be repeated...”



On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, thirty community leaders from different communities in Upper River Region of The Gambia gathered at the Basse Area Council for a day-long Community Dialogue on the implementation of the recommendations of the TRRC

which was organized by the ECOWAS Permanent Mission in The Gambia and the National Human Rights Commission.

The Dialogue sought to increase understanding,

manage expectations and popularise the status of implementation of the TRRC recommendations.

At the opening of the Dialogue, Mrs. Fatou Danso, the Alkalo of Basse Kabakama, welcomed participants and urged them to listen attentively and share the knowledge gained from the discourse.

Mr. Abubacarr Danso, the Vice Chairman of Basse Area council, commended ECOWAS and the NHRC for initiating such an important Dialogue. He stressed the need for

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## **“If the Slogan is ‘Never Again’...”**

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speedy implementation of the Government White Paper on the Report of the TRRC and urged the Government to be more committed to ensuring that the recommendations are implemented.

The ECOWAS Resident Representative to The Gambia, Ambassador Miatta Lily French, stated that the purpose of the Dialogue was to listen to the views of the community of URR on the status of implementation of the recommendations. She added that ECOWAS plans to support the Government to set up a Special Court for the prosecution of those recommended by the TRRC.



**Ambassador Miatta Lily French**

The opening ceremony of the Dialogue was followed by different presentations on human rights and human rights instruments, the TRRC recommendations and the progress of implementation, the Government White Paper and other human rights related issues. The Presenters were staff of the NHRC, namely Dr Saikou Kawsu Gassama and Messrs. Mansour Jobe and Abdou J. Bah,

During the open discussions, Mr. Abubacarr Sankareh from Koba Kunda stated that the Dialogue has availed him the opportunity to understand some of the misconceptions about the TRRC Recommendations and the position of the Government. Some of the views expressed during the Dialogue are mentioned below:



**Abubacarr Sankareh**

**“The TRRC has done its job. We do not want to experience again the human rights violations that we went through in this country. But that cannot happen without truth and justice, and justice can come through our courts. The perpetrators of those crimes must face justice, so that such violations will not happen again”,** Sankareh stated.

Hawa Kijara from Sutukonding Village said: **“The gross human rights violations that people have experienced in this country was unimaginable on both males and females. I have to say personally that I am not happy with the way things are going. If nothing is done about the recommendations, that means the TRRC was worthless. But if perpetrators face justice, such violations will reduce drastically in the country”,**



**Hawa Kijara**

Muhammed Drammeh from Basse raised concern about people who have lost their loved ones. He stated: **“The recommendations should not be put aside to gather dust. Those who lost their lives are gone forever. But their families are around, and they are still angry. Therefore, the Government should consider the recommendations and implement them to the fullest”.**



**Muhammed Drammeh**

Tida Danso also from Basse remarked: **“There are those who have violated people’s rights, committed atrocities, and then appeared before the TRRC to confess. If the slogan is ‘Never Again’, such actions should not be repeated. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that victims get justice”,**

At the closing ceremony, Mr. Claudio Gondo from the ECOWAS Permanent Mission – The Gambia, thanked the participants for their insightful contributions, and the NHRC for facilitating the Dialogue.

## NHRC and Partners Conducted Human Rights Training and Quiz for Senior Secondary Schools on ‘Advancing the Rights of Children with Disabilities in The Gambia’



The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in partnership with the National Council for Civic Education (NCCE), the African Network against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED) and Baekanyang, organised a two-day training and quiz for human rights clubs in various schools, on the theme: ‘**Advancing the Rights of Children with Disabilities in Schools**’. The training brought together ten Senior Secondary Schools within the Greater Banjul Area and West Coast Region, to raise awareness of students on human rights, particularly on the rights of people with disabilities.

During the opening ceremony, the Chairperson of the NHRC, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, stated that there is need to promote and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities in The Gambia. He mentioned that the school is

an institution to build character and socialize, and not just about reading and writing. He underscored that such training was important for young people to enable them to understand and appreciate human rights. He also encouraged a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.



Mr. Emmanuel D. Joof

**“We may be of different tribes and religions, but that difference should not affect our social cohesion. We ought to respect each other”**, he emphasised.

Mrs. Sirra Ndow, Director of ANEKED, thanked the NHRC and UNICEF for the initiative. She highlighted the need for people with disabilities to have access to quality basic services and public buildings.

**“Persons with disabilities should not be viewed as objects of pity but rather as partners, and should be engaged constructively in decision-making processes, particularly on issues affecting them”**, she added.



Ms. Sirra Ndow



## ‘Advancing the Rights of Children with Disabilities in The Gambia’

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Delivering her keynote address, Mrs. Nafisa Binte Shafique, UNICEF Representative, thanked the National Human Rights Commission for organising the activity and encouraged participants to make best use of the training. Ms. Shafique stated that 49.4% of the world's population are youth or children and thus they need to know their rights and duties, especially the rights of persons with disabilities.



Mrs. Nafisa Binte Shafique

**“Children with disabilities have the same rights as everyone. As such, organizations like the National Human Rights Commission and civil society organizations have the responsibility to educate them of their rights”,** she stated.

The opening ceremony was followed by different presentations on basic human rights principles, mandate of the NHRC, Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, and civic duties of children.



Mr. Muhammed Krubally presenting

The quiz took place on the following day after the workshop. Prior to the start of the quiz, Mr. Nfamara Jawneh, the Director of Baekanyang, dilated on the importance of having human rights clubs in schools and the support his organisation is providing schools to establish and maintain school-based human rights clubs.



Participants from Masroor Senior Secondary School

Following a tough three rounds of the quiz, Gambia Senior Secondary School emerged as the 2<sup>nd</sup> runner-up and received a cash prize of D3,000, St Peters Senior Secondary School as 1<sup>st</sup> runner up received D5,000 and Masroor Senior Secondary as the winner was given D10,000. Participants were awarded certificates and gift bags.

Dr. Saikou Kawsu Gassama, the Executive Secretary of the NHRC, delivered the Closing Remarks. He thanked all the students and their Teacher Coordinators for their participation and urged the students to contribute to the nurturing of a culture of human rights in their schools.



Dr. Saikou Kawsu Gassama presenting a gift bag to a participant from St. John's School for the Deaf

## ‘Count Her In...’ International Women’s Day Commemoration 2024



The Deputy Executive Secretary, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Ms. Matilda Mendy, represented the Commission at the commemoration of the International Women’s Day, held at the Residence of the Governor of West Coast Region in Brikama, where she delivered a Statement.

Speaking on the theme of the Day: ‘Inspire Inclusion’ which was localised as ‘Count Her In, Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress’, the DES recognised its aptness considering the countless challenges that women continue to face. She said that the Day is not only meant to take stock of the progress being made by the country in promoting and fulfilling the human rights of women but also to celebrate the women of The Gambia who continue to work with little to no recognition to maintain the country’s social fabric.



**“As a National Human Rights Institution, the NHRC applauds the Government for the measures taken to address the plight of women in the country. However, we remain concerned by the many challenges women continue to face, some of which are historical and others newly emerging,”** said Ms. Mendy.

The statement was a clarion call to action, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and integrating women’s contributions in all spheres of life. The localized theme: ‘Count her in, Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress

highlighted the need for concrete actions and investments that directly benefit women, and ensure that they are at the forefront of every decision-making process. The NHRC reminded the Government of its obligations to create a more inclusive, diverse and equitable society and to put in place initiatives for the empowerment and advancement of women.



Female police officers at the event



Women vegetable growers display their garden produce

# International Women’s Day

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Harmful traditional practices such as FGM and child marriage continue to inhibit the potentials of women and hamper the lives and wellbeing of the girls. NHRC will continue to nurture a culture of respect for fundamental human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls as guaranteed by the domestic legislation and international and regional human rights treaties. The Gambia is party to.

The event was attended by the First Lady of the Republic of The Gambia, dignitaries from various sectors and international organizations, and women groups.



The First Lady during presentation of certificates to outstanding women

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## The NHRC, a Beacon of Hope for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights



UNICEF Country Representative with NHRC Commissioners and Staff

The National Human Rights Commission recently received widespread attention and admiration for its impressive work, unwavering commitment to the protection of human rights in the country and holding duty bearers accountable. This growing recognition has increased the visibility of the Commission

and the respect it continues to earn from institutions, Embassies, national and international organizations and distinguished figures across various sectors, each lauding the Commission’s pivotal role in the promotion and protection of human rights in The Gambia.

In the first quarter of the year, the Commission received important visitors at its Secretariat. One of the most notable visits was that of the US Ambassador to The Gambia, H.E. Ambassador Cromer, who in one of her courtesy calls said:



**US Ambassador to The Gambia**

**” The Gambia National Human Rights Commission stands as a shining example of how dedicated institutions can champion the cause of human rights. The Commission’s tireless efforts in promoting and protecting human rights in The Gambia is highly commendable”.**



In another visit to the Commission, Ambassador Beth Van Schaack, US Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice, and her team discussed contemporary human rights issues, transitional justice, and the monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of the TRRC.

Other high-profile visitors included officials from the Commonwealth Office in Geneva, UNICEF Country Representative in The Gambia, Ms. Nafisa Binte Shafique,



**UNICEF Country Rep and NHRC Chairperson**

High-Commissioner designate of Canada to The Gambia, H.E. Marie-Geneviève Mounie, a team of Parliamentarians from the United Kingdom and Ms. Ida Persson, Special Adviser to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice on Transitional Justice. They all commended the Commission for its efforts in the promotion and protection of human rights and identified various human rights thematic areas for collaboration and partnership, including child protection, harmful cultural practices, Gender Based Violence, torture prevention, Human Rights Education and transition justice.



**Ms. Ida Persson**

Students and teacher coordinators of the Human Rights Clubs of Sheikh Mass, Kanifing East, Sifoe and Kotu Senior Secondary Schools also came for learning visits. The students got first-hand information about the work of the Commission and human rights related issues, as part of their civic education in school.



**Students and teachers from Sifoe Senior Secondary School**

**“Visiting the NHRC was very important to us and our students. The dedication and**

**professionalism exhibited by the Commission are remarkable”,** said a Teacher Coordinator from Sifoe Senior Secondary School.



**Students from Sifoe School**



These visits and courtesy calls have reinforced the Commission’s growing reputation as a pivotal institution in The Gambia’s human rights landscape. The NHRC has established an effective complaint handling system for receiving and addressing human rights complaints, providing a critical platform for citizens to voice their concerns.



**Students and teachers from Sheikh Mass Kah and Kanifing East Senior Secondary Schools**

