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Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law

PRESS STATEMENT

CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS REMEMBERS DAWDA JAWARA AS AN AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS ICON

30 August 2019

Dawda K Jawara, who played a considerable role in laying the foundations of the African regional human rights system, passed away on 27 August 2019. He was 95 years old.

For those following and committed to human rights in Africa, the name of Dawda Jawara takes pride of place.

Jawara was the Prime Minister, and later independence President of one of Africa's smallest countries, The Gambia. Counteracting a continental trend towards the installation of the developmental authoritarianism state, characterized by one-party or one-man rule, under Jawara a multi-party democracy was carefully being cultivated in the Gambia.

When a window of opportunity opened, allowing for the adoption of a regional human rights treaty, Jawara stepped forward to prod the process along. His support for the drafting process, including the hosting of drafters' meeting in Banjul, the capital of The Gambia, is memorialised in the name of the eventually adopted treaty, the *Banjul African Charter*.

When the OAU considered the seat for the supervisory body established under the Charter, the choice fell on Banjul. The seat of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is still located there.

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Regrettably, the fledgling Gambian democracy was uprooted in 1994, when a junior military official, Yahya Jammeh, took power through a military *coup d'état*. His authoritarian regime eroded the rights of Gambians, and the country gained infamy for its use of the death penalty and non-compliance with court judgments.

Jawara not only acted as a ‘norm-entrepreneur’, but also came to make use of these norms. Soon after the overthrow of his government, he brought a case to the African Commission (*Jawara v The Gambia*). In its decision in this case, the Commission found that the military overthrow constituted a violation of the right of the Gambian peoples to self-determination.

Allowed to return to his homeland, Jawara lived a life of care and concern for those around him and his country, outside the spotlight of public attention.

Africa owes much to him. Our memories of him will live on in the work of the African Commission.

We at the Centre for Human Rights honour President Jawara for his contributions and commit ourselves to uphold his legacy by doing what we can to advance human rights in Africa through our support of the African human rights system.
