

Gambia: update on trial of two women human rights defenders

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UPDATE: Gambia: Trial of WHRDs Dr. Isatou Touray & Amie Bojang-Sissoho adjourned to 1 December <http://www.wluml.org/node/6810>

Update on: Gambia: Isatou Touray and Amie Bojang-Sissoho freed on bail

Online action: Gambia: Call for the fair trial of Dr. Isatou Touray and Ms. Amie Bojang-Sissoho

The International Solidarity Network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLURL) and the Violence is Not our Culture Campaign (VNC), continue to call for the fair trial of two women human rights defenders, WLURL board member, Dr. Isatou Touray, and Ms. Amie Bojang-Sissoho. Coalition for Human Rights in the Gambia Press Release, 24 November 2010: State Prosecution Officer Sainey Joof told the court that the case against GAMCOTRAP is not a Civil case but it is the State that has brought in the case against the two Senior Officers of the Organisation. The court hearing of the trial of Dr. Isatou Touray, the Executive Director and Amie Bojang- Sissoho, Programme Coordinator for the Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) failed to proceed yesterday Monday November 22nd 2010 at the Banjul Magistrates Court before Magistrate Emmanuel Nkea. The prosecution applied for an adjournment of the hearing because their witnesses were not present.

State Prosecution officer Sainey Joof said that he was only informed that morning that the witnesses would not be available in court. He told the court that the witnesses are dispersed in different parts of the Upper River Region and the Central River Region of The Gambia and it is expensive and difficult to bring and maintain them in Banjul.

In response to the concern that the main complainant Yolocamba Solidaridad was not in court, Prosecution Officer, Sainey Joof told the court that the case was not a civil case but it was the State that has brought in the case against the accused.

The Defence Lawyers led by Amie Bensouda did not agree to the adjournment because it is an infringement of the Constitutional rights of the accused. She raised concern that the defence lawyers did not have access to the witnesses' statements and other relevant documents regarding the case in the custody of the Police. She made a formal request to the Magistrate for the Prosecution Officers to provide the documents. Mrs. Bensouda also raised concern that the main complainant Yolocamba Solidaridad has not appeared in court, instead it was the poor women who did not complain against the two Senior Officers of GAMCOTRAP who were dragged to the court as witnesses. She urged the court to discharge the accused persons or strike out the case for lack of diligent prosecution.

Magistrate Emmanuel Nkea in his ruling for the day said he would not strike out the case at this point but would grant adjournment to allow the Prosecution to bring in their witnesses for the next hearing scheduled for the 1st December 2010 at 12 Noon. Magistrate Nkea also ordered the Prosecution to provide the defence lawyers with the statements of the witnesses and all relevant

documents. He finally extended the bail for Dr. Touray and Ms. Bojang-Sissoho until the 1st December 2010. The court room was packed full and the Deputy Ambassador of the American Embassy in Banjul Cindy Gregg and other local dignitaries were amongst the public who witnessed the hearing. The two women will appear in court again on December 1st, 2010.

The Duo were accused of theft of 30,000 Euros from Yolocamba Solidaridad. The Spanish NGO has never been present in court. It appeared as if it is being represented by the Gambia government. This situation has begun to raise critical issues such as the interest of the Gambia government in a civil matter concerning two NGO's that signed a Project Cooperation Agreement. Instead of protecting its own citizens the state of the Gambia is in this case representing a Spanish organisation that has no legal status in the country. Moreover, the report of the panel it had earlier set up is at variance with the allegations. Civil society organisations in The Gambia and elsewhere are concerned that the special interest of the state in this case might serve as a disincentive and deterrent to many similar initiatives that other patriotic Gambians are undertaking especially those working in the area of human rights.

GAMCOTRAP has contributed tremendously to promote women's rights in the Gambia complementing the State in its responsibility to promote and advance the cause of women. It has made great strides in putting The Gambia in the development agenda of the world by raising funds and reaching out to the most deprived citizens of The Gambia and addressing very critical issues that are inimical to the health and wellbeing of women and children of the Gambia.

Organisations

Amnesty International Senegal branch,

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ),

Syndicat des Professionnels de l'information et de la Communication du Sénégal (SYNPICS)

Gambia Press Union (GPU)

Organisation Nationale des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH)

Rencontre africaine pour le Défense des droits de l'Homme (RADDHO),

Inter Africa Network for Women, Media, Gender and Development (FAMEDEV),

Réseau Presse et Parlement du Sénégal (REPPAS)

Radio Alternative Voice for Gambians (AVG)

West Africa Journalists Association (WAJA)

In solidarity,

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