



## **NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF THE GAMBIA**

### **Press Release From The National Human Rights Commission of The Gambia on the Issue of Reported Discriminatory Practice Among the Sarahule Community in Upper River Region, Caste System in The Gambia, And The Threatening Remarks Made by Presidential Adviser Henry Gomez that Would be Demonstrators Risk Being Shot if they Conduct Protest Demanding that President Barrow Steps Down After 3 years**

The National Human Rights Commission, established by an Act of the National Assembly in 2017, is an independent and permanent institution which is mandated to promote, monitor, investigate and protect human rights, as well as create a culture of human rights in The Gambia. Its other functions include recommending appropriate remedial action to the Government regarding a human rights violation, seeking appropriate redress on behalf of victims, and assisting the Government in the formulation of appropriate policies and laws to guarantee human rights. The 5 members of the Commission were sworn into office on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

It has been brought to the attention of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) that, serious and discriminatory practices are being meted out by some members of the Sarahule tribe who regard themselves as “nobles” on other members of the same tribe they regard as “slaves”. The said discriminatory practices among the Sarahule tribe has been recently reported in Koina and Fatoto villages of Kantora District in the Upper River Region.

The report reaching NHRC suggests that those who regard themselves as “nobles” have been provoking those that they regard as “slaves” by using derogatory, insulting and threatening language resulting in fighting, assault and disorderly conduct.

The Commission is also aware that caste system is still widespread in some parts of the country in the North Bank Region, the Central River Region, and the Central River Region where some tribes and clans regard others within their own tribes and communities as inferior (slaves) and others as superior (nobles). Some communities have also been known to discriminate those they regard as “recent arrivals” and therefore regard them as strangers as opposed to those they regard as the original settlers. This kind of discriminatory labelling has translated into discriminatory practices in relation to land ownership and land use, marriage, including segregated burial sites for “nobles” and “slaves”.

The NHRC not only condemns any and all forms of discrimination against anyone within the soil of the Gambia but also wants to make it categorically clear that it is illegal and unlawful under the laws of the Gambia and all the international treaties and conventions that the Gambia has ratified for anyone to discriminate against anybody based on tribe, ethnicity, race, gender, religion and or social status.

The NHRC is therefore calling on all community leaders, religious leaders, opinion leaders, elders, civil and public servants and the citizenry to be very wary and to desist from making discriminatory statements and or engaging in discriminatory practices.

Discrimination cannot be condoned in our communities and those responsible for fanning the seeds of hatred and division will be brought to book. The police are also advised to be very vigilant, take an active role in the fight against all forms of discrimination and treat seriously all cases of discrimination reported to them with professionalism and impartiality.

As part of its promotional mandate, The NHRC, in collaboration with stakeholders, will engage the affected communities and will also roll out a series of activities geared towards sensitizing the general public on human rights, promoting a culture of human rights in The Gambia and assisting the Government in the formulation of appropriate policies to guarantee human rights.

Meanwhile, the NHRC would also like to condemn in the strongest possible terms statements reportedly made by Presidential Adviser Mr Henry Gomez during a “political” rally in Brikama on Saturday 16 June in which it is reported that he said that would be demonstrators risk being shot at if they conduct protest marches demanding that President Barrow steps down after 3 years and citing as warning April 10 and 11 of 2000 in which 14 Gambians were shot following demonstration by school children as reference to what can happen again.

The NHRC would like to reiterate the fact that people have a right to freedom of expression, assembly and to demonstrate peacefully. These are fundamental rights guaranteed in our constitution and under regional and international treaties and conventions that we have ratified. The fact that people are demonstrating or wish to do so does not mean that they are riotous or that they are criminals. To threaten would be demonstrators with bullets is unbecoming of a Presidential Adviser and should be condemned in the strongest terms. Such language is not one which is or should be permitted in a democratic society.

The NHRC urges all and every Gambian including politicians, security personnel the youths and everyone to be law abiding and follow due process in their actions. Never again will Gambians allow oppression and or fear to take hold in our society.

On Behalf of the National Human Rights Commission



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