

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALISTS ACQUITTED AND DISCHARGED

On 10 November, Gambian journalists Musa Sheriff and Sainey M.K. Marenah were acquitted and discharged on the two counts of “publication of false news with intent to cause fear and alarm to the public” and “conspiracy to commit felony”. They had been on trial for more than 10 months.

The magistrate of the Banjul Magistrate Court of The Gambia ruled that “the prosecution have failed to prove the essential ingredients of the offence on both counts” and decided to acquit and discharge journalists **Musa Sheriff** and **Sainey M.K. Marenah**. This ruling ends a 10-month long trial which caused distress to the two men and their families.

Following the ruling, both men announced they will continue their journalistic work and expressed gratitude to their supporters.

Sainey M.K. Marenah said "Words can't express how I feel, but I am happy. I am walking home a free man. I must commend Amnesty International and other international partners for their support. Their campaigns calling for our release and for charges against us to be dropped really bear fruits."

No further action is requested of the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the fourth update of UA 10/14. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR27/013/2014/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Musa Sheriff and Sainey M.K. Marenah were arrested on 13 January in the town of Serekunda over an article published in *The Voice* on 9 December 2013. The article reported on the defection of youth supporters of the ruling party, the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), to the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP). The APRC contested the story, and *The Voice* later published a response.

Journalists, human rights activists and political opponents in the Gambia are routinely subjected to human rights violations such as unlawful arrest and detention, torture, unfair trial, harassment, assault and death threats, making it extremely difficult for them to do their work.

In July 2013, the Gambian government passed a law which limits freedom of expression on the internet, one of the few remaining public spaces for dissent. The “Information and Communication (Amendment) Act 2013”, allows the government to impose penalties of up to 15 years imprisonment and hefty fines for criticising government officials online. It targets people who spread “false news” about the government or public officials; caricature or make derogatory statements against public officials; and incite dissatisfaction or instigate violence against the government.

Three months earlier the Gambia’s National Assembly had unanimously passed the “Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, 2013”, also known as “The Principal Act”, which broadens definitions of offences and places harsher punishments on the following: acts of public disorder, such as “hurling abusive insults” or “singing abusive songs”; giving false information to a public servant; and it criminalizes people’s expression through their choice of clothing. The Principal Act contains vague definitions which leave room for interpretation and application that do not comply with international human rights law.

Names: Musa Sheriff and Sainey M.K. Marenah

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 10/14 Index: AFR 27/014/2014 Issue Date: 12 November 2014