

Violent Clashes Reported in Brikama and Serrekunda: At Least 20 People Hospitalized



Demographic Analysis

- The Gambia's population estimate stands at 2,051,363 (as of July 2017) with approximately 58 percent under the age of 24 (0-14 years: 37.44%; 15-24 years: 20.47%)¹.
- Brikama is the Administrative Capital/Headquarters of the West Coast Region with a population size of 699,704.
- Kanifing Municipality has a population of 377,134. The Serrekunda market is the biggest market within the municipality.

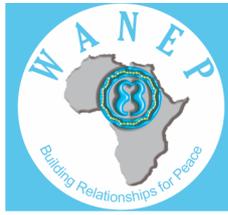
INCIDENT PROFILE

Violent clashes have been reported in Brikama and Serrekunda in the West Coast Region and Kanifing Municipality on Wednesday, July 24, 2019. The WANEP NEWS monitors reported that the incident in Brikama started as a protest to denounce the Brikama Area Council (BAC) over the lack of basic services such as a good market and other utilities as well as allegations of rampant corruption and maladministration within the council. Protest, dubbed as *#OccupyBAC* turned violence and disrupted socio-economic activities in the area. The Office of the Inspector General of Police of the Gambia claimed that the protesters had no police permit to organize a peaceful protest which is a violation of the Public Order Act (2009). As a result of that, the the Police Intervention Unit (PIU) was deployed to restore Law and Order. The protesters clashed with the police leading to at least 20 people injured and many more arrested.

Similar protest also broke out in Serrekunda in the Kanifing Municipality against the death of a Sierra Leonean national who was arrested and allegedly beaten by the Police Anti-Crime Unit. It was claimed that the victim died from the wounds he sustained during the incident. According to a press statement issued by the office of the Inspector General of Police the name of the deceased Ousman Darboe was mentioned during police investigation into a robbery incident at Kerr Serign on 11 July 2019.² The key suspects in the case confessed that

¹ Index Mundi: Available at https://www.indexmundi.com/the_gambia/demographics_profile.html (Accessed 24 July 2019).

² Press Release Office of the Inspector General of Police (Accessed: 24 July 2019)



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the stolen items were sold to Darboe (now deceased). In this regard, some youth gathered at the Serrekunda Police Station in Bijilo to protest against the action of the police that led to the demise of the victim.

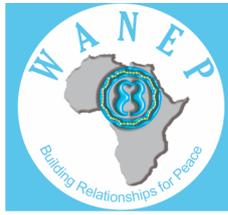
Socio-economic activities were brought to a halt in both locations before police intervened to restore Law and Order. Reports suggest that the police fired tear gas canisters to disperse the crowd while protester allegedly pelted stones at the police and mounted road blocks with burning tyres causing traffic congestion and chaos for shoppers, vendors and passers-by. In addition, the house of the Commander of the Police Anti-Crime Unit, Mr. Goorgi Mboob in Ebo Town was vandalised, property looted and set on fire, allegedly, by irate youths. Local media reports indicate that police vehicles were damaged while some personnel sustained injuries. Police investigations into both incidents are in progress.

ANALYSIS

Heightened security measures and police deployments have been evident in the affected communities. Eventhough the Government and Civil society Organisation (CSOs) have issued statements to condemn the action, the underlying causes of the protests remain unaddressed, which leaves room for similar protests in the short term. Local reports claimed that police response to the incidents was heavyhanded. In as much as the police has mandate to restore Law and Order, its actions must comply with human rights standards while protecting lives and properties. In a similar incident in early July 2019, a-25 year student of the University of The Gambia was stabbed to death in an altercation with an alleged police officer. The recent spate of protests and disregard of rule of law by youth and the manner of police response has increased concerns and fear among the local people, especially, ahead of the anticipated massive protests to let President Barrow honour the three years term limit as agreed to in the December 2016 Coalition Agreement.

In addition, dwelling confidence and trust for the police among the populace is worrisome. The manifestation of public mistrust in the security agencies, especially the Anti-Crime Unit is evident in the persistent clashes of young people with the police during protests or demonstrations. This suggests the need for continuous dialogue and confidence building activities at the community and national levels on the role of the police in safety and security, security sector governance and accountability, as well as civic rights and responsibilities³. The activities of the Gambia Police Force should also be people centred and anchored on human right-based approach.

³ *Conflict and Development Analysis – The Gambia*. A collaboration of Ministry of Interior of the Republic of The Gambia and West Africa Network for Peacebuilding – The Gambia (WANEP), with support from joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention and United Nations in The Gambia. July 2019



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It is vital for local government authorities especially the councils to appropriately aligned community development strategies with the Local Government Act (2002) to ensure the equitable distribution and management of councils resources. According to the Act, 60% of revenues collected should be invested back to communities. However, implementation and councils feedback mechanisms to reach the people are challenging.

MECHANISM FOR INTERVENTION

The Gambia Armed Forces and the ECOWAS Mission in the Gambia (ECOMIG) forces have been deployed to restore Law and Order, while the Office of the Inspector General of Police has issued a press statement assuring the public of speedy investigations in to the incidents while encouraging the public to maintain calm and continue daily activities.

The WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) structure will continue to monitor the incidents with keen interest and provide updates as the issues unfold.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Gambia Police Force and the Ministry of the Interior should expedite investigations into the death of Ousman Darboe and the violent confrontation to bring the culprits to face the full force of the Law;
- The Government through the Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Regional Administration should ensure the engagement and inclusion of local communities in resource management and adhere to the Local Government Act (2002) to prevent and mitigate destructive conflicts ;
- The Government through the Ministry of Interior and development partners should consider to retrain and reorient the security forces, especially the Police Intervention Unit and para-military in civil-police/military relationships and human rights standards in crowd control and management;
- There is the need for preventive diplomacy by ECOWAS/UNOWAS and other international partners to engage key political actors to facilitate dialogue on the political direction for The Gambia as the timeline of the December 2016 Coalition Party Agreement draws near.