



For immediate release – 3 June 2009

## **The Gambia: ARTICLE 19 Calls on the Gambian Government to Respect Freedom of Expression**

**ARTICLE 19 issued an oral statement at the recent 45<sup>th</sup> session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHR), expressing the organisation's concern about continuing violations of freedom of expression in The Gambia.**

The Gambian government under President Yahya Jammeh is notorious for its human rights abuses and the country's media operate in a consistently repressive climate. ARTICLE 19 has called on the government to respect freedom of expression and to repeal all laws that restrict free expression, especially the Criminal Code and the Newspaper Amendment Act.

In 2006, Chief Ebrima Manneh, a journalist for the *Daily Observer*, disappeared. The government has refused to shed light on or investigate his plight, despite being subpoenaed five times by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice.

In June 2008, the ECOWAS Court, ruled in favour of Manneh and called on the Gambian government to release him and compensate him for arbitrary and prolonged detention without charge. In April 2009, the Gambian Attorney General and Minister of Justice publicly stated that Manneh is not in government custody and rejected the decision of the ECOWAS Court.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Gambian government to implement the decision of the ECOWAS Court and to investigate and prosecute all acts of violence and harassment against media workers.

In December 2004, Deyda Hydara, managing editor of *The Point* Newspaper was brutally murdered. Investigations to this case stalled in early 2005 after a so-called "confidential" intelligence report, smearing Hydara, was leaked to the press. ARTICLE 19 calls on the Gambian government to investigate Deyda Hydara's murder and break the cycle of impunity in The Gambia.

ARTICLE 19 welcomes a recent decision by the Gambian government to allow the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa to conduct a mission to assess the situation in the Gambia. ARTICLE 19 hopes that this will pave the way for better protection of the right to freedom of expression.

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- To view ARTICLE 19's statement to the ACHR, please go to:  
<http://www.article19.org/pdfs/conferences/gambia-freedom-of-information-and-access-to-information.pdf>
- For more information: please contact Fatou Jagne-Senghore, ARTICLE 19 Africa Programme Officer at [fatouj@article19.org](mailto:fatouj@article19.org) or + 22 177 569 2315.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.