



PRESS STATEMENT

CENTRE SEEKS ASSURANCES FROM GAMBIAN GOVERNMENT FOR MOOT COURT TO GO AHEAD

12 May 2016

In a statement on 18 April 2016, the Centre for Human Rights expressed grave concern about the human rights situation in The Gambia, on the basis of events that took place from 14 to 16 April 2016. The Centre called on the government of The Gambia to diligently investigate the events; bring to justice and punish those responsible; release from detention those involved in peaceful protest; and provide adequate medical attention to those injured in the protests and in detention.

The human rights situation in The Gambia is of particular concern because the Centre, as part of a partnership, has agreed to organise the 25th African Human Rights Moot Court Competition in The Gambia, from 16 to 21 October 2016. The Moot Competition has been scheduled to form part of the events celebrating the African Year of Human Rights. In the light of the alarming human rights violations observed in The Gambia, the Centre committed itself to engaging with its partners – the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the University of The Gambia – with a view to possibly relocating the Competition out of The Gambia.

Having conferred with our partners, we agree that, despite the unfortunate events, planning should go ahead for the Moot Court Competition to take place in The Gambia. The following are important considerations informing our agreement: (i) The Moot was scheduled to coincide not only with the session of the African Commission, but also of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights of the Child, rendering the logistical implications of changing the arrangements extremely far-reaching and difficult to achieve. (ii) The event is less than six months away, making any changes to prior arrangements very complex. (iii) The joint meeting of the three AU human rights bodies, as well as the Moot Court Competition, will provide an opportunity for human rights actors to highlight the human rights situation in The Gambia in light of the coming elections.

Although we take seriously the invitation extended to the Centre for Human Rights to organise the Moot Court Competition in The Gambia, as a common denominator to the sessions of the three AU human rights bodies, we remain concerned about the situation in The Gambia. We therefore asked the African Commission, through its Chairperson, to obtain the following written assurances from the government of The Gambia:

- Visas will be issued to all Moot Court organisers and participants who fulfil the usual requirements.
- The government will ensure the safety and security of all Moot Court organisers and participants.
- The Moot Court Competition will be allowed to take place unhindered.

We trust that the Moot Court Competition will continue to be seen for what it aims to be: a forum for a critical discussion of human rights issues of importance to The Gambia, specifically, and Africa, more broadly. In coming to The Gambia for the Moot Competition, we also trust that yet another generation of young African human rights lawyers and activists will be challenged to envisage a new and better Africa on the basis of human rights.

The Centre will continue, on the longer term, with its campaign to see the seat of the African Commission moved out of The Gambia.

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