



NHRC Statement on Inflammatory, Divisive Statements and Hate Speech by Politicians and their Followers

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is deeply concerned by the increase in tribal and ethnic rhetoric, inflammatory statements, derogatory remarks and divisive speeches by political leaders, State Ministers, National Assembly Members, political party members and supporters at political and other public gatherings.

In 2024 and 2025, the NHRC published two studies on hate speech in The Gambia which unambiguously identified politicians as the primary perpetrators of hate speech and put forward significant recommendations for political parties, political leaders and State institutions. However, the NHRC continues to record the proliferation of divisive tribal remarks, hate speech, ethnic rhetorics and derogatory remarks by political leaders and their followers. These unfortunate and divisive statements do not add any value to our political discourse or advance the national interest. On the contrary, they are an affront to fundamental human rights and social harmony and have the potential to incite disunity and conflict between and among people and communities who have peacefully lived together in The Gambia.

While the NHRC is conscious of the right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Section 25(1)(a) of the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia, it is reminding political leaders and the public that the law also imposes reasonable restriction on the exercise of this right in the interest of public order and decency. Similarly, The Gambia's Criminal Offences Act, 2025 also criminalises several categories of speech including:

- ✓ **statements that instigate violence, or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group on account of their race, religion, national or ethnic origin, descent, colour, gender, disability or any other characteristics;**
- ✓ **statements that promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different classes of the population;**
- ✓ **statements that incite hatred against any national, ethnic, racial or religious group.**

Consequently, politicians and political parties and groups are strongly urged to abide by and operate within the confines of the law, as divisive, derogatory speech contributes to social division, disharmony and conflict, which can lead to serious human rights violations and pose a threat to a peaceful electoral cycle.

Political leaders play an important role in the society and carry enormous responsibilities too, as protectors of human rights, peacebuilders and opinion shapers. In the same vein, political leaders should ensure that their gatherings and platforms are never used to spread hate

speech, swiftly condemn them when they are made, and hold those responsible accountable through appropriate disciplinary action.

As The Gambia progresses through the 2026-2027 election cycle, the NHRC reminds political actors of their constitutional and legal duty to refrain from hate speech, tribal rhetoric, and incitement to hatred against ethnic, racial, tribal, or other social groups. It also reminds them of their commitments under the Janjanbureh Peace Accord and their responsibility to ensuring issue-based political campaigns and discourses.

Consequently, the NHRC calls upon

- Political party leaders to publicly disavow hate speech and other inflammatory and divisive statements that are made by their party members and supporters, in the name of their parties, and at their party events.
- Political parties and their leaders to restrain their members and sympathisers, and ensure political competition focuses on party manifestos, political ideologies and relevant national issues rather than tribal hostility or personal attacks.
- The public to outrightly reject and report hate speech and divisive rhetoric, respect the rights and freedoms of others, uphold the law, promote The Gambia's rich ethnic and religious diversity, and recognise our shared identity and destiny as one nation.
- The Gambia Police Force to diligently and impartially investigate and prosecute incitement to hate and hate speech in accordance with the laws of The Gambia, while respecting human rights safeguards.
- The IEC to hold accountable political parties whose platforms are used to spread hate speech or act in contravention to adopted IEC Codes of Conduct applicable to political parties.
- Media houses and platforms should adhere to the Cherno Jallow Charter and align their content to the provisions against publication and dissemination of hate speech and inciteful content.

Signed

**The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC),
The Gambia**