



The National Human Rights Commission, The Gambia

PRESS RELEASE

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The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is extremely saddened by news of the death of children in the fire incident which took place at the Bilal Boarding School in Yarambamba, West Coast Region on 17th October 2021. NHRC extends its deepest condolences to the families of the victims, their fellow students and friends. It also wishes speedy recovery to those students who are currently hospitalised.

NHRC is currently investigating this sad incident to establish the exact cause of the fire and the circumstances surrounding the occurrence. With the outcome of this investigation, NHRC will engage with the relevant Government authorities to ensure that there is full accountability.

NHRC wishes to reiterate that State institutions with oversight for children's protection, in particular the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, should ensure that childcare centres and private residential care homes, including boarding schools of every sort, conform to the dictates of Sections 198 - 203 of the Children's Act 2005, with Minimum Standard of Care implemented in full. It is the obligations of these State institutions to regularly inspect these facilities, rigorously monitor the implementation of these standards and guidelines, and severely penalise those care institutions and facilities found wanting.

NHRC calls on the school and other relevant authorities to ensure that students who were present at the time of the incident receive the necessary psycho-social support as they overcome the shock and trauma this may have caused. The Government, parents and care givers must always seek the best interest of children and ensure their safety either under care or in their homes as protected by law.

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