

Geneva, 28 September 2009

**Re: Human Rights Council must condemn death threats to human rights defenders by Gambian President**

Excellency,

We the undersigned non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the work of the Human Rights Council are deeply concerned about the threats attributed to the President of the Gambia, Col. A.J.J Jammeh (Rtd), to kill those who collaborate with human rights defenders in the country.

We call the Human Rights Council Member States to adopt a Presidential Statement expressing strong concerns at the public statement by the President of the Gambia and recalling the obligation of the Gambia to protect human rights defenders, in particular as host country of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The President was reported as having made the following remarks in a speech that he delivered on national television on 21 September 2009.

*"I will kill anyone, who wants to destabilize this country. If you think that you can collaborate with so-called human rights defenders, and get away with it, you must be living in a dream world. I will kill you, and nothing will come out of it. We are not going to condone people posing as human rights defenders to the detriment of the country. If you are affiliated with any human rights group, rest assured that your security and personal safety would not be guaranteed by my Government. We are ready to kill saboteurs."*

These remarks constitute not only a threat to the right to life and physical integrity of Gambian human rights defenders and their supporters, but may have implications for the safety of those working in and with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which has its headquarters in Banjul, the Gambia.

The Human Rights Council has the mandate to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, as well as to contribute towards the prevention of human rights violations. Therefore the Council has a clear duty to immediately respond to these unacceptable threats by a head of State, which endanger the lives of many human rights defenders. The Council also has to reaffirm the obligation of all States to protect defenders. In her opening statement to the 12th session, the High Commissioner for Human Rights 'reminded States of their obligation to protect human rights defenders, [...] from any form of violence, intimidation or discrimination, and to hold accountable those who are responsible for any such acts of violence, intimidation or discrimination.'

We urge you to use your good offices as President of the Human Rights Council to bring to the attention of all Member States of the Council the call of a large number of NGOs for the adoption of a Presidential Statement in this regard.

Sincerely,

West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, Togo

Partnership for Justice, Nigeria

FAWE, Benin

The Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD), Nigeria

Forum of Conscience, Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leone Network of Human Rights Defenders, Sierra Leone

FONADH, Mauritania

La Coalition Sénégalaise des Défenseurs des Droits Humains, Sénégal

RADI, Sénégal

Wildaf, Sénégal

Ligue Civique Sénégalaise, Sénégal

Coalition Togolaise des Défenseurs des droits Humains, Togo

Groupe de réflexion et d'action, femme, démocratie et développement, Togo

Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains, Cote d'Ivoire

Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples, Burkina Faso

ADF, Gambia

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, Uganda

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Egypt

GeED, Cameroun

Human Rights Watch

Democracy Coalition Project, USA

Conectas Human Rights, Brazil

International Service for Human Rights

Amnesty International