



## FREEDOM NOW

P.O. Box 30155 • Bethesda, Maryland 20824 • 202 629-3385 • info@freedom-now.org • www.freedom-now.org

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### United Nations Declares Gambia's Detention of Chief Ebrima Manneh a Violation of International Law, Calls for Immediate Release

**Washington, D.C., November 18, 2009** – In response to a petition filed by attorneys from Freedom Now and Hogan & Hartson LLP, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has issued an opinion affirming that the arrest and continued detention by the Gambian government of Chief Ebrima Manneh, a senior reporter for the Gambian newspaper, *Daily Observer*, are without legal justification and in violation of international law. In its decision, the UN called for the Gambian government to release Mr. Manneh immediately.

Freedom Now Chair Jeremy Zucker stated: “We are strongly encouraged that the Working Group has issued a clear and direct opinion in support of Mr. Manneh. We urge the Gambian government to release Mr. Manneh immediately.”

On July 7, 2006, two plainclothes agents of Gambia's National Intelligence Agency arrested Manneh in the *Daily Observer's* Banjul office. The agents did not inform Mr. Manneh of the reason for his arrest; whatever the reason, it was clear that he was detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. Mr. Manneh has not been charged with a crime nor given a trial. Instead, he remains imprisoned *incommunicado*, while the Gambian government disavows his arrest and detainment.

Reports from Gambia indicate that Mr. Manneh may be subject to deeply inhumane treatment while in detention. According to the U.S. State Department, Gambian security forces have used various forms of physical and mental torture against Gambian political prisoners. In addition, Mr. Manneh has suffered serious health problems during his detention yet has generally been denied access to medical care.

The UN decision is the latest in a growing number of demands for Mr. Manneh's release. Last year, the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declared that Mr. Manneh's detention violates international law. The Court demanded that Gambia release Mr. Manneh and pay damages to his relatives. U.S. Senators Durbin, Feingold, Casey, Murray, Lieberman and Kennedy echoed these demands in an April 22, 2009 open letter to Gambian President Jammeh. The Committee to Protect Journalists also has called for Manneh's release. To date, the Gambian government has ignored these demands.

In response to the UN decision, Senator Durbin, the Assistant Majority Leader, stated: “This judgment by the United Nations adds a new and important voice to the growing chorus of those calling for the immediate release of Chief Ebrima Manneh who, for three long years, has been held *incommunicado* and without charge or trial. The UN's judgment is more than a powerful rebuke of the Gambia government; it is a warning to all regimes holding political prisoners without cause. Freedom Now and the Committee to Protect Journalists should be commended for their tireless work, not only on behalf of Mr. Manneh, but for thousands of political prisoners languishing in prisons across the globe.”

Senator Russ Feingold, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, stated: “I am deeply troubled that Chief Manneh remains in detention *incommunicado* and without trial. The UN Working Group has affirmed that this is a violation of the most basic human rights. If the Gambian government does not immediately release Manneh or provide information about his whereabouts, the international community should take action to make clear this is unacceptable.”

Freedom Now, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to free prisoners of conscience, and Hogan & Hartson, an international law firm, welcome the UN's decision. They call on the Gambian government to release Mr. Manneh immediately.

**Contacts: Jeremy Zucker 202.468.4648 / Erica Mintzer: 703.623.8767**

#### **Honorary Co-Chairs**

The Honorable  
Václav Havel

The Most Reverend  
Desmond M. Tutu

#### **Board of Directors**

*President*  
Jared Genser

*Chair*  
Jeremy Zucker

*Treasurer*  
Daniel Silverberg

*Secretary*  
Haylie Iseman

Hillary Coyne Brill  
Glenn Kaminsky  
Micheline Mendelsohn

#### **Board of Advisors**

Prof. Karima Bennouna  
Rutgers University  
School of Law (Newark)

Prof. Jerome A. Cohen  
New York University  
Law School

Irwin Cotler MP  
Parliament of Canada

Harry C. McPherson  
DLA Piper US LLP

Nuala Mole  
AIRE Centre

Prof. A.W. Brian Simpson  
Michigan Law School

Prof. Christopher  
McCrudden  
Oxford University

The Honorable  
Patricia M. Wald

#### **Executive Director**

Maran Turner