Victims Say NO to TRRC’s Amnesty “Approval” for Sanna Sabally

Press Statement

Families of victims of November 11th, 1994, together with other victims of human rights violations during the regime of Yahya Jammeh and a coalition of Gambian organisations condemn in the strongest possible terms the approval of an amnesty for former AFPRC Vice-Chairman Sanna Sabally by the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) Amnesty Committee and Commissioners and urges the Gambia Government, through the Minister of Justice, to disregard this recommendation.

On 24th & 25th April 2019, Sanna Sabally appeared before the TRRC and confessed to killing at least 12 Gambia National Army (GNA) soldiers accused of plotting to overthrow the AFPRC regime: Lieutenant Basirou Barrow, Lieutenant Gibril Saye, Lieutenant Abdoulie Dot Faal, Sergeant Ebrima (Ebou M) Ceesay, Lieutenant Buba Jammeh, Sergeant Fafa Nyang, Lieutenant Lamin Darboe, Sergeant Basirou Camara, Lieutenant Bakary Sanneh/Nyancho, Lieutenant Abdoulie Bah, and Cadet Amadou Sillah.

In his testimony, Sanna Sabally did not apologise to the families of the soldiers that were executed as he claimed they were in a situation of war and he saw them as enemies, not captured soldiers that were to be treated humanely. He said that he ordered for the bodies to be taken to and buried at Yundum Barracks and acknowledged that they were not given the proper burial saying, “they were not entitled to decent treatment as they were enemies and enemies cannot be treated properly...”

“I grew up without my father, without his love and companionship which was very difficult for me and my family. A day doesn’t go by without being traumatised by the events and mannerism in which he and his companions were gruesomely killed on day of November 11th. His death was sanctioned by a coward and carried out by an unrepentant, remorseless and degenerate individual. My family deserves justice and so do all the families affected by Sanna Sabally and his henchmen” - said Abdou Aziz Barrow, son of Lieutenant Basirou Barrow.

In its final report, which was publicly released on December 24th, 2021, the TRRC found Sanna Sabally, Edward Singhateh, Yankuba Touray and Yahya Jammeh as perpetrators bearing the greatest responsibility for the November 11th, 1994 incident. They were found responsible for the torture, assault, beatings, and extrajudicial killings of the 11 GNA soldiers and the torture, beatings, arbitrary and unlawful detention of five private soldiers. Sanna Sabally was also found responsible for subjecting numerous people to human rights violations.

The announcement of amnesty comes as a shock to the victims given that according to Section 19 (3) of the TRRC Act, Sanna Sabally SHOULD NOT qualify for amnesty because the crimes he committed form part of crimes against humanity. This therefore renders the “approval” illegal and thus should not be acted on by the government.

Victims also wish to express their outrage and displeasure at the matter in which they received the information, which was through the media (yet again). There was no prior consultation with families of direct victims who have been forced to live through the trauma of Sanna Sabally and co.’s brutal act all these years.

Victims further decry the lack of transparency and zero victim participation in the amnesty policy development and approval process and demand that this be disclosed to victims who wish to know and victim organisations forthwith.
“Sanna Sabally confessed to killing our husbands. If they say they are going to set him free, we do not have the power [to stop it] but we are not happy about it...we have not forgiven him and cannot forgive him...setting him free is going to be traumatising and painful for us. The entire family is suffering from a pain that cannot be measured...truly”-stated Mbaya Demba, widow of Lieutenant Gibril Saye.

We would like to remind the Commission that victims are not incidental, but bona fide stakeholders with a key role to play and the right to participate in the transitional justice process, including any amnesty process. This has been reiterated on several occasions, yet the Commission and the government continue to disregard the victims over and over again. The lack of transparency in the amnesty approval process is abysmal and contrary to the “NEVER AGAIN” slogan and spirit.

We demand that Sanna Sabally’s amnesty approval is disregarded and warn the government that we will FIGHT against this and any other decisions which denies us our right to justice and a say in the transitional justice process in The Gambia.

SIGNED:

Abdou Aziz Barrow (Basirou Barrow)
Abdoulie J. Darboe (Lieutenant Lamin Darboe)
Awa Njie (Abdoulie Dot Faal)
Dawda EM Ceesay (Ebrima M Ceesay)
Fatou Jammeh (Buba Jammeh)
Fatou Manneh (Bakary Manneh)
Fatou Sowe (Fafa Nyang)
Isatou Marong (Basirou Camara)
Matty Sallah (Abdoulie Bah)
Mbaya Damba (Gibril Saye)
Mamodou Sillah (Amadou Sillah)
Other victims of human rights violations under Yahya Jammeh’s regime
ANEKED
FANTANKA
Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violation
Solo Sandeng Foundation
WAVE
WILL