



GAMBIA: EX-PRESIDENT TIED TO 2005 MURDERS OF GHANAIAN AND NIGERIAN MIGRANTS

Ghanaian Groups Urge Prosecution of Yahya Jammeh

A paramilitary unit controlled by then-[Gambian](#) president Yahya Jammeh summarily executed more than 50 Ghanaian, Nigerian, and other West African migrants in July 2005, Human Rights Watch and TRIAL International said today.

Interviews with 30 former Gambian officials, including 11 officers directly involved in the incident, reveal that the migrants, who were bound for Europe but were suspected of being mercenaries intent on overthrowing Jammeh, were murdered after having been detained by Jammeh's closest deputies in the army, navy, and police forces. The witnesses identified the "Junglers," a notorious unit that took its orders directly from Jammeh, as those who carried out the killings.

"The West African migrants weren't murdered by rogue elements, but by a paramilitary death squad taking orders from President Jammeh," said [Reed Brody](#), counsel at Human Rights Watch. *"Jammeh's subordinates then destroyed key evidence to prevent international investigators from learning the truth."*

Martin Kyere, the sole known Ghanaian survivor; the families of the disappeared; the family of [Saul N'dow](#), another Ghanaian killed under Jammeh; and Ghanaian human rights organizations on May 16, 2018, called on the Ghanaian government to investigate the new evidence and potentially seek Jammeh's extradition and prosecution in Ghana.

Jammeh's 22-year rule was marked [by widespread abuses](#), including forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary detention. He sought exile in Equatorial Guinea in January 2017 after losing the December 2016 presidential election to Adama Barrow.

The insiders interviewed by TRIAL International and Human Rights Watch include some of the highest-ranking security commanders in the Gambian government at the time, as well as several officials present at the arrest, detention, and transfer of the migrants, a Jungler who witnessed the killings, and two who participated in a subsequent cover-up. Another Jungler who witnessed the killings was interviewed on the radio.

They said that the migrants – including some 44 Ghanaians and several Nigerians – were arrested in July 2005 at a beach where they had landed, then transferred to the Gambian Naval Headquarters in Banjul, the capital. They were detained there in the presence of the inspector general of police, the director general of the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the chief of the defense staff, and the commander of the National Guards. At least two of them were in telephone contact with Jammeh during the operation. The head and several members of the paramilitary Junglers were also there.

The officials divided the migrants into groups and then turned them over to the Junglers. Over one week, the Junglers summarily executed them near Banjul and along the Senegal-Gambia border near Jammeh's hometown of Kanilai.

Kyere was detained in a Banjul police station, then driven into the forest. In February 2018, he explained to Human Rights Watch and TRIAL International how he escaped, just before other migrants were apparently killed.

“We were in the back of a pickup truck,” he said. “One man complained that the wires binding us were too tight and a soldier with a cutlass sliced him on the shoulder, cutting his arm, which bled profusely. It was then that I thought, ‘We’re going to die.’ But as the truck went deeper into the forest, I was able to get my hands free. I jumped out from the pickup and started to run into the forest. The soldiers shot toward me but I was able to hide. I then heard shots from the pickup and the cry, in Twi [Ghanaian language], ‘God save us!’”

Kyere helped the Ghanaian authorities identify many of the dead and travelled around Ghana to locate their families and promote efforts to seek justice.

Despite measures in ensuing years by Ghana as well as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations (UN) to investigate the case, no arrests have ever been made.

The [Bulletin of the UN Department of Public Affairs](#) said that an ECOWAS/UN report, never made public, concluded that the Gambian government was not “directly or indirectly complicit” in the deaths and disappearances but rather that “rogue elements” in Gambia’s security services “acting on their own” were probably responsible.

The new evidence makes clear, however, that those responsible for the killings were the Junglers, who were not rogue elements, but a disciplined unit operating under Jammeh.

In October 2017, Gambian and international rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, and TRIAL International, launched the “[Campaign to Bring Yahya Jammeh and his Accomplices to Justice](#)” (#Jammeh2Justice), which calls for prosecuting Jammeh and others who bear the greatest responsibility for his government’s crimes under international fair trial standards.

President Barrow of The Gambia has [suggested](#) that he would seek Jammeh’s extradition from Equatorial Guinea if his prosecution was recommended by the country’s Truth Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, which is expected to begin work in the next few months with an initial two-year mandate. The government and international [activists](#) and [academics](#) have said that the political, institutional and security conditions do not yet exist in The Gambia for a fair trial of Yahya Jammeh which would contribute to Gambia’s stability.

President Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea [said](#) in January that he would “analyze [any extradition request] with [his] lawyers.” A week later, however, he [said](#) “we have to protect him [Jammeh], we have to respect him as a former African head of state, because that is what is going to ensure that the other heads of state of Africa who have to leave power do not fear for subsequent harassment.”

Ghanaian groups noted that the UN Convention against Torture, which Equatorial Guinea has ratified, requires a country in whose territory a torture suspect is found to refer the case for investigation or extradite that person.

“Our investigation has enabled us to get closer to the truth about this horrible massacre,” said [Benedict De Moerloose](#), head of Criminal Law and Investigations for TRIAL International. “The time has now come to deliver justice for the victims and their families.”

For information about the Campaign to Bring Yahya Jammeh and his Accomplices to Justice, please visit: <https://www.facebook.com/Jammeh2Justice/>

[For details about the killings and the accounts of those interviewed](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS

In Accra

Bénédict De Moerloose for TRIAL International
(English, French, Spanish)

T: +41 79 192 37 44 or +233 548 71 52 52

E: b.demoerloose@trialinternational.org

or media@trialinternational.org

Reed Brody for Human Rights Watch

(English, French, Spanish, Portuguese)

T: +1-917-388-6745 or +233 54 902 2806

E: brodyr@hrw.org | @reedbrody

In Banjul

Marion Volkmann for the Campaign to Bring Yahya Jammeh and his Accomplices to Justice

(English, French, German)

T: +220 212 4243

E: marionvolkmann@gmail.com

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@trialinternational.org
+41 22 321 61 10
trialinternational.org
@trial