

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

November 2, 2011

Mr. William Hague
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
Westminster, London SW1A 2AH
The United Kingdom

Dear Foreign Secretary Hague:

I am writing to express strong support for the United Kingdom's role in the investigation into the deeply troubling disappearance of Gambian journalist Chief Ebrima Manneh more than five years ago.

Manneh, a journalist with the Gambian newspaper, the *Daily Observer*, disappeared on July 7, 2006, after allegedly being detained for political reasons by plainclothes police officers thought to have been members of the Gambian National Intelligence Agency. After years of obfuscation and silence, the Gambian government recently indicated that Manneh was alive and that it would seek international support through the British Foreign Office to facilitate an inquiry into his whereabouts – both of which require timely attention from the international community.

After his apparent arrest, Manneh was reportedly held at the Fatoto Police Station in eastern Gambia, at Mile Two Prison, and/or a National Intelligence Agency compound in Serekunda, in addition to being sent at one point to the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital in Banjul for high blood pressure treatment. Amnesty International, the Economic Community of West African States Community Court of Justice, Freedom Now, the Media Foundation for West Africa, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and a number of other human rights organizations consider Chief Manneh to be a prisoner of conscience and have called for his immediate release.

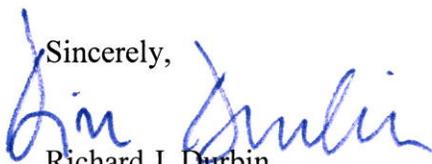
Both the United Nations Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declared the arrest and detention of Chief Manneh illegal and ordered his immediate release. However, Gambian officials, including President Yahya Jammeh, have refused to answer even basic questions about Chief Manneh's arrest or his whereabouts, including a direct appeal from me to discuss the case. Gambian opposition parliamentarian and Minority Leader Momodou Sanneh condemned his government's handling of the case and failure to respect the ECOWAS ruling.

In a surprising turn of events, on October 11, 2011, Gambian Attorney General and Minister of Justice Edward Gomez made public comments suggesting knowledge of Chief Manneh's welfare and whereabouts. He stated in an interview with the Gambia's *The Daily News*, "Let me tell you with a high degree of certainty that Ebrima Chief Manneh is somewhere... I can tell you that Ebrima Chief Manneh is alive."

The deteriorating political and human rights situation in the Gambia is of considerable concern internationally, as it must undoubtedly be for you, as Gambia is a member of the Commonwealth. I have been following this case for years, and while little progress been forthcoming from the Gambian government, I was pleased to hear that your office would be considering supporting an investigation into Manneh's disappearance in response to the Campaign for Human Rights in The Gambia. The Campaign, along with a number of other pro-democracy and human rights organizations, has been committed to addressing Gambia's troubling human rights situation.

Attorney General Gomez also recently spoke of the need for increased efforts toward reconciliation, peace, tolerance, and democracy at the 50th session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights at Banjul, only days after his acknowledgement of Chief Manneh's welfare. A resolution to this case offers a significant opportunity for the Gambia to uphold its commitment to human rights following years of backsliding.

I respectfully ask you to investigate Chief Manneh's disappearance and urge you to continue to press the Gambian government to respect its international commitments as a member of both the UN and the Commonwealth in this case. Thank you for your leadership on this issue and please let me know if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator