



May 2, 2016

The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield  
Assistant Secretary for African Affairs

The Honorable Tom Malinowski  
Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Dear Assistant Secretaries Thomas-Greenfield and Malinowski:

As organizations focused on protecting and defending the dignity and human rights of all people, we are deeply concerned about recent reports out of The Gambia regarding arbitrary arrests, police brutality and possible torture. This follows additional concerns that we have raised with the State Department and the White House over the past several years, including pointed concerns about the targeted persecution of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. We recognize, of course, that these abuses are intensifying as we enter an election year in The Gambia and that the human rights environment is likely to deteriorate precipitously as we approach the December target date for elections.

As you know, on April 14, Gambian security forces broke up a demonstration in Banjul calling for electoral reforms in the run-up to December's presidential elections. They arrested a number of people, including Mr. Solo Sandeng, a prominent member of the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP). Rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, subsequently reported that Mr. Sandeng died under suspicious circumstances while in custody shortly after his arrest. Members of Sandeng's party allege that he died after being tortured by Gambia's National Intelligence Agency and that two other party members also died in custody.

Members of the UDP demonstrated again on April 16 to demand justice for Sandeng's death and the release of other members of their party. The security forces again intervened, and at least five UDP executive members, including party leader Ousainou Darboe, were arrested, as well as a number of other protesters and bystanders. While some people arrested on April 14 and 16 have subsequently been released, more than 35 remain in custody at the time of writing this letter.

The government's harsh suppression of these protests, and particularly Sandeng's death have been condemned by United Nations Secretary-General, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the ECOWAS Commission and the State Department.

There have been similar statements of concern from leading civil society in the region, including IHRDA, WACSOFF and the NGO Forum at the African Commission. This latest crackdown is only the most recent chapter in a long line abuses perpetrated against independent voices by President Jammeh's regime since he took power in 1994.

President Jammeh has also continued his inflammatory rhetoric against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Gambians. In March 2016, when addressing the opening of the National Assembly, he said that homosexuality is "ungodly," and "I will never tolerate it here in The Gambia. Those who will be caught practicing it will face the full force of the law." These remarks are not empty rhetoric – the Gambian criminal code was amended in October 2014 to include much harsher sentences for various acts defined as "aggravated homosexuality." LGBT Gambians have since been subjected to arrest and detention, torture, and other ill-treatment by state security forces.

In light of these reports, we urge the United States government to take further actions against President Jammeh and his government to make it clear that continued violations of human rights such as these will not be tolerated and will severely strain his country's relationship with the United States. In particular, as previously requested, we urge you to consider visa bans against Gambian officials guilty of grave human rights abuses, and to consider using the sanctions powers available under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), which have been used in the past to respond to human rights abuses in countries such as Belarus, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. We also ask you to cut any remaining security assistance to the government in the wake of these abuses.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue with you or your staff in the coming weeks. We look forward to working with you as we seek to advance the human rights and dignity of all people, no matter who they are or whom they love.

Sincerely,



Serra Sippel  
President  
Center for Health and  
Gender Equity (CHANGE)



Mark Bromley  
Council Chair  
The Council for Global Equality



Joseph Tolton  
Executive Director  
The Fellowship Global



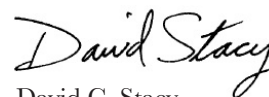
Daniel Calingaert  
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Sarah Kate Ellis  
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Rev. Pat Bumgardner  
Executive Director  
Global Justice Institute



David C. Stacy  
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Shawn M. Gaylord  
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Human Rights First



Lori L. Jean  
Chief Executive Officer  
Los Angeles LGBT Center



George Ayala  
Executive Director  
The Global Forum on  
MSM & HIV



Kate Kendall  
Executive Director  
National Center for  
Lesbian Rights



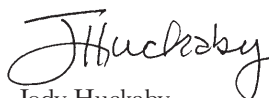
Mara Keisling  
Executive Director  
National Center for  
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Justin Nelson  
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Wade McMullen  
Managing Attorney  
Partners for Human Rights  
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

Cc: Mr. Steve Pomper, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights,  
National Security Staff, The White House

Mr. Randy Berry, Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons, United States Department of State