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ITUC and IFJ Welcome Release of Journalists in Gambia

Brussels, 4 September 2009: The ITUC has joined with the International Federation of Journalists in welcoming the release from prison of the six members of the journalists' trade union in Gambia, GPU, who were sentenced on 6 August to two years in jail and fined US\$ 20,000 each by the High Court in Banjul for seditious publications and criminal defamation.

According to the GPU, the six journalists, Sarata Jabbi-Dibba, Emil Touray and Pa Modou Faal, GPU vice president, secretary general and treasurer respectively, together with Pap Saine and Ebou Sawaneh, publisher and editor of The Point Newspaper, and Sam Sarr, editor of Foroyaa newspaper, were released yesterday 3 September at 21:00 GMT/UTC.

The GPU says the Gambian minister of the interior, Ousman Sonko, explained the presidential pardon as a "humanitarian" gesture in the spirit of Ramadan" on the part of President Yahya Jammeh.

The six journalists were arrested in June following their public criticism of President Jammeh's comments on Deyda Hydara, a prominent Gambian journalist who was killed in suspicious circumstances in 2004. The seventh journalist, Abubcarr Saidykh, a reporter of the Foroyaa, newspaper was also arrested but later released.

The ITUC and IFJ condemned their arrest and the subsequent conduct of their trial, which included closed hearings among many abuses of due process. They also supported the GPU in its impressive campaign to secure the journalists' release.

"The IFJ has argued from the beginning that the trial was flawed and we are relieved that President Jammeh finally saw sense and pardoned the journalists," added Boumelha. "We hope this will be the beginning of a new era where journalists will be treated with respect and which will lead to the scrapping of the legislation regarding sedition and defamation in particular, and the introduction of freedom of information and access to information legislation in accord with international norms."

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 157 countries and has 312 national affiliates.

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