

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE SUPPLEMENTARY VOTER REGISTRATION INCIDENT IN NYAGEN VILLAGE, NIANI CONSTITUENCY, JANJANBUREH

1. About Gambia Participates and EWC

Gambia Participates is a civil society organization focused on promoting fiscal transparency, anti-corruption, enhancing electoral processes and the rule of law to strengthen democracy in The Gambia. GP has been working on improving the electoral process through citizen election observation, voter education, participation, and electoral reform. Gambia Participates is also involved in election observation within the sub-region of West Africa.

The **Elections Watch Committee (EWC)** is a non-partisan citizen observation platform created through a partnership of seven organizations with expertise in governance, youth participation, and gender inclusion. The EWC includes Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA, National Youth Parliament (NYP), Think Young Women (TYW), Beakanyang, Peace Hub – The Gambia (PHTG), and The Gambia Federation of the Disabled (GFD). Since November 2020, the EWC has monitored elections across The Gambia, providing recommendations for improving electoral integrity. Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia serves as the secretariat of the committee.

2. Background

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of The Gambia announced on March 3, 2026, that it will conduct a supplementary voter registration from April 8th – May 21st, 2026. By virtue of section 13(2) of the Election Act, 2025, any Gambian is qualified or entitled to have their name registered on the register of voters in their constituency by the IEC if he or she produces either of the following documents:

- (a) a birth certificate;
- (b) a Gambian passport;
- (c) a National Identity Card, or
- (d) an attestation from an Alkalo or Seyfo certifying that he or she is a Gambian”

Therefore, it is mandatory for the IEC to register the name of any citizen who meets the nationality, age and residency stipulated in 13(1)¹ on the register of voters if he or she produces any of the above-mentioned documents is eligible to be registered on the electoral register by the IEC.

In rural communities such as Nyagen village, where access to formal identification remains limited, attestation by an Alkalo serves as a lawful and essential mechanism for ensuring citizens without government issued identification documents or birth certificates are not excluded from the electoral process. An attestation document certifies that an individual is a Gambian and he/she is eligible to be registered as a voter. Alkalo certifies the prescribed attestation forms using the official Alkalo seal (stamp).

3. Facts

The Government in its press release dated April 9, 2026, announced that it has temporarily withdrawn and taken custody of the Nyagen Village's Alkalo stamp following allegations of a misuse of the stamp *"in a manner inconsistent with its intended purpose."*²

The government reported that the Governor of Central River Region (CRR), Ousman Bah, with his Deputy Governor, engaged the Alkalo of Nyagen and other district Seyfos (chiefs) in a meeting where the Alkalo confirmed that he entrusted the stamp to his son. As a result of this, the Alkalo's seal was seized and *"placed in a secure custody"*. The government press release claims that the temporary seizure of the stamp was necessitated by the need to protect the integrity of the ongoing voter registration exercise in Njagen Village, in the Niani Constituency, Central River Region. The Government in its press release also stated that the village stamp of Njagen was entrusted to the son of Alkalo by the Alkalo.

The statement did not go further to elaborate on the nature of the abuse of the stamp other than asserting that *"official administrative instruments belong to the community and the State. No individual, regardless of position, affiliation, may use them for purposes other their lawful administrative function"*

Although the Government did not state the reason for withdrawing the stamp other than that it was being abused by virtue of the fact it was left with the son of the Alkalo.

¹ Election Act, 2025 s 13(1)

² Government Press Release through the Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, reference number BGV/97/124/01 (02)

From our findings as domestic observers, and third-party accounts, we have reliable information that, the primary reason why the Alkalo stamp was withdrawn was based on political affiliation to the opposition.

Other than the fact the Alkalo may have entrusted the village stamp to his son, no other evidence or information of alleged abuse of or improper use of the stamp has been provided by the Ministry of Information or the Executive.

It is worth noting that, it is the norm and custom for many Alkalolu and Seyfolu in The Gambia to entrust their Alkalo stamp to their most trusted offspring or relative due to many factors, which includes but not limited to, age, literacy deficits in the official language, disability, etc.

It is also worth noting that Alkalolu and Seyfolu, and their immediate family members, have openly supported, and continue to support and campaign for their desired candidates, including the ruling party, while exercising their Alkalo or Seyfoship responsibilities. This is a fundamental political right guaranteed under section 26 of the 1997 Constitution.

4. Our Position

We state unequivocally that, **the temporary seizure of the Nyagen Alkalo's Stamp is ill-advised, unjustified, potentially a violation of the law and has the effect of depriving bona-fide Gambian residents of Nyagen village their inalienable right to vote.**

It is also our position that the action of the Governor in seizing the Alkalo's seal without lawful authority or grounds may constitute a violation of the constitutionally guaranteed rights of bona fide residents of Nyagen who are entitled to vote under the laws of the country.

Firstly, the seizure of the stamp of the Alkalo will prevent many citizens of Nyagen from being registered on the voter roll. Which is a violation of their right to vote as provided for in Section 39 of the 1997 Constitution (right to vote and be registered) hence the action violate Section 39 of the Constitution.

It is important to note that the IEC's supplementary voter registration teams have limited days to conduct supplementary voter registration. In some rural areas, the distance to voter registration centres poses

challenges to some people where adequate means of transportation are limited. For example, one of the closest registration centres in Nyagen is Kataba Alhagie Omar, where registration, based on the IEC team movement schedule, will only last for three (3) days (April 8 - April 10, 2026).³

Failure to get registered means these eligible voters will be disenfranchised from voting in the 2026 presidential election, 2027 parliamentary and local government elections and any other by-election or referenda, until the next voter registration (possibly in 2031).

Secondly, we believe that the action of the Governor can result to voter suppression and it is an abuse of his office, thus, violating Section 39 (right to vote and be registered) and Section 222(3) (code of conduct on the rights of other person while exercising official public functions) of the 1997 Constitution.

In addition, Section 26 of the 1997 Constitution, the fundamental political rights, stated that; “Every citizen of The Gambia of full age and capacity shall have the right, **without unreasonable restrictions...**” and “**...on general terms of equality**”⁴ have access to public service and they shall not be discriminated based on political affiliation.

Thirdly, it is our position that the government in its official press release (on this subject matter) has not provided any legal justification that the Alkalo or his aide (the son) has issued attestation certificates to minors, non-Gambians or any other person disqualified under section 14 of the Elections Act, 2025.

The Government also did not provide any legal justification that the Alkalo of Nyagen’s action in entrusting his stamp to his son, like many Alkalolu and Seyfolu would do, that his action is illegal.

Lastly, any person or any political party, who is satisfied that the Alkalo or his aide (the son) has issued an attestation to an individual who should not have been registered by the IEC, the person should duly present his or her objection during the sessions of the Revising Court⁵, which will sit immediately after the draft supplementary voter registration list is published by the IEC.

In conclusion, the credibility of any public election largely depends on the credibility of the voter roll. As a result, no lawful and/or eligible citizen should be disenfranchised by any person or authority. The state

³ Team Movement 2026 Supplementary Voter Registration https://iec.gm/ova_doc/team-movement-2026-supplimentary-voter-registration/

⁴ 1997 Constitution of The Gambia, section 26

⁵ Elections Act, 2025 s25, 26 and 27

and public officials must ensure that the non-negotiable right to vote and be registered, the political right and the right to access public service on “**general terms of equality**” are always protected.

Public officials must exercise their powers within the confines of the law and must not weaponize state authority in ways that undermine democratic participation, particularly against vulnerable rural populations.

5. Recommendations

1. To stop the ongoing voter suppression in Nyagen, and as a matter of urgency, we demand that the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, through the CRR Governor’s office, return the Nyagen Alkalo stamp to prevent further disenfranchisement.
2. All disputes in connection with the supplementary voter registration process must be resolved through the designated judicial process through the revising courts which is the appropriate forum to challenge the validity of any individual’s registration on the register of voters by the IEC.
3. We have long advocated for the removal of the attestation requirement in the Election Act and made suggestions to the National Assembly on the Elections Bill (now Elections Act, 2025) to remove this requirement, citing justifiable grounds, but to no avail. We once again, call on the National Assembly to amend Section 13(2)(d) of the Elections Act, by removing the Alkalo Attestation as one of the ways of establishing citizenship and eligibility to vote in the Gambia.
4. The government must make the acquisition of national identity documents mandatory while introducing seamless, affordable and accessible means of acquiring national identity documents.
5. Though IEC is not at fault on this matter, however, we recommend IEC to consider extending the supplementary registration days at Kataba Alhagie Omar (once the Alkalo Stamp is returned)

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