



Appeal Trial of Former Gambian Interior Minister Ousman Sonko for Crimes Against Humanity Opens in Switzerland

(Geneva, 30 March 2026) - Nearly a decade after his arrest, and almost two years after a landmark conviction, appeal proceedings open today in Bellinzona, offering a renewed opportunity for victims of Jammeh-era crimes to seek justice.

In May 2024, the Swiss Federal Criminal Court (FCC) found [Ousman Sonko](#) guilty of multiple counts of crimes against humanity committed between 2000 and 2016, under the rule of Gambia's former president Yahya Jammeh. He was [sentenced](#) to 20 years in prison.

Arrested in 2017, following the [filing of a denunciation by TRIAL International](#), **Ousman Sonko is the highest-ranking official ever convicted in Europe under the principle of universal jurisdiction.**

In its 2024 judgment, the [FCC found](#) Ousman Sonko guilty of the killing of a perceived political opponent in 2000; of torture and illegal detention in connection with a coup plot in March 2006; of the killing of a politician in 2011 and of deprivations of liberty as well as acts of torture - including one killing - of peaceful demonstrators in 2016. The Court further ordered Mr. Sonko to pay compensation to the plaintiffs.

The FCC [discontinued](#) all charges related to sexual violence: it found that some of the alleged acts were time-barred, while others were considered isolated incidents, and as such, could not be qualified as crimes against humanity.

The accused, the Office of the Attorney General, and ten plaintiffs have appealed the decision, each on different grounds. While the accused challenged the judgement in its entirety, the Office of the Attorney General and the plaintiffs are appealing only specific aspects of the ruling.

The appeal proceedings, which should last at least two weeks, will also see five plaintiffs travelling from The Gambia to attend the trial. *"I sincerely hope that this process will bring truth, accountability, and justice. My deepest wish is that the voices of victims and survivors are heard and respected, and that this trial contributes to healing and dignity for all those who suffered."* Said Ramzia Diab Ghanim, one of the plaintiffs in the case.

As The Gambia continues efforts to [establish a special tribunal](#) to prosecute crimes committed under Yahya Jammeh's regime, the Sonko case forms part of a broader wave of prosecutions targeting those responsible for these crimes, including landmark convictions in [Germany](#) and the [United States](#) against members of the "Junglers" death squad.

TRIAL International will provide weekly reviews of the appeal trial, and will collaborate with the [Solo Sandeng Foundation](#) to disseminate information in The Gambia and affected communities in various local languages.

A [Q&A](#) on the appeal, and more information about the first instance trial, including trial monitoring, can be found [here](#).

About TRIAL International

TRIAL International is an international NGO fighting impunity for international crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, torture, enforced disappearances and conflict-related sexual violence. Founded in 2002, it has offices in Switzerland, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

About the Alliance of Victim-Led Organisations (AVLO)

The Alliance of Victim-Led Organisations (AVLO) is a coalition of Gambian civil society organizations that has been championing and representing the interests of victims of human rights violations in The Gambia.

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