



**EFSCRJ Concerns Over the Non-Implementation of Resolutions Relating to the
Gambia Tourism Board Staff Petition**

Introduction

On 8th July 2020 five senior staff members of the Gambia Tourism Board filed a petition to the National Assembly highlighting massive malpractices in their office which affected the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the entire tourism sector. After four years of hearings by the Public Petitions Committee, the Chair of the Committee Hon. Suwaibou Touray presented their final report to the National Assembly on 24th September 2024 and was approved and adopted by Members.

Since the adoption of the report and its resolutions, neither the National Assembly nor the institutions mentioned in the report have updated the public about the status of implementation of the recommendations. A set of clear recommendations were imposed on certain committees of the National Assembly, the Inspector General of Police, the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, GTBoard, and the Auditor General to fulfil. The resolutions provided specific timelines for implementation between December 2024 and February 2025. It is nine months today since the adoption of the resolutions yet there is no evidence of implementation or enforcement.

In light of the foregoing, EFSCRJ hereby issues this position paper to raise concerns at the lack of implementation of the resolutions of the Public Petitions Committee. Hereunder we provide an overview of the final report of the Committee and conclude with our recommendations.

1. Key Issues Identified by the Public Petitions Committee

The Public Petitions Committee Report focused on allegations of corruption, mismanagement, and abuse of office at the Gambia Tourism Board (GT Board). The Committee uncovered issues related to:

- Eco-lodges contracts awarded to Lerr Group.
- Staff employment matters relating to unjust terminations, and unfair salary cuts.
- Land allocation in Tourism Development Areas (TDA) involving irregularities and unjustified waivers.
- Governance challenges and interference by the Minister of Tourism.
- GTBoard's head office construction involving contract mismanagement.



2. Key Findings of the Public Petitions Committee

A summary of the key findings of the Public Petitions Committee includes the following:

A. Eco-Lodges Contract

- **Irregular Award:** The contract was awarded to Lerr Group despite higher bids and GPPA's recommendation to split it among multiple contractors.
- **Misconduct:** The Contracts Committee Chair misled the committee about Lerr Group's financial capacity.
- **Delays and Mismanagement:** Lerr Group failed to complete projects on time. GTBoard paid 40% upfront (D38.5M) without proper oversight. Unauthorized hotel construction in Barra which was abandoned and costing millions.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Maafoz Consulting advised both GT Board and Lerr Group.

B. Staff Employment Matters

- **Unjust Punishments:** Staff who filed the petition were redeployed to regional offices or dismissed.
- **Salary Cuts:** Staff salaries were reduced by 50% without justification.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The Director of Finance (husband of the PS, Ministry of Tourism) influenced decisions.

C. Land Allocation in TDA

- **Irregular Waivers:** The Minister (Hamat Bah at the time) waived 3% of the 5% development levy for certain investors such as Kaijang Group, costing GTBoard revenue.
- **Unverified Allocations:** Priority Leisure Group (linked to the PS's mother) received prime land without proper shareholder disclosure. MOAB Capital got a lease before paying the levy.
- **Lack of Oversight:** No Lands Committee to vet allocations.

D. Governance Issues

- **Ministerial Interference:** The Minister dissolved the GTBoard Governing Body for resisting salary cuts.
- **Unqualified Appointments:** The Minister's son was employed at GTBoard.

E. GTBoard Head Office Construction

- **Contract Breach:** The original agreement with Construct Company Ltd. was cancelled without cost-benefit analysis.
- **Financial Losses:** GTBoard paid D15.8M for an office it never occupied only to rent elsewhere.



These issues highlight severe legal, professional, and ethical violations for which there should be accountability.

In light of these findings, the Committee made the following recommendations.

3. Key Recommendations of the Public Petitions Committee

These recommendations were made to various National Assembly committees, the Inspector General of Police, the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, GTBoard, and the Auditor General to fulfil. None of them have reported progress since then.

A. Eco-Lodges Contract

- i. Investigate and prosecute the Contracts Committee Chair for misleading evaluations.
- ii. Recover funds from Lerr Group for incomplete work.
- iii. Ensure VAT payments are verified by GRA.
- iv. Ban Lerr Group from future government contracts.

B. Staff Employment

- i. Reinstate wrongfully terminated staff.
- ii. Repay 50% salary deductions.
- iii. Conduct a staff audit (2017–2023) to review appointments and promotions.

C. Land Allocation

- i. Establish an independent commission to review TDA land allocations (2017–2024).
- ii. Investigate Priority Leisure Group and MOAB Capital for underpayment.
- iii. Prohibit ministerial waivers of the 5% levy without Cabinet approval.
- iv. Form a Lands Committee (GT Board, NEA, Geology Unit) for oversight.

D. Governance

- i. Stop ministerial interference in GTBoard operations.
- ii. Restructure the Governing Body to prevent conflicts of interest such as placing spouses in leadership.

E. GTBoard Head Office

- i. Investigate payments to Construct Company Ltd.
- ii. Audit the D900,000 rental contribution.

F. General

- i. Transparency: All GTBoard expenditures must be captured in annual reports.
- ii. Accountability: Suspend officials under investigation.



Our Conclusion and Recommendations

In our review of the petition report, it has highlighted systemic mismanagement at GTBoard, driven by the following illegal and unethical malpractices:

- a) Lack of procurement compliance in which GPPA rules were ignored.
- b) Political interference with the Minister overriding decisions.
- c) Conflict of interest reflecting nepotism and spousal influence.
- d) Financial mismanagement highlighting unauthorized payments and illegal waivers.

These malpractices have therefore severely undermined the independence, professionalism, and efficiency of the GTBoard, hence the overall development of the tourism sector.

EFSCRJ calls for the full implementation of these recommendations, failure of which constitute contempt of the National Assembly which is a criminal offense. All institutions and officials mentioned in the report must execute their responsibilities which have suffered severe delays already. Furthermore, we call for the protection of whistleblowers who are necessary and useful in the protection of public property and preventing harm to society. Specifically, we recommend,

1. The President of the Republic to take personal interest and commitment on this matter to ensure full implementation of the recommendations.
2. The National Assembly to summon all adversely mentioned institutions and officials to ensure full accountability.
3. The National Human Rights Commission to look into the wrongful termination of staff to ensure their rights are protected.
4. Civil society and political parties should engage with this report to ensure full implementation of its recommendations.
5. The media should provide adequate reporting and analysis of this report to ensure wider public awareness and understanding.

Once again, this matter validates our position that the fundamental challenge facing the governance and development of the Gambia has been the disregard of the rule of law, abuse of power and corruption by those put in charge of public office. The disregard of the rule of law, abuse of office and corruption are direct threats to the social and economic as well as the civil and political rights of citizens, hence pose serious obstacles to national development and peace and security, while undermining shared prosperity. We will continue to call for the total adherence to the principles, procedures and standards of transparency and accountability across the state.

2025 – The Year of Transparency and Accountability