



**Gambia-Helfernetz**

# **Statement of German supporters of Gambian refugees in Germany**

Stuttgart, Germany  
June 1, 2019

**Intended for the President of the Republic of The  
Gambia;**

**Submitted for the attention of the Vice-President, the  
Ministers and the Speaker of the National Assembly of  
the Republic of The Gambia;**

**Submitted for the attention of the media and the  
people of The Gambia.**

**His Excellency  
Mr. Adama Barrow,  
President of the Republic Of The Gambia  
State House,  
Banjul.  
The Gambia, West Africa.**

**1<sup>st</sup> June, 2019.**

Your Excellency,

**Statement of German supporters  
of Gambian refugees in Germany**

It's with great respect that we, the undersigned, address this statement of concern to you in your capacity as the President of the Republic of The Gambia. We've decided to turn to you on the issue of Gambian migrants / refugees in Germany and we would be very grateful if you could grant this statement a worthy attention.

We thought it imperative to draft this statement of concern because of a problem that affects both the Republic of The Gambia and Germany, specifically the deportation of Gambian nationals from Germany. We would like to bring to your attention the views of those in Germany who work with, support and employ Gambians in Germany.

We comprise the Refugee Council Baden-Württemberg, a non-profit organization that advises refugees and advocates for their rights; the 'Gambia Helfernetz' (Gambia Helpers Network), an information platform for full-time and honorary supporters of Gambian refugees with over 500 participants; employers and other private individuals who are concerned about refugee issues.

We observe with great concern that the German authorities have deported more than 100 Gambian refugees to The Gambia between November 2018 and March 2019. We are worried that German politicians are determine to send back at least another 2400 Gambians. This does not mean that only criminals will be deported to The Gambia, as it is wrongly assumed and claimed. People are also deported who have been living in Germany for several years, they have a steady job, earn their own living and pay taxes to the German State. They learned the difficult German language and went to schools. They do good work in German companies, they successfully play in German football clubs, get involved in sports and cultural clubs and have German friends. Most of them did not get into conflict with the law and were not to be blamed for anything. Even after the Gambian government placed moratorium on deportation of Gambian migrants following the last mass deportation of Gambian refugees from Germany through chartered flights, at least 12 people were reported deported to The Gambia through other means.

You will find a list of examples in the appendix to this statement. These people are personally acquainted with members and participants of our organizations. Many of these Gambians were picked up by the police from the factories where they worked and schools, put on a plane and deported to The Gambia. Some of these people had to leave their children behind in Germany, some were about to get married. And also good relations and friendship between Gambians and Germans have been destroyed as a result of these unexpected mass deportations.

Despite The Gambia being a tiny West African, its name became more popular here in Europe especially Germany due to the high presence of its citizens who sought refuge here from 2015 onwards. Through the Gambian refugees we learned about the reign of terror of former president Yahya Jammeh; about poverty; and the difficult living conditions in your country. We have met people who have courageously left their country to help their country and their families, and who tell with pride and love about their people and their homeland. Every Gambian is a representative of his/her country. Some have not taken this role seriously. But many have won the hearts of Germans because we



have met friendly, hard-working and highly motivated people. They built bridges through which we got to know and understand Africa's problems better.

It is worth mentioning that several of the members and participants of our organizations have visited your country in the meantime. We especially appreciate the peaceful co-existence and the friendliness that characterize The Gambia. We see the enormous challenges of training all your youthful population and offering them employment and a good future in The Gambia. Some of us still have contacts with some deportees and we further realized that people who were having a good livelihood in Germany are now faced with nothing in Gambia and join the large number of unemployed young people without very good future prospects.

The acceleration of deportations in recent months has led many Gambians in Germany to live in fear. This is because, it can affect anyone, and no one knows who is next. Some go into hiding in order not to be deported, and sometimes we don't know whether they are well. Even the companies that employ Gambians live with the fear that a Gambian employee may not come to work overnight or can even be arrested in the company like a criminal to be deported back to the Gambia. Despite the fact that these Gambian employees are often highly motivated and work to the satisfaction of their bosses and colleagues and the companies urgently need these employees. The German economy is currently very strong and cannot find enough employees in some industries because there are far fewer young people and young professionals in Germany than in other countries, and German companies will continue to depend on recruiting employees from non-EU countries.

The German politicians who are now pushing for deportations pretend to have no other choice. However, we know that it would be possible, in accordance with our laws, to allow hard-working and motivated employees in the companies and well-integrated refugees to stay in our country, even if their application for asylum was rejected. This is already

the case for refugees who are undergoing vocational training. They are not deported.

We know that the strong supporters of deportations among German politicians are particularly concerned about the interests of rich Germany and Europe. The poorer countries of Africa do not have them in mind. This is the only way to explain why in 2016, before Yahya Jammeh's election defeat, when nobody expected that the dictator would have to vacate his place, the Minister of the Interior of Baden-Württemberg, Mr. Thomas Strobl, suggested for Gambia to be declared a "safe country of origin". "Safe country of origin" means that in this country no one is persecuted by the state and the state protects them from all other persecutions. The German state then assumes that the observance of human rights is guaranteed and that applicants for asylum can be deported without hesitation. This minister, who is still responsible today for the deportation of Gambians, completely ignored the torture and the trouble that many missing and persecuted persons in The Gambia continue to face.

We would like to emphasise that we want nothing more than for the Gambian youth to have a future in The Gambia. We are not happy to see people who took the dangerous road (the backway) and could have died in the desert, or were abused in Libyan prisons and camps, and risked their lives in the Mediterranean Sea.

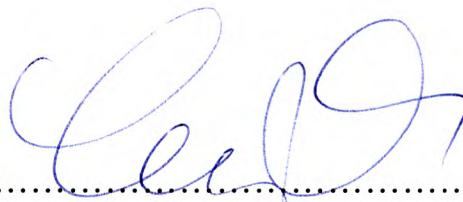
For this, however, the countries in Europe must assume a responsibility towards the poorer countries in the world. With The Gambian situation, we would be happy to see German taking responsibility in handling the complicated deportation issue wisely to ensure that they don't overload Gambia with a lot of deportees that could later pose a threat to the prevailing peace and stability in that country. They must ensure that deportations do not lead to social conflicts and instability in countries such as The Gambia with a young and unstable democracy. We know that even the returnees from Libya pose enormous challenges to the IOM which can hardly be overcome at the moment. In our view, the deportations from Germany only aggravate the situation.



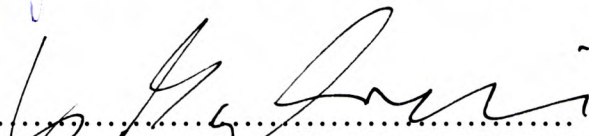
We would like to ask you once again, with all due respect, to take note of our point of view. We are well aware that the Republic of The Gambia must make concessions to the European Union and to Germany in order to receive aid from the EU. But just as our politicians have room for maneuver, perhaps the Gambian representatives, politicians and authorities also have the opportunity to influence certain procedures.

We assure you that we have the utmost respect for the Gambian representatives and institutions and their decisions, and we would be very pleased if our statement could meet your kind considerations. We would also be pleased if you could find good ways to solve the problems for The Gambia, the Gambian population, the Gambian refugees in Germany, but also for us the full-time and honorary helpers and supporters of Gambians and the German companies that employ Gambian refugees.

**Yours Faithfully,**



.....  
Lucia Braß, 1st Chairwoman of the Refugee Council of Baden-Württemberg



.....  
Birgit Hummler, Kay Bochmann-Riess, Coordinators of the Gambia helper network

**CC:**

**HE The Vice President,  
Office of the Vice President, Banjul, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Banjul, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Interior (MOI), Bertil Harding Highway, Kotu, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS), Banjul, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Information, Communication and Infrastructure (MOICI), MDI Road,  
GRTS Building, Kanifing, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Trade, Industries and Employment (MOTIE),  
Banjul, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General Chambers (MOJ+AG), Marina Parade,  
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**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science & Technology (MOHERST),  
Kotu, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Minister,  
Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MOBSE), Banjul, Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Speaker,  
National Assembly, Banjul, Republic of The Gambia**

## **The senders and bearers of the statement**

The "Flüchtlingsrat Baden-Württemberg" e. V. is a non-profit organisation that advises refugees and campaigns for their rights. It supports local work for refugees by providing comprehensive information on the social and legal situation in Baden-Württemberg, on refugee policy and on the situation in the countries of origin. Through targeted public relations work and discussions with politicians and social groups, the Refugee Council works for the rights of refugees and for a humane refugee policy in Baden-Württemberg. There are refugee councils in Germany in all federal states.

The "Gambia-Helfernetz" is an information platform for full-time and volunteer supporters of Gambian refugees with over 500 participants, mainly from the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. The network especially monitors the situation of Gambians in Germany, informs Gambian refugees and their supporters about their rights and informs about the situation in The Gambia.

Both organizations are based in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, in the south-west of Germany. The vast majority of Gambians live in this federal state of Germany - more than 11,000 Gambian citizens. Migrants from The Gambia were mainly accommodated in this federal state for administrative reasons. Apart from a few exceptions, all those who have been deported to The Gambia in recent months have been living in this state.

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## **Deportations of Gambians, as at 1 April 2019**

The deportations listed were reported to the Gambia Helper Network by full-time and volunteer refugee supporters. The list is therefore not exhaustive. Gambians who were deported but had no contact with the helpers could not be registered. All information, for example on employment, cooperation in identity verification and delinquency, was verified by the helpers as far as possible.

### **General situation:**

- From November 2018 until the end of February 2019 there were monthly cumulative deportations. About 15 to 20 people were returned to The Gambia on charter flights.
- Individual deportations also took place until the end of March 2019. In general, these deportations are handled by regular flights via Frankfurt.
- After the deportation flight on 25 February, which caused great indignation in The Gambia, the Gambian government promised a moratorium on deportations and wants to renegotiate with the EU and Germany. A moratorium on collective deportations is agreed.

## **Deportations and attempted deportations**

(in reverse chronological order)

**In order to protect the persons affected and their data, the full names are not mentioned. However, these are known to the local counsellors and supporters.**

### **March 29, 2019, Karlsruhe, Germany**

A. S., 19 years old, is deported. He was accommodated in the "Supervised Youth Housing". He graduated from secondary school in 2018 and speaks very good German. Afterwards he completed a voluntary social year. Shortly before, he had

received a training contract as a nurse. The application for the "Exceptional Leave to remain for training" had been made, but not yet approved.

With the same regular flight 3 further Gambians are deported. One of them lived in Ispringen and worked there for 2 years. After his asylum application was rejected, he lost his work permit.

#### **March 21, 2019, Heddesheim, Germany**

Deportation attempt: L. D. has worked full-time for almost 2 years at a large car wash company in Mannheim. His application for asylum was rejected a year ago. A new law, which has been in force since April 2019 in parts of Germany, would have offered him protection against deportation. The police wanted to pick him up first in the accommodation, then at work, but did not find him at either place.

L. D. did not commit a criminal offence, participated in the ID determination and followed the summons to the Gambian delegation. He is now so scared that he is swapped and puts his job at risk.

#### **11 March 2019, Hirschberg, Germany**

B. M. was picked up by the police at work and taken to the police station in Mannheim. Since September 2017 he has been working full-time for a gardening and landscaping company. Apparently he was to be brought to The Gambia with the March collective deportation flight, which was cancelled there after the protests. He was sent back to work because there was no flight.

B.M. suffers from a life-threatening disease that requires constant medication. He was never imprisoned or noticed by the police. He tried to obtain a birth certificate and introduced himself to the Gambian delegation.

#### **March 4, 2019, Lörrach, Germany**

S.D. was picked up by the police at 5:00 in the morning. As far as we know, he did not hand in any papers, nor was he summoned before the Gambian delegation.

#### **Early March, Neustadt near Waiblingen, Germany**

E. G. is picked up by the police and taken away in handcuffs. The employer and his colleagues are shocked. E.G. has been working at a bookbindery since 2015 and has had a fixed employment contract since 2017. He has worked in the warehouse and in production. He has never been in conflict with the law. He, too, would have benefited from the new law, which protects a few working people from deportation.



"We were more than happy about Mr. G.. He was totally integrated, had meanwhile good German knowledge. He was punctual, never ill and reliable," said the boss of E.G. in a letter to the Minister for Social Affairs in Baden-Württemberg, Manfred Lucha.

**March 1, 2019, Biberach, Germany**

B. S. is picked up by the police on his way to work, taken to Frankfurt and deported to The Gambia. He was employed by a metalworker in Biberach. The employer is outraged and turns to the press. He urgently needed the employee, as the Gambian had "really got down to it". "We could count on him". B. S. was not to blame for anything.

Three further cases in the region - deportations despite good work and integration - have recently been reported by the company IDS (Industrie Dienstleistung Süd).

**28 February 2019, Kandern, Germany**

Deportation attempt: Two police vehicles with 8 officials try to pick up the refugee directly from the employer, a painting company. He is not found. The Gambian has been working full-time for this company for 1 ½ years. He goes to the language school three times a week.

**25 February 2019, collective deportation**

On February 25th another collective deportation to The Gambia took place. About 20 people were taken on a flight from Frankfurt to Banjul. A report of a network participant who was on site at Banjul/Yundum airport is available.

The deportation took place under extremely strange circumstances. The authorities (Immigration Office) in The Gambia were apparently not prepared for the arrival of the deportees and did not want to let the people in at first.

Among those deported from 25.02.2019:

Name unknown. Trainee from Konstanz, 2nd year of apprenticeship as painter. He was taken along by the police on his way to the vocational school.

G. from Greater Stuttgart, had worked as a painter, but had not submitted any papers and was therefore banned from working. No crimes. Has a two-month-old child. He wounded himself severely with a knife and was deported despite wounds that had not healed.

**25 February 2019, Bammental, Germany**

M. C. was picked up from his job at a gardening company, taken to Frankfurt and flown to Banjul with a Moroccan airline in the afternoon (not with the collective deportation!). M.C. had a work permit for the gardening company until 2021. The boss was satisfied and wanted to take him into vocational training.

**29 January 2019, collective deportation**

According to a report by a person (participant in the Gambia helper network) who was able to follow the arrival of the deportees on site in Banjul: About 15 Gambians were deported. (Not verified: Altogether 30 to 40 deportees, possibly from other countries like Nigeria etc.)

The deported Gambians came from Freiburg, Rheinfelden, Baden-Baden, Entringen, Stuttgart and surroundings.

One of the deportees was in the process of obtaining his papers in order to get married. A deportee was so deeply disturbed that he could hardly speak properly. There were people there who had handed over documents to the Foreigners Authority in Germany and were not in prison. Others were only deported with a birth certificate and others completely without papers.

Some confirmed that they were in prison. Others denied this, partly very credible, others less credible.

They were people with and without a job.

On site were the representatives of the Foreign Office of Germany with headquarters in Senegal as well as vehicles of the Gambian Immigration Authority. The IOM was not present. The IOM (International Organization for Migration) is responsible for helping returnees.

**January 25, 2019, Wendlingen,**

Deportation attempt: K., who arrived in 2015, was employed by a timber construction company as a construction worker since 2015. K. trained as a carpenter in The Gambia. Since 2016 he has made his own living and paid taxes. He, too, would have benefited from the new law, which protects a few working people from deportation. K. did not commit a criminal offence. After rejecting his asylum application, he cooperated fully in establishing his identity (Gambian delegation,



handing in his birth certificate). The police tried to arrest him in his business. K. has run away, is afraid to go home and has been hiding ever since. The company was very satisfied with his work and urgently needed the employee.

#### **25 January 2019, Nürtingen, Germany**

Deportation attempt: Name not known. The boy was not found by the police. He wanted to finish secondary school this year.

He did not commit a criminal offence. He had found a training place, which he cannot take up now, because he is submerged.

18 January 2019, Villingendorf near Rottweil

Deportation attempt: A man who has been in Germany for 6 years and has been working for a construction company for 3 years is brought to Frankfurt by the police at 7 a.m. Lawyer tries to prevent the deportation by urgent request.

#### **17 January 2019, Bräunlingen**

A. F. is picked up and deported by the police from his workplace in Hüfingen near Donaueschingen at about 10 a.m. at a wood processing plant. At the end of November, a work permit was issued and delivered to the employer, who therefore had not expected the deportation at all. According to the counsellor at the Villingen-Schwenningen District Office, there were no reasons such as delinquency.

In The Gambia, however, he is questioned by the authorities and asked what crime he committed in order to be deported.

#### **14 January 2019, Rhine-Neckar district**

Deportation attempt. Prevented by argumentation.

This is the second deportation attempt by S. The young Gambian was simultaneously wanted by policemen at home and at work. He was arrested at work and taken to Frankfurt without being allowed to take documents, mobile phone, wallet and personal belongings with him. The boy refused to get on the plane, argued with the federal police for half an hour that his boss needed him, that he had an employment contract and that he was not to blame for anything. Passengers supported him. The pilot refused to take him with him. S. was allowed to go home again.

#### **18 December 2018, collective deportation**

The Regional Presidium of Karlsruhe confirmed the deportation of 15 Gambians from Baden-Württemberg.

Among them Y. F. from Leonberg. Was in prison for drug offences. Afterwards he successfully completed a rehabilitation measure "Perspektive für junge Flüchtlinge" (perspective for young refugees) and had the promise to start a vocational training. B. from Ilvesheim. For about 4 years in "exceptional leave to remain", no work, no prison sentences. He was allegedly never at a hearing of the BAMF, did not hand in any papers and was not with the Gambian delegation.

M. J. from Weil der Stadt was imprisoned in 2015 or 2016 for drug offences. He has a 4-year-old daughter with a German, from whom he could no longer say goodbye. B. D. from Alpirsbach. Initially had a training tolerance as a baker, but dropped out of training in the 2nd year due to learning difficulties in the vocational school. His boss continued to employ him because he was satisfied and needed the employee. He was arrested from the company and deported. He was fully employed and did not commit a crime.

O. F. from Wannweil. He had not presented any papers and was therefore banned from working.

#### **December 6, 2018, Müllheim**

Gambian from Müllheim. In the morning the police handcuffs him and brings him to Frankfurt. He worked full time. And he presented the birth certificate and appeared before the Gambian delegation.

#### **Mid November 2018, Müllheim**

Deportation attempt: L., working, with his own apartment, was not found by chance at home. He handed in papers so as not to lose his work permit and was with the Gambian delegation.

#### **Mid-November 2018, Stuttgart, Constance:**

Another collective deportation apparently took place in calendar week 46 (14 to 17 November): 5 Gambians from the Stuttgart and Constance area, and 6 Gambians from Switzerland.

#### **Beginning of November 2018, collective deportation**

15 Gambians were deported to Banjul, The Gambia, among them probably working people.



M., who lives in Schwetzingen, was also deported to Gambia with this flight at the beginning of November. He had a work permit and a permanent job. He had followed the summons to the Gambian delegation, but had not handed in any papers. He was picked up by the police at 3 a.m. at night. The bank card was taken from him, although there was still a balance of 700 €.

**September 2018, Esslingen/Nürtingen:**

B. C., is allegedly taken to Banjul without any papers. The bank card was also taken from him beforehand. He could not take all his personal belongings with him.