

PRESS RELEASE

Gambian Police Forces commit to move away from practices leading to human rights violations

BANJUL, 30 January 2019 – On 29 and 30 January 2019, 30 members of the Gambian Police Force took part in a human rights workshop at the Metzky Residence Hotel in Banjul, which enabled them to reflect on how they can perform their work in compliance with international human rights standards.

Participants were presented with key human rights principles limiting the use of force during protests as well as those linked to arrest, search and seizure procedures. They were also introduced to the main human rights instruments they must enforce, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Convention against Torture, which was ratified by The Gambia on 28 September 2018.

Organised jointly by the West Africa Regional Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-WARO) and the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), the workshop ended with a commitment of the participants to uphold human rights when carrying out their duties. Once they go back to their respective unit, they shall develop an action plan with the aim of putting their newly acquired knowledge into practice, together with their colleagues.

Recognising the multifaceted importance of human rights in policing, one inspector of police said, “When law enforcement agencies and officers respect, uphold and defend human rights, public confidence and trust are built and we ourselves are protected as well.” Moving away from past abusive practices and building trust is all the more needed today. The country is transitioning from 22 years of brutal rule, in which elements of the Gambian Police Force played a central role.

In her opening address, the UN Resident Coordinator Seraphine Wakana stated that “the community depends on the police to protect the full range of rights through the effective enforcement of the country’s laws, including human rights law”. She further emphasised the crucial role of the police “to ensure a successful, functioning democracy, since they are the guardians of the law and the first line of defence for human rights”.

On his part, IHRDA Executive Gaye Sowe corroborated the above assertions and added that, when police are seen to respect, uphold and defend human rights, they can contribute to fair administration of justice through successful legal prosecutions in court, and the construction of stable societies through peaceful resolution of conflicts and complaints.

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The **West Africa Regional Office of the Office of the United High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-WARO)** is the leading agency of the UN system responsible



for the promotion and protection of human rights in West Africa. The **Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA)** is a pan-African non-governmental organisation working to promote awareness of human rights in Africa and improve the effectiveness of the African Human Rights system through defending, educating, and informing about human rights.

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