



Gambia ALERT: NIA detains Foroyaa newspaper publisher

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MFWA Press Release

Halifa Sallah, publisher of privately-owned Banjul-based Foroyaa newspaper was on June 18, 2009 arrested and detained by the notoriously feared National Intelligence Agency (NIA) of the Gambia.

Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) sources reported that Sallah's arrest and subsequent detention followed a telephone call he received at about 15 hours GMT from the NIA inviting him to their office to procure bail for his colleagues who were being detained.

Sallah's arrest brings to nine the number of journalists arrested within three days since June 15 when the NIA begun the swoop on journalists and Gambian Press Union (GPU) executives over a statement that criticised President Yahya Jammeh over comments he made recently that slandered Deyda Hydara, journalist and an ardent critic of his regime, who was gunned down in 2004 by a yet to be identified assailants.

Although the NIA has not given any reasons for Sallah's detention, the sources believe it is in connection with an open letter he wrote to President Jammeh demanding the release of his colleagues. He is very outspoken and granted interviews to various international media.

All the eight journalists are facing three criminally charges including "publishing with seditious intention" and "conspiracy to publish with seditious intention".

They are currently being detained at the Mile Two Prison on the outskirt of Banjul, the capital following the Kanifing magistrate court's refusal to grant them bail. Sarata Jabbi-Dibba, first vice president of the GPU, the only female who is a nursing mother was granted bail in the sum of 200,000 Dalasis (about US \$7, 000).

All of them will reappear on June 22.