

CALLING FOR AN END TO IMPUNITY FOR PREDATORS OF PRESS FREEDOM

**HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, June 15, 2006*

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the 18-month anniversary of a tragic event that is symptomatic of the deterioration of press freedom in the Gambia and elsewhere.

On December 16, 2004, one of the most respected journalists in West Africa, Deyda Hydara, was shot in the head and chest by unidentified gunmen. He died instantly, but the repercussions of his murder sent a shock wave through media and human rights advocates throughout the region. Mr. Hydara co-founded the Gambia's first independent newspaper and served as a foreign correspondent for a French newspaper and the media rights organization, Reporters Without Borders.

Hydara's murder is just one incident in an alarming crackdown by Gambian authorities on the independent press. In July 2002 the government passed legislation requiring journalists and media organizations to register with a media commission for one-year renewable licenses. In September 2003, Hydara and three other independent journalists filed a lawsuit challenging the law in a case that is still pending before the Gambian Supreme Court.

Two days before Hydara's murder, the Gambian National Assembly passed a new round of repressive media legislation that imposed mandatory prison terms of six months to three years for any published work judged to be "seditious" and increased the scope of what might be deemed libelous. Hydara and other independent journalists had publicly opposed the law and Hydara had published an editorial denouncing it the day before he was killed.

In the 18 months that have elapsed since Deyda Hydara was killed, Gambian authorities have ignored calls for a thorough investigation into his murder. It is widely believed to have

been politically-motivated and related to a string of similar attacks. Meanwhile, at least 3 journalists are currently detained in Gambia in violation of regional and international human rights law. I will be sending a letter to Gambian President, Mr. Yahya Jammeh, urging him to appoint an independent board of inquiry to investigate the murder of Deyda Hydara and improve protections for journalists and the principle of press freedom in his country. I would like to submit this letter for the RECORD.

Resistance to impunity is essential to maintain civil peace and demonstrate a commitment to democratic values. In a time when repeated anonymous attacks against media professionals have created tense relations between the state and the media in many countries, Deyda Hydara's unrequited murder is deeply worrisome to those who are committed to democracy and justice in Africa. I hope that the Gambian Government will take this occasion to reverse its record on press freedom and set an example for the rest of the region.