

PRESS RELEASE: **RHM 58/97/01(51)**

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

10 February 2026

PRESS STATEMENT

Worrying Concerns about the Involvement of Children, Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers in Irregular Migration

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) expresses deep concern over the heightened death toll of irregular migrants departing from the shores of The Gambia. The recent high number of deaths along these journeys is alarming for the Commission and the nation, triggering widespread panic and calls for robust interventions to curb the menace.

The Commission is particularly troubled by the rising trend of exposing children, pregnant and lactating mothers, and other vulnerable groups to the dangers of these perilous journeys. This leads to compounded violations of rights, including the rights to life, health, liberty, and protection from harm.

The Commission acknowledges that migration is integral to human and national development and a cornerstone of global integration especially for a country like The Gambia, with an economy heavily reliant on remittances. However, migration is a complex phenomenon intertwined with civil, political, economic, and socio-cultural rights, requiring rigorous and multi-pronged measures to protect all migrants, whether in regular or irregular situations.

Accordingly, the Commission calls on the Government to develop and effectively implement laws, policies, and programs that adequately address the multifaceted aspects and evolving trends in irregular migration, particularly concerning vulnerable groups.

The rising numbers of youth, children, pregnant and lactating mothers, and transiting migrants from the sub-region—despite the alarming death tolls—highlight significant gaps in existing prevention measures. The Commission reminds the Government of its obligations under international and regional human rights instruments, as well as SDG 10.7, regarding the protection of vulnerable migrants.

The Commission therefore urges the Government, as the primary duty bearer, to establish comprehensive legal, administrative, and structural frameworks addressing the push factors of irregular migration by ensuring economic and socio-economic rights such as:

- the right to work
- the right to accessible, affordable, and quality education
- the right to the highest attainable standard of health

The Commission also emphasizes the urgent need for laws and regulations on migrant smuggling to protect vulnerable persons and ensure effective redress mechanisms.

Furthermore, the Commission calls on the Government to fully implement the National Migration Policy 2020–2030 by strengthening existing governance structures such as:

- the National Coordination Mechanism on Migration
- national taskforces
- the Migration Unit of the Gambia Immigration Department

Adequate resources must be provided, particularly for managing the return and reintegration of irregular migrants in line with international standards.

While recognizing ongoing efforts by various stakeholders, the Commission reminds the Government that detaining rescued migrants violates international norms. It urges the establishment of proper return and reintegration programs and facilities to ensure that all rescued or intercepted migrants are treated with dignity.

Let Justice guide our actions.



Chairman, National Human Rights Commission