

## PRESS RELEASE

October 30, 2024

### WADEMOS CONDEMNS APPLICATION OF DRACONIAN LAW AGAINST THE MEDIA IN THE GAMBIA

The West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) is deeply concerned by the growing harassment, intimidation, and repression of journalists and the media in The Gambia and the increasing closure of the country's civic space. The Network specifically condemns the arrest and prosecution of three prominent journalists under the False Publication and Broadcasting Law, a vile legacy of the Jammeh era that the ECOWAS Court of Justice, a government-appointed Media Law Review Committee, as well as The Gambia's Truth Commission in 2021, have recommended for repeal.

WADEMOS is worried that the application of this draconian law will force the Gambian media into self-censorship and that the weaponization of the judiciary to close the civic space will significantly limit the media's ability to effectively carry out their constitutional mandate of holding the government and public officials accountable.

As a solidarity Network, WADEMOS calls for an immediate end to the defamation suits brought by notable officials of the Gambian government against Musa Sheriff and The Voice newspaper, as well as against reporter Kebba Ansu Manneh and The Alkamba Times. Additionally, the Network calls for an end to the criminal trial of Musa Sheriff and Momodou Justice Darboe of The Voice newspaper on charges of false publication. Finally, the Network calls for an end to all similar civil and criminal proceedings brought against the Gambian press and media.

These laws and proceedings contradict the pledge by the Barrow administration to the people to protect their freedoms and uphold democratic values following the transition from Jammeh's dictatorship. WADEMOS advises the government to focus on strengthening the country's democratic institutions and building citizens' resilience to entrench its newfound democracy.

WADEMOS urges the Gambian government to prioritize in its constitutional review provisions that guarantee the fundamental rights of the country's citizens, including the right to life, freedom from discrimination, freedom of expression, and the press. The False Publication and Broadcasting Law infringes on media freedoms and citizens' collective and individual rights and must be expunged.

The Network congratulates the government and people of The Gambia for the progress made in the review of the new constitution but urges expedited action as it contains presidential term limit provisions to do away with the uncertainty that surrounds incumbency in the Gambia, preserve the country's newfound democracy, and safeguard its stability.

As a network, we will continue to stand in solidarity with the civil society and the people of The Gambia and their aspirations for a fair, just, and equal society.

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Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) | Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) | West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) | WANEP | Center for Democracy and Development-West Africa (CDD-West Africa), Nigeria | StatView International, Guinea | Center for Democratic Governance (CDG), Burkina Faso | Africivistes, Senegal | Sindicato de Jornalistas e Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

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## About WADEMOS

WADEMOS is an independent and non-partisan network of diverse national and transnational civil society organizations and civic groups working to promote and defend democracy, good governance, and inclusive development in the West Africa region. WADEMOS mobilizes, coordinates, and leverages the collective voice and power of civil society and other pro-democracy actors, resources, and opportunities within the West Africa region to advance its mission. The current membership of WADEMOS stands at 47 spread across West Africa. The WADEMOS Secretariat is based in Accra, Ghana.

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