

Karel De Gucht
Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid
European Commission

22 July 2007
Ref: B891

Dear Mr De Gucht,

Amnesty International: Gambia Day for Action

The president of Gambia, Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, took over power in a military coup on the 22 July 1994. He was elected president in September 1996 and has been re-elected since then. The president usually celebrates every 22 July as 'freedom day' despite the fact that it is clear freedom and human rights are violated on a daily basis.

Though Gambia is one of the smallest countries in West Africa, it has a massive record of human rights violations such as torture and ill treatment, enforced disappearances, restriction on freedom of expression and arrests of prisoners of conscience and of political opponents to the regime. Amnesty International carried out extensive research and field visits to Gambia in 2006 and 2007 and published in November 2008 a report *Gambia Fear Rules (AFR27/003/2008)* highlighting these violations. This report was launched in Nigeria during the 44th session of African Commission on Human Peoples' Rights in November 2008. During this session, the African Commission adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Gambia.

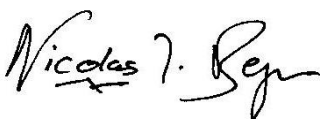
With an estimated population of 1.5 million people, Gambia heavily relies on donor support and on the income generated from the tourist industry to run the state. The European Union contributes to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper adopted by the government. The 10th European Development Fund Country Strategy for Gambia aims at reducing poverty in the context of sustainable socio-economic development. In this strategy, human rights, good-governance and the rule of law are considered essential objectives for doing so.

Amnesty International has decided to take action on this symbolic day to increase awareness of the current situation in Gambia and to call for meaning to be brought to the title 'freedom day'. Demonstrations are organized in Washington, London, Dakar and Accra and press conferences are held in several African states to denounce the numerous ongoing human rights violations. There is presently no real opposition in the country as opponents are likely to become victims of reprisals from the government. Actors in other countries thus have a crucial role to play in promoting human rights in Gambia.

Amnesty International therefore asks the EU to put more pressure on the Gambian government to ensure that its policies and practices fully respect human rights. As the new Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, publicly condemning the current repressions would be an important step in supporting human rights in Gambia.

We would be very happy to meet with you or your team to discuss these issues further and would be very grateful for feedback on how these matters are being taken forward in the European Commission co-operation with Gambia.

Yours sincerely,



Nicolas Beger
Director
Amnesty International EU Office

Cc: Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy
Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations
Riina Kionka, Javier Solana's Personal Representative on Human Rights
Michaela Wright, desk officer for Gambia, DG DEV