

Love Beyond Caste: How Alpha and Aramata Overcame Tradition to Build a Family



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Love Beyond Caste: How Alpha and Aramata Overcame Tradition to Build a Family

For many young couples, marriage is a celebration of love, commitment, and the beginning of a new life together. But for Alpha Conteh, a young farmer and taxi driver in his early thirties from Sabi Village in Upper River Region (URR), the journey to marry the girl he loves was a painful struggle against a deeply rooted caste and descent-based discrimination system.

Alpha, is regarded as belonging to the so-called 'lower caste'. He fell in love with Aramata, a young girl in her mid-twenties from a family considered to be of the 'upper caste'. Their relationship, which was built on love pure and simple, was met with fierce resistance from the community because of the social statuses they inherited.



Alpha

"It was on a particular day when I met Aramata and asked her if she was married. She replied in the negative. We exchanged telephone numbers and then started talking thereafter. As we got to know each other, we agreed to spend our lives together," Alpha recalled.

As dictated by Sarahule tradition, Alpha informed his family of his intention to marry Aramata. His parents bought cola nuts, a customary symbol of respect and announcement of a person's marriage intention, and visited Aramata's family to formally seek her hand in marriage for their son.

Unfortunately, Aramata's family rejected the proposal on the sole reason that it would be beneath their status for their daughter, who is from the 'noble' class, to marry a man from a lower caste.

"They told my family that they could not allow the marriage because I am from the Conteh clan, which they considered to be from the 'slave' caste, while Aramata comes from the 'noble' caste. It was painful because they were rejecting me because of the family I was born into," Alpha bemoaned.

Aramata, aware of the resistance of her parents, sought the support of her relatives, including her uncle, so that they could mediate on her behalf and dissuade the parents from their position.

"I tried everything I could. I spoke to my uncle and other family members, but nothing changed. No matter what we said, they refused to accept our decision," she stated.



Aramata

With no progress despite different efforts, Aramata and Alpha turned to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Regional Office in Basse for assistance.

"We went to the Human Rights Commission and explained everything we were going through. The officers listened to us and visited Aramata's parents to engage them, but they still refused to accept the marriage," Alpha explained.

Alpha's story mirrors the findings of the National Human Rights Commission's 2022 Study on **Caste and Descent-Based Discrimination in The Gambia** which shed light on a long-standing human rights issue that continues to affect some communities, especially in Upper River Region (URR).

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Love Beyond Caste:

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The Study revealed that since 2018, there have been recurring tension in some Sarahule communities in URR, linked to divisions between those regarded as 'nobles' and socially 'superior' and those labelled as descendants of 'slaves' and are treated as inferior. Individuals perceived to belong to the so-called 'lower caste' are often subjected to degrading and dehumanizing treatment.

After a thorough assessment of Alpha and Aminata's case at the NHRC Office in Basse, Mr. Momodou Lamin Badjie, NHRC Regional Investigation Officer for CRR and URR, visited Aramata's family to engage them in a dialogue.



"When we visited Aramata's family in Kumbija Village in URR, we talked to them about the law and made them to understand that discrimination based on caste is strongly prohibited by law. However, the family still insisted that there cannot be any marriage between Aramata and Alpha," stated Mr. Badjie.

Instead of helping to soften the position of the parents, the visit by the NHRC triggered a violent reaction.

"After the human rights people left, my father and my elder brother beat me seriously because they said I had involved the Human Rights Commission," Aramata recounted. **"They even wanted to marry me off to another member of my caste who had paid the dowry and did all the rites required. I refused to give in to their arrangement. Finally, my parents returned the**

dowry to the man," she explained.

The NHRC continued its intervention by engaging relevant stakeholders, including Gambana, a Sarahule association advocating against caste and descent-based discrimination, and the Cadi Court. Through many other dialogue and mediation sessions with the parents, the marriage finally took place between Aramata and Alpha.

The process of the marriage between Aramata and Alpha, which began in 2023, lasted nearly three years.

"It was not easy. At one point, Aramata's parents even took me to the Police Station and warned me to leave their daughter alone," Alpha said.

Alpha expressed deep appreciation for the role played by the NHRC. Although the marriage marked a significant victory for the couple, Alpha's reconciliation with Aramata's family remained difficult.

After the wedding, Aramata visited her family compound while her father was away. Unfortunately, she was also not welcomed. Her mother ignored her greetings.

"My mother told me that she would only reconcile with me if I leave Alpha and end the marriage. I told her I will never do that," Aramata said.

Over time, the relationship with her mother gradually improved.

"My mother eventually started talking to me again, but my father still refuses to accept my decision," she remarked sorrowfully.

Despite the continued resistance from parts of her family, Alpha and Aramata remain committed to each other, and are blessed with their first child.

Regrettably, these harmful perceptions continue to persist in some communities today.

Flood Victims Cry Out to the NHRC for Help



The National Human Rights Commission Assessment Report on Climate Change and Human Rights (2025) indicated that flooding is one of the major climate-related hazards affecting many communities in the Upper River Region (URR). These floods are often triggered by torrential rainfall and rising river levels, particularly in Basse Badala and its surrounding areas.

Ebrima Manneh, a resident of Giroba Village in Basse, URR, tragically lost his daughter during a heavy downpour that caused severe flooding in the area. In 2025 the eight-year-old Adama Manneh fell into a nearby rainwater retention pit which was close to her house. The pit was dug in 2023 during the construction of the Basse-Fatoto Road.

“One Friday morning, we had heavy downpour while I was at work. When the rain stopped, I received a telephone call from my wife, and she told me that Adama was missing. At first, I thought some travelers on the

new road took her away. So, I rushed home to confirm”, Ebrima bemoaned.

According to Ebrima, when he arrived in his compound, it was overcrowded.” **I saw Adama’s clothes and shoes beside the pit. A lot of thoughts came into my head. I feared that the worst may have happened to my daughter. That she might have drowned in the pit near our house.”** As Ebrima recalled the incident of that fateful day, he burst into tears.



Late Adama Manneh

Ebrima stated that he attempted to jump into the pit water but was stopped by some of people in the crowd. He was advised to call the Basse Branch of the Gambia Fire and Rescue Service.



Ebrima Manneh, Adama’s father

“When the team from the Fire Service came, they accused me of being careless about the safety of my own child. I was already in pain because of my missing child and now they were blaming me. So, an altercation ensued, and they said they were not getting inside the water to search for my missing child”, he stated.

According to Ebrima, the situation became tense until another community member intervened and urged the Fire and Rescue Service personnel not to leave without helping to search for the child or draining the water.

“In the commotion, a herdsman removed his shirt and jumped into the water. After taking a few steps, he felt the child with his feet and was able to retrieve her from the bottom of the pit.”

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Flood Victims Cries Out to the NHRC for Help

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“She was immediately rushed to the hospital. That was the most heartbreaking and devastating moment for me and the entire family”, Ebrima explained between sobs.

On what kind of redress, he wanted, Ebrima stated that the only support he is seeking is for the pit to be completely covered to prevent a similar tragedy and ensure the safety of his family and the wider community.

The location of the water retention pit is about one metre close to Ebrima’s house and the culvert is incapable of containing or adequately draining large volume of water within a short period. The placement of such a structure in close proximity to a residential compound constitutes a serious breach of safety standards and raises significant human rights and environmental protection concerns.

Ebrima’s elder brother, Demba Manneh, recalled that while flooding has long been a recurring challenge for the community and its residents, they had never witnessed anything as severe as what occurred during the last rainy season.

“We have always experienced flooding. Whenever there were heavy rains, community members would come together to protect their homes by using sandbags to block and divert the water and reduce its



impact. However, in 2023, the National Road Authority (NRA) dug this water retention pit. While it has helped safeguard other households, our family has been left to bear its devastating consequences”, Demba lamented.

The trauma inflicted on the Manneh family is profound. Demba Manneh, overwhelmed by grief and distress, reacted angrily on the day little Adama drowned in the pit which led to the intervention of the Police and his subsequent detention at the Police Station.

According to Demba, the NRA promised them that the pit was just temporary and would be relocated. But since then, nothing has been done about it.

“The flood destroyed one of the houses in the compound and our pit latrine toilet collapsed too. We also lost two goats and many chickens”, he recounted.

When the incident occurred, the NHRC Regional Office in URR sent an investigator to the scene. According to Mr. Ebrima Kinteh, NHRC Principal Regional Administrator, the Office received the news around 8pm.

“Upon receiving the information about the incident, I assigned the Regional Investigation Officer to visit the affected family the following morning. When he arrived, tensions were high between the victim’s family and the regional authorities. However, the intervention of the NHRC led to the de-escalation of the tension and some relief to the family. We also engaged the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) to provide support to the affected family,” stated Mr. Kinteh

The assessment of the situation by the NHRC team indicates that the water retention pit is unlikely to be relocated anytime soon unless there is urgent intervention by the concerned authorities. The continued existence of the pit poses an imminent and serious risk to the Manneh family.



Ghana Town Residents Seek Recognition as NHRC Engages Authorities on Citizenship and Documentation



For decades, residents of Ghana Town, a fishing settlement in Kombo North, West Coast Region of The Gambia, have lived in legal uncertainty despite many having been born and raised in the country. While some of the community's first settlers migrated from Ghana in the late 1950s, many arrived before The Gambia attained independence in 1965. Successive generations have since known no other home, yet many continue to face difficulties obtaining citizenship documentation and accessing basic public services.

During a community engagement marking International Migrants Day, organised by the NHRC, with support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), residents described the daily challenges resulting from the lack of national identity documents, birth certificates and passports. Many explained that the absence of documentation has denied young people opportunities for higher education, formal employment and freedom of movement.



One resident captured the community's frustration, stating: **"We have been here since 1958. Many of us were born here, and this is the only home we know. We simply want to be recognised."**

Community members also spoke of children being unable to enroll in tertiary institutions, difficulties accessing public services, and instances where young people were questioned or detained because they lacked documentation and were perceived to be foreigners.

The Alkalo of Brufut, Lamin Manneh, recalled that the Ghanaian fishing community was allocated land decades ago because of its contribution to the local fishing industry. He emphasised that the community has long been part of the social and economic fabric of the area and called for a lasting solution to their documentation challenges.



Lamin Manneh, Alkalo of Brufut

Ghana Town Residents Seek Recognition...

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Folonko Jatta, a native of Brufut village who is married in Ghana Town, became emotional as she recounted her experience.



Folonko Jatta

“I was born and raised in Burfut Village and later got married to a Ghanaian migrant living here in Ghana Town. I have five children with him but all of them have been denied documentation,” she said, struggling to hold back her tears.

Alexandra Mensah, Chairperson of the Village Development Committee (VDC) of Ghana Town, stated that young people, particularly those of school going age, are among the most vulnerable groups facing challenges in the community. According to him, many students are unable to further their education after completing secondary school because they lack the necessary documentation.



Alexandra Mensah, VDC Chairperson,
Ghana Town

Prior to the dialogue, the NHRC had undertaken a human rights assessment of Ghana Town in March 2025. The assessment revealed a range of interconnected challenges, including difficulties in acquiring identity documents, barriers to education, limited access to healthcare, inadequate public services, and restricted economic opportunities, particularly for women and young people.



The findings informed the Commission's subsequent engagement with key government institutions, particularly the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior, to explore practical and lawful solutions for addressing the community's long-standing concerns.

As part of these engagements, the NHRC has encouraged closer collaboration among the Ministry of Justice, the Gambia Immigration Department, the Gambia Immigration Department's Civil Registration and documentation authorities, and community leaders to facilitate the regularisation of the immigration and citizenship status of eligible residents. The Commission has emphasised that every case should be assessed in accordance with the Constitution and the relevant nationality and immigration laws, while ensuring that individuals who qualify for Gambian citizenship are not left in prolonged legal uncertainty.

The community dialogue also provided an opportunity for government representatives to respond directly to residents' concerns. Officials from the Gambia Immigration Department

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Ghana Town Residents Seek Recognition...

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acknowledged the challenges raised and assured participants of their willingness to work with the relevant authorities to resolve legitimate concerns.

The NHRC views the situation in Ghana Town as both a human rights and development issue. Access to legal identity is fundamental to the enjoyment of a wide range of rights, including education, healthcare, employment, political participation and freedom of movement. Without recognised legal status, affected individuals remain vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion and the risk of statelessness.



Thirty Military Officers from Horton Senior Command and Staff College in Sierra Leone Visit the NHRC



Thirty (30) military officers from the Horton Command and Staff College in Sierra Leone, on the 5th of May 2026, paid a courtesy visit to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as part of the annual study tour that the College undertakes.

The College's theme for this year is: '**Leveraging Multi-Dimensional Approaches in Enhancing National Security and Development**'.

The multinational delegation comprised military students from Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Tanzania and Liberia.

Welcoming the delegation, the Chairperson of the NHRC, Emmanuel Daniel Joof, provided an overview of the Commission's mandate and its role in promoting and protecting human rights in The Gambia.

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Thirty Military Officers from Horton Senior Command and Staff College in Sierra Leone Visit the NHRC

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Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, NHRC Chairperson

He underscored the shared historical experiences among the represented countries, which is key in fostering peace, stability and democratic governance.

Chairperson Joof further highlighted the evolving nature of security in the modern context. He explained that security is no longer limited to the defense of territorial borders or response to threats, but encompasses a broader range of issues, including instability and conflict, inequality, discrimination, youth employment and climate change related issues.

“Security is not solely about protecting borders or responding to threats. It also requires addressing emerging challenges such as terrorism, inequality, exclusion, discrimination, youth unemployment and the impact of climate change,” Chairperson Joof emphasised.



Chairperson Joof informed the delegation that The Gambia is still undergoing transition after years of authoritarian rule, during which state institutions, particularly the security sector, were significantly compromised. He noted that the findings of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) revealed that members of the security services, including the armed forces, were responsible for many human rights violations committed during that period.

The Chairperson underscored the Commission’s commitment to strengthening respect for human rights within the security sector through continuous training and capacity building. **“As a national human rights institution, the NHRC supports the integration of human rights into the training curriculum of security personnel. Effective civil-military relations are built on cooperation, mutual trust, respect for the rule of law, and clear accountability. These are essential foundations for a stable, peaceful and resilient society,”** he concluded.

Speaking on behalf of the delegation, Brigadier General Muhammed Ali Kamara, Commandant of the Horton Command and Staff College and the head of the visiting delegation, expressed gratitude to the NHRC for the warm reception extended to the team. He highlighted the long-standing relationship between Sierra Leone and The Gambia, pointing out their shared history and cultural ties, which often makes it difficult to distinguish between a Sierra Leonean and a Gambian.



Brigadier General Muhammed Ali Kamara

Brigadier General Kamara also provided an overview of the Horton Command and Staff

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Thirty Military Officers from Horton Senior Command and Staff College in Sierra Leone Visit the NHRC

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College, explaining that it was established in 2003 as part of Sierra Leone's Security Sector Reform programme. He noted that the College was created not only to train officers of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces but also military officers from Liberia and The Gambia.

Brigadier General Kamara further explained that the study tour forms an integral part of the College's academic curriculum, providing student officers with an opportunity to visit other African countries and undertake research on issues that can contribute to regional peace, national security, and development.

"This tour is a major component of the College's curriculum. It enables our student officers to engage with institutions across Africa, conduct research, and generate recommendations that

can strengthen national security and promote development throughout our region," he said.

The visiting delegation was hosted by its Gambian counterpart, The Gambia Armed Forces, through the Ministry of Defence, as part of efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and knowledge exchange among military institutions.



Brigadier General Kamara presenting a certificate of appreciation to the NHRC Chairperson

Police, Civil Society Meet to Promote Peaceful Public Assemblies



Earlier in May 2026, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) convened a successful high-level meeting at its headquarters in Kotu, with the top command of The Gambia Police Force and

representatives of TANGO, including its Chairperson, Executive Director and Programme Manager.

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Police, Civil Society Meet to Promote Peaceful Public Assemblies

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The meeting focused on current public order and policing concerns in the country, particularly issues relating to protests, processions, and public assemblies. Discussions also focused on the recent incident which led to the arrest, detention, and charging of members of Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA), who had gathered at the Youth Monument at Westfield Junction on Friday, 8th May 2026, to commemorate their one-year anniversary.

In his opening statement, the Chairperson of the NHRC, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, expressed his profound appreciation to all the stakeholders for participating in the dialogue. He described the meeting as an opportunity to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with the security agencies on matters relating to public order, peace, and the protection of fundamental human rights.

The Chairperson further stated that the right to peaceful assembly is a cornerstone of every democratic society, guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution of the Gambia.

“When people are able to assemble peacefully and safely, it strengthens democratic governance, promotes accountability, and builds public confidence in state institutions”, said the Chairperson.

Chairperson Joof appealed to the security chiefs to allow GALA to carry on with their planned peaceful assembly.

He promised to engage the members of GALA to remind them that their exercise of rights also carries responsibilities. The Chairperson also urged all stakeholders to work together to demonstrate that The Gambia can manage peaceful assemblies in a manner that upholds the rule of law,

In his remarks, the Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIGP) for Administration, Mr. Ebrima Bah, stated that the engagement was prompted by the need to proactively engage key stakeholders in safeguarding national peace and stability, amid growing public concerns about demonstrations and public gatherings.



AIGP Ebrima Bah

“We saw the need to bring together all the relevant stakeholders to have honest conversation on the current public order concerns facing our country,” AIGP Bah said.

AIGP Bah stressed that maintaining peace and stability requires collective responsibility and continuous dialogue between security institutions and civil society.

Mr. Pateh Jallow, AIG for Operations, underscored the importance of balancing citizens’ constitutional rights with public safety and security.

“The maintenance of peace and tranquility should never be compromised,” AIG Jallow said.
“Every Gambian has the right to assemble peacefully, including GALA and any other group”.

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Police, Civil Society Meet to Promote Peaceful Public Assemblies

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“However, organisers must comply with the legal requirements by obtaining the necessary permit before holding public assemblies.”

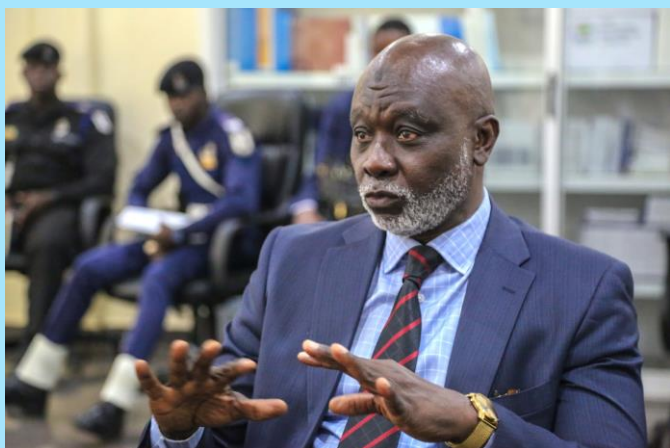


AIGP Pateh Jallow

AIGP Jallow emphasised that the role of the Police is not to suppress peaceful assemblies but to facilitate them in a manner that guarantees public safety.

“The use of tear gas has never been the wish of the security. Our primary responsibility is to protect lives and property while ensuring that public gatherings remain peaceful,” AIGP Jallow remarked.

Mr. Tamsir Jasseh, the Police Adviser, remarked that the maintenance of peace and stability are everyone’s responsibility, and that through dialogue and mutual understanding, the concerns of citizens can be addressed peacefully.



Mr. Tamsir Jasseh

Speaking on behalf of civil society, Mrs. Yadicone Njie Eribo, TANGO Chairperson, commended the Gambia Police Force for its continuous efforts in providing security for the people.

“We appreciate the sacrifices made by the police. While many Gambians are asleep at night, security officers remain on duty to ensure the safety of lives and property,” she said.

The TANGO Chairperson, Mrs. Yadicone Njie Eribo, encourages continued engagement between the Police and Civil Society Organisations to build trust and enhance cooperation in addressing national security concerns.

Mrs. Ndey Bakurin, the Executive Director of TANGO, expressed concern over recent public order incidents involving GALA and called for collective responsibility in preserving peace.

“Civil society is deeply concerned about the recent events involving GALA. We all have to be careful because we are all Gambians, and we have nowhere to go if conflict erupts,” she said.

Mrs. Bakurin also emphasised the need for dialogue, restraint and mutual respect among all stakeholders, noting that peaceful coexistence remains essential for national development and democratic governance.



Mrs. Ndey Bakurin

Other participants included Mrs. Amie Nyassi, AIG for Crime Management, Mr. Adeline Basangh, AIG for the Police Intervention Unit, and Mr. Modou Lamin Mbye, Programme Manager, TANGO.

NHRC Hosts Consultative Dialogue with Stakeholders on the Electricity Crisis in The Gambia



In June 2026, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), convened a consultative dialogue with key stakeholders to discuss the ongoing electricity crisis affecting communities across The Gambia and to promote constructive engagement aimed at addressing public concerns.

The meeting brought together representatives of Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA), Team Gom Sa Bopa, the National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC), the State Intelligence Service (SIS), TANGO, Supreme Islamic Council, and Christian Council.



The dialogue provided an opportunity for GALA to present its concerns regarding the electricity challenges experienced throughout the country over the past several weeks, as well as its planned public demonstration because of the situation.

It also enabled participants to hear directly from NAWEC on the causes of the current challenges and the measures being taken to mitigate and resolve them.

During the discussions, GALA representatives highlighted the impact of persistent power outages on students who were preparing for their examinations, businesses, and ordinary citizens. They stressed the urgent need for sustainable solutions.

Ali Cham, popularly known as Killa Ace, a musician and human rights activist, stressed the importance of sustained and regular dialogue between the authorities and protest organisers ahead of any planned demonstration.



Killa Ace

NHRC Hosts Consultative Dialogue on the Electricity Crisis...

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“There should be continuous dialogue before the proposed protest date, or at least a day before the protest,” Cham said. “However, dialogue should never be used to derail a peaceful protest. It should serve as a platform for understanding and cooperation, not as a tool to deny citizens their rights,” he emphasised.

Yusuf Taylor, a journalist, activist and member of Team Gom Sa Bopa, called on the security services to facilitate peaceful demonstrations and work collaboratively with organisers to ensure public safety.



Yusuf Taylor

“We urge the security services to allow us to exercise our right to peaceful protest. Let us work together to maintain a peaceful, orderly and problem free environment where everyone can express themselves without fear,” Taylor remarked.

Responding to concerns over the country’s electricity concerns, the Managing Director of the National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC), Mr. Galo Saidy, acknowledged the challenges facing the company but also noted that many of the factors affecting power generation are beyond its direct control.

“The challenges we are facing are not entirely within NAWEC’s control,” the Managing Director said. “While we have our own generators and solar plants, we depend on imported electricity

through regional interconnections. No modern electricity utility operates in isolation.”

The Managing Director explained that the utility’s dependence on heavy fuel oil makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in global fuel prices.



(R) Mr. Galo Saidy

“We are not here to make excuses,” he said. “The reality is that all of NAWEC’s operations depend on fuel. When fuel prices increase on the international market, the cost of generating electricity also rises, and has a direct impact on our operations. Despite these challenges, we remain committed to improving electricity supply for the people of The Gambia.”

Representatives of the State Intelligence Service (SIS), TANGO, Supreme Islamic Council, and Christian Council all underscored the importance of dialogue, mutual respect, adherence to the rule of law, and the protection of constitutional rights. They encouraged all stakeholders to work together in the spirit of peace, understanding, and national unity.

The recommendations of the meeting included the following:

1. Protesters to respect the conditions attached to any permit issued for public assemblies;
2. GALA, Team Gom Sa Bopa, and other stakeholders to visit NAWEC facilities to better appreciate ongoing efforts being undertaken to address the crisis; and
3. NAWEC to enhance communication with the public through regular updates on progress made and challenges encountered.

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NHRC Hosts Consultative Dialogue on the Electricity Crisis...

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As part of its mandate to promote human rights, prevent conflict, and contribute to the peaceful resolution of disputes, the NHRC convened the dialogue to facilitate constructive engagement among stakeholders and help de-escalate tensions arising from the electricity crisis.



The Commission emphasized in the meeting that its role in the process was that of a neutral convener, providing a platform for open, respectful, and meaningful dialogue. The meeting was initiated following engagement by the State Intelligence Service (SIS) to foster understanding between stakeholders and to help prevent any potential conflict.

Participants unanimously welcomed the dialogue, describing it as timely, meaningful, and important in strengthening communication, building trust, reducing tensions, and promoting peaceful democratic engagement.

Open Letter to the Minister of Justice and the Inspector General of Police on the Arrest and Detention of GALA Members

In May 2026 following the arrest and detention of members of the Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA) for converging at the Youth Monument at West Field to commemorate their one-year anniversary, the National Human Rights Commission issued an open



letter to the Minister of Justice and the Inspector General of Police.

In the open letter the Commission raised concern about the arrest of GALA members and the conditions of their detention.

Below is the full open letter.

Dear Honourable Minister of Justice and Inspector General of Police,

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) wishes to bring to your attention concerns arising from a fact-finding and monitoring mission conducted by NHRC Investigators on 9 May 2026 at Kairaba Police Station and Kotu Police Station following the arrest and detention of some members of Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA) who were arrested at the Youth Monument at WestField while commemorating their organisation's first anniversary.

The monitoring mission was undertaken pursuant to the mandate of the NHRC to monitor, investigate, and report on the promotion and protection of human rights in The Gambia, including the rights of persons deprived of their liberty.

During the visits, NHRC Investigators interviewed the detainees, observed detention conditions, and engaged officers on duty at both Police Stations. The findings raise serious concerns regarding compliance with constitutional safeguards and internationally accepted human rights standards relating to arrest, detention, bail, and the treatment of detainees.

The Commission notes with grave concern allegations and observations which indicated that several detainees were arrested without being promptly informed of the reasons for their arrest,

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Open Letter to the MoJ and IGP

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GALA protest

contrary to the guarantees provided under Section 19 of the Gambia Constitution 1997. It was further alleged that some detainees were denied timely access to legal counsel, communication with family members, and information relating to bail procedures.

The detainees also informed the Commission's investigators that their mobile phones were confiscated and that they were initially prevented from contacting their lawyers and relatives.

If true, such restrictions would undermine fundamental due process guarantees and the right to legal representation.

Additionally, the NHRC observed detention conditions in the aforementioned Stations that fall below acceptable human rights standards, including overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of lighting, inadequate sanitation facilities, insufficient bedding, unhygienic conditions, presence of bedbugs and roaches and the absence of gender-sensitive detention arrangements for female detainees. Of particular concern are allegations of solitary confinement being imposed on one detainee without explanation or clear justification. These conditions are contrary to the requirements of dignified and humane treatment of detainees.

The Commission further observed uncertainty on the part of the Police Officers regarding the facilitation of Police bail despite the offences reportedly being bailable in nature. The prolonged detention of certain detainees without clear justification raises concerns regarding compliance with constitutional safeguards relating to liberty and pre-trial detention.

While recognising the duty of the Gambia Police Force to maintain public order and enforce the law, the NHRC reminds the Police that all law enforcement operations must be conducted in strict compliance with the Constitution, domestic law, due process, the rule of law, and The Gambia's regional and international human rights obligations.

In light of the foregoing, the NHRC calls on the Office of the Inspector General of Police to:

1. Ensure that all arrests are conducted in accordance with constitutional and legal safeguards, including promptly informing persons of the reasons for their arrest;
2. Guarantee the detainees immediate access to legal counsel, family members, and communication facilities;
3. Ensure that police bail is considered and facilitated in accordance with the law;
4. Restrict the use of solitary confinement to exceptional circumstances and ensure full compliance with legal and human rights standards.
5. Take immediate measures to improve detention conditions at Kairaba and Kotu Police Stations, particularly with regard to lighting, ventilation, sanitation, bedding, hygiene, and gender-sensitive detention arrangements;
6. Ensure that all officers are reminded of their obligations and held accountable under the Constitution and applicable human rights standards regarding arrest, detention, and treatment of persons in custody.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

NHRC Observes Supplementary Voter Registration Nationwide



The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) successfully concluded its observation of the supplementary voter registration exercise conducted across nearly 200 registration centres in 44 constituencies nationwide, from 8th April to 9th May 2026.

The exercise formed part of the Commission's mandate to safeguard democratic processes and ensure that citizens can freely exercise their civic and political rights. Section 26 of the 1997 Constitution guarantees every Gambian aged 18 and above the right to vote and participate in genuine periodic elections.

The observation assessed compliance with electoral procedures, human rights standards and IEC guidelines while promoting transparency, accountability and public confidence in the electoral process.

Following accreditation by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the NHRC deployed 12 observer teams across all seven administrative regions of The Gambia.

The findings of the report indicated that the registration centres generally opened on time,

most of the staff also reported on time and security officers were present in the Centres. It also indicated that the registrants were largely treated with respect and fairness which contributed to peaceful and orderly registration process.



The Commission's findings also highlighted positive efforts towards inclusivity, with most of the centres reporting representation of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

However, the NHRC observed several challenges, including late delivery of registration kits, power outages, malfunctioned biometric machines, and

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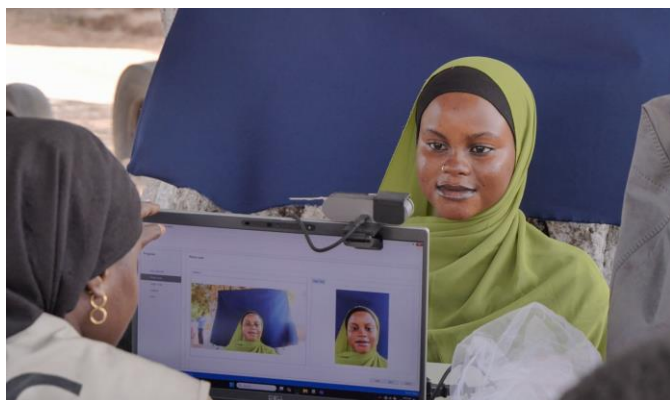
NHRC Observes Supplementary Voter Registration

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limited accessibility for persons with disabilities. Accessibility measures such as ramps, braille materials and sign language interpretation were not consistently available across centres, creating barriers for many persons with disabilities.



The NHRC observers also noted active participation by political parties through their agents, reflecting broad engagement in the registration process. Many registration denials were linked to age ineligibility, citizenship issues and documentation problems, underscoring the need for clearer public awareness on registration requirements and stronger age verification measures to protect both electoral integrity and child rights.



The NHRC recommended stronger accessibility measures, inclusive voter education materials, increased representation of persons with disabilities in the electoral processes, improved public awareness campaigns and enhanced training for IEC officials and political party agents.



The Commission also called for greater efforts to prevent intimidation, improve centre visibility, and ensure all electoral processes remain transparent, inclusive and rights based.



At the conclusion of the exercise, the NHRC Chairperson, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to promoting credible, peaceful and inclusive elections and urged all stakeholders to uphold democratic principles and comply with electoral guidelines.

"Free and fair elections begin with a transparent and inclusive voter registration process. Every eligible Gambian has equal opportunity to register and exercise their constitutional right to vote without barriers," remarked Chairperson Joof.



Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, NHRC Chairperson

National Conference on Women's Political Participation in The Gambia



The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was among the line-up of speakers at a two-day National Conference on Women's Political Participation in The Gambia, held at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre in mid-December 2025, under the theme: **“Breaking Barriers, Building Power: Advancing Women's Political Participation in The Gambia.”**

The Conference was organised by International IDEA under the EU-funded CODE Project and brought together key stakeholders to provide a national platform for collectively examining barriers to women's political participation, share best practices, and develop a coordinated action plan for advancing women's political empowerment in The Gambia. The initiative was implemented in partnership with the National Assembly, the NHRC, Gambia Press Union and CSO Gender Platform with the overarching aim of promoting inclusive governance by enhancing meaningful participation of women in politics.

The NHRC was represented at the Opening Ceremony by its Vice Chairperson, Commissioner Jainaba Johm, who highlighted the Commission's critical role in promoting women's participation in political processes. She underscored the NHRC's efforts in advocating for gender equality,

monitoring and reporting on the state of human rights violations and pushing for reforms that empower women in decision-making spaces.

Below are excerpts from the Vice Chairperson's statement.



Commissioner Jainaba Johm, Vice Chairperson of the NHRC

“The National Human Rights Commission is proud to express its unwavering solidarity with the women of the Gambia, as we gather for the National Conference on Women's Political Participation and Representation. As an independent institution mandated to protect and promote human rights, we have played a crucial role in promoting women's participation in politics, by advocating for gender equality,

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National Conference on Women's Political Participation in The Gambia

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monitoring and reporting on the state of human rights violations, and pushing for reforms that empower women in decision-making spaces.

The NHRC has powers to receive complaints of human rights violations, including those affecting women. We investigate suspected abuse, we summon government officials, we recommend remedies and report findings to the Government. Each year, for the past six to seven years, we have submitted our State of Human Rights Report yearly to the Gambia Government, and the National Assembly inclusive.

The Commission is composed of five members, including at least two women, which the NHRC 2017 Act states, ensuring gender representation at leadership level. I see the Act as very progressive because there is nothing stopping all Commissioners at one time to be all women.

The NHRC has delivered so many solidarity messages and reports, emphasising the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the rights of women. Our messages of solidarity are always rooted in our 1997 Constitution of The Gambia, which guarantees the fundamental rights of all citizens to participate in public affairs.



Commissioner Halimatou Dibba, NHRC

The NHRC notes that despite women comprising a significant portion of the population, they still remain severely underrepresented in elected and appointed leadership roles at both national and local levels.

The Commission points to stark statistics such as women holding only a small percentage of National Assembly seats and Cabinet positions – 8.6% of Assembly seats and 13.6% of Cabinet positions. The NHRC believes it is dismal.

Additionally, women making up less than half of the workforce but owning less than 10% of land, even though they dominate the agricultural sector, and continually bearing the brunt of most underdevelopment issues. Such as poverty, inaccessible health care, human insecurity, economic disempowerment, and other socio-economic challenges. This is simply unacceptable and a grave impediment to national development.

As a Commission, we are guided by these figures and compelling evidence of systematic marginalisation and human rights violations, entrenched in social norms, policy and structural barriers, the impact of sexual and gender-based violence, gender biases, and unfair gender norms that fuel these disparities across all sectors. Both in formal and informal settings.

The upcoming 2026/2027 electoral cycle presents a key opportunity in the upcoming transition of the country to consolidate democracy, and ensure women who comprise more than half of the population are adequately represented in elected offices.

Women's representation and active participation in such positions ensures that national policies and programmes are well informed and contextualised to address the lived realities of women and girls in The Gambia. It is rooted in the understanding that the barriers that women face are diverse, and the constitution of these decision-making bodies should therefore be diverse to include urban, rural, the young and older women, women living with disabilities and women who belonged to other marginalised communities to ensure diversity".

Thank you for your kind attention.

NHRC Strengthens Capacity to Advance Child Rights Monitoring



As part of its continued commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of children in The Gambia, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) organised a three-day capacity-building training for Commissioners and Staff in March 2026 on Child Rights Monitoring, the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and data analysis.

The training was designed to enhance the Commission's capacity to effectively monitor and safeguard children's rights, generate evidence-based findings and make practical recommendations that contribute to improved child protection. It also formed a key component of the efforts to operationalize the NHRC's Child Rights Monitoring Unit, which was established as a joint initiative between the Commission, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare and UNICEF to strengthen child rights monitoring and accountability in The Gambia.

At the opening of the training, the Chairperson of the NHRC, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, underscored the significance of the programme and urged Commissioners and Staff to take the training with commitment and dedication.

Chairperson Joof emphasised that the ultimate measure of the Commission's success would not

merely be the completion of programme or reports but the tangible improvements in the lives of children across the country.

"This training is important because it will enable the Commission to effectively monitor and safeguard the rights of children, make informed and practical recommendations, and support the effective operationalization of the Child Rights Monitoring Unit. The true measure of NHRC's success is that a child somewhere in The Gambia is safer and treated with dignity because of the work that we do," Mr. Joof stated.



(L-R) Commissioner Njundu Drammeh and Commissioner Emmanuel Daniel Joof, Vice Chairperson of the NHRC

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NHRC Strengthens Capacity to Advance Child Rights Monitoring

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Chairperson Joof further encouraged participants to use the knowledge and skills gained during the training to strengthen the Commission's collective efforts in ensuring that every child is protected, valued and able to enjoy their rights without discrimination.

"Let this training strengthen our collective efforts to ensure that every child counts, every child matters, and every child's rights are protected," he added.

Delivering the keynote address, Mr. Emmanuel Michaud, Child Protection Manager at UNICEF, commended the NHRC for its steadfast commitment to protecting the rights of all people in The Gambia, particularly children who remain among the most vulnerable to human rights violations.

Mr. Michaud noted that children constitute approximately 54 per cent of The Gambia's population, making it imperative for national institutions to place children's rights at the centre of their work. He also referenced the 2025 Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which highlighted the need for The Gambia to strengthen its systems for collecting children's rights data, generate evidence, and establish effective monitoring mechanisms.



Mr. Emmanuel Michaud



"Monitoring children's rights without quality data is extremely challenging. This is why UNICEF, in partnership with the NHRC and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, supported the establishment of the Child Rights Monitoring Unit, which was launched in December 2025," Mr. Michaud stated.

Mr. Michaud expressed optimism that the training would help integrate children's rights monitoring across all aspects of the Commission's work rather than limiting it to a single unit or programme.



The training provided participants with practical knowledge on international child rights standards, rights-based monitoring approaches and data analysis techniques that will enhance the Commission's ability to identify emerging issues affecting children.



Safeguarding Human Rights Behind Bars



The protection of the rights and dignity of persons deprived of their liberty remains a fundamental responsibility of the National Human Rights Commission of The Gambia. Through its regular monitoring of Prisons, Police Stations and other places of detention, the Commission plays a vital role in ensuring that individuals in custody are treated with humanity and in accordance with national, regional and international human rights standards.

Earlier in November 2025, the NHRC embarked on a nationwide monitoring exercise of prisons, police stations and other places of detention across the country. The exercise is a core function of the Commission mandate in safeguarding the rights of people deprived of their liberties.



The Commission derives its authority from Section 20 of the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2017, which grants it unrestricted access to all places of detention to independently examine whether detention facilities operate in compliance with domestic laws and international human rights obligations.

During the monitoring visit, the NHRC teams engaged with prison and police authorities, conducted confidential interviews with detainees and inmates, inspected detention infrastructure, and reviewed relevant records and procedures.

One of the most pressing concerns observed during the monitoring is the persistent overcrowding in the prison facilities, particularly at Mile 2 Central Prison and Janjanbureh Prison.

The findings also revealed a significant sanitation challenge in several prison facilities, including non-functional toilets, inadequate bathing facilities, poor waste management system, and limited access to clean water. Such conditions pose serious health risks to inmates and staff. In addition, concerns were raised regarding the

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Safeguarding Human Rights Behind Bars

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quality of food provided to inmates and the overall hygiene standards within detention facilities.



Access to healthcare remains a major challenge across prison facilities. Inmates often face delays in receiving medical attention. A particular concern is the lack of mental health support services despite the growing need for psychosocial care for inmates. Rehabilitation opportunities remain limited in many prison facilities.



The monitoring team also highlighted weaknesses in recordkeeping and case management systems within the prison administration. Poor documentation practices, coupled with inadequate coordination between prisons, prosecutors and other justice sector institutions, contribute to delays in the processing of cases.

These shortcomings have resulted in prolonged periods of pretrial detention for some detainees, raising concerns about the right to a fair trial and the administration of justice.



Particular attention was paid to the Juvenile Wing at Jeshwang Prison, where Juveniles in detention face limited access to healthcare, legal aid services, educational opportunities, and social support programmes.

The welfare of Prison Officers was another area of concern during the monitoring visits. Officers reported staffing shortages, limited opportunities for professional training, inadequate protective equipment and low remuneration.

In the Police Stations, one of the recurring concerns observed was the poor physical condition of the detention cells. Several Stations have cells with inadequate natural lighting and poor ventilation.

Many stations lacked updated arrest and detention registers, while custody logbooks were either incomplete or not properly maintained. They also lacked designated child friendly and gender sensitive interview rooms or custody space. As a result, Police Child Welfare and Gender Officers were often compelled to conduct interviews in open or unsuitable environments that offered little privacy or confidentiality.



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Safeguarding Human Rights Behind Bars

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Significant disparities were observed between Police Stations in urban and rural areas. Rural stations generally operate in poorer physical conditions, with ageing infrastructure, inadequate office and detention space, and limited access to essential services.

At the end of the monitoring exercise, the NHRC Chairperson, Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof, remarked that the treatment of those in custody is a true reflection of a nation's commitment to human rights and the rule of law.

“How a nation treats those in its custody says much about its commitment to human rights,” Chairperson Joof said. **“Every person regardless of the reason for their detention, retains their inherent dignity and fundamental rights. It is therefore essential that detention facilities operate in full respect of national laws and international human rights standards.”**

The NHRC Chairperson added that regular oversight of detention facilities remains an important safeguard against ill treatment and reinforces public confidence in the country's justice and law enforcement institutions.



(L-R) NHRC Chairperson, an inmate and Principal Regional Administrator, URR

According to Abdou A. Manneh, Principal Investigation Officer at the NHRC and also coordinator of the monitoring visit, the Commission's inspections of prisons, police

stations and other detention facilities have shown that while there have been notable improvements, significant human rights concerns remain.



Abdou A. Manneh

“The NHRC's monitoring of prisons, police stations and detention centres revealed both progress and persistent challenges in the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty,” Manneh said. He stressed that addressing these challenges require a long-term commitment from all relevant stakeholders.

The findings from the nationwide monitoring exercise will inform the Commission's recommendations to relevant authorities and contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen a humane, transparent and rights respecting criminal justice system.

The NHRC remains committed to ensuring that all persons, including those in detention, are treated with dignity and in accordance with the law and international human rights obligations.



NHRC and AAITG Commemorate Day of the African Child



The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in collaboration with ActionAid International The Gambia (AAITG), commemorated the Day of the African Child 2026, in Janjanbureh, Central River Region.

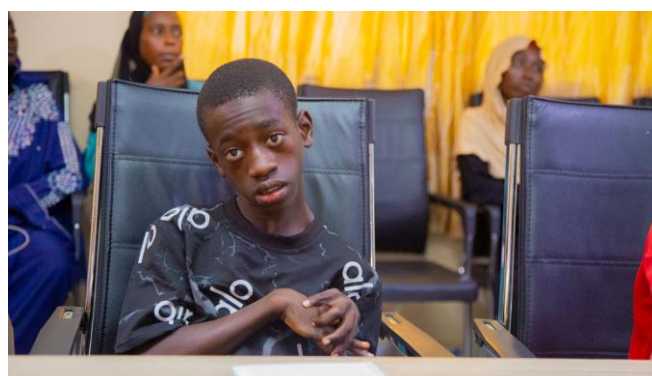
The theme for this year's commemoration is **'Ensuring Universal Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for Every Child in Africa'**, reflecting on the recognition that access to basic services is fundamental to the realisation of children's rights.

The Day of the African Child is observed annually on 16 June, in honour of the children who lost their lives during the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa. It also serves as a reminder to everyone, especially duty bearers, of the importance of protecting, promoting and fulfilling the rights of every child.

The two-day celebration brought together duty bearers and school children from Upper and Lower Niumi Districts, Niamina East, West and

Niamina Dankunku, including Children with disabilities and those in the Madarassas, to facilitate dialogue to identify challenges and priorities, and generate child informed recommendations to improve WASH services for children.

On Day One of the commemoration, officials of the NHRC, AAITG and children's representatives, gathered to develop a communique which stated the challenges faced by children regarding WASH and the recommendations to minimise or improve these challenges.



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NHRC and AAITG Commemorate Day of the African Child

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Delivering the opening statement on behalf of the NHRC, Commissioner Njundu Drammeh highlighted the significance of the partnership between the NHRC and AAITG, stating that both the NHRC and AAITG are champions, defenders and protectors of human rights.



Commissioner Njundu Drammeh

Commissioner Drammeh reminded participants that children comprise about 48% of our population and that children are not just future leaders but are also the present. He posited that what duty bearers and other stakeholders do for children today would determine the future that these children would live in. Commissioner Drammeh also delved into the significance of the Day of the African Child and, reflected on the Soweto massacre of 1976.

“It is absolutely important to remember the sacrifices of those children in 1976 who went out on the streets of Soweto to demand for quality education, to demand to be taught in their own mother tongue,” Commissioner Drammeh stated.

Commissioner reminded the participants that as they remember the Soweto incident, it is equally important to reflect on the situation of children in The Gambia, in particular the situation of children in CRR, NBR, WCR, URR, Banjul and KM.

“We are here to look at the divide between children in the urban areas and children in the rural areas.

We are here to also reflect on the basic services that the State is supposed to give them, and whether or not there are any disparities in access to these services”.

Speaking on behalf of ActionAid International The Gambia, Mrs. Ndella Faye Colley, the Executive Director, highlighted the significance of the theme and its timeliness. She reminded stakeholders that the voices of children need to be heard, respected, and incorporated into decisions that affect their lives.



Mrs. Ndella Faye Colley

Madam Faye Colley further emphasized the need to support and strengthen children’s rights, stating that Children’s access to certain facilities is not a privilege, but a fundamental human right.

“Children are not merely beneficiaries of development; they are right-holders. They are active agents of change whose views and experiences matter. Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene for children is not a privilege; it is a basic service and a fundamental human right. And that is why we are not here to beg for them to be provided, but we're here to ask for them and to demand for them to be provided”, she mentioned.

The AAITG Executive Director commended the NHRC for the partnership, and urged all stakeholders, including Government institutions, the NHRC, schools, communities, and development partners to advance children's rights and promote inclusive development.

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NHRC and AAITG Commemorate Day of the African Child

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Honourable Jariatou Touray, a member of the Children National Assembly of The Gambia, delivered a statement on behalf of the Speaker of the Assembly. She stated that the theme speaks directly to one of the most basic, yet most essential rights of every child.



“Access to water, safe sanitation, and good hygiene is not a luxury. It is a fundamental right and a foundation of good health, quality education, and protection for sustainable development”, Honourable Touray stated.

Ms. Kaddijatou Jawo, a representative of the Children’s National Assembly CRR, presented the joint Communique adopted by children from the North Bank and Central River Regions during the Commemoration of the Day of the African Child 2026, to the Deputy Governor of CRR.

The Communique calls for urgent action to improve children’s access to safe water,

sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools and communities across The Gambia. It highlights persistent challenges such as inadequate toilets, unsafe water, poor menstrual hygiene support, and limited facilities for children with disabilities.

The children urged the Government, local Councils, regional education authorities and schools to invest in WASH infrastructure, strengthen policies and funding, and ensure child-friendly and inclusive facilities.

Receiving the Communique on behalf of the Governor, Mr. Sainey Mbye, Deputy Governor of Central River Region, commended the organisers for commemorating the Day of the African Child and reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to protecting children’s rights.

Mr. Mbye stressed the need to strengthen child protection systems to end child labor and all forms of abuse and exploitation, and to also improve children’s access to health, nutrition, education, clean drinking water and other essential services.

Mr. Mbye described the demands contained in the Communique as fundamental rights rather than privileges, noting that **“children are not asking for favours; these are their rights. Every responsible Government must ensure those rights are fulfilled because they are the leaders of today and the future.”** He pledged that the Government would continue working with partners to build a future that enables every child in The Gambia to thrive.

