

3 July 2020

The Gambia: Charges brought against human rights defender Madi Jobarteh

On 30 June 2020, human rights defender **Madi Jobarteh** was charged with "false information and broadcasting" in accordance with Section 181A (1) of the Gambian criminal code. If found guilty, he could face between six months to five years' imprisonment, or a fine ranging between 500 Ghambian Dalasis (approximately 9 euros) and 50,000 Ghambian Dalasis (approximately 860 euros).

Madi Jorbarth is a human rights defender and focuses on promoting democracy and human rights in The Gambia. He is the former executive director of the Association of Non-Governmental Organizations in The Gambia (TANGO), and is also a member of the Foundation for Legal Aid Research and Empowerment (FLARE). The defender currently acts as the country representative for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

On 30 June, Madi Jorbarth was instructed to present himself at the Kairaba police station in Serrekunda to answer some questions. The request was in relation to an interview he gave to a media outlet during a Black Lives Matter demonstration he had organised on 27 June in Serrekunda, in front of the U.S. Embassy. During the interview, he criticized the government's inaction in investigating the deaths of Haruna Jatta, Ousman Darboe and Kebba Secka, three citizens reportedly killed by Gambian police officers between June 2017 and July 2019.

Haruna Jatta was allegedly killed by members of the ECOMIG Forces during a peaceful protest in Kanilai in June 2017, whilst Ousman Darboe was reportedly tortured to death in June 2019 by officers at the Anti-Crime Unit while he was in their custody in Bijilo. According to a press release issued by the Gambia Police Force, Kebba Secka, a student of the University of The Gambia, was stabbed to death in July 2019 and the identified suspect was an officer of the Gambia Police Force.

In the office of the Deputy Commissioner Pateh Bah at Kairaba police station, the human rights defender was asked to write a statement retracting the comments he made during the interview. After writing the statement, the defender was arrested and charged with "false information and broadcasting" in accordance with Section 181A (1) of the criminal code.

On the same day, Madi Jorbarth was released on bail and asked to report to the police station the following day. On 2 July, the defender was instructed to report to Kairaba police station again, but was then directed to the prosecutor's office at Kanifing police station. He is due to report there on 6 July again. A date is yet to be scheduled for his hearing.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the arbitrary arrest of Madi Jorbarth and the charges brought against him. It believes that he has been targeted solely for his peaceful and legitimate human rights activities and exercising the right to freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Gambia to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Madi Jorbarth, as Front Line Defenders believes that he has been charged for his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;

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2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Gambia can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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