

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 22, 2009

President Yahya Jammeh
State House
Banjul
The Gambia

Dear President Jammeh:

We write to request the immediate release of Chief Ebrima Manneh, a reporter with the Gambian newspaper, the *Daily Observer*, who has been held incommunicado without charge or trial for more than two years. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and has called for his immediate release, as have the Economic Community of West Africa States Community Court of Justice and the Committee to Protect Journalists. We are deeply troubled that repeated requests to your embassy in Washington and to you directly regarding Mr. Manneh have been met with silence.

Chief Manneh was allegedly detained in July 2006 for political reasons by plainclothes police officers thought to have been from the Gambian National Intelligence Agency. Recent reports suggest that he is being held at the Fatoto Police Station in eastern Gambia, at Mile Two Prison, and/or a National Intelligence Agency compound in Serekunda. In July 2007, he was also reportedly escorted by members of the Gambian Police Intervention Unit to the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital in Banjul for high blood pressure treatment.

The Media Foundation for West Africa, a regional independent nongovernmental organization based in Ghana, filed suit on Mr. Manneh's behalf in the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) in Nigeria. This court has jurisdiction to determine cases of human rights violations that occur in any member state, including your own. On June 5, 2008 the Court declared the arrest and detention of Chief Manneh illegal and ordered his immediate release. We are also aware that attorneys for Mr. Manneh have filed a petition on his behalf with the United Nations Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and that a decision from this body is expected soon.

Yet despite the judgment of the ECOWAS Court of Justice – a judgment that is binding on your Government – as well as repeated requests by Mr. Manneh's father and fellow journalists, your Government continues to deny any involvement in his arrest or knowledge of his whereabouts. In fact, earlier this month, Gambian Attorney General and Justice Minister Marie Saine Firdaus made a rare comment on the case, telling the National Assembly that Mr. Manneh is not and has not been in government custody.

Opposition parliamentarian and Minority Leader, Momodou Sanneh condemned the government's handling of the case and failure to respect the ECOWAS ruling.

Recently Agence France-Presse quoted an unnamed senior Gambian police source as saying that plainclothes government agents took Manneh from the Mile Two Prison sometime last year. The source, who said agents seized Manneh from the prison in the middle of the night, speculated that the journalist is no longer alive.

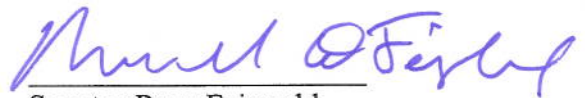
The conflicting information and lack of responsiveness further the perception of a disturbing deterioration of human rights in the Gambia, particularly in regards to basic press freedoms.

We urge an immediate resolution of the questions surrounding Mr. Manneh's whereabouts and detention. Your help in addressing this matter would be an important step in resolving the troubling allegations that continue to be raised about his disappearance.

Sincerely,



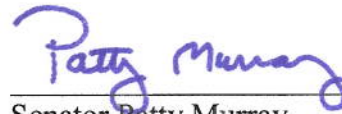
Senator Richard J. Durbin
Assistant Majority Leader



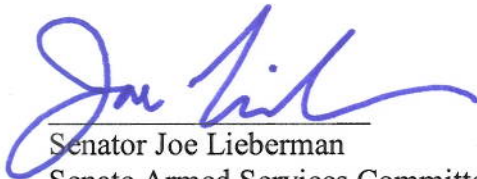
Senator Russ Feingold
Chairman Senate Foreign
Relations Subcommittee on
African Affairs



Senator Robert Casey
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Senator Patty Murray
Senate Appropriations
Committee



Senator Joe Lieberman
Senate Armed Services Committee



Senator Ted Kennedy
Senate Armed Services
Committee

