



TRIAL
International

MEDIA UPDATE

Geneva, 12 July 2017
For immediate release

Sonko case: voices of the victims

The Attorney General of Switzerland has heard two victims in the investigation against Ousman Sonko. The former Gambian Minister of Interior is suspected of crimes against humanity.

It took Destiny (real name withheld) more than ten years to file a complaint against Ousman Sonko. A victim of torture in Gambian prisons, she was finally able to testify before the Attorney General of Switzerland last week in Bern.

*“I was so relieved when I learned about Ousman Sonko’s arrest”, says **Destiny**. “I really hoped I could take part in the proceedings. This case is my first occasion to tell my story. I need justice for closure.”*

Another victim has also travelled from Gambia to testify. He too was tortured when the suspect was at the head of security services, first as a General Inspector of the Police and then as Ministry of Interior.

*“These people have suffered in silence for years”, says **Philip Grant**, Director of TRIAL International. “The Gambian judiciary is still fragile. For these victims, the opening of a trial in Switzerland would be a unique occasion to get justice.”*

Other victims may be heard in the future by the Attorney General of Switzerland, who has been conducting a meaningful investigation since Sonko’s arrest in January 2017 (see “The case at a glance” below).

Why is Switzerland competent?

Ousman Sonko is prosecuted in Switzerland on the basis of [universal jurisdiction](#), which requires Swiss authorities to investigate suspects of torture and crimes against humanity on its territory.

At the moment, no extradition request has emanated from Gambian authorities. They have expressed their willingness to collaborate to the Swiss investigations.

As for the International Criminal Court, it has opened no investigations on Gambia. It therefore has no jurisdiction to prosecute Ousman Sonko. Besides, the Court only has a subsidiary role in international crimes prosecution, meaning that it only intervenes should States be unwilling or unable to do so themselves.

TRIAL International is a non-governmental organization fighting impunity for international crimes and supporting victims in their quest for justice. TRIAL International takes an innovative approach to the law, paving the way to justice for survivors of unspeakable sufferings. The organization provides legal assistance, litigates cases, develops local capacity and pushes the human rights agenda forward.

Media contact:
media@trialinternational.org
+41 22 519 03 96
+41 79 192 37 44
www.trialinternational.org
@trial



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The case at a glance

26 January 2017: Ousman Sonko is arrested in Switzerland following a criminal complaint by TRIAL International for torture. Given the suspicions against him, he is placed in pre-trial detention.

6 February 2017: The Attorney General of Switzerland takes up the investigation against Ousman Sonko. The crimes he is suspected of are re-qualified as crimes against humanity. [Read more](#)

April 2017: Two Gambian victims file a complaint for torture.

3 May 2017: The Court of Measures of Constraint in Bern extend the detention by three months. It could be further extended in July. [Read more](#)

June-July 2017: The two victims are heard by the Attorney General of Switzerland.

Background

Dictator Yahya Jammeh has reigned over Gambia from 1994 to 2016. The international community has repeatedly condemned the brutality of his regime, where torture and extrajudiciary execution were common. The United Nations, NGOs and regional courts have all denounced the crimes of the armed forces.

Ousman Sonko was the Minister of Interior from 2006 to 2016. During this period, he is suspected of having participated to acts of torture.

Removed from his office in September 2016, Ousman Sonko fled Gambia and went to Switzerland, where he filed for asylum.

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