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EFSCRJ Election Watch

20th October 2026

EFSCRJ Calls on President Barrow To Withdraw Threats Against Hon. Bah and Respect Citizens' Right to Peaceful Protest

EFSCRJ Election Watch strongly condemns the threatening remarks directed by President Adama Barrow at the National Assembly Member for Banjul North, Hon. Modou Lamin Biram Bah, during a meeting in Banjul on 19 October 2026. Such rhetoric is incompatible with the President's constitutional responsibilities, undermines democratic participation, and risks encouraging repression as the country approaches the December presidential election.

Referring to the September protests against prolonged electricity blackouts, which began in Banjul and spread to other communities in the Greater Banjul Area and West Coast Region, President Barrow accused Hon. Bah of seeking to destabilize the country by leading protesters. He invoked the shooting of protesters under former dictator Yahya Jammeh to suggest that Hon. Bah and other demonstrators owed their safety to his personal tolerance. He further claimed that protests do not take place outside State House and warned Hon. Bah of consequences he would remember until his death should such protests recur.

Citizens' safety cannot depend on presidential tolerance. It is protected by law. Refraining from shooting peaceful protesters is a binding obligation of the State, not an act of generosity for which citizens should be grateful. The President has no authority to threaten punishment outside the law, and disagreement with his government does not make a citizen an enemy of the country.

Section 25(1)(d) of the Constitution guarantees the right to assemble and demonstrate peacefully and without arms. Although section 25(4) allows reasonable restrictions prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society, those restrictions cannot legitimately be used to extinguish the right or shield public officials from accountability.

There is no general prohibition in the law that makes a peaceful protest unlawful merely because it takes place outside a public institution. State House's status does not, by itself, extinguish constitutional rights in the surrounding public space. Applicable rules concerning processions, loudspeakers, access, and security must be distinguished from a blanket ban.

Equally, section 59 of the Criminal Offences Act 2025, concerning watching and besetting premises, addresses specified conduct intended to prevent or compel another person's lawful activities. It should not be treated as automatically criminalizing every peaceful gathering outside an institution. EFSCRJ supports peaceful protest and rejects violence, threats, and destruction of property. Where an individual is reasonably suspected of an offence, the response must follow lawful investigation and due process.

The President's invocation of Jammeh's brutality is particularly reprehensible. The killing of student demonstrators in April 2000 and the torture and killing of Solo Sandeng following the April 2016 electoral reform protest represent grave abuses that must never become benchmarks for acceptable presidential conduct. Those responsible for repression provide lessons in accountability, not models of leadership.

The democratic promise of "*Never Again*" requires a decisive rejection of that legacy. President Barrow should reassure citizens that the security services will protect their rights.

His remarks instead risk being understood as permission to intimidate protesters and political opponents.

EFSCRJ also considers the attack on Hon. Bah part of a troubling pattern observed during the ongoing tour. Our monitoring has recorded attacks on opposition figures and local government leaders, including Kanifing Municipal Council Mayor and UNITE Party leader Talib Ahmed Bensouda, Brikama Area Council Chairperson Yankuba Darboe, UDP leader Ousainou Darboe, and opposition parliamentarians. We are equally concerned by instances in which citizens expressing grievances or differing opinions have faced ridicule or hostile responses from the President and ministers.

The President and his associates are entitled to criticize political opponents. That freedom carries responsibilities, especially when exercised through the authority and resources of the State. Political disagreement must not descend into disinformation, hate speech, ethnic hostility, threats, or rhetoric that exposes others to violence. Public officials must respect the lawful mandates of elected councils and parliamentarians, including those controlled by opposition parties.

Section 222(15) requires the President to undertake nationwide tours to familiarize himself with prevailing conditions and the effects of government policies. Turning this publicly funded exercise into a platform for intimidation and campaigning for another term subverts its constitutional purpose and deepens the unfair advantages of incumbency. Citizens attending these meetings must be able to speak honestly about government performance without fear of humiliation or retaliation.

EFSCRJ therefore calls on President Barrow to:

1. **Withdraw his threats against Hon. Bah and apologize** to him and the affected citizens.
2. **Publicly affirm the right to peaceful protest** and make clear that no security officer or political supporter should interpret his remarks as authorization to intimidate or harm anyone.
3. **Restore the tour to its constitutional purpose**, allowing citizens to express grievances freely and requiring ministers and other speakers to respect democratic standards.
4. **Address the electricity crisis through transparent reporting and measurable action**, including public updates on commitments, expenditure, and improvements in supply.

We further urge the National Assembly, NHRC, IEC and Inter-Party Committee to address these remarks within their respective mandates.

Demanding electricity is not an attempt to destabilize the country. Holding leaders accountable is an exercise of citizenship. The President's duty is to listen, respond and uphold the law.

2026 – The Year of Empowerment: Empowered Citizens. Accountable Leadership