



PRESS RELEASE

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Sonko Case: Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) confirms former Interior Minister's role in atrocities committed during Jammeh's presidency

Geneva, 26 January 2022 – Ousman Sonko, accused of crimes against humanity and imprisoned in Switzerland for the past five years, now faces additional charges from the Gambian Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. These charges relate to his role as the right-hand man of former dictator Yahya Jammeh.

In 2017, exactly five years to the day, Ousman Sonko was arrested in Switzerland after TRIAL International lodged a criminal complaint before the Bernese prosecuting authorities. The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland (OAG) took jurisdiction over the case and has placed the former Inspector General of the Gambian police forces, who later became Minister of Interior, under investigation for crimes against humanity. The OAG notably accuses Sonko of having participated in torture during the interrogation of suspects of a failed coup attempt in 2006. Sexual violence may also have been perpetrated in that context.

Atrocities and other crimes

The circumstances surrounding Ousman Sonko's case in Switzerland have also been examined by the Gambian Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC). The Commission's investigation started in 2019 to highlight the many abuses committed under Yahya Jammeh's rule. On 24 December 2021, the TRRC released its final report which included the names of numerous individuals suspected of perpetrating atrocities during the Jammeh era. The report portrays Ousman Sonko as having played a key role in the Gambian repressive system. The document also highlights numerous other serious crimes that may not be covered by the investigation in Switzerland.

Attempt to cover up a massacre

Between other findings, the TRRC accuses Ousman Sonko of having participated in the July 2005 cover-up of the massacre of 56 West African migrants - including 44 Ghanaians – carried out by "Junglers", a paramilitary unit dedicated to serve and protect the former Gambian President, who is currently in exile in Equatorial Guinea. According to the TRRC, Ousman Sonko also allegedly planned, in collaboration with Yahya Jammeh, the execution of numerous detainees in 2012 and is personally responsible for multiple acts of sexual violence, including numerous rapes from the year 2000s.

According to Benoît Meystre, Legal Advisor at TRIAL International: "these new accusations highlight the crucial position occupied by Ousman Sonko within Yahya Jammeh's criminal regime, reinforce the charges currently being investigated against Sonko by the OAG, and strengthen the call for Ousman Sonko to face trial in the near future."

The TRRC report can be downloaded at <https://www.moj.gm/downloads>.

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.

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