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DECLARATION BY THE PRESIDENCY ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON
ELECTIONS IN THE GAMBIA

The European Union has taken note of the presidential elections in the Gambia on 26th September 1996. The Union is glad that polling passed off peacefully, and congratulates the Provisional Independent Electoral Commission (PIEC) on their role. It regrets, however, that the recommendations drawn up by PIEC were ignored and that conditions which would have ensured free and fair elections were not met.

The Union recalls its memorandum to the 51st General Assembly of the United Nations which contains the following passage:

“Since the military takeover in July 1994, the EU has urged the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council to return the Gambia to civilian democratic government, to release or bring to trial political detainees and to protect the freedom of the press.

While welcoming the lifting of the ban on political activity and the proposed holding of presidential and legislative elections, the EU is deeply concerned that the three major parties and all who have served as Ministers over the past 30 years have been excluded from contesting the elections. The Union believes the elections cannot be free or fair if so many are prohibited from participation.”

The Union calls on the Gambian authorities to take all necessary measures so that parliamentary elections due on 11 December 1996 meet the guidelines established by PIEC.