

NHRC Organised National Convergence on the Draft Constitution 2024



Group photo of some of the participants

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The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), with support from the European Union (EU) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), organised a two-day National Convergence on The Gambia's Draft Constitution 2024, held from 28th to 29th November 2024 at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre.

The convergence provided a platform for representatives of various political parties, Civil Society Organisations and government institutions

to discuss critical provisions in the Draft Constitution. The inclusive approach reflects the NHRC's commitment to fostering dialogue and ensuring diverse perspectives are considered in the process of constitutional reform.

Delivering his welcome remarks, the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, reflected on The Gambia's transformative journey since the end of dictatorship in 2017. He noted that the country had embarked on a path of transitional justice,

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marked by the establishment of key institutions and reform processes aimed at building a democratic society rooted in good governance and accountability.

Central to these reforms was the creation of the Constitutional Review Commission (CRC), which was tasked with developing a new Constitution that truly represented the will and aspirations of the Gambian people. In March 2020, the CRC submitted to the President a Draft Constitution that was widely regarded as a people centered document. However, Mr. Joof highlighted the disappointment of many Gambians when the Draft was rejected by the National Assembly in September 2020.



Mr. Emmanuel D. Joof, NHRC Chairperson

“This setback was a significant blow to the aspirations of many Gambians who had placed their hopes on the new Constitution,” he said.

The Chairperson further reminded the gathering that in August 2024, a revised Draft Constitution was gazette by the

Government in accordance with Section 226 of the 1997 Constitution. This development reignited a national debate, with diverse and often polarizing opinions on the 2024 draft constitution. Mr. Joof, therefore underscored the significance of the convergence, highlighting its role in fostering dialogue and building consensus on a draft constitution that reflects broad national acceptance, while upholding human rights, accountability, and good governance. He further emphasized the significance of a national Constitution, describing it as more than just a legal document.

“A Constitution is a social contract, a blueprint for national governance for the rights and dignity of everyone,” Chairperson Joof concluded.

In her statement, Ms. Penda Dibba, Executive Director of the Gambia Bar Association, raised critical concerns about the lack of transparency and inclusivity in the development of the draft 2024 document.

Ms. Dibba revealed that the Bar Association received a copy of the Draft Constitution in August 2024 through one of its members. She lamented that there was no consultation with the Bar before the Draft Constitution 2024 was gazetted.



Ms. Penda Dibba, Executive Director,
The Gambia Bar Association

“The absence of a broader consultation undermines the legitimacy of the Draft and the principles of participatory governance,” she stated.

Ms. Dibba further emphasized that the shift from transparent practices compromises the integrity of the constitutional process and raises concerns that the revised Draft Constitution does not adequately address the aspirations of Gambians.



Ms. Yadiconne Njie-Eribo,
TANGO Board Chairperson

Ms. Yadicone Njie Eribo, the Board Chairperson of TANGO, remarked that the convergence is not just an event, but a crucial step towards shaping the future of The Gambia. She highlighted that The Gambia has embarked on robust reform processes to ensure that the mistakes of the past do not repeat themselves again.

In a brief statement, Mr. Karl Frederick Paul, the UN Resident Coordinator, stated that progress is achieved through dialogue and consensus building.

“This dialogue represents the best tradition of democratic

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discourse. A Constitution serves as the fundamental legal framework of any nation, directing and influencing the safeguarding of civil liberties, political and economic rights, and social justice," Mr. Paul remarked.



Mr. Karl Frederick Paul, UN Resident Coordinator

Delivering the keynote address, Mr. Hussein Thomasi, the Solicitor General and Legal Secretary, noted that the rejection of the Draft Constitution 2020 highlighted deep political division between those who supported the Draft and those who opposed it. He stated that after the Draft Constitution was rejected, the Government started a very elaborate and consultative process on the Draft that involved all political party leaders, CSOs, and religious and community leaders.



Mr. Hussein Thomasi, Solicitor General and Legal Secretary

"The 2024 Constitution Bill that we now have gazetted, reflects the outcomes of those mediation efforts, and incorporates adjustments

based on the lessons learned from the failed CRC Draft," he asserted.

The Solicitor General further highlighted that the mediation efforts that the Government embarked upon represent a new attempt to create a Constitution that can garner the necessary support in the National Assembly and be endorsed by the Gambian people.

There were presentations on lessons learned from the work of the CRC, comparisons between the Draft Constitution 2020 and Draft Constitution 2024, new or added provisions of the Draft 2024 Constitution, and break-out sessions and presentations on the Draft 2024. A key highlight of the convergence was an extensive presentation on: 'Constitution Making Across Africa: Dynamics, Challenges and Consensus Building and Solutions' by Professor Olaolu S. Opadere, the Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of The Gambia.

The discussions after the presentations highlighted critical points relating to constitution making and constitution building and which path the Gambia is taking, the importance of political consensus and compromise, the prerequisite for public participation and consultation in the drafting of Constitutions, and the need for a constitution that reflects and represents the wishes and aspirations of the people and is anchored on separation of powers, checks and balances, good governance, and democratic values and human rights standards and norms.

The Convergence adopted a Communique, as an outcome of the event, which has been shared with the National Assembly, the Executive, development partners, CSOs, the media and all stakeholders.



Participants on a group work

NHRC and Partners Held the First National Stakeholder Dialogue on Mental Health Rights in The Gambia



(L-R sitting: Mr. Karl Frederick Paul, UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Emmanuel D. Joof, NHRC Chairperson, H.E. Mohammad B. S. Jallow, Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia, Mrs. Jainaba Johm, NHRC Vice Chairperson and Mr. Babanding Sabally, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health

Over one hundred participants convened at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre to take part in the first-ever National Stakeholder Dialogue on Mental Health Rights in The Gambia.

The two-day event, held from 26th to 27th November 2024, was jointly organized by the National Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Health, ActionAid International The Gambia, the World Health Organisation and UNICEF.

The Dialogue, which was attended by stakeholders from Government institutions, Civil Society Organisations, healthcare providers and international organisations, discussed pressing challenges in accessing mental health care services in the country and mapped out strategies for

collaborative actions and efforts to advance mental health rights, promote mental health awareness, combat stigma and ensure respect and fulfilment of the rights of persons with mental health issues.

Speaking at the opening of the Dialogue, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, Chairperson of the NHRC, mentioned that while mental health is a subject that affects everyone, either directly or indirectly, it remains one of the most misunderstood and stigmatized aspect of public health.



Mr. Emmanuel D. Joof, NHRC Chairperson

According to the Chairperson, stigma and misconception around mental health have prevented open discussion, hindered timely interventions, and exacerbated the challenges faced by individuals living with mental health conditions.

“Here in The Gambia, it is estimated that 27,000 people suffer from mental health and substance abuse disorder. An additional 91,000 individuals are living with mild mental health challenges that require treatment,” Joof stated.

The Chairperson further asserted that the troubling rise of drug induce mental illness amongst the youth is placing additional strain on families, communities, and the limited mental health services in the country.

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National Stakeholder Dialogue on Mental Health Rights...

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“The Tanka Tanka Psychiatric Unit, which is the primary facility, dedicated to mental health in The Gambia, continues to grapple with inadequate human, material, technical and financial resources,” he stressed.

In her statement, the Executive Director of ActionAid International The Gambia, Ms. Ndella Faye Colley, remarked that mental health remains an issue of concern in The Gambia. She indicated that more vulnerable groups are being affected by mental health problems, particularly the youth who form a large portion of the Gambian population. **“The current state of mental health in The Gambia is confronted with outdated policy and legal frameworks which limit the efforts of stakeholders,”** she reiterated



Ms. Ndella Faye Colley
Executive Director of AAITG

Delivering the keynote address, H.E. Mohammad B. S. Jallow, Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia, mentioned that the rise in mental health conditions, exacerbated by the abuse of illicit substances like ‘kush’, cannabis and other hard

drugs, has become a pressing national concern.

“This National Dialogue on mental health is both timely and crucial, offering an opportunity to raise awareness, reduce stigma and recommend effective strategies for improving mental health services and tackling drug abuse,” VP Jallow stated.



H.E. Mohammad B. S. Jallow, Vice
President of the Republic of The Gambia

The Vice President further highlighted that the adoption of human rights-based approach to mental health requires a holistic framework guided by equality, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and participation. He noted that the ongoing reforms, such as the Constitution making process and the drafting of the Mental Health Bill, provide opportunities to strengthen

domestic legislation, protect the rights of people struggling with mental health conditions, and enable equitable access to services.

There were a series of presentations on the state of mental health in The Gambia. The plenary discussions highlighted the gaps in mental health service delivery, including limited access to specialized care, insufficient funding, and a shortage of trained mental health professionals.

Participants called for increased public investment in the mental health care service delivery system, intensified awareness campaigns on mental health issues, expeditious enactment of the Mental Health Bill, support for the Gambia Prisons Service to be able to adequately take care of prisoners with mental health issues, investment in community-based care for patients and coordinated national efforts to tackle mental health challenges in the country.



Cross session of participants

Ageing with Dignity in The Gambia



Group photo of participants of the Forum on the Rights of Older Persons in The Gambia

In its drive to promote respect, protection, and realization of the rights of older persons in The Gambia, NHRC held a day stakeholder forum to promote the rights of older persons in The Gambia. The Forum organised under the theme: **'Ageing with Dignity in The Gambia: Promote the Human Rights of Older Persons,'** took place at the Senegambia hotel on the 28th of August 2024.

Older Persons are valued members of our society who have the right to participate in their families, communities, and society. The 1997 Constitution and other national legislation like the Women's Act 2010 uphold the human rights of older persons and older women and protect them against all forms of discrimination and other forms of violence. However, at present, there is no specific national policy and legal frameworks for the effective protection of older people.

In a brief remark, Commissioner Imam Baba Leigh emphasized the need to respect older persons. He quoted a hadith of the Prophet (SAW) that states that the young should respect the elderly and the elders should have mercy for the young.

In her welcome remarks, the Vice Chairperson of the NHRC, Commissioner Jainaba Johm, expressed appreciation to the participants for gracing the occasion. The Forum, she remarked, was the first of its kind in the country.



Mrs. Jainaba Johm,
NHRC Vice Chairperson

"This stakeholder forum on the promotion of rights of older persons would offer all an opportunity to discuss issues effecting the enjoyment of human rights by older persons in the country. It would also help us to map out ways on how the State and stakeholders can address these challenges and ensure that older persons have dignified lives and are seen as equal members of society", Commissioner Johm stated.

The Vice Chairperson informed the gathering that the NHRC, as an institution that had been mandated to protect and promote human rights in The Gambia, has established a Thematic Committee, led by Commissioner Imam Baba Leigh, which looks into the challenges older persons face, identifies solutions to these challenges and advises the Government on ways to ensure older persons enjoy their rights and are actively

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Ageing with Dignity in The Gambia

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engaged in national and local development efforts and discourses.

Delivering the keynote address, the Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, Hon. Fatou Kinteh, stated that in The Gambia the older persons are the pillars of communities, custodians of culture and tradition, transmitters of values, and wisdom keepers. However, the Hon. Minister contended that older persons face various challenges, including poverty, health issues, social isolation, and discrimination, which affect their dignity and wellbeing and called for collective responsibility to address these challenges.



Hon. Fatou Kinteh, Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare

“The Government of The Gambia, through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, is committed to improving the rights of older persons, and ensuring that their rights are respected. Our dedication to this course is grounded in key legislation, policy instruments, and frameworks”, Minister Kinteh

The Minister further stated that the 1997 Constitution lays the foundation for protection of rights of all citizens. She also referred to the Women’s Act of 2010 as a crucial piece of legislation that provides for the empowerment and protection of women, including older women. However, the Minister recognised that these legislation do not specifically meet the needs of older populations. She assured her Ministry’s commitment to developing robust legislation and policies that will address the legal and policy gaps on the protection of rights of the older persons.

Mr. Sola Mahoney, the interim National Coordinator of Aging with a Smile Initiative, an Association that promotes and protects the rights of older persons, told the gathering not to look at the older persons as liabilities but as a resource that can be harnessed to move The Gambia forward.

There were presentations on the situational analysis of older persons in The Gambia, and rights of older persons in national and international frameworks, and many panel discussions on the rights and welfare of older persons in The Gambia.



Cross session of participants



Dr. Nyan doing a presentation

Access to Justice for Migrants



Group photo of participants

With support of OHCHR through the PROMIS Project with funding from the Kingdom of The Netherlands, the NHRC implemented the “Strengthening Rights of Migrants to Access Justice in The Gambia” Project under which it organised capacity building for the National Assembly, Law Enforcement Institutions and the UTG Faculty of Law Legal Aid Clinic. These trainings enhanced the understanding of the participants on issues affecting migrants in the country, and The Gambia’s obligations to protect them.

The training which brought together law enforcement officers from various security units, enhanced their capacity on national and international human rights instruments, and equipped them with effective strategies for protecting migrants in the country.

Speaking on behalf of the Chairperson of NHRC, the Director of Legal and Investigations, Mr. Mansour Jobe, cited Chapter 4 of the 1997 Constitution which guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms of everyone without any distinction, including migrants and members of their families.



Mr. Mansour Jobe, Director of Legal & Investigations, NHRC

“The Gambia, in addition to our laws, also recognised regional and international human rights frameworks, including the UN Convention

on the Right of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Therefore, having an activity that is intended to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement officials to be able to do their work in protecting migrants is a laudable initiative,” Mr Jobe remarked.

Representing the OHCHR, Ms. Lina Reguigui, highlighted the significance of the training. She stated that it will help in ensuring a safe and orderly migration which is anchored on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2018 for the protection of migrants and members of their families, especially their fundamental rights to access justice. However, Ms Reguigui expressed concern about the challenges that migrant workers and their families face in

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Access to Justice for Migrants

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enjoying their rights to access justice.

“Despite commendable legal frameworks, National Immigration Policies and the National Referral Mechanism of The Gambia, there are significant gaps impeding migrant access to justice. Recognising these challenges, The OHCHR’ PROMIS Project stands in solidarity with the National Human Rights Commission, offering vital support from access to justice grant,” she remarked.



Ms. Lina Reguigui,
OHCHR Representative

Speaking on behalf of the Director General of The Gambia Immigration Department, Commissioner Ebrima Manneh, commended the NHRC for its proactive leadership in initiating the training.



Commissioner Ebrima Manneh, GID

He noted that the training is not merely a series of workshops

but a significant milestone in enhancing capacities of law enforcement officials to uphold rights of all individuals irrespective of their nationality or legal status.

In his remarks, the Assistant Inspector General of The Gambia Police Force, Mr. Ebrima Bah, described the training as relevant and timely as The Gambia is currently witnessing cases of trafficking in persons and a lot of challenges that migrants are facing.



Mr. Ebrima Bah, Assistant IGP

“Migrants are vulnerable and need your support and protection from the clutches of traffickers. Because of their circumstances, they are often afraid to seek support from law enforcement officers,” AIG Bah stated.



Some of the participants

The training is part of activities to commemorate the International Day Against Trafficking in Persons. With this year’s theme centered on

“Leave No Child Behind in the Fight Against Human Trafficking” which seeks to accelerate global action to end child trafficking, the training highlighted domestic provision protecting children from trafficking especially as children represent a significant proportion of trafficked victims.



Sukai Cham from IOM doing a presentation

A similar training was conducted for the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters. It enhanced their understanding of issues affecting migrants and The Gambia’s obligations to protect migrants and provided the Committee the opportunity to identify ways to strengthen the protective environment for migrants and the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration in the country.



Hon. Madi Ceesay



Hon. Fatoumatta Jawara

Access to Justice for Migrants with UTG Legal Aid Clinic



Group photo of participants of the Access to Justice for Migrants with UTG Legal Aid Clinic

A five-day capacity building on Access to Justice for Migrant was also organised for the members of the Legal Aid Clinic of the UTG Faculty of Law, a student-led initiative that provides free legal services to the public, including vulnerable people, through community education on human rights, legal literacy, and legal empowerment.

The training for the members of the Legal Aid Clinic enhanced their knowledge on legal frameworks, the available access to justice services for migrants and their families in the Gambia, how to facilitate referrals of cases of migrant for appropriate support and action, and the strategies to integrate access to justice for migrants and their families into the Clinic's legal aid programmes.

Mr. Lasana Sumareh, the President of the Law Students' Association (LSA), thanked the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for organising such a training. **"We are now well empowered to engage in advocacy for the rights of migrants in The Gambia"**, stated Mr. Sumareh.



Mr. Lasana Sumareh, President of the LSA



Participants of the training



A participant receiving her certificate from Aminata LB Ceesay, Senior Investigation Officer, NHRC

The University of Calabar Wins the 5th Edition of the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Human Rights Moot Court Competition



(L-R: Essien Greatness Evonsa and Nwokeukwu Chidera Royal, winners of the Moot Court Completion from University of Calabar

In a thrilling contest which also witnessed remarkable display of legal acumen, the University of Calabar, Nigeria, emerged the winner of the 5th Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Human Rights Moot Court Competition against the University of the Gambia.

The finals, which took place at the SDKJ International Conference Centre on the 10th of December 2024, also coincided with the commemoration of International Human Rights Day.

The Moot Court Competition is a key activity of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) that creates a platform for university students across Africa to practise and improve both their written and oral advocacy skills in various fields of human rights.

The Moot Court Competition is named after Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, former President of the Republic of The Gambia, in recognition of his efforts in laying the foundation of the African human rights system. At a time when the African

continent was struggling with human rights violations, authoritarianism, and impunity, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara played a key role in the drafting of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which today is the foundational document for the protection of human rights in Africa.

The theme of the 2024 Moot Court Competition centered on migration and its related human rights implications, including trafficking in persons. Eight universities were selected

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University of Calabar Wins the 5th Edition of the Moot Court...

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to participate in the competition: University of The Gambia, International Open University (Gambia), Makerere University (Uganda), University of Makeni (Sierra Leone), Fourah Bay College (Sierra Leone), Obafemi Awolowo University (Nigeria), University of Lagos (Nigeria) and Calabar University (Nigeria).



Participants at the Moot Court Competition

During the preliminary rounds, University of Makeni, Fourah Bay College and Makerere University withdrew from the competition. As a result of their withdrawal, as respondents in their respective groups, the University of the Gambia and University of Lagos submitted ex parte. Similarly, Makerere University was also absent on the day the preliminary round was held which allowed the University of Calabar to make its arguments ex parte. Consequently, all three Universities, after their ex parte submissions, proceeded to the Semi Finals.



NHRC staff and judges during the preliminary rounds

In the semi-final matchups, the University of Lagos, as the Applicant, submitted their arguments against the University of The Gambia, the Respondent. Similarly, Obafemi Awolowo University, as the Applicant, went against the University of Calabar as the Respondent. Each case that was presented revolved around migration and its human rights implications and the parties drew on international laws and conventions to substantiate their cases and abilities to argue.



Muhammed Bah from the University of The Gambia submitting his argument

The University of Calabar, which emerged the winner of the competition, received a cash prize of D200,000 while the University of The Gambia, as the runner up, received D150,000.

The 2024 Moot Court Competition was organized in partnership with the Faculty of Law of the University of The Gambia (UTG), and with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the EU, UNICEF, OHCHR and the PROMIS Project.



NHRC Vice Chairperson and Executive Secretary pose with winners from Calabar University and the runner up from UTG

Hate Speech Has No Place in The Gambia



Group photo of the participants

Between July and August 2024, the NHRC organized a validation Conference on a national Study on Hate Speech in The Gambia and conducted a series of workshops and stakeholder dialogues aimed at addressing hate speech in The Gambia. These activities were implemented with the support of UNESCO under the **'Strengthening the National Infrastructure for Peace to Promote Social Cohesion Project'**.

In his opening remarks at the validation of the Study on Hate Speech in The Gambia, the Chairperson of the NHRC, Mr. Emmanuel Joof, stated that the growth of hate speech in The Gambia, which is amplified on media outlets such as social media, is worrying. He informed the gathering that the NHRC, in the exercise of its mandate,

regularly scans both the print and online media, frequently issues press releases and engages actors to counter hate speech when such arises.

"There is a need to enhance the capacities and competencies of national actors such as the Independent Electoral Commission, the Gambia Press Union, WANEP, the National

Council for Civic Education, and the Inter-Party Committee to enable effective responses to this conflict trigger.' Chairperson Joof asserted.

On his part, Mr. Michel Kenmoe, the UNESCO Head of Communications, and Information, thanked the National Human Commission

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Members of the high table during the opening ceremony of the workshop

Hate Speech Has No Place in The Gambia

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and the consultants for producing such ground-breaking work. Mr. Kenmoe noted that hate speech is complex and contentious and therefore needs to be addressed.

“Research and monitoring of new causes and drivers of hate speech are key to appropriate and adequate actions and strategies to counter hate speech. It is a cancer and menace to democratic processes, religious tolerance, and exacerbated conflict.” He noted.

The findings and recommendations of the Study were presented by the consultant, Mr. Saikou Jammeh. This was followed by interactive sessions, including groups discussions and plenary sessions, which improved the content of the Report.



Participants of the workshop on the hate speech report

In a similar vein, the Commission organised two separate training for officials of the Independent Elections Commission (IEC), WANEP-The Gambia, Gambia Press Union, Inter-Party Committee (IPC), and National Council for Civic Education (NCCE) on hate speech and strategies to mainstream and effectively address hate speech in their work. These workshops were facilitated by an international consultant.

At the opening of both workshops, the Chairperson of the Commission reiterated the importance of combating hate speech at all levels of society as it undermines social cohesion, fuels discrimination, and can incite violence. He added that hate speech affects individuals and communities, thereby perpetuating divisions and harming the very fabric of the society. At workshop for the Inter-Party Committee and the

Independent Elections Commission, the Chairperson stated:

“As we move towards the 2026 Presidential Elections, the NHRC wish to remind all Political leaders and their parties and all politicians of the Peace Accord that they have signed and to tone down their rhetoric and conduct their affairs in a peaceful manner and desist from utterances that are divisive with the potential of fanning the flames of disunity and hatred”.



Members of the high table at the training with the IPC members

In the workshops, the Consultant-Trainer delved on the differences between freedom of expression and hate speech, the international human rights instruments that protect freedom of expression, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19), and the Constitution of The Gambia (Section 25). Participants had group exercises and examined case studies on hate speech. Each participating organisation and institution were urged to develop a draft Plan of Action to counter hate speech in The Gambia

The NHRC commended all the stakeholders who participated in the workshops, especially the Inter-Party Committee (IPC) that was represented by UDP, PDOIS, GDC, APP and NPP, for their effective participation and contributions.



GAF Trained on Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law and SGBV



Participants from The Gambia Armed Forces

The National Human Commission (NHRC) trained personnel of the Gambia Armed Forces on human rights, international humanitarian law and Sexual and Gender-based Violence.

In his opening remarks, the Chairperson of the NHRC, Mr. Emanuel Joof, informed the gathering that the training was premised on the findings and recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparation Commission (TRRC), which were subsequently accepted by the Government in its White Paper.



NHRC Chairperson

“The Gambia has made significant strides in recent years towards strengthening human rights. Despite the gains we have made in the advancement of human rights since 2017, we cannot be complacent. Instances of human rights violations including SGBV continues to pose significant challenges in our society. Generally, this training provides us with a unique opportunity to learn, understand and engage:’ He admonished.

Mr. Alieu Jallow, representative of the Solicitor General and Legal Secretary, stated that the training provided a good opportunity for the Armed Forces personnel and relevant stakeholders to be familiarised with the Gambia’s human rights legal frameworks and other emerging trends in human rights.

“The Government of the Gambia is committed to promoting and protecting human rights, adhering to the rule of law as well as eradicating sexual and gender-based violence in the country, and strengthening legal and security sector institutions, and to ensure that all hands are on deck for us to attain sanity on this important area of our intervention”, Mr. Jallow highlighted.



Mr. Alieu Jallow

Mr. Ousman Bah, the Deputy Permanent Secretary at the

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GAF Trained on Human Rights...

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Ministry of Defence recognized the important role the NHRC plays in fulfilling the TRRC 'Never Again' mantra.



'The NHRC plays an important role in the realization of the TRRC's 'Never-Again' mantra and the sustaining of our democracy and the rule of law endeavours. We cannot prosper as a country if the people are not guaranteed fundamental rights, including the rights guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution and other regional, and international human rights treaties ratified by the Gambia.' Bah stated.



Participants from GAF

Other speakers at the opening included Mr. Mulai CFA Colley, Director, Monitoring and Coordination of the National Security Office, who also spoke on the importance of human rights and the need to create a protective environment for women and girls.



As part of the training, participants were introduced to Modules on human rights, International Human Rights Law and Sexual and Gender Based Violence. Some of the topics covered included the following: Introduction to Human Rights Norms, Standards, and Mechanisms; Principles of Human Rights; Positive and Negative Obligations of the State; Overview of SGBV and its legal Frameworks; Human Rights violations and Accountability; and Command and Control accountability. The training was facilitated by Ms. Priscilla Yagu Ciesay, the Consultant, and her team.

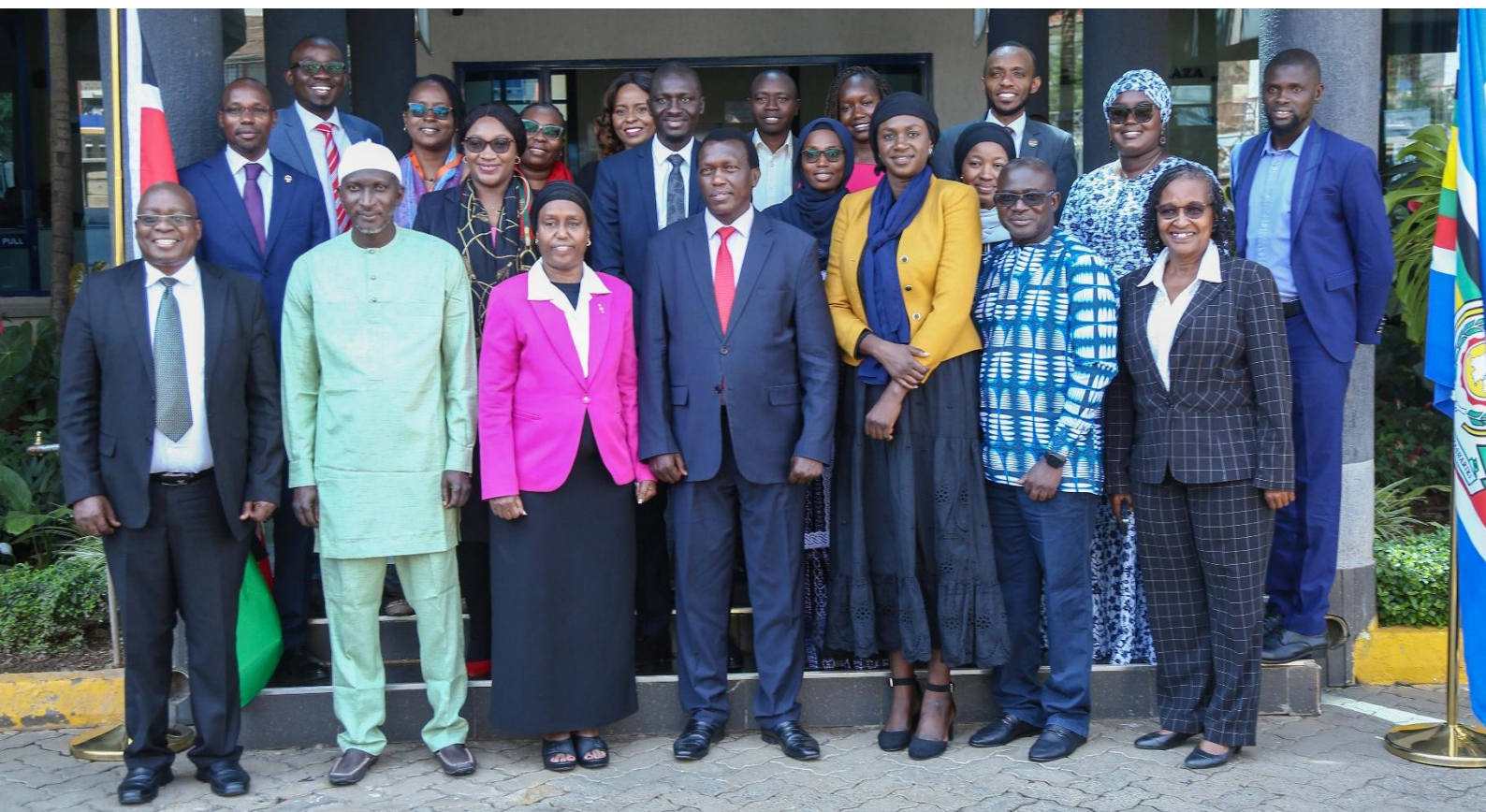


Lead Consultant presenting



Participants from GAF

NHRC Commissioners and Staff Embarked on a Study Tour to KNCHR



NHRC delegation with Commissioners and Staff of KNCHR

A delegation from the National Human Rights Commission, comprising Commissioners and staff, went on a study tour to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) from the 3rd to 9th August 2024. It was funded by International IDEA through the EU CODE Project.

The team learned best practices and experiences from the KNCHR, particularly on public Inquiries, Public Interest Litigation, complaints handling process, and enforcement of recommendations and decisions. It also got insights into the functioning of the ICT Infrastructure and complaints management system, and policy implementation and decision-making within the Commission's

leadership structure.



Dr. Raymond Nyeris
Vice Chairperson of KNCHR

At a brief opening ceremony, Dr. Raymond Nyeris, the Vice Chairperson of KNCHR, gave a brief background on the mandate and work of KNCHR. Similarly, the NHRC head of delegation, Commissioner Halimatou Dibba, talked about the mandate of NHRC and the purpose of the visit. She

highlighted that the KNCHR was selected for the visit due to its recognition as a leading and pioneering National Human Rights Institution in Africa.

The brief opening ceremony was followed by various presentations from different departments and units of KNCHR, which covered automated complaints management system for effective documentation and web-based election monitoring system, which makes election monitoring in Kenya by the Commission very effective.

During the visit, the NHRC team had presentations from

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...Study Tour to KNCHR

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heads of the different Departments and Units of KNCHR on their work, available automated and web-based systems, work of the regional offices, partnerships, and challenges. The team also visited and had discussion with the Executive Director of the Network of African Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI). The Network consists of 47 National Human Rights Institutions from Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone African countries.



At the end of the study visit, Commissioner Halimatou Dibba conveyed heartfelt gratitude to the Commissioners and staff of KNCHR for their invaluable support. She expressed deep appreciation for KNCHR's generosity in sharing their expertise, insights, and experiences, which greatly enriched the NHRC delegation's understanding.



Commissioner Halimatou Dibba, Head of NHRC delegation



NHRC presenting a certificate of appreciation to KNCHR

'Building a Strong Civil-Security Relationship: A Catalyst for Enhanced National Security'

The Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, delivered a paper on **'Building a Strong Civil-Security Relationship: A Catalyst for Enhanced National Security'**, at the Capacity Building Workshop for the Media, Civil Society Organisations and Public Relations Officers of Security Institutions which was organized by the Office of the National Security under the theme **'Fostering Effective Communication, Coordination, Collaboration and Partnership for Enhanced National Security'**.

The Chairperson reflected on the autocratic rule that The Gambia had experienced for 22 years under Yahya Jammeh. According to him, there was widespread and systematic abuse of human rights, the independence of the Judiciary was undermined and compromised, and the security services were seen as a tool of oppression, all of which made many people to lose trust in the security.

"There is need to improve the civil-security relationship significantly by promoting dialogue, community policing and building trust through joint initiatives for a civil-security relationship grounded in human rights", stated Chairperson Joof.

According to Chairperson Joof, the most important part of the Transitional Justice Process is the 'Never Again' mantra, to ensure that the human rights abuses that occurred in The Gambia during Jammeh's 22 years rule, will not happen again.

Chairperson Joof also emphasized the importance of community policing to create civil-security relationship in the SSR process, promote dialogue and building trust through joint initiatives, and the need to improve significantly the civil-security relationship grounded in human rights.

The NHRC Bids Farewell to H.E. Corrado Pampaloni



H.E. Ambassador Pampaloni with some NHRC Commissioners and Staff

The NHRC bade farewell to H.E. Corrado Pampaloni who has served as Ambassador and Head of the Delegation of the European Union to The Gambia for the past four years. A brief ceremony was held at the NHRC's office in Kotu to honour his service and support to the Commission.

Ambassador Pampaloni reflected on his time in The Gambia and highlighted some of his most cherished moments as Ambassador. He expressed deep admiration for the warmth and hospitality of the Gambian people, remarking, **“the natural kindness in Gambians is a true reflection of the name: ‘the Smiling Coast of Africa’.**

The Ambassador also acknowledged the challenges faced by the NHRC in carrying out its mandate, describing its work as both difficult and essential. He praised the institution for its competence, pragmatism, and dedication to protecting and promoting human rights in The Gambia.

The Chairperson of the NHRC thanked Ambassador Pampaloni for his unwavering support throughout his tenure. He noted that the Ambassador had assisted the Commission in various areas and described him as a friend of the Commission.



H.E. Ambassador Corrado Pampaloni



NHRC Chairperson presenting a certificate of appreciation to H.E. Ambassador Pampaloni

Development and Rollout of Human Rights Modules for Lower and Upper Basic Schools



Participants of the workshop

In fostering a culture of human rights in schools, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MOBSE), organised two separate retreats in September and December 2024, in Sitanunku, North bank Region and Mansakonko, Lower River Region, to review and adapt a textbook and develop Teachers' Guide on Civic Education for both Lower Basic and Upper Basic Schools in The Gambia.

Directorates of MOBSE such as the Curriculum Research, Evaluation and Development Directorate (CREDD), Standard Quality Assurance Directorate (SQAD), and Inservice Training Unit (INSET), and practicing teachers.

Representing the NHRC, the Executive Secretary, Dr. Saikou Kawsu Gassama, remarked that the development of the human rights modules for Upper Basic Schools in The Gambia is timely.



Dr. Saikou Kawsu Gassama (L) with other participants

“Education is the bedrock of a just and equitable society. By embedding human rights principles into the curriculum, we are equipping young people with the tools to understand, respect and uphold human rights”, the ES remarked.

The exercise is aimed at integrating human rights in the curricula of the Lower Basic and Upper Basic School as part of the efforts to restore a culture of human rights in The Gambia. It was organised with the support of the European Union through International IDEA and the British High Commission.

The workshop was attended by representatives from the NHRC, National Council for Civic Education (NCCE), Conference of Principals for Upper Basic Schools, Gambia College,

Bringing Legal Aid to the Doorsteps of Communities



Community engagement in North Bank Region

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in partnership with the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and with support from the US State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), embarked on a ten-day Mobile Legal Aid Clinic in North Bank and West Coast Regions.

The purpose of the Clinic was to sensitize communities on relevant national laws, including the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023, Women's (Amendment) Act 2015, Children's Act 2005, and provide legal advice on complaints of human rights violations and information on how and where to seek legal assistance. The team delved into different topics and issues such as human rights principles, norms



Ms. Ngenarr Yasin Jeng,
IDLO Programme Consultant

and standards, and obligations of the State; regional and international human rights instruments; prevention of torture, domestic violence, and sexual offences; child labour; child marriage; importance of alternative dispute resolution; FGM and strengthening the implementation of the Women's (Amendment) Act 2015, and the role of the community in strengthening community policing. The powers, roles and functions of institutions such as the NHRC, ADRS, NALA, Police Child

Welfare Unit and Ministry of Justice.

Various human rights issues and violations were raised in different communities. These included forced marriage, which is still pervasive in some rural communities in the Nuimis, burglary, which sometimes trigger mob justice and domestic violence in the Fonis, sending of children to Senegal to learn the Quran and the hardship they encounter, access to land for women, and wrongful arrests, prolonged detentions, alleged torture, and certain corrupt practices by police officers. Communities were urged to be always law abiding and to report cases of burglary or theft to the Police instead of taking the law into their hands.

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Bringing Legal Aid to the Doorsteps of Communities...

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One of the activities was the 'ataya' (green tea) session which gave the team the opportunity to interact with the youth to discuss gender-based violence and other human rights issues affecting them.



'Ataya' session in Memmeh Village, NBR

The team also engaged with women on the issue of access to land – a critical issue for many rural communities where land ownership and access can directly impact economic stability and personal empowerment. The President of Kalaji Women's Vegetable Garden highlighted the significance of permanent access and ownership over land, as a human right.



The team visit the women vegetable garden in Kalaji

“Women too have rights, and those rights include permanent access and ownership over land. This garden belongs to an association and therefore, we could not cultivate the quantity of vegetables that each and every one of us would

like to grow. Access to land is a challenge. Even during inheritance, every property of the deceased is shared except the land, which are often under the custodian of the men,” she remarked.



The President of Kalaji Women's Vegetable Garden

In all the communities visited, there was film screening which showcased various human rights violations. Students in attendance actively engaged in the discussions and identified specific abuses highlighted in the film, such as domestic and sexual violence, child marriage, and human trafficking.



Community film screening

NHRC Defends 2025 Draft Budget before the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters.



The team from the NHRC

The Commission took a significant step in its fiscal planning for 2025 by presenting its draft budget estimates to the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters.

achievements of the Commission and its critical role in the promotion and protection of human rights in the country. He also stressed the importance of adequate funding /resources to enable the NHRC to effectively fulfil its mandate



Members of the Standing Committee

The Committee Members and the NHRC team had a very fruitful and constructive engagement. The Members sought clarifications on specific allocations and offered recommendations to enhance the impact of the Commission's work.

The NHRC remains committed to transparency and accountability in its operations and will continue to safeguard human rights in the Gambia.

The session provided the Commission the opportunity to defend its programmes of activities and estimated budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Mrs. Isatou Jagne Kolley, the Commission's Director of Finance, led the budget defense process.

The NHRC team was led by the Chairperson of the Commission, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof. In his brief remarks, Chairperson Joof highlighted the recent



(L-R) NHRC Chairperson, Director of Finance, Executive

Prison Officers Urged to Uphold Human Rights in the Prison System



Group photo of participants at the opening of the training with senior officers

In a significant move to strengthen human rights in the prison system, the National Human Rights Commission, with the support of the European Union through the UNDP, organized two separate human rights training retreat for senior and junior prison officers. Each training was attended by twenty-five officers.

The trainings enhanced the officers' knowledge and understanding on human rights principles and standards, rights of detainees and inmates in domestic and international human rights instruments, treatment of women prisoners, International Humanitarian Law, the Mandela Rules, and best practices in the management of prisons.

In his remarks on behalf of the NHRC Vice Chairperson,

Commissioner Njundu Drammeh highlighted the important relationship between the rights of prisoners and those of the officers entrusted with their care.



Commissioner Njundu Drammeh

“We cannot talk about the rights of prisoners without addressing the rights of the men and women in uniform who provide protection within the confines of the prison,” he stated.

Commissioner Drammeh reiterated the significance of creating a prison environment that is fair and conducive for everyone, aligning with the ‘Never Again’ mantra – a commitment to ensuring that past injustices are not repeated.

The Commissioner underscored the pivotal role human rights play in shaping society.

“Human rights are the foundation of everything. It is through human right that human development is built, and it is also through human rights that human security is pursued,” he emphasized. He reminded participants that prisoners, despite their circumstances, retain their

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Prison Officers Urged to Uphold Human Rights...

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inherent rights and must be treated with dignity.

Ms. Enya Braun, representing the EU Delegation in The Gambia, emphasized that human rights are universal and must extend to all individuals, including those in detention.



Ms. Enya Braun, representative, EU Delegation in The Gambia

“The promotion and protection of human rights represent an important component of our collaborative efforts to support governance and uphold human rights in The Gambia’s Prison System,” she stated.

Ms. Braun further reiterated the EU’s commitment to fostering a humane and rights respecting environment in prisons to strengthen democratic principles and the rule of law in The Gambia.

Mr. Sainey Ceesay, who deputized for the UNDP Representative, reminded participants of the findings of the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations commission (TRRC). According to Mr. Ceesay, the TRRC hearings shed light on the historical context in which

systemic issues within The Gambia Prison Service contributed to human rights abuses and the erosion of dignity.



Mr. Sainey Ceesay, UNDP Representative

“Addressing these historic challenges requires the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and international partner,” said Ceesay.

Addressing junior officers at the workshop specifically for that category, Chief Superintendent Lamin Fadera cautioned the officers to be mindful of executing unlawful orders.

“This training should serve as a food for thought at the prisons. Don’t say I was ordered to do so and so when it is not lawful. Most officers were implicated during the TRRC not because they committed wrongful actions of their own volition, but because they were given unlawful orders,” Fadera stated.



Some of the participants

Commissioner Buba Jatta, the Officer in charge of Janjanbureh Prisons, noted

that historically, Gambian prisons before the TRR, were neglected. It was a custodian and a system that led to human rights abuses in the prisons.

“Today, we are no longer custodians. We are here to reform, rehabilitate and reintegrate inmates into society,” he emphasized.

Giving the Vote of Thanks at the end of the workshop, a female officer highlighted the importance of respecting human rights in a democratic state. She pointed out the poor conditions in the prisons, which negatively impacted both officers and inmates. While some improvements have been made, she stressed the need for more improvements.

Chief Superintendent Ebrima Ceesay lauded the NHRC for enhancing officers’ understanding of human rights. He reflected on the TRRC’s revelations, describing them as a wake-up call for prison officers.

“If any officer did not learn from the TRRC, I don’t think they want to change. As prison officers, we are committed to change,” Ceesay stated. He also appealed to the NHRC to conduct more such training to benefit more officers.



Chief Supt. Ebrima Ceesay (right)

Training of Police Officers on the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023



Group photo of participants at the opening of the training

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), with support from the British High Commission, organized a two-day capacity building for Officers of the Gambia Police Force on the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023, from the 12th and 13th of December 2024, at Bakadaji Hotel.

The training was borne out of the need to popularize the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023 and to further build the capacity of rule of law actors on the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of acts of torture as provided by law.

In his welcome remarks, the Chairperson of the NHRC, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, underscored the importance of the training. He highlighted that

the event symbolizes a collaborative commitment to fostering accountability and upholding human rights in The Gambia.



NHRC Chairperson

Mr. Joof placed the training within the historical context of The Gambia's journey since 2017. He referenced the findings of the TRRC which documented widespread human rights abuses over a 22-year period. These abuses included torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial

killings and unlawful detention.

“The prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023, serves as a critical response to those past atrocities, formally criminalizing torture and domesticating international conventions against such practices,” he concluded.

Mr. Mulie Colley, representing the National Security Adviser, emphasized the importance of respecting the rule of law and human rights by law enforcement officers. Reflecting on the TRRC findings, he noted that the prevalence of torture in the past could have been avoided with proper adherence to ethical practices.

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Training of Police Officers on the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023

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He urged participants to reject torture as a method of obtaining information, reaffirming the role of the ongoing Security Sector Reform (SSR) process in addressing historical lapses.

Mr. Martin Norman, Deputy British High Commissioner, praised the Gambia's enactment of the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023 as not only a legal milestone, but also a profound moral commitment to justice and accountability.



Mr. Martin Norman, Deputy British High Commissioner

Mr. Norman reminded participants of the harrowing testimonies shared during the TRRC hearings, which serve as a stark reminder of the past and a call to ensure such atrocities are never repeated.

“The training is a crucial step towards empowering members of the Gambia Police Force with knowledge and tools to uphold standards set by the Act as well as the Mendez Principles and the Istanbul Protocol.” He emphasized.

Norman also highlighted the collaborative relationship between The Gambia and the UK in fostering a shared vision of justice and human dignity.

Delivering the keynote address on behalf of the Inspector General of Police, Chief Superintendent Ousman Colley underscored the pivotal role of law enforcement in safeguarding human rights. He acknowledged the NHRC's contributions to building the capacity of the Gambia Police Force

through training programmes, including the development of a Code of Conduct and a Guideline for the Policing of Public Assembly in The Gambia.



Chief Superintendent Ousman Colley

Chief Superintendent Colley reiterated the recommendations from the TRRC, which served as a learning opportunity for the Gambia Police Force.

“The enactment of the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023 also means a lot of responsibility on the police force. We are the guardians of the rule of law. Therefore, we are expected not only to perform our traditional or core functions of law enforcement, which includes protection of lives and property, but also seen as a defender of human rights,” he stated.

The training program represents the NHRC's desire to equip all law enforcement officers in the country with the knowledge and tools to implement the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023 effectively.



Participants of the training

Community Sensitization on Human Rights and the TRRC White Paper in NBR and URR



Community engagement in North Bank Region (NBR)

In December 2024, the NHRC Regional Offices in North Bank and Upper River Regions embarked on an eight-day community sensitization on Human Rights and the Government White Paper on the Report of the TRRC, and the role, functions, and mandate of the NHRC. The activity was implemented with the support of the British High Commission.

In both regions, the teams held meetings in major locations, covering a cluster of communities of five villages, which were attended by traditional and religious leaders, Local Government Authorities, women and youth leaders, and representatives of youth groups.

At the meeting held in Fass Njaga Choi Village, North Bank Region, the Alkalo of the village Alhagie Joof expressed appreciation for the sensitization efforts, stating, **“This session has provided us with valuable knowledge about human rights and how those principles are essential for fostering peace and justice in our communities. I am committed to ensuring that this knowledge is shared widely within my village to promote understanding and harmony.”**

Like in the North Bank Region, in Upper River Region (URR) the NHRC informed the communities about the mandate of the NHRC and its pivotal role in monitoring the implementation of the TRRC recommendations. **“The Commission is here to promote and protect the rights of everyone, ensure transparency and accountability in addressing past human rights violations,”** stated the NHRC URR Regional Administration Ebrima Kinteh.



Community engagement in Upper River Region (URR)

Participants expressed their appreciation for the platform provided by the NHRC. Many highlighted the importance of such engagements in enhancing public understanding of human rights issues and the TRRC recommendations. One participant noted, **“The gathering has been an eye opener, helping us understand our rights and the steps being taken to address injustices from the past.”**