

**Question for written answer P-008067/2011
to the Commission
Rule 117
Harlem Désir (S&D)**

Subject: Human rights in The Gambia and the Cotonou Agreement

Seven Gambian activists, including three journalists and a member of the opposition, were charged last month with high treason and are now facing the death penalty for having produced and distributed T-shirts with a message calling for an end to the dictatorship in The Gambia.

While several NGOs and federations of journalists are calling on the Gambian government to drop these charges of high treason, the public prosecutor, on behalf of the government, remains unmoved and has expressed the view that the death penalty is appropriate for what he considers to be 'abominable crimes'.

It is unacceptable for the EU to remain inactive in view of this fresh violation of human rights in The Gambia. This infringement of freedom of expression, indeed, comes in the wake of the arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture or unfair trials that have taken place in this country, when The Gambia is a signatory to the Cotonou Agreement and as such is bound by the obligation to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms (Article 9).

The Commission has said that it has embarked upon a political dialogue with The Gambia and established development cooperation instruments (see reply to written question E-003428/2011 of 7 April 2011), but given the urgency of the situation, what specific and immediate measures will it take to avoid the risk of the death penalty that is hanging over these activists?

In view of the repeated violations of human rights in this country, will it consider solutions that are more radical than political dialogue, for instance a possible suspension of the Agreement (Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement)?