

Drop 'bogus charges' against Gambian journalists' leader, says IFJ

BRUSSELS: The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) on Friday, 22 July 2011, joined the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) and the West African Journalists Association (WAJA), in condemning the decision by the Gambian government to charge Ndey Tapha Sosseh, FAJ treasurer and former president of the Gambian Press Union (GPU), an IFJ affiliate, with treason and sedition, and called for these charges to be dropped.



Sosseh was charged last Tuesday, 19 July, by the state prosecutor's office along with three other persons, including Mathew K. Jallow, Famara Demba and the already detained former information Minister Amadou Scattered Janneh, with conspiracy to commit "treason" and "seditious act". The charges allege that "on, or about, the 26th of May 2011 in diverse places in the Republic of The Gambia and elsewhere, they conspired to overthrow the Government of The Gambia by unlawful means and thereby committed an offence".

Perilous situation for journalists

"Not only are these charges appalling, but they underscore the perilous situation faced by journalists and civil society activists in the Gambia," said Omar Faruk Osman, FAJ president. "Our colleague Ndey Tapha Sosseh has at no time committed any criminal offence and these charges are made-up to destabilise and discredit not only Gambian journalists but also journalists in Africa as a whole."

"The government of President Jammeh has been notorious in charging its opponents as well as defenders of freedom of expression with extremely serious offenses such as high treason and sedition," said IFJ President Jim Boumelha, "These are clearly bogus charges and aim to frighten and silence journalists who expose the shocking record of Jammeh's government on human rights in the Gambia."

"These charges are very despicable and unacceptable. We emphatically condemn and will use all avenues to challenge these charges in our region and beyond," said Mohamed Garba, WAJA president. "Ndey Tapha is innocent and cannot be charged with false charges".

The IFJ and its regional organisations believe that these charges cannot stand up to any serious scrutiny and should be

categorically dismissed as false and mere tools to browbeat opponents and journalists who tell the truth about the state of civic and human rights in the Gambia.

Atrocious human rights record

Two years ago, the same government charged and sentenced six journalists to jail, included officials from the GPU, also for sedition publications. They were finally released following international outcry.

The atrocious human rights record of The Gambian government has been frequently condemned across the world, in particular its oppression of journalists, freedom of expression advocates and human rights defenders. The IFJ and its affiliates have, for many years, called for the Gambian government to lift the veil behind the murder of Gambian journalist Deyda Hydera and the disappearance of journalist Chief Ebrima Manneh.

"In pressing these charges against Ndey, the Jammeh government is clearly sending a message to Gambian citizens that dissent will not be tolerated and also to journalists that check on power is off limits. The IFJ and the global community of journalists will launch the widest campaign backed by regional and international institutions and governments to protect Ndey and dispel these trumped up charges," added Boumelha.

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