

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 25, 2010

Mr. Kamallesh Sharma
Commonwealth Secretary General
Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

Dear Secretary-General Sharma:

We write to request your help with a tragic case in Commonwealth member-state the Gambia.

Chief Ebrima Manneh was a reporter with the Gambian newspaper the *Daily Observer* who has been held incommunicado without charge or trial for almost four years. Unfortunately, repeated attempts to work with Gambian President Yahya Jammeh on this case have gone unanswered. Mr. Manneh's disappearance and the Gambian Government's ongoing refusal to account for his whereabouts are in direct contradiction of the strong human rights standards embraced by the Commonwealth.

Chief Manneh was reportedly detained in July 2006 for political reasons by plainclothes police officers thought to have been from the Gambian National Intelligence Agency. Some reports suggest that he is being held at the Fatoto Police Station in eastern Gambia, at Mile Two Prison, 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.

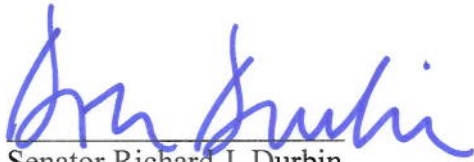
The Media Foundation for West Africa, an independent nongovernmental organization based in Ghana, filed suit on Mr. Manneh's behalf in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice in Nigeria. On June 5, 2008, the ECOWAS Court declared the arrest and detention of Chief Manneh illegal and ordered his immediate release – an order that has thus far been ignored by the Gambian government. More recently, in response to a petition filed by Mr. Manneh's attorneys from the organization Freedom Now, the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued a sweeping opinion against the Gambian Government calling for the "immediate release of Mr. Manneh."

Despite the UN Working Group opinion, the judgment of the ECOWAS Court of Justice (a judgment that is binding on the Gambian government), and repeated requests by Mr. Manneh's father and fellow journalists, President Jammeh refuses to answer even basic questions about Manneh's arrest or his whereabouts. Only last year did Gambian Attorney General and Justice Minister Marie Saine Firdaus make a rare comment on the case, telling the Gambian National Assembly that Mr. Manneh is not and has not been in government custody.

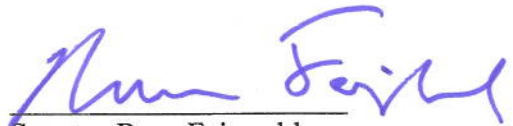
Undoubtedly many members of the Commonwealth also share our concern about the deteriorating political and human rights situation in the Gambia, an issue you raised at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Trinidad and Tobago. Accordingly, we respectfully ask that you investigate Mr. Manneh's disappearance and press President Jammeh not only for his immediate release, but also to reverse the Gambia's poor human rights record.

Thank you for your leadership in this regard.

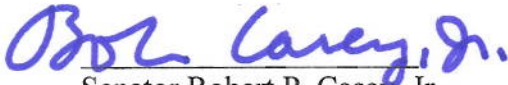
Sincerely,



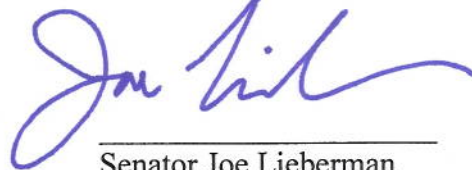
Senator Richard J. Durbin
Assistant Majority Leader
Chairman Senate Subcommittee on Human
Rights and the Law



Senator Russ Feingold
Chairman Senate Foreign
Relations Subcommittee on
African Affairs



Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Senator Joe Lieberman
Senate Armed Services
Committee



Senator Benjamin L. Cardin
Chairman Helsinki Commission
Senate Foreign Relations Committee