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Asia
Middle East
Europe



Français Espanol

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Gambia 17 December 2004

AFP and Reporters Without Borders correspondent gunned down in Banjul

Reporters Without Borders voiced outrage and deep sadness today at the murder last night of its correspondent in Gambia, **Deyda Hydara**, who was shot three times in the head as he left his office in Banjul.

"Deyda Hydara's death is a tragedy that profoundly distresses all of our staff," the organisation said. "We will go to Banjul as soon as possible to help his family and demand a serious investigation by the authorities."

Aged 58, Hydara was the managing editor and co-owner of the independent weekly *The Point*, and had been the local correspondent of Agence France-Presse (AFP) since 1974. Entirely fluent in French, he was also one of Reporters Without Borders' longest-serving correspondents in Africa, putting his experience and authority at the service of press freedom since 1994.

His dedication and professionalism had been of great help to his fellow-journalists in Gambia for years. He was married and the father of four children.

He was shot by one or several persons as he left his office shortly after midnight today. Two of his newspaper's employees who were with him were injured in the shooting. The Gambian police said they are investigating.

The killing comes at moment of tension between the Gambian authorities and the independent press. On 13 December, the national assembly passed a law that makes all press offences punishable by imprisonment. Another newly adopted law will increase the cost of an operating licence for newspaper owners fivefold.

Reporters Without Borders had written to President Yahya Jammeh yesterday urging him "to reconsider the national assembly's decisions and to not sign either of these pieces of legislation into law, so that Gambia's journalists are able work in an untroubled and professional climate."

Journalists recently campaigned successfully against the introduction of a media commission which was seen as mechanism for thought control and which was finally dissolved on 13 December. The new legislation runs counter to that success and bodes ill for the practice of journalism in Gambia.

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- ♣ [Gambia - 2003 Annual Report](#)
- ♣ [Gambia - Annual report 2002](#)

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- ♣ [Africa archives 2004](#)
- ♣ [Africa archives 2003](#)
- ♣ [Africa archives 2002](#)
- ♣ [Africa archives 2001](#)
- ♣ [Africa archives 2000](#)

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22 Jan 2005 - 3 Mar 2014



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