

### Press Release

## **Gambian President Fights Laws of Islam!**

(Translated)

The Gambian parliament approved on Thursday, July ٢١<sup>st</sup>, ٢٠١٦ the decision of the Gambian President, Yahya Jammeh, to ban marriage for girls under ١٨ years. The parliament passed an amendment to the Child Protection Act of ٢٠٠٥, imposing exaggerated penalties on anyone involved in a marriage of a girl under the age of eighteen. This law was preceded by a statement of the Gambian president in which he said: "Anyone who marries a girl under ١٨ years will spend ٢٠ years in jail. The girls' parents would spend ٢١ years in jail and anyone who knows about it and fails to report the matter to the authorities would spend ١٠ years in jail." The President also vowed imprisonment for any imam who presides over the marriage ceremony.

The issuance of the law to ban marriages under the age of eighteen coincided with the launch of the African Union campaign to eliminate underage marriage by the first lady, the president's wife, Mrs. Zainab Yahya Jammeh. It also coincided with the celebration of ٢٢ years of military rule of Yahya Jammeh, which included international condemnation of Gambia's poor record on human rights and persecution of opponents and journalists.

This arbitrary law has been promoted through intensive activities, and by sometimes linking marriage of girls under the age of eighteen with some diseases such as AIDS, and at other times claiming that preventing the girls from early marriage is the key to development and economic progress and renaissance in this impoverished African country. The campaign was based on a number of inaccuracies, for example, the campaign denounced the widespread phenomenon of young marriage and promoted the government's field research, which was supported by UNICEF, and which showed that ٨,٥ percent of girls in Gambia are married under the age of fifteen, while ٤٦,٥ percent marry before the age of eighteen. This means that most marriages under the age of eighteen take place between the ages ١٥-١٨ years. So how is this considered an offense which warrants the girl's father a life sentence as if he has killed an innocent soul without reason?! And how strange is this president, who has vowed, prohibited and imposed punishments without any legitimate basis after he announced only recently that his country became an Islamic republic! So *Hasbuna Allahu wa Ni'ma Al-Wakil* (Allah (Alone) is sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs for us).

The campaign appeared like a media promotion and an international marketing for the regime, and the president and his wife worked to deceive the girls that they are protecting and defending them. And the fact of the matter is quite otherwise. This

campaign did not to protect women and girls of Gambia from poverty, ignorance, disease and exploitation, for Gambia remains at the forefront of the countries threatened by malaria in the Third Millennium. They fight the provisions of Islam while we have not seen from them even one campaign that fights for the protection of young girls whose honour falls in the nets of the traffickers. Instead the government leaves them as easy prey for foreign tourists and turns a blind eye under the pretext of encouraging and promoting tourism! A government that prevents the marriage of any girl under the age of eighteen is the same one that grants licenses to young women to work in prostitution, and even demands of them to carry the necessary medical tests. Several international organizations have condemned the failure of Gambia to protect girls working in this humiliating area. UNICEF has pointed out this in Gambia's page on its official website.

This law is not only targeting the committed Muslim families and intimidating those who desire chastity and virtue, but it aims to criminalize the Muslim community and to disseminate corruption. They are fighting marriage and facilitating immorality to spread evil among the people, and they open the doors of sin wide open and shut the doors of goodness that preserves the Muslim men and women from falling into the prohibitions of the Lord of the Worlds. They are fighting Allah's rules in broad daylight and forbidding that which Allah has permitted, and working within the guard of the enemy to promote their concepts of life and working within their suspicious organizations. Accordingly, we urge the Ummah as a whole to be truthful with its Lord and not to allow Islam to be attacked through it. And we call on imams and scholars in Gambia to stand like impervious dams to protect the Shar'iah (Laws) of their Lord and protect the honors of Muslims.

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

**“Indeed, those who like that immorality should be spread [or publicized] among those who have believed will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter. And Allah knows and you do not know”. [An-Noor: ١٩]**

### **Women's Section in the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir**

