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Statement by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on recent inflammatory rhetoric by President Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia, targeting the Mandinka ethnic group

(New York, 7 June 2016) The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, condemned the inflammatory speech by President Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia at a political rally in Tallinding on 3 June, in which he reportedly threatened to eliminate the Mandinka ethnic group. President Jammeh allegedly referred to the Mandinka as “enemies, foreigners” and threatened to kill them one by one and place them “where even a fly cannot see them”.

“I am profoundly alarmed by President Jammeh’s public stigmatisation, dehumanisation and threats against the Mandinka,” the Special Adviser stated. “Public statements of this nature by a national leader are irresponsible and extremely dangerous. They can contribute to dividing populations, feed suspicion and serve to incite violence against communities, based solely on their identity.”

The Special Adviser was particularly appalled by President Jammeh’s vitriolic rhetoric as history has shown that hate speech that constitutes incitement to violence can be both a warning sign and a powerful trigger for atrocity crimes. “We have seen, in Rwanda, Bosnia – and more recently in the Middle East - how incitement to violence has led to mass killings along identity lines,” the Special Adviser stated. He reminded President Jammeh that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence is prohibited under international human rights law as well as under national legislation.

States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations. In 2005, all Heads of State and Government acknowledged the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement. “I urge the President of the Gambia to fulfil this responsibility,” said the Special Adviser, “and ensure that the rights of all populations of the Gambia are respected, irrespective of ethnicity or political affiliation.”

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