



EFSCRJ

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING REPORT

**Police Conduct During GALA'S
First Anniversary
Commemoration
- 8th and 11th May 2026 -**



Armed PIU officers at Westfield on May 8

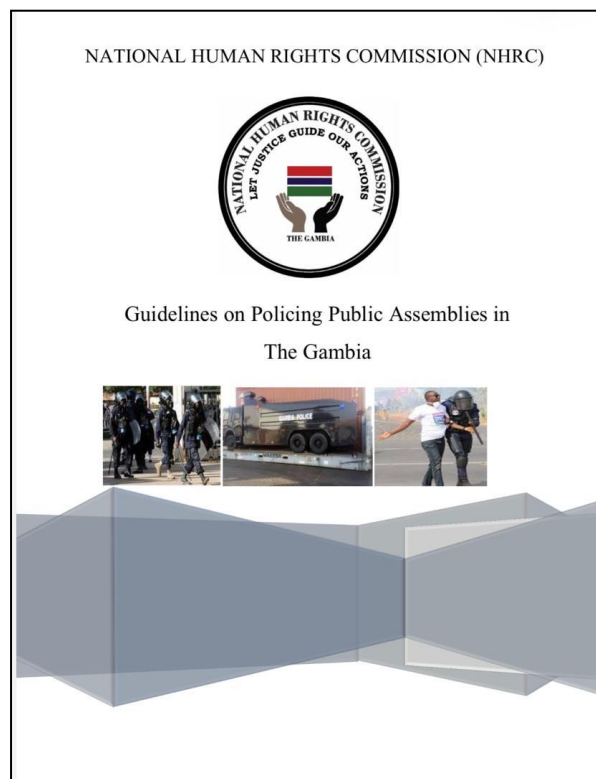
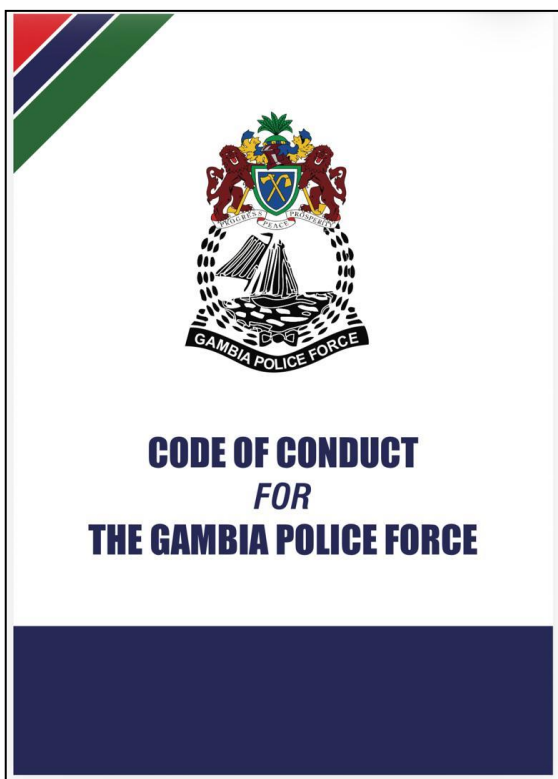
EFSCRJ
©May 2026

CONTENTS	PAGE
1. Introduction	1
2. Legal Basis for Police Conduct in Public Assemblies	2
3. Background to the GALA First Anniversary	3
4. Monitoring of Police Conduct	6
5. Failure to Enforce Human Rights and Professional Standards Within the Gambia Police Force (GPF)	15
6. Conclusions	16
7. Recommendations	18

1. Introduction

The Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice (EFSCRJ) is a human rights organization committed to monitoring and documenting the conduct of public institutions, particularly law enforcement agencies, as citizens exercise their constitutional rights and freedoms. The law places a clear obligation on law enforcement officers to respect, protect, and uphold the rights of citizens while ensuring that only reasonable, necessary, and proportionate force is employed in dealing with the public. The Gambia Police Force is further guided by the Constitution, the NHRC Guidelines for Policing Public Assemblies, the Police Code of Conduct¹, and international human rights standards.

This report documents and analyses the conduct of the Gambia Police Force during incidents surrounding the first anniversary commemoration of Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA) and the subsequent court proceedings between 8 and 11 May 2026. The report highlights the unlawful denial of access to a public venue, excessive and disproportionate use of force, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, cruel and degrading treatment which are acts amounting to torture, and broader violations of constitutional rights and democratic policing standards.



¹ Code of Conduct for the Gambia Police Force, Article 3 Use of Force, “Police officers may use force guided by law and consistent with the fundamental principles of, “Proportionality, Legality, Accountability and Necessity”.

2. Legal Basis for Police Conduct in Public Assemblies

The duty of the police in protecting human rights and policing public assemblies including the use of force are guided by several provisions in the Constitution, the Criminal Procedure Act, 2025, and the Criminal Offences Act 2025. The relevant provisions establish that law enforcement officers must act lawfully, protect human rights, avoid abuse, and use only reasonable, necessary, and proportionate force.

A. The 1997 Constitution

Section 17 – Fundamental Rights and Freedoms: This section imposes a constitutional duty on all organs and agencies of the state, including the police, to respect and protect human rights. It states that fundamental rights and freedoms “*shall be respected and upheld by all organs of the Executive and its agencies.*” This is the foundational constitutional obligation on law enforcement officers.

Section 18 – Protection of Right to Life: The right to life limits the use of force by state agents. Any use of force by law enforcement that results in death or serious injury must be strictly lawful, necessary, and proportionate.

Section 19 – Protection of Right to Personal Liberty: Protects citizens against arbitrary arrest and detention and requires lawful procedures during arrest and detention.

Section 21 – Protection from Inhuman Treatment: Prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This directly governs police conduct during arrest, detention, interrogation, and crowd control.

Section 24 – Protection of the Law and Fair Trial: Guarantees due process and lawful treatment of persons accused or arrested and ensures court proceedings are open to the public.

Section 25 – Freedom of Assembly and Association: Protects the right of citizens to assemble and associate peacefully. Law enforcement has a duty not merely to control assemblies but also to facilitate and protect peaceful assemblies.

B. Criminal Procedure Act, 2025

Several provisions of this law directly regulate police conduct during arrest and detention.

Section 8 – Mode of Arrest: Requires arrests to be carried out lawfully and properly.

Section 9 – Notification of Cause of Arrest and Rights of Suspect: Obliges police officers to inform a suspect of the reason for arrest and their rights. Section 19 of the Constitution sets a maximum of three hours within which a person should be informed of the reasons of his arrest and in the language he understands.

Section 14 – No Unnecessary Restraint: This is one of the clearest statutory expressions of the principle of proportionality. It prohibits the use of unnecessary restraint during arrest or detention. This means force used by law enforcement must be reasonable, necessary, and proportionate to the circumstances.

Section 21 – Humane Treatment of Arrested Person: Directly imposes a duty on law enforcement to treat arrested persons humanely.

Sections 57 – 60 – Preventive Action of the Police: These provisions empower police to prevent offences and protect public order, but the powers must be exercised within the law and in a manner consistent with constitutional rights.

Section 71 – Court to be Open to the Public: Reflects the broader principle of transparency and accountability in law enforcement and criminal justice administration.

C. Criminal Offences Act, 2025

Section 16 – Use of Force in Effecting Arrest: This is the principal statutory provision governing police use of force. It authorizes force only to the extent that it is reasonably necessary to effect an arrest. This provision embodies the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and reasonableness.

Section 17 – Defence of Person or Property: Permits force only where reasonably necessary in defence of persons or property. Excessive force is not protected.

Sections 179, 181, 184, 195 – 201: These provisions criminalize acts causing grievous harm, unlawful assault, and assaults by or against law enforcement officers, reinforcing that police conduct remains subject to criminal liability where force is unlawful or excessive.

D. Key Legal Principles Emerging from These Laws

Taken together, these laws establish that law enforcement officers have a constitutional and statutory duty to respect and protect human rights, must act lawfully and professionally, and may only use force where strictly necessary. For that matter, these laws guide law enforcement officers to ensure that the use of force is proportionate to the threat or resistance encountered. In any case, they must avoid torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and must treat arrested and detained persons humanely. It is for this reason that police officers remain individually accountable for unlawful or excessive use of force.

These provisions are also consistent with international standards such as the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Guidelines on Policing Assemblies in Africa.



PIU officers blockade the entrance to Kanifing Magistrate's Court on May 11 marking the first appearance of detained GALA members.

3. Background to the GALA First Anniversary

GALA is a civic and anti-corruption activist movement established in 2025 to demand transparency, accountability, and justice concerning the management and disposal of public assets, protection of human rights, the rule of law and defending public interest.

The movement emerged directly from the groundbreaking investigative report by [The Republic](#) titled “*The Assets of Gambia’s Former Dictator Go for a Song*,” written by Editor-in-Chief Mustapha K. Darboe and published on 30 April 2025². The report sparked widespread public outrage and national debate over the disposal of former dictator Yaya Jammeh’s assets. In response, members of GALA assembled at the Memorial Arch in Banjul to submit a petition to the Ministry of Justice demanding transparency of the sales. They were met with a violent police crackdown that resulted in the arrest of dozens of protesters. Rather than suppressing dissent, the crackdown intensified public anger and triggered further protests, which continued around the Westfield area over the following three days.

One year later, on 8 May 2026, GALA members planned a peaceful anniversary commemoration at the Westfield Youth Monument in Kanifing. On the morning of the event, as members gathered to prepare the venue ahead of the afternoon program, police officers arrived and demanded that they produce a police permit. Officers were also heard questioning whether GALA was a registered organization, despite the constitutional guarantee of freedom of assembly and association under Section 25(1)(d) and (e) respectively.

The Youth Monument is a public facility managed by the Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC), which routinely grants approval for events held within the premises without requiring police permits. GALA had duly secured approval from KMC for the use of the venue, and the event did not involve a procession or march beyond the facility to warrant a police permit.



Cover page of The Republic’s story on the sale and disposal of Jammeh assets

² The Republic, The assets of Gambia’s former dictator go for a song, [April 30, 2025](https://therepublic.gm/the-assets-of-gambias-former-dictator-go-for-a-song/3042), [Mustapha K. Darboe](#), <https://therepublic.gm/the-assets-of-gambias-former-dictator-go-for-a-song/3042>

4. Monitoring of Police Conduct

EFSCRJ was on the grounds from 8 to 11 May to observe the unfolding of events surrounding the commemoration and the court case and monitored the conduct of police officers. We have also monitored local and international media and social media platforms as well as followed other sources of information including from the Gambia Police Force, the National Human Rights Commission, CSOs, eyewitness accounts, and Gambian diaspora outlets.

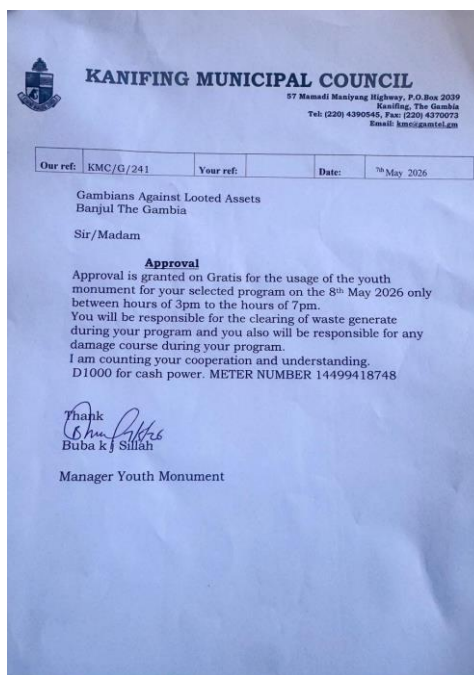
This report documents our observation and monitoring of the events, and the various stages and actions of police conduct which are analyzed against domestic, regional, and international law and other instruments on human rights. The aim of this report is to strengthen accountability, highlight gaps in policing methods and provide recommendations for non-recurrence of human rights violations and ensure adherence to the rule of law.

i. Denial of Access by the Police

Despite the lawful approval granted by KMC (see picture), police officers from the Kanifing region moved to block access to the venue and prevented the gathering from taking place, citing the absence of police authorization and questioning the registration status of GALA. GALA members maintained that they had fulfilled all lawful requirements for the use of the venue as required by KMC. Nevertheless, the police ordered the group to disperse and subsequently proceeded to arrest several members.

EFSCRJ observed that the denial of access to the Youth Monument lacked any clear legal basis and amounted to an arbitrary interference with the constitutional rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. The incident also raised serious concerns about selective targeting of GALA, particularly in light of the fact that the police have not prevented other groups from using the premises on grounds of lacking a police permit. EFSCRJ notes, for example, that the commemoration of the April 10 and 11 Student Massacre was held on 11 April 2026 at the same venue, jointly organized by Fantanka, WAVE, Activista, GALA, Team Gom Sa Bopa, and EFSCRJ³. The event proceeded without any requirement for a police permit.

Furthermore, EFSCRJ monitored public comments by the Mayor of Kanifing Municipality, Talib Ahmed



³ Askanwi Media, Five CSOs Commemorate 26 Years Since April 2000 Student Massacre, Demand Government Action, Press Release, 10 April 2026, <https://www.askanwi.com/news/five-csos-commemorate-26-years-since-april-2000-student-massacre-demand-government-action>

Bensouda, indicating that more than twenty events⁴ had already been held at the Youth Monument this year solely on the basis of KMC approval and without police permits. In light of the foregoing, EFSCRJ considers the denial of GALA access to the grounds to constitute discriminatory and targeted action by the police, inconsistent with the lawful powers, duties, and obligations of the agency under the Constitution and applicable human rights standards.

ii. Arrests

Fourteen GALA members and other youths were arrested on 8 May in two separate operations. Eleven individuals were initially arrested in the late morning to early afternoon, followed by the arrest of three others later in the afternoon. All detainees were first taken to Kairaba Police Station.



Alieu Bah being carried by armed PIU officers

The arrests were marked by excessive force, intimidation, humiliation, and a clear disregard for lawful policing standards. EFSCRJ observed that the conduct of the police violated the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and accountability that govern the policing of public assemblies and the use of force.

For example, in just one case, our monitoring indicated that the arrest of Alieu Bah, commonly known as “Immortal,” involved the use of force and humiliation, as he was physically lifted and carried by a group of police officers before being thrown into a waiting police vehicle. Video evidence also showed the arrests of Mozai Sissoho, Pato Jallow, and Maimuna Bah involving forceful pushing, grabbing, and dragging by officers. In the case of Pato Jallow, he was compelled to sit on the floor of the police pickup truck in a degrading manner.

iii. Arrest of Female Detainees

Particularly concerning were the arrests of female activists Kaddy Jadama and Maimuna Bah. Reports indicate that both women were arrested and physically handled by male police officers rather than female officers, raising serious concerns regarding bodily integrity, privacy, dignity, and the absence of gender-sensitive policing.



Maimuna Bah grabbed by male PIU officers

The failure to deploy female officers during the arrest and

⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/DYRxMagDFf9/>

initial detention of the women exposed them to unnecessary vulnerability, humiliation, and psychological distress. Accepted policing standards and human rights principles require that female detainees be handled, searched, and supervised by trained female officers.

Furthermore, while detained at Kanifing Police Station, Kaddy and Maimuna were made to sit across the station counter because the only available detention cell was already occupied by male detainees. The apparent lack of appropriate detention facilities and accommodation for female detainees further undermined the rights, dignity, and safety of the women and points to serious human rights and institutional failures within police detention practices.

iv. Excessive and Disproportionate Force

Video evidence and eyewitness accounts reviewed by EFSCRJ show that GALA members were peaceful, unarmed, and non-resistant at the time of arrest. Activists calmly asserted their constitutional rights and highlighted the unlawful nature of the police action even as they were being apprehended.

One of the most disturbing incidents involved activist Alieu Bah. According to EFSCRJ monitoring reports, police officers physically assaulted him, lifted and carried him before



forcefully throwing him into a police vehicle. This conduct constituted unnecessary, degrading, and disproportionate force against a peaceful civilian and violated the NHRC Guidelines for Policing Public Assemblies. The arrest of Muhammed Sillah similarly demonstrated the unlawful and excessive nature of the police operation. Video footage showed that he was peaceful and posed no threat to public order or officer safety.

The NHRC Guidelines on Policing Public Assemblies in the Gambia require police officers to facilitate and protect peaceful assemblies while ensuring that any restrictions imposed are lawful, necessary, proportionate, non-discriminatory, and grounded in clear legal authority. The Guidelines further require police to prioritize communication, negotiation, de-escalation, and minimum use of force, while prohibiting arbitrary arrests, excessive force, intimidation, and the dispersal of assemblies merely for technical or administrative reasons.

In the case of GALA's first anniversary commemoration, EFSCRJ observed conduct by police officers that appeared inconsistent with these standards. The blocking of access to the venue despite KMC approval, the insistence on a police permit as a basis to prevent the gathering, the use of force during arrests, the handling of female detainees by male officers, and the arrest of participants engaged in a peaceful assembly raised serious concerns regarding compliance with the constitutional right to freedom of assembly and the operational obligations imposed on the police under the Guidelines, the Police Code of Conduct, and broader regional and international human rights standards.

v. Detention

Fourteen people were detained – 13 at Kairaba and 3 at Kotu police stations⁵. The detention conditions at these Police Stations were deplorable, inhumane, degrading, and inconsistent with both domestic and international standards governing the treatment of detainees.

a. Kairaba Police Station

Eleven detainees were held at Kairaba Police Station in filthy, overcrowded cells lacking beds, adequate sanitation, ventilation, and proper sleeping arrangements. Detainees reported overpowering stench from toilet facilities, unsafe conditions, and severe discomfort.

The station itself was heavily militarized, with armed riot police officers barricading the entrance and restricting access to detainees. Lawyers, family members, supporters, and even human rights defenders faced severe restrictions in accessing those detained. The activists detained at Kairaba Police Station were:

1. **Hakeem Touray** (National Coordinator)
2. **Omar Saibou Camara** (GALA Spokesperson)
3. **Abdoulie T. Bah** (GALA National Organizing Secretary)
4. **Kemesseng Sanneh** (GALA Head of Media and Communication)
5. **Omar Sanyang** (GALA Secretary General)
6. **Alieu Bah** (also known as Alieu Immortal Bah)
7. **Ebrima Janha** (also known as Ebrima Genius Janha)
8. **Alieu Sarr** (GALA Member)
9. **Muhammed Sillah** (GALA Member)
10. **Mamadou Jallow** (GALA Member)
11. **Ebrima Kaira** (GALA Member)

b. Kotu Police Station

Conditions at Kotu Police Station were reportedly worse. The cells were infested with bedbugs and cockroaches, poorly ventilated, and lacked proper sanitation facilities. Those detained at Kotu were:

1. **Fallou Gallas Ceesay** (GALA Program/Admin Officer)
2. **Kaddy Jadama** (GALA Logistics Officer)
3. **Maimuna A. Bah** (GALA Member)



Maimuna and Kaddy

⁵ Askanwi Media, Fourteen GALA Activists Charged With Unlawful Assembly & Common Nuisance, 13 May 2026, <https://www.askanwi.com/news/over-a-dozen-gala-activists-charged-with-unlawful-assembly-and-public-nuisance>

c. Female Detainees: Kaddy Jadama and Maimuna Bah

The treatment of female detainees was especially alarming. Kaddy Jadama reportedly spent the entire detention period on May 8 seated on a chair because there was no available space within the female detention cell. In the evening of the same day, May 8, both Kaddy and Maimuna together with Gallas Fallou Ceesay were transferred to Kotu police station apparently because of lack of space, especially for female detainees.

Both detention facilities lacked adequate arrangements for women, including sanitary materials, hygiene products, and privacy. The detention of women under such conditions constituted degrading and inhuman treatment and reflected blatant disregard for human dignity and gender-sensitive detention standards.

vi. Torture

The treatment of GALA members during arrest and detention raises serious concerns under the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act, 2020.

Section 3 of the Act defines torture as any act or omission by which severe physical or mental pain or suffering is intentionally inflicted upon a person by or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official for purposes including punishment, intimidation, coercion, or suppression.

The Act recognizes both physical and psychological torture, including systematic beatings, forced stressful body positions, denial of sleep, degrading treatment, intimidation, incommunicado detention, and confinement in inhumane conditions.

a. Physical Torture and Ill-Treatment

The physical assault and forceful handling of Alieu Bah by police officers constituted physical abuse and degrading treatment. The unnecessary force used against other activists and peaceful civilians further violated lawful policing standards and the prohibition against torture and cruel treatment. The detention conditions themselves such as overcrowded filthy cells, insect infestation, lack of beds, inadequate sanitation, and prolonged exposure to unhygienic conditions, caused severe physical suffering and discomfort.

b. Mental and Psychological Torture

The treatment of female detainees, particularly the denial of adequate sanitary support and detention in unsuitable conditions, amounted to degrading and inhuman treatment. EFSCRJ received information that Maimuna Bah, who was menstruating at the time of her detention, was not provided with any sanitary materials by the police and only received such support after fellow GALA members procured the materials for her.

The detention conditions generally were deeply concerning. Detainees were reportedly held in filthy, overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and unhygienic cells that were unsuitable for human

habitation. Such conditions, coupled with severe and unnecessary restrictions on access to family members, lawyers, and colleagues, amounted to both physical and psychological abuse. During the period of detention, access by relatives, legal representatives, and colleagues was tightly restricted without reasonable justification. Furthermore, the unusually heavy security presence at Kairaba Police Station created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, despite the fact that the detainees were neither terrorists, armed insurgents, nor persons accused of serious violent crimes.

Section 4 of the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act expressly provides that there shall be no derogation from the right to freedom from torture under any circumstances, including political instability or a public emergency. Similarly, Article 5 of the Code of Conduct for Police Officers prohibits torture and all forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Guideline 23 of the NHRC Guidelines on Policing Public Assemblies further requires that detention during assemblies comply with constitutional safeguards, including the presumption of innocence, the right to bail, access to lawyers, family members, and medical care, as well as the absolute prohibition of torture and degrading treatment. The conduct and conditions observed in this case raise serious concerns regarding compliance with these legal and human rights obligations.

vii. Militarized Deployment and Appearance of Police Officers

EFSCRJ observed the deployment of heavily armed police officers in full riot gear, including officers carrying rifles, while several others concealed their identities with face masks during the crackdown on the GALA anniversary gathering. We express grave concern over this militarized and intimidating police deployment against civilians engaged in a peaceful assembly.

a. Deployment of Armed Officers

Public assemblies in the Gambia are civilian activities involving unarmed citizens exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of assembly and association. Despite this, the police deployed heavily armed riot officers carrying rifles and supported by a water cannon truck at Kairaba Police Station during the detention of GALA members. Similarly, on 11 May, the day of the detainees' court appearance, there was a significant and heavily armed police presence at the Kanifing Magistrates' Court.



At no point was there any indication of rioting, armed violence, or a threat of such magnitude as to justify the visible deployment of officers armed with assault rifles and presumed live ammunition. The deployment was therefore unnecessary, intimidating, and grossly disproportionate to the circumstances.

Guideline 21.1.2 of the NHRC Guidelines on Policing Public Assemblies clearly states that the use of force is exceptional and that police officers must, as far as possible, employ non-

violent means before resorting to force. The conspicuous display of heavily armed officers unnecessarily escalated tensions, generated fear and anxiety among civilians, and projected an atmosphere of coercion rather than public protection and reassurance.

The Gambia’s history offers painful reminders of the tragic consequences of deploying armed security personnel against civilians engaged in public assemblies. The April 2000 student massacre and the Faraba Banta shootings in 2018 remain stark examples of the grave dangers associated with militarized policing responses to civilian protests and demonstrations. These incidents underscore the urgent need for rights-based, civilian-oriented policing grounded in legality, restraint, accountability, and respect for human rights.

b. Use of Face Masks

EFSCRJ has also observed the widespread use of face masks by police officers engaged in public order operations. We find it deeply troubling that many riot police officers concealed their identities during the arrests of GALA members and throughout subsequent court proceedings.



PIU officers in commando-like face masks



International human rights and policing standards require law enforcement officers involved in public order management to remain clearly identifiable at all times in order to guarantee transparency, accountability, and public trust. The concealment of identity by officers undermines these principles, obstructs accountability for misconduct, and creates conditions that foster abuse, fear, and impunity. Citizens who are subjected to unlawful force or abuse are effectively denied the ability to identify perpetrators for purposes of complaints, investigations, or legal redress.

The absence of body cameras and visible name identification tags further weakens oversight and accountability mechanisms within police operations. Guideline 14 of the NHRC Guidelines on Policing Public Assemblies expressly provides that police officers deployed during assemblies must be visibly identifiable, avoid intimidating deployments, deploy only the minimum number

of officers necessary, and refrain from provocative tactics. The use of commando-style face masks directly undermines these requirements by concealing officer identities, escalating fear and intimidation, and frustrating efforts at de-escalation, transparency, and accountability.

viii. Charges

All fourteen GALA members arrested were subsequently charged with unlawful assembly and common nuisance contrary to the Criminal Offences Act. EFSCRJ considers these charges baseless, politically motivated, and intended to intimidate, punish, and silence civic activism and public dissent.

In the context of the use of the Youth Monument, the planned anniversary commemoration was a lawful gathering for which the organizers had already obtained approval from the Kanifing Municipal Council. Importantly, the event had not even commenced at the time the arrests were carried out. Consequently, there was no factual basis upon which the gathering could reasonably be said to have caused public nuisance or constituted an unlawful assembly. EFSCRJ observed no evidence that GALA members endangered public safety, obstructed traffic, interfered with pedestrians, disrupted nearby businesses or offices, or otherwise caused annoyance, inconvenience, or disorder to the public.

In light of these facts, EFSCRJ finds the charges to be devoid of legal merit and inconsistent with constitutional protections for freedom of assembly and association. The prosecution of the detainees further reinforces our longstanding concern regarding the continuing weaponization of laws and state institutions to suppress civic engagement, infringe on the rights of citizens, and deter peaceful public participation in governance and accountability processes.

ix. Denial of Public Access to Court Proceedings

Section 24(2) of the Constitution expressly requires court proceedings to be conducted in public, thereby guaranteeing the principle of open justice. Similarly, Section 71 of the Criminal Procedure Act provides that courts should be open to the public, reflecting the broader constitutional principles of transparency, accountability, and public oversight in the administration of justice and law enforcement. Arbitrary restrictions on access to court proceedings therefore undermine and violate these constitutional and statutory guarantees.

At the Kanifing Magistrates' Court, EFSCRJ observed heavily armed police officers blocking roads leading to the court premises. There was no indication that these measures had been ordered or requested by the court itself, which is an independent organ of the state. Armed officers, some wearing face masks, barricaded both ends of the street stretching from the KMC offices on one side to the NAWEC offices on the other, effectively sealing off the court area located between them. Police officers exercised discretionary control over who could access the court premises, irrespective of the person's role or legitimate purpose. EFSCRJ observed members of the public, including lawyers, journalists, GALA members and supporters, and other citizens, being compelled to seek permission from stationed officers before entering the court area.

While maintaining security around court premises may be legitimate in appropriate circumstances, security measures must not be transformed into tools for restricting public access to judicial proceedings. Our observation indicates that the deployment of heavily armed PIU officers functioned less as a genuine security measure and more as an instrument for limiting public access and intimidating observers, despite the absence of any apparent threat or judicial directive necessitating such extraordinary restrictions.

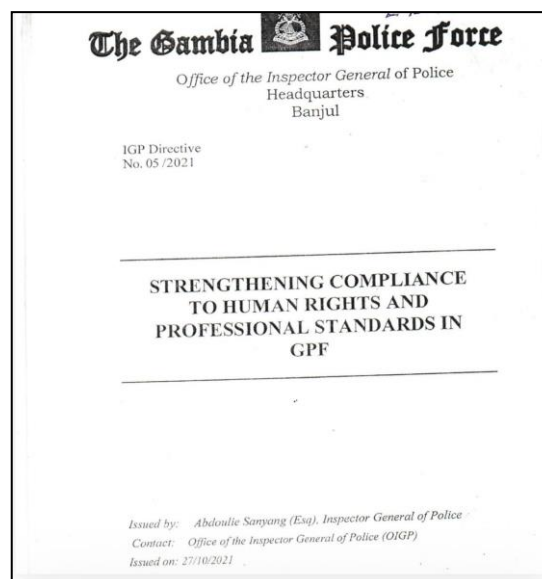


PIU officers stationed by the KMC gates barring direct and unfettered access to the courthouse

5. Failure to Enforce Human Rights and Professional Standards Within the Gambia Police Force (GPF)

The GPF Human Rights and Professional Standards Directive (2021) establishes internal accountability and oversight mechanisms aimed at ensuring police compliance with human rights standards and professional conduct. The Directive (see picture) created the Human Rights and Professional Standards (HRPS) Unit and issued by the Inspector General of Police is to specifically monitor police conduct, address human rights violations, and investigate professional misconduct within the police service. Under the Directive, the HRPS Unit is mandated to monitor compliance with human rights standards, inspect police stations and detention facilities, investigate abuses and misconduct by officers, and ensure adherence to lawful policing practices.

The Directive further grants the HRPS Unit powers to summon police officers, review detention practices, inspect official records, and investigate allegations of torture, unlawful arrests, degrading treatment, and other forms of abuse. It also places responsibility on senior police commanders to promote respect for human rights within their commands, prevent violations, and report or address abuses committed by subordinate officers. Importantly, the Directive specifically requires active monitoring of unlawful arrests, detention beyond the constitutional 72-hour limit, detention conditions, and the treatment of detainees while in police custody.



In light of the events surrounding the GALA's First Anniversary Commemoration, EFSCRJ is deeply concerned that the standards and obligations contained in the Human Rights and Professional Standards Directive were either ignored or inadequately enforced. The allegations and observations of arbitrary arrests, excessive use of force, degrading detention conditions, restrictions on access to lawyers and family members, and the treatment of female detainees point to significant failures in internal oversight, accountability, and command responsibility within the Gambia Police Force. These incidents highlight the urgent need to strengthen the independence, visibility, effectiveness, and enforcement capacity of the HRPS Unit to ensure genuine accountability and rights-based policing in the Gambia.

During the period of the arrests and detention, EFSCRJ made repeated and urgent attempts to contact the GPF Human Rights and Professional Standards Unit and its officers, but these efforts proved unsuccessful. We have also not observed any indication that the Unit undertook any intervention during the period to monitor the situation, ensure compliance with human rights standards, or safeguard the rights and welfare of detainees within police custody. The apparent absence of the Unit at such a critical moment raises serious concerns about its effectiveness, responsiveness, visibility, and operational independence in fulfilling its mandate to prevent abuses, monitor police conduct, and ensure accountability within the Gambia Police Force.

6. Conclusions

The actions of the Gambia Police Force between 8 and 11 May 2026 during the GALA First Anniversary Commemoration constitute serious violations of the Constitution, domestic laws, democratic policing standards, and the Gambia's regional and international human rights obligations. The arbitrary denial of access to a lawfully approved public venue, the unlawful arrests, the use of excessive and degrading force, the poor detention conditions, the deployment of masked and heavily armed officers, and the restrictions placed on public access to court proceedings collectively demonstrate abuse of power and a troubling erosion of civic space in the Gambia.

The Youth Monument is a public facility under the management of the Kanifing Municipal Council, and GALA had lawfully obtained approval from the competent authority responsible for the venue. There was no lawful basis requiring an additional police permit for a peaceful gathering within the premises. The police therefore acted outside their lawful authority by denying access to the venue and disrupting the planned commemoration. Section 25 of the Constitution guarantees the rights to freedom of assembly and association, and the gathering posed no threat to public order, public safety, or national security. The arrests were therefore arbitrary from the outset and amounted to unlawful interference with constitutionally protected rights and freedoms.

The conduct of the police during the arrests and detention further violated both the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act and internationally recognized human rights standards prohibiting torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Particularly disturbing were the treatment and conditions faced by detainees, especially female detainees, including the absence of gender-sensitive handling, inadequate sanitary support, unsuitable detention conditions, and restrictions on access to family members and lawyers. The Act expressly provides that no superior order, political instability, or public emergency can justify torture or degrading treatment.

Equally concerning was the militarized deployment of police officers armed with rifles, supported by water cannon vehicles, and the widespread use of face masks by officers during public order operations and court proceedings. These tactics were unnecessary, intimidating, and disproportionate given the peaceful and civilian nature of the gathering. Rather than promoting public safety and confidence, the deployment created fear, heightened tension, undermined accountability, and projected coercion and intimidation. The restriction of public access to the Kanifing Magistrates' Court further violated the constitutional principle of open justice and undermined transparency in the administration of justice.

Taken together, these incidents reflect a disturbing pattern of shrinking civic space, intimidation of activists, selective and discriminatory policing, and the continuing weaponization of laws and institutions against citizens exercising their constitutional rights. Ten years after Gambians declared "*Never Again*" following the end of dictatorship, these events demonstrate the continued absence of meaningful security sector reform and the failure to institutionalize rights-based and democratic policing practices. Rather than protecting and facilitating the constitutional rights of citizens, the police interfered with a peaceful civic activity and subjected citizens to

intimidation, arbitrary detention, degrading treatment, and unlawful prosecution. The conduct of the police throughout the GALA anniversary events was unlawful, unconstitutional, disproportionate, and fundamentally inconsistent with democratic policing standards and the rule of law.

GalaNize

ARRESTED FOR COMMEMORATING

YEAR OF THE PEOPLE'S ACTION
AGAINST THEIR MANIPULATIONS, THEFT AND INJUSTICE
A YEAR EXPOSING THE MONSTER IN THEM.

WE MOVE TO THE COURTS.
WE SHOW UP. WE STAND FIRM.

Today | 9AM | KANIFING MAGISTRATE COURTS

Justice must be seen. The people will be present

7. Recommendations

To the Inspector General of Police

1. Immediately and unconditionally withdraw all charges against GALA members.
2. Cease all acts of intimidation, unlawful arrest, excessive force, and human rights violations and selective application of the law against peaceful citizens.
3. End the deployment of masked and heavily armed officers at peaceful public assemblies except where there is a clear and imminent threat of armed violence.
4. Ensure that officers involved in public order operations remain clearly identifiable at all times.
5. Adopt body cameras during public order operations to strengthen transparency and accountability.
6. Ensure that female detainees are handled by female officers and held in facilities that meet gender-sensitive detention standards.

To the IGP and the Human Rights and Professional Standards Unit

1. **Strengthen the Independence and Operational Capacity of the HRPS Unit**
The Gambia Police Force should strengthen the institutional independence, staffing, logistics, and operational capacity of the Human Rights and Professional Standards Unit to enable it to conduct prompt, impartial, and effective investigations into allegations of police misconduct and human rights violations without interference or undue influence from police command structures.
2. **Undertake an Independent Investigation into the GALA Operations**
The HRPS Unit should immediately launch a thorough and transparent investigation into the conduct of police officers involved in the GALA First Anniversary operations, including allegations of unlawful arrests, excessive use of force, degrading treatment, unlawful restrictions on court access, and violations of the rights of female detainees, with findings and disciplinary actions made public.
3. **Establish Mandatory Human Rights Compliance and Monitoring Mechanisms**
The HRPS Unit should institute regular monitoring and inspection of police stations, detention facilities, and public order operations, including mandatory human rights compliance assessments during assemblies and protests, with particular attention to arrest procedures, detention conditions, gender-sensitive policing, and the identification of officers during operations.
4. **Enhance Accountability, Transparency, and Public Complaints Mechanisms**
The Gambia Police Force should establish accessible and transparent public complaints procedures under the HRPS Unit, including confidential reporting channels, protection for complainants and whistleblowers, regular publication of reports on police misconduct investigations, and mandatory use of visible identification and body cameras for officers engaged in public order management operations.

To the Attorney General and Minister of Justice

7. Initiate an independent investigation into the police operation against GALA and hold all responsible officers accountable.
8. Ensure full compliance with constitutional rights and obligations under the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act.
9. Support reforms to align public order policing with democratic and human rights standards.

To the National Human Rights Commission

10. Continue monitoring the situation and publish findings and recommendations regarding violations committed during the GALA anniversary events.
11. Pursue accountability measures where evidence of torture, degrading treatment, or abuse of power exists.
12. During public assemblies, provide regular updates to the public on the situation.

To the Gambia Bar Association and Civil Society

12. Provide legal support to victims seeking redress for unlawful arrest, detention, torture, and human rights violations.
13. Advocate for stronger legal and institutional safeguards against abuse of power and shrinking civic space.

To the Government of the Gambia

14. Accelerate comprehensive security sector reforms consistent with the objectives of transitional justice and the national commitment to “*Never Again.*”
15. Guarantee and protect the constitutional rights to freedom of assembly, association, expression, and participation without intimidation or repression.
16. Ensure that no citizen is subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment under any circumstances.
17. Cease all acts of interference and the politicization and weaponization of public institutions especially the police by protecting their independence, professionalism, and integrity in line with the rule of law.

EFSCRJ stands ready to support all lawful efforts aimed at ensuring accountability, justice, democratic governance, and the protection of human rights.

The End

Disclaimer: *All pictures are obtained free of charge from media and social media platforms and duly recognized and accredited to their original sources.*

Contact Us

**Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice
Samasa House
Kerr Serign West Coast Region, The Gambia**

Tel: (220) 9995093 / 7973611 / 3730797 / 7434610

Email: efscrj@proton.me / info@efscrj.org

Web: www.efscrj.org

X: @EFSCRJ

Facebook: Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice

LinkedIn: Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice

EFSCRJ Human Rights Hotlines: +220 7434610 / +220 3730797

WhatsApp Line: +220 7434610

#Report: Violations – Corruption – SGBV – Abuse

EEFSCRJ Motto:

“Transparency and Accountability are the Foundations of Justice.”

