
GAMBIA

Republic of the Gambia

Population: 1.5 million (704,000 under 18)

Government armed forces: 800

Compulsory recruitment age: no conscription

Voluntary recruitment age: 18

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: signed 21 December 2000

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ICC, ILO 138, ILO 182, ACRWC

There were no reports of under-18s being used in the armed forces.

Context

In April 2007, ten former army officers were convicted of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court for attempting to overthrow President Jammeh in March 2006. Five people who had been arrested as part of the attempted coup in March 2006 were feared to have been executed in April 2006 after the government stated that they had escaped while being transferred to a different prison.¹

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

There was no conscription. Section 23 of the Armed Forces Act stated, “Where a person enlisting has not attained the age of eighteen years, his period of enlistment shall commence from the date he attains the age of eighteen years.” Although in November 2001 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asked the government to establish a clear legal minimum age for enlistment into the armed forces,² it appeared that no action had been taken.

The government reported that it planned to establish a military academy, an infantry centre and school, and military primary and secondary schools. Currently a number of countries were training the Gambian military.³

The Children’s Act, passed in June 2005, was designed to protect and promote the welfare of children and to curb abuses against them, including trafficking. The definition of a child was set as any person under the age of 18. As a result of the Act one of five regional children’s courts opened in February 2006. The Act also protected children from exploitative labour or hazardous employment.⁴

Developments

In August 2006 over 4,000 Senegalese refugees fled into Gambia from Senegal’s southern Casamance region to escape fighting between Senegalese troops and a splinter group of the armed political group Democratic Forces of Casamance (Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance, MFDC) led by Salif Sadio.⁵ According to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) there were over 6,000 refugees by the end of October 2006.⁶

- 1 “Gambia jail terms for coup plot”, BBC News, 20 April 2007.
- 2 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of report submitted by Gambia, Concluding observations, UN Doc. CRC/C/15/Add.165, 6 November 2001.
- 3 See NewGambia.com, www.newgambia.gm.
- 4 US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2006, the Gambia, March 2007, www.state.gov.
- 5 “Thousands flee Senegal fighting”, BBC News, 24 August 2006.
- 6 UNHCR, “Gambia: New arrivals from Senegal”, press briefing note, 31 October 2006.