



The National Human Rights Commission

Press Statement

NHRC/PR/ 18072021

18th July 2021

Condemnation of the Public Utterances of the Alkalo of Babylon Village Against the Christian Community in The Gambia

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is aware of a video recording on GTTV in which a man purported to be the Alkalo of Babylon, a settlement near Lamin village in the West Coast Region, made derogatory statements about Christians. His comments included his disapproval of the construction of a church in his village or allocating land for such a purpose. The Commission finds the remarks of the said Alkalo to be wrong, unwarranted, insensitive, demeaning, unjustified and totally disrespectful towards a faith whose believers have every right to construct their place of worship in the country.

The Commission wishes to remind the Alkalo of Babylon, and every person residing in The Gambia, that the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia prohibits discrimination on any ground and guarantees the fundamental right to practice and manifest one's religion without fear of persecution. These rights are untouchable, indivisible and inalienable. As a Public Officer and Community Leader, the Alkalo of Babylon is duty-bound to respect, protect and fulfil the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all people. To deny the construction of a place of worship in his community or refuse the allocation of a land for such a purpose is a flagrant violation of the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia, and an abuse of power, trust and authority which will not be tolerated in The Gambia.

Public officials, including Alkalolu, are guarantors and defenders of human rights and must not only be seen to be fair in the dispensation of their mandate but must also treat every citizen equally, by providing equal, just and equitable opportunities to all. To refuse to allocate land to people for the purpose of the construction of a place of worship is illegal and an affront to the constitutionally guaranteed rights.

The Commission reiterates that in The Gambia no one faith is more important than the other. The Constitution guarantees equal status to all religions and protects the rights of all people to practice their religions. Thus, no Public Officer can arrogate to himself or herself the legal authority to prohibit the existence or construction of a place of worship in his or her community or be discriminatory in the allocation of land for such purposes.

Given that the Alkalo of Babylon is a public official, the Commission calls on the Minister of Lands and Regional Government to immediately take action against such a behaviour, and to



demand the withdrawal of the offensive statements and a public apology from the said Alkalo. Public officials are expected to be measured in their public statements, promote peace and tolerance, protect human rights and be exemplary in their words and actions. Sowing seeds of discord or instigating hostility towards any one group is not only counterproductive but a danger to social justice and security of the country.

The Commission has a zero-tolerance policy to political, religious and tribal bigotry and would not hesitate to condemn such actions in no uncertain terms by any individual or group who engages, promotes, encourages or incites such unacceptable behaviour. NHRC would also continue to play its watchdog role as the public promoter and protector of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all persons residing in The Gambia, a mandate it would not backtrack from.

Emmanuel Daniel Joof
Chairperson
NHRC