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PRESS STATEMENT

THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC ASSEMBLIES: THE SITUATION SINCE 22nd AUGUST 2025

The National Human Rights Commission (the Commission) has been closely monitoring events arising since Friday, 22 August 2025, when nineteen (19) youths, who had gathered around the premises of PURA to submit a petition following its decision to floor prices for mobile data, were arrested and detained by the police.

In related events on 25 August 2025, police officers, while transporting twenty-three (23) individuals remanded to Mile II Prison by the Kanifing Magistrates' Court, fired tear gas to disperse the crowd gathered around the court premises. On the same day, the Commission also learnt that fourteen (14) individuals allegedly on their way to the National Assembly to petition their National Assembly Members were arrested and detained by officers of the Police Intervention Unit.

The NHRC team of investigators and legal officers were on the ground to monitor these developments. They engaged with both police officers and petitioners/demonstrators around the PURA premises, and visited detainees at the Kairaba, Kotu, Bakoteh, and Kanifing Police Stations. The team interviewed the detainees and requested that police cells be decongested to ensure humane conditions of detention. In addition, NHRC investigators were present at the Kanifing Magistrates' Court on 25 August to monitor proceedings and safeguard the rights of those concerned.

Following these observations, the Commission is deeply concerned with the developments and condemns the manner in which some law enforcement officials handled the events, particularly the heavy-handedness of officers and the indiscriminate firing of tear gas. The Commission reminds the Government, and the Inspector General of Police in particular, of the obligation to respect and protect the human rights of individuals during public assemblies.

The Commission further notes with concern that, in many instances, the exercise of freedom of assembly and association—guaranteed under Section 25 (1) (d) and (e) of the 1997 Constitution and other international and regional human rights instruments ratified by the State—is often undermined by laws that limit these freedoms and by practices that contravene State obligations.

In line with its mandate to support the State in ensuring the enjoyment of these rights, the Commission, in its 2020 Advisory Note on the Right to Freedom of Association and Assembly vis-à-vis the Public Order Act, recommended the amendment of Section 5 of the Public Order Act to replace the requirement for a permit with a simple notification system. The Commission has also developed *Guidelines on the Policing of Public Assemblies in The Gambia* for the Gambia Police Force, as well as training modules on international human rights law for integration into the curricula of security institutions.

Considering recent developments, the Commission reiterates the urgent need for the Government to uphold its human rights obligations to respect and protect the right of the people to assemble and associate in accordance with international standards. This is crucial not only as The Gambia continues its democratic journey, but also as the country heads towards the 2026 electoral cycle, a period likely to witness numerous assemblies.

The Commission further emphasizes that both duty bearers and rights holders must exercise restraint and work together to preserve the peace and stability the country continues to enjoy. While law enforcement agencies must maintain law and order without undermining human rights and freedoms, rights holders must equally exercise their rights responsibly, with due regard for the rights of others, and refrain from abusive, insulting, or threatening behaviour. All actions should remain within the confines of the law and reflect mutual respect and civility.

The Commission urges the Government to:

- a) Withdraw all charges against the detainees and engage in meaningful dialogue to address the concerns of individuals in the country.
- b) Amend Section 5 of the Public Order Act from a permit requirement to a notification procedure.
- c) Conduct a comprehensive review of the Public Order Act and align its provisions with the human rights obligations of the country.
- d) Integrate comprehensive training on crowd control and the management of assemblies into the curricula of the Gambia Police Force.

The Commission also urges rights holders to:

- a) Conduct themselves peacefully during assemblies, protests, and demonstrations.
- b) Respect the rights, freedoms, and dignity of others while exercising their own rights.
- c) Avoid acts of violence, incitement, or destruction of property.
- d) Refrain from using abusive, insulting, or threatening language or behaviour when making demands.
- e) Cooperate with law enforcement authorities to ensure public order and safety.

Let Justice guide our actions.



Emmanuel Daniel Joof
CHAIRPERSON