


WICID

 WARWICK INTERDISCIPLINARY
 RESEARCH CENTRE FOR
 INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Title: Institutionalising Human Rights Education in Security Sector Reform Through Memorialisation – The Case of The Gambia

Authors: **Briony Jones** (University of Warwick); **Sirra Ndow** (African Network Against Extrajudicial Killing and Enforced Disappearances); **Luqman Saka** (University of The Gambia); **Lesley Stahlecker** (African Network Against Extrajudicial Killing and Enforced Disappearances)

Date Published: September 2026

Executive Summary

From the 1-4 June 2026, the African Network Against Extrajudicial Killing and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED), in strategic partnership with the Office of National Security (ONS), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and the Centre for Transitional Justice and Sustainable Peace, University of The Gambia (CTJSP-UTG) convened a human rights training for personnel drawn from the Gambia's eight¹ Security Institutions. The training was supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the Warwick Interdisciplinary Research Centre for International Development (WICID). This training took place within the framework of an International Partnership Fund project co-led by ANEKED, CTJSP-UTG and WICID.

¹ Namely the Gambia Armed Forces (GAF); Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Gambia (DLEAG); Gambia Fire and Rescue Services (GFRS); Gambia Immigration Department (GID); Gambia Police Force (GPF); Gambia Prison Services (GPS); Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA); and the State Intelligence Service (SIS).

In this policy brief we draw on insights presented as part of the training as well as participant feedback generated through post-training feedback. We highlight the need to systematically embed citizen-centred human rights norms, professional ethics, and operational accountability within the core DNA of the Gambian security sector. Rather than treating human rights as peripheral compliance, this work positions rights-protective behaviour as an essential component of operational readiness and professional legitimacy.



Background and Rationale for the Training

Confronting a Legacy of State Terror

The rationale for the training is rooted in the historical and political imperatives of The Gambia's ongoing democratic transition, which commenced in 2017, following the 2016 electoral defeat of former President Yahya Jammeh and the collapse of his 22-year authoritarian regime. This transitional epoch represents a critical juncture in the nation's history, as it presents the Gambia with an opportunity to move away from a culture of systemic impunity toward a governance model explicitly anchored in democratic accountability, comprehensive institutional reform, and ironclad guarantees of non-recurrence regarding state-sponsored human rights violations.

To formally confront the legacy of past widespread human rights abuses and lack of institutional accountability that was the hallmark of the 22 years authoritarian reign under Jammeh, the Government of The Gambia under President Adama Barrow, established, among others², the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) to investigate the nature, causes, and extent of human rights violations committed between July 1994 and January 2017. The TRRC's findings extensively documented an institutionalised apparatus of state terror characterized by systematic abuses, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, prolonged torture without trial, and state-sanctioned sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Crucially, the findings underscored that defence and security institutions traditionally mandated to protect civilian populations were weaponised as primary instruments for regime survival.

Learning from Memorialisation

The training program was an outcome of collaboration between key partners, ANEKED, ONS, NHRC, CTJSP-UTG, and WICID, illustrating the need for an inclusive and cross-sectoral approach founded on dialogue. The program employed a participatory, adult-learning methodology designed to bridge theoretical concepts with operational field realities. The training was structured around the delivery of 6 key modules: Introduction to Security Sector

² The Constitution Review Commission and the Janneh Commission were also some of the mechanisms that were put in place to address the legacy of dictatorship.



Governance and Reform; Good Governance and Respect for Human Rights; Gender Mainstreaming; Engaging Civil Society; Institutions and Transitional Justice Processes; and Memorialisation. Prior to beginning the classroom-based learning, all participants took part in a immersive guided walk through at ANEKED's Memory House³. They interacted directly with the portraits and personal stories of victims, and the preserved personal artefacts belonging to victims of the former regime who are no longer with us. This immersion was paired with the screening of two targeted documentaries: one focusing on the state-sponsored witch hunting exercise and the other detailing the extrajudicial execution and disappearance of over West African migrants by the Junglers⁴ in 2005.

The importance of embedding the training programme in the memorialisation work of ANEKED was clear from the start. Participants highlighted this as one of the most important lessons in their post-training feedback, connecting memorialisation with guarantees of non-recurrence and greater understanding of the experiences of victims. Designing a training programme which connected such work of civil society with a national reform agenda and the practical realities of the work of security sector was key to its success. It allowed a space to be created and used which encouraged dialogue, critical reflection, and rooted SSR discussions in historical as well as contemporary human rights sensibilities.

Outcomes and Insights from SSR and Memorialisation Training

Key Learning from the Modules and Plenary Discussions

- **Anonymity of Directives:** The lingering use of unrecorded, ambiguous verbal directives ("orders from the top") continues to shield decision-makers and forms a severe barrier to command and individual accountability within the security forces.
- **Legislative Archaism:** The operational capacity and human rights compliance of civil police and correctional services are severely crippled by out-dated, colonial-era

³ Memory House is The Gambia's first permanent memorial and exhibition space dedicated to preserving the stories of victims and survivors of the Jammeh dictatorship and promoting remembrance, education, healing and a commitment to "Never Again."

⁴ The Junglers were a covert death squad linked to Yahya Jammeh's regime and implicated in enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and other serious human rights violations



service Acts dating back to 1947 and 1948, which fail to reflect modern constitutional standards.

- **Detention Infrastructure Failures:** 90% of citizen complaints regarding right-to-liberty violations stem from systemic failure to notify suspects of charges within three hours, paired with severe sanitation and overcrowding crises inside short-term police cells.
- **Tokenism in Gender Mainstreaming:** Gender integration is frequently reduced to an administrative afterthought or token slots at command and other leadership levels, while female personnel remain concentrated in low influence clerical paths, face promotion penalties due to maternity leave among other systemic constraints to career advancement.
- **Budgetary Misallocation:** National human rights and security oversight assets remain dependent on short-term foreign donor funding, while internal state budgeting lines are dominated by recurrent travel rather than capital budget headlines for infrastructure and accessibility.

Key Learning from Participant Feedback

- **Educational Use of Memory Spaces:** participants highlighted the integration of intersectionality and human rights frameworks with physical spaces of remembrance like the Memory House, noting that it successfully shifted the training from a dry academic lecture into a profound psychological and professional reflection loop.
- **Operational Blind Spots in Traditional Human Rights Advocacy:** the workshop highlighted that CSOs frequently advocate for abstract rights without understanding the practical, internal, day-to-day realities inside recruitment camps—such as handling unexpected pregnancies during active training cycles or identifying undetected mental health conditions among recruits. These blind spots need to be made visible, to be discussed, and to be addressed as part of SSR agenda.
- **Importance of Inter-Agency Collaboration:** participants noted that Gambian civil society demonstrates an exceptionally high level of inter-agency collaboration compared to other regional post-conflict environments, providing an excellent multistakeholder foundation for executing future security sector reforms.



Next Steps for SSR in The Gambia

The training marks a vital milestone in advancing victim-centred, rights-based security sector governance within The Gambia in the context of the ongoing transitional justice and reform agenda. The workshop successfully demonstrated that structural adjustments alone—such as shifting reporting lines or rewriting agency mandates—are insufficient to transform a post-authoritarian security apparatus of State. Lasting democratic consolidation demands a profound cultural and attitudinal metamorphosis across defence and law enforcement services.

By establishing an unbreakable link between historical memorialisation, empirical transitional justice data, and professional security education, this initiative provides an innovative model for internal institutional learning. Moving forward, the ultimate success of the Gambian SSR agenda relies on translating these shared strategic insights into continuous vehicle for enhancing internal accountability, transparent civilian oversight, and realistic national resource allocation, ensuring a professional and people-centred security architecture dedicated to protecting the rights, liberties, and human dignity of all Gambians.