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## **Survivors of Bogus “AIDS Cure” Testify in Public**

July 15, 2020: History is being made today in The Gambia.

The country's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC)—which is conducting public hearings into human rights violations committed under the presidency of former dictator Yahya Jammeh—began hearing testimony from survivors of Jammeh's fraudulent and destructive “AIDS cure.”

For the first time, survivors are raising their voices in public, braving the stigma and discrimination that people living with HIV in The Gambia still endure. They deserve to be heard. And the world must heed their warning.

The first witness was Fatou Jatta, an HIV activist whose courage will serve as an example to her fellow Gambians and an inspiration to other HIV positive Gambians.

In 2007, after announcing that he could cure AIDS with a secret herbal concoction, Jammeh conscripted Gambians living with HIV to reside in a state facility under the surveillance of armed guards. Many Gambians who entered Jammeh’s program were members of HIV support groups. Jammeh ordered his “patients” to cease taking antiretroviral drugs, an action that posed grave threats to their health and their lives.

Instead, he had them drink herbal mixtures that often made them violently ill. He also slathered the concoctions on his victims’ partially nude bodies while chanting prayers. Select sessions were broadcast on Gambian television without the consent of the victims, some of whom hadn’t yet informed friends or family of their HIV status.

HIV health care workers in The Gambia confirm that many of their patients ceased taking legitimate HIV treatment and subsequently died.

Jammeh has no medical training. International health experts roundly condemned his claimed cure as quackery. After UN resident coordinator Fadzai Gwaradzimba challenged the efficacy of his potion, Jammeh had her ejected from the country. The program ran from 2007 until 2016, when Jammeh lost a national election. After initially contesting the results of the election, Jammeh fled The Gambia in January 2017. He is now living in opulent exile in Equatorial Guinea.

Jammeh's fraudulence was endorsed by medical professionals of high standing in The Gambia, including Dr. Tamsir Mbowe and Dr. Malick Njie, both of whom served at different points as Jammeh's Minister of Health. Dr. Mbowe was the program's Director General, responsible for recruiting victims and participating in the sessions with Jammeh. Dr. Mbowe has remained steadfast in his public assertion that Jammeh's treatment was successful.

The TRRC hearings on the bogus AIDS cure come at an important time. Other fake remedies are on the rise. The president of Madagascar, Andry Rajoelina, has promoted an herbal tea as a cure for COVID-19. Several African nations have put in orders. To protect against the novel coronavirus, the president of the United States flogs his own cure, hydroxychloroquine, which his Food and Drug Administration has [said](#) has "no benefit for decreasing the likelihood of death or speeding recovery."

Fraudulent AIDS cures have been a feature of the HIV story since the 1980s. Most notoriously, South Africa's health minister during Thabo Mbeki's administration dismissed antiretroviral therapies as "poison" and promoted garlic, lemon, and beetroot as an alternative treatment, leading to appalling suffering. It remains a scandal that Jammeh's experiments on people living with HIV were met with silence by African governments.

The testimony of the survivors of Jammeh's AIDS cure offers a powerful lesson to the world: follow the science.

AIDS-Free World will continue to support the survivors as they seek a measure of justice from [Jammeh](#) and his medical [accomplices](#). We remain awed and humbled by their bravery.

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#### **MEDIA CONTACT**

Peter Duffy

[media@aidsfreeworld.org](mailto:media@aidsfreeworld.org)

Tel: +1-646-924-1710