



# Seventy-Two Children Die From AKI



## MoH Reports 28 Children Dead by 8th August 2022

Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) first came to the public's attention on Monday 8th August 2022 when the Ministry of Health (MoH) published a situation report revealing that 28 children had died out of 35 reported cases of an unidentified AKI.

At that stage the MoH noted that the "event case" was defined as "any child less than 5 years of age with sudden failure to pass urine for more than a day with any of the following: fever, diarrhoea or vomiting from the 24th June 2022 to date".

Subsequently, a two-page leaflet on AKI was published by the MoH on 4th September 2022 titled "Key Messages on Acute Kidney Injury (AKI)" indicating that Health Officials were aware of the rise in deaths and attempted to make efforts to warn the public about the outbreak.

## WHO Alert - 66 Children Dead by 5th October 2022

Almost two months passed without much updates from the MoH. It was after the World Health Organisation (WHO) published a statement on 5th October 2022 that the MoH

decided to host a press conference on 8th October 2022. Around that period the MoH had reported that the death toll had risen to 66 Children. Reacting to WHO's Press Release, Health Minister Samateh raised concerns that the International Health Organisation published its findings without their approval. The WHO statement highlights that test results prove that four medicines manufactured by "Maiden Pharmaceuticals Limited (Haryana, India)" were contaminated. "The four products are *Promethazine Oral Solution, Kofexmalin Baby Cough Syrup, Makoff Baby Cough Syrup and Magrip N Cold Syrup*. In addition "laboratory analysis of samples of each of the four products confirms that *they contain unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol as contaminants.*" WHO raised an international alert that the tainted medicines "may have been distributed, through informal markets, to other countries or regions".

## MoH Reports 69 Children Dead by 8th October 2022

The contaminants identified in the drugs are known to be used as anti-freeze. News that the similar incidents had occurred in other countries started making the rounds. Following

the statement issued by the WHO, the MoH conducted a press conference on 8th October 2022 revealing that 3 more children had died from AKI, bringing the death toll up to 69. Minister Samateh also revealed that some AKI patients were receiving treatment in Senegal.

## Two More Deaths in 2023 Increases Death Toll to 72 Children

After the press conference, Health Minister Samateh was summoned by Parliament to an Extraordinary Session which triggered a Parliamentary Investigation and the Government similarly established a Task Force to investigate the AKI deaths. Since then the MoH failed to publish full situation reports and instead opted to publish one page briefs on social media announcing three more deaths.

- Another death was reported on **22nd October** by the MoH increasing the death toll to **70**.
- The death toll reached **71 children** on **1st January 2023** after another MoH statistical update.
- The latest death was reported on **22nd March 2023** increasing the death toll to **72 children**.
- The total number of cases is **84** making a **mortality rate of 85.7%**.

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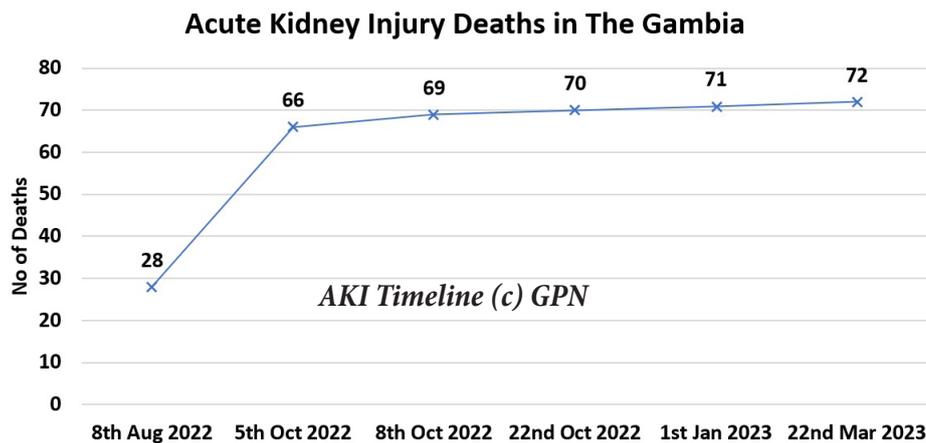


Chart of AKI Cases since 8th August 2022.

### President Authorises License Suspension of Suspected Pharmacies

A press release from The Gambia's State House announced that "President Barrow has authorised the Medicine Control Agency, through the Ministry of Health, to suspend the license of the suspected pharmacy and importer". The statement adds that the President has "directed the Foreign Minister to reach out to the Indian Ambassador to The Gambia for consultation on his government's most profound concern over the issue". However a statement from the Indian Government highlights that the responsibility to test the drugs rests on The Gambia Government. In the same statement issued in October 2022, State House noted that "the suspected pharmacy owner and importer of the drug syrups, as well as Senior Officials of the Medicine Control Agency, have been called for questioning by The Gambia Police Force to assist in their investigation".

### President Barrow Promises to Implement AKI TaskForce Report

During President Adama Barrow's 2023 new year speech he made reference to the AKI Investigation Report being prepared by the AKI Task Force which he expects "will submit its report in the New Year. We will review the report together with the recommendations from the National Assembly to inform Government's decision on the matter". The Task Force which was constituted since October 2022 is understood to be finalising its Report which will be submitted to the President for action. The membership of the Task Force is not fully known but the National Human Rights Commission and Gambia Press Union are both part of the Task Force.

### Minister Reveals: Seven Children Passed Away in Dakar

During Health Minister Lamin Samateh's AKI submission to Parliament on 26th October 2022, he revealed that seven children passed away in Dakar while seeking treatment from AKI. Delivering his speech during an Extraordinary Session specifically on the AKI outbreak, Minister Samateh called the incident "a big blow to have lost 70 children below the age of 7". He highlighted that "in four months seven of them passed away in Senegal". The Minister's speech came after the WHO conducted tests on the suspected drugs causing AKI and concluded that four drugs from Maiden Pharmaceuticals were contaminated and causing the deaths.

### Health Minister: AKI Death Could be Caused by Contaminated Water

Although WHO announced that tainted drugs caused the death of over 70 children, Health Minister Lamin Samateh was not entirely convinced. Speaking to Parliamentarians during the Third-Extra Ordinary Session for the 2022 Legislative year, Minister Samateh revealed that "these [AKI victim] children were referred from 5 regions of the country. These were the regions where floods had also been reported. The only region where there [were] no referred cases was the North Bank East health region where there was no or minimal flooding". According to the Health Minister "clinicians arrived at the suspicion that they were dealing with an outbreak of AKI that might have arisen because of contamination of sources of water and food in the communities". This message was echoed by the MCA some days later during a press conference where they claimed that some children did not die from tainted drugs but from contaminated water.



AKI Victims Chair

### AKI Victims Says Their Children Died From Tainted Coup Syrups

Family members of victims of AKI were left confused after the MoH and MCA claimed that AKI could have been caused by contaminated water after WHO's investigations concluded that the cause of AKI was from four drugs manufactured by Indian Company Maiden Pharmaceuticals. Our reporter got hold of a copy of the AKI position paper submitted to Parliament's Select Committee on Health on 9th November 2022 debunking statements from the MCA and the MoH that AKI victims died from contaminated water.

It can be recalled that on Monday 31st October 2022, the MCA held a press conference at its headquarters claiming that some children did not die from tainted drugs rather they died as a result of consuming contaminated water and floods.

However, the Position Paper of AKI Victims noted that "our children died not because of the floods or contaminated water. Rather they died and got sick from taking tainted cough syrups". The paper was signed by the Chairperson of the bereaved family members of AKI Victims, Ebrima Sagnia who was interviewed by our reporter. Victims demanded justice for their deceased children and urged the government to hold those found liable accountable.

Similarly, The Gambia Bar Association (GBA) and the Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia (FLAG) issued a statement on 10th October 2022 calling on the Government "to take its responsibility as [the] primary protector of the citizenry to investigate this tragic incident and thereafter take steps to ensure appropriate measures are taken to hold those responsible accountable". The AKI Victims also met the President's Task Force established to investigate AKI.

## Bereaved AKI Victims Confront Health Minister Outside Parliament



At least five family members of the children that died from Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) confronted, Health Minister Hon Ahamdou Lamin Samateh outside Parliament on Wednesday 26th October 2022 expressing their heartfelt disappointment on the failure of his ministry to protect over 70 children from contaminated drugs.

Waiting for the Minister outside Parliament just after he delivered a speech at the Third Extraordinary session for the 2022 Legislative Year, bereaved family members faced the Health Minister who attempted to console distressed family members.

The quick encounter was captured by our reporter who managed to capture a picture [shown above] of the moment bereaved family members confronted the Health Minister.

One man who seemed to know the Minister started explaining his disappointment on how his son passed away. Still mourning his son visibly in tears the man started making his way towards the exits prompting the Minister to call him back by his name Kamaso. The Health Minister proceeded to hold his hand, consoling him for his loss. The bereaved man still in shock headed for the exit and returned twice. Health Minister, Samateh pursued Kamaso, calling him back after which he told the bereaved family members in Mandinka, "sorry for your loss, it is our shared loss".

Eventually, other bereaved family members and the Minister managed to calm him down and console him.

Another bereaved man who also spoke in Mandinka to the Minister complained about the charges levied on him at the health facilities. He put

it to the Minister that he was ordered to pay D3,000 for an injection which he paid and another D500 to pay for medicines at the Pharmacies.

Bereaved family members poured out their agony in losing their children, some tried to explain to the Health Minister the poor level of service delivery by medical practitioners attending to patients at numerous health facilities. During the Health Minister's speech in Parliament, he paid condolences to the bereaved families and the Speaker of the House held a minute's silence for all the children killed by the AKI.

### Police Seize Over 41K Tainted Cough Syrups



Following the AKI outbreak the Gambia Police Force (GPF) also launched an investigation into the unfortunate death of some 70 children. According to a preliminary AKI report from the GPF published on 11th October 2022, "50,000 bottles of contaminated baby syrups" were found at Atlantic Pharmaceuticals Company Limited.

"It is established that from the aforesaid sum of 50,000 bottles of contaminated baby syrups, **41,462 bottles have been quarantined/seized** by MCA, and over Eight Thousand (8,538) bottles remained unaccounted for".

### Indian Government Says Drugs Not Sold in India

A statement issued by the Indian Government's Information Bureau notes that their "State Drug Controller had given licenses to the said Company [Maiden] only for export of these four drugs" and that all the "four drugs manufactured only for exports by M/s. Maiden Pharmaceuticals Limited are not licensed for manufacture and sale in India".

"In effect, none of these four drugs of M/s. Maiden Pharmaceuticals is sold domestically in India," added the statement. More worryingly the release adds that "*the company has manufactured and exported these products only to [The] Gambia*".

Not only is the Gambia alleged to be the sole destination for these deadly concoctions the statement adds that "it is a usual practice that the importing country tests these imported products on quality parameters, and satisfies itself as to the quality of the products before the importing country decides to release such products for usage in the country".

Speaking at the emergency press conference, the Deputy Executive Director of the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) confirmed that the Indian company has been supplying drugs to The Gambia for the past 24 years.

In a statement that won't give confidence to Gambians, the MCA revealed that they don't have "inspectors yet in the regions" however, a special unit at the MCA called the Inspectorate Unit goes out quarterly to the regions for inspection of drugs.

## AKI Victims Meet Parliamentary Committee



### MoFEA Allocates One Million to Visit Bereaved AKI Victims

A leaked letter dated 20th October 2022, from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) has revealed that a cash amount of One Million Dalasis (D1,000,000) has been sent to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare to “lead a government condolence team to visit the Families of the AKI Victims”.

According to the letter, “the allocation has been released as Development through Epicor Reference Number 22CA37900”. The letter also revealed that the Office of the President instructed in a letter dated 20th October 2022 for the allocation of funds to be made.

Speaking at the Ministry of Health’s AKI press conference held in early October 2022, the Health Minister told members of the media that “his Excellency has put up a high-powered delegation who will be meeting with them. Who would pay a condolence visit and update them on the steps government is taking”.

The Office of the President issued a statement on social media in early October referencing the visit. The press release noted that “the President has assigned a high-powered delegation to meet the families affected by the AKI death cases, express his government’s condolences, and share their grief in these difficult times”.

The statement added that “President Adama Barrow reassures the families and the public of his government’s commitment to do all it can to get to the bottom of the AKI death cases and possible remedies to avoid its recurrence”.



The Chairperson of the bereaved families of AKI Victims, Mr Ebrima Sagnia revealed to GPN in an exclusive interview that many families have returned the cheque given to them at the Governor’s office in Brikama and instead demanded justice from the government.

The interview took place at the National Assembly on the same day that Victims met Parliament’s Select Committee on Health, Disaster, Humanitarian Relief and Refugees on 9th November 2022. It can be recalled that Parliament has been investigating the death of over 70 Children from AKI which the WHO says was caused by four medicines from the Indian Company, Maiden Pharmaceuticals.

Chairman Sagnia who is also the father of an AKI victim informed our reporter that *the Governor’s Office contacted the mothers of the victims in a closed-door meeting where they were each given a cheque worth fourteen*

*thousand two hundred and eighty-five dalasi (D14,285).* However, he urged each to return the cheque and fight for justice for their children.

*“As the chairperson, I ordered each one of them to return the cheque given at the governor’s office and not by force because I don’t want to force any of them to return the cheque when they need it”* said Mr Sagnia.

During the interview with our reporter, Mr Sagnia confirmed that only few family members of AKI victims were able to attend the meeting at the governor’s office as other Families were unreachable.

“We want to implore on the government to equip the health facilities with standard medicines, testing machines and professional health personnel, so if you [Families of AKI Victims] are to collect the cheque, it’s like the justice we are fighting for we are no more fighting for it”.

After having that discussion with family members of AKI Victims, according to the Chairperson, many obliged and voluntarily returned the cheque which he says he confirmed with the Governor’s office.

Mr Sagnia urged those “cheques to be used to support the AKI patients who are currently in serious condition. So they will not also lose their lives like how our children died”.

“Victims deserve to have Justice, we want the government to tell us how these drugs came into this country, who imported them? Was it tested? Where was it tested? When was it tested? Who tested it until it was declared safe for consumption? We (victims) are interested to know this,” said the Chairperson of AKI Victims Group.

## “Lack of Regional Inspectorates not an Excuse” says Health Committee Chair



*Hon Amadou Camara*

The Chairperson of Parliament's Select Committee on Health, Refugees, Disaster and Humanitarian Relief, Hon Amadou Camara has responded to the Deputy Executive Director of Medicine Control Agency (MCA), Fatoumata Jah Sowe's statement, highlighting that the lack of regional drug inspectorates is not an excuse for the Agency.

It could be recalled that on Saturday 8th October 2022, the Minister of Health called for an emergency press conference to update the general public via the media on the death of Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) patients. The Deputy Executive Director who was in attendance at the event disclosed that the MCA doesn't have inspectorates to inspect drugs in the regions which she claimed is among the challenges impacting its ability to monitor contaminated drugs.

According to the Deputy Executive Director, the Indian company has been supplying drugs to The Gambia for the past 24 years.

In a statement that won't give confidence to Gambians, the MCA revealed that they don't have "inspectors yet in the regions" however, a special unit at the MCA called the Inspectorate Unit goes out quarterly to the regions for inspection of drugs. When our journalist raised the concerns of the MCA Director, Hon Camara was not impressed and argued that the MCA Director's statement "is not enough and then that cannot be an excuse".

In an exclusive interview with GPN, Hon Camara highlighted that "the agency has been existing for a while now and if there [are] capacity gaps or being it human capacity or ma-

terials like facilities they should have raised that long since not today when this tragedy happened. So, that's not an excuse".

The lawmaker for Nianija Constituency seized the opportunity to assure the public that Parliament's Health Committee will work hard to ensure that the root causes of the Acute Kidney Injuries are addressed and that "whosoever is responsible will be held accountable".

### MCA Director Highlights Capacity Challenges

The Executive Director of the Medicine Control Agency, (MCA) Mrs Markieu Janneh Kaira highlighted some of the capacity challenges hampering her institution's capability to test medicines during her presentation to Parliament's Select Committee on Health. During the MCA Director's presentation delivered on Thursday 3rd November 2022, she explained that "because of the capacity gap, [MCA] have been going for trainings with our sister countries and they have been training our evaluators on short term courses". She revealed that although the MCA was established in 2015 real operations only commenced from late 2017 to early 2018. Mrs Kaira explains that MCA "cannot register almost over 5,000 different products in the market, with 3, 4 or 5 evaluators when the number of evaluators should be far above the said numbers of evaluators. So, we categorized the products because we cannot register all the products".

Deliberating on the strategy they employed the MCA Chief noted that they started with the most common diseases such as anti-malaria, anti-hypertension, antibiotics and painkillers. These were

the first identified for registration. "Today, unless it is illegally imported, but all pharmaceutical importers bringing in these products have to register them. If they are not registered, they are put under quarantine until they have gone through the registration process, which is the review part". She explained that the registration process also includes the quality control process, adding that even after reviewing the product it should be tested through taking of samples to do a quality control testing.

The MCA Director highlighted more challenges affecting their work. "Unfortunately, we don't have the capacity and there is no lab to do that. The rest of the products that have not been registered because of capacity inadequacy, we do listing, where we take the name of the product, the batch numbers and the manufacturers, so that at least we know that it is in the country, and should in case there is a problem, we will be able to identify and withhold this product," explained the MCA Director.

Elaborating further, Director Kaira revealed that listing was employed to track the four Maiden products. She noted that the "contaminated medicines" were not registered but only listed. Due to their registration the medicines were identified and subsequently traced all the way through distribution and retail level.

"Unfortunately, we can only stop at the retail level, because of the way things are and that is why we went further to do household recall to be able to see what has been consumed and what has not been consumed and what is left in the household". So far the Police have reported seizing some 41 thousand bottles of tainted syrups.

## Hon Fatoumatta Njai Storms out of AKI Session



Banjul South NAM

The Speaker of The Gambia's Sixth Legislature, Hon Fabakary Tom-bong Jatta ordered Banjul South Lawmaker, Hon Fatoumatta Njai to leave the chambers after her observation that Deputy Speaker Hon Seedy S K Njie was "lieing". According to Hon F. Njai the Deputy Speaker was not saying the truth that the Ministry of Health acted quickly to save the lives of AKI Victims. The incident occurred during the Third Extra Ordinary Session held on Wednesday 26th October 2022 which focused on AKI.

The incident started after the Deputy Speaker rose to contribute to the debate, applauding Government's response to the AKI Outbreak. This did not sit well with the firebrand Parliamentarian who raised up her placard to observe the Deputy speaker. When given the floor Hon Fatoumatta Njai argued that the Assembly's Standing Orders 18 dictates that "any member deviating from the Standing Orders may be immediately called to order by the Speaker or by any other member rising on a point of order". Hon Njai noted that "the Hon member [Seedy Njie] just stood up and told this assembly something that is not true. Hon [Speaker] it is a lie." Her observation was curtailed by reactions from other members.

In response Speaker Jatta requested for Hon F. Njai to "withdraw that statement please," an order she refused to comply with. The Speaker then presented her with two options saying "you [are] either going to withdraw it or you leave the chambers?" Not looking to backdown the Banjul South Lawmaker decided to leave the chambers after which the Extraordinary session on AKI continued.

### Lawmakers Call for Further Investigation into AKI Outbreak

The Chairperson of Parliament's Select Committee on Health, Disaster, Humanitarian Relief, and Refugees tabled the Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) report on 20th December 2022 after almost two months of investigations. Lawmakers called for the Health Committee to deepen their investigation and come up with more substantial recommendations.

At least five lawmakers reacted to the AKI report tabled by the Chairperson of the Health Committee, Hon Amadou Camara, noting that the report still has some gaps leaving some questions unanswered.

According to the AKI Report "the actual cause of death of these children is still under scientific investigations as causality test are currently being undertaken by the Ministry of Health and partners".

Parliament couldn't get hold of Maiden Pharmaceuticals because "they have not been answering to their emails and calls". One of the recommendations of the AKI Report is an order for the Medicine Control Agency "to blacklist maiden pharmaceuticals products and ban all their products in the Gambian market".



### CMS, Atlantic and Pharma Star Breach MCA Regulations

According to Parliament's AKI Report "all drugs procured by the Government through the Central Medical Stores (CMS) are not registered or listed with MCA". The report which features findings from a tour of sixteen pharmacies and government institutions notes that the "CMS could not procure medications for the year 2022 because there was not enough budget allocation for that purpose". Pharmacies identified to have sold Maiden drugs include importers Atlantic Pharmaceuticals and Pharma Star Pharmacy. The report notes that the 4 contaminated products arrived in the Country in June 2022 together with 28 other products.

### AKI Report Recommends Legal Action Against Maiden

The much anticipated Select Committee Report on the AKI Outbreak submitted to Parliament has concluded "that *all the cases of AKI are linked to the consumption of the contaminated medical products imported by Atlantic Pharmaceuticals and Manufactured by Maiden Pharmaceutical Ltd India*".

One of the recommendations in the report highlights "that Maiden Pharmaceuticals Ltd. is culpable and should be held accountable for exporting the contaminated medicines that was linked to the death of at least 70 children in The Gambia 2022".

The report urged "the government [to] pursue legal action against Maiden Pharmaceuticals for exporting contaminated drugs to The Gambia with the Atlantic brand name". On the other hand importers, Atlantic Pharmacy, have been allowed to go scott free with no punitive action recommended towards them in the report.

The AKI Report notes that their "investigation has revealed that Atlantic pharmacy in The Gambia had followed all regulations for importation of medicines including the batch that had the contaminated syrups". This is surprising given that the responsibility for testing was placed on the importer but there's no mention of any evidence of testing conducted before the drugs were sold.

The report also calls on relevant institutions "to revisit their initial emergency responses to the AKI tragedy in collaboration with relevant CSOs and CBOs to address the issues of the victims and their families".



Janjanbureh NAM

## Two Lawmakers Urge Health Minister to Resign

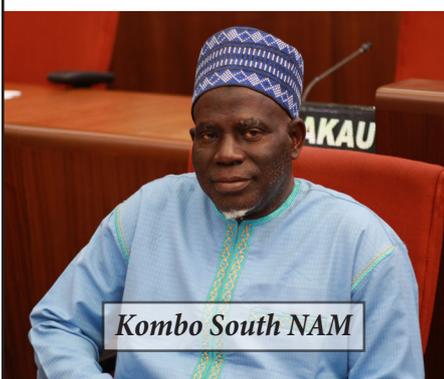
Hon Omar Jammeh for Janjanbureh constituency and Hon Kebba K Barrow for Kombo South constituency have called on the Minister of Health, Lamin Samateh to officially resign from his position immediately.

Lawmaker for Janjanbureh believes that the Medicine Control Agency (MCA) is not fulfilling its "primary mandate" and the Agency doesn't deserve to be paid any salary.

"Why are we providing operational cost to MCA when they cannot fulfill their mandate more especially their primary mandate," said Hon Jammeh.

In his view, the Health Minister "should honestly resign and go and do something better".

Meanwhile, the lawmaker for Kombo South, Hon Kebba K Barrow also urged the Health Minister and the MCA Staff to resign from their office. Hon Barrow demanded for institutions and individuals to "be prosecuted right away" for their failure to fulfil their mandate.



Kombo South NAM

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## Health Minister to Respond to Parliament's AKI Report

The Chairperson of Parliament's Health Committee has revealed to GPN that Health Minister Dr Lamin Samateh will appear in parliament early next week to respond to their AKI Report and Recommendations.

Speaking to our reporter, Chairperson Camara revealed that "the stakeholders that were written to in the report with recommendations have all replied to us and the Minister next week will be coming to the floor of the house to answer the recommendations forwarded to the Ministry".

Hon Camara confirmed that "the Minister will come and reply according to our standing orders on the 28th [March 2023 and] after our session we will start monitoring the implementation of the recommendations".

One of the institutions which met Parliament's Health Committee is the MCA who raised numerous challenges affecting their work. The AKI Report has made numerous recommendations to improve the country's drug testing regime. One key recommendation calls for the construction of a modern drugs testing laboratory earmarked to be funded by World Bank.

## NHRC Calls for Legal Actions & Effective Remedies for AKI Victims'

*From Back Page.*

The statement highlighted that "the right to life is inviolable and sacrosanct" and that the Constitution and the Children's Act 2005 give children the right to the best attainable state of physical and mental health".

The NHRC's statement made 10 recommendations and demanded a response within 30 days on "the remedial measures" that the MoH will take to implement their recommendations.

The recommendations include sensitisation on the risk of the drugs, an investigation to "determine the level of distribution of the drugs across the country", instituting more rigorous testing regimes for drugs, taking legal action against those found wanting and providing "effective remedies for the affected victims' families".

## GPN Publishes Video Interview With AKI Victim Chair

Watch the two part video interview on 'GPN Gambia Parliamentary Newsletter' on Facebook. The videos reveal how AKI Victims returned compensation money from the Government and the lack of medicines at hospitals.



## MoH Fails to Respond to NHRC Concerns, Task Force Report Still Pending

The death of two more children from Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) announced by the Ministry of Health (MoH) in 2023 has increased the total death toll to 72 Children dead out of 84 suspected cases. According to the MoH's latest AKI Situation Report the mortality rate is quite high, standing at 85.7% with only 12 children reportedly discharged.

Speaking to a representative of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) our reporter requested to know if the MoH has complied with their October 2022 request to respond to their concerns on AKI within 30 days.

In response the NHRC Official revealed that the Government set-up a Task Force to investigate the AKI deaths and has decided not to respond to avoid pre-empting the work of the Task Force.

According to our sources the Investigation Report is being finalized and is expected to be submitted to President Adama Barrow in the coming weeks, after which it should be made public. Speaking to Family Members of AKI Victims they revealed that they were invited to present evidence to the Task Force where they were interviewed. Victims say they were not allowed to keep their phones and record their submission.

Parliament's Health Committee which meet AKI Family members recommended for the Government to "provide compensation to the families of deceased and surviving children".



## GBA, FLAG & NHRC Urge Government to Take Legal Action for AKI Deaths



**GBA President - YELEF**



**NHRC Chair**

The Gambia Bar Association (GBA) and the Female Lawyers Association (FLAG) urged the government to leave no “stone unturned” to ensure legal action is taken against those found wanting in the investigation of the untimely AKI death of over 70 children. Around the same time the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) wrote a letter addressed to the Ministry of Health (MoH) recommending that the government implements remedial measures to address the AKI situation and to respond within 30 days.

In a statement released on Monday 10th October 2022, GBA and FLAG have demanded answers as to how substandard, contaminated medications manufactured by Maiden Pharmaceuticals were imported and distributed in the country, bypassing all the health institutions mandated to regulate medicines in the Gambia. **Independent Inquiry to Ensure Accountability**

The two-page press release noted that the importation of pharmaceutical products in The Gambia is regulated and administered by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) in accordance with the Medicines and Related Products Act 2014. “The GBA and FLAG are gravely concerned

that contaminated pediatric medicinal products were imported into the country from a manufacturer whose reputation and credibility according to widely available public records is dubious. We trust that it is the responsibility of the body charged with regulating the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that the quality and standard of drugs imported into the country are safe for human consumption,” the statement reads.

“The GBA and FLAG are calling on the Government (as duty bearer) to take its responsibility as the primary protector of the citizenry to investigate this tragic incident and thereafter take steps to ensure appropriate measures are taken to hold those responsible accountable,” added the statement. The two legal institutions urged the Government to create an Independent Inquiry with multiple stakeholders and experts, including the NHRC, to provide answers to the public and the bereaved families. The inquiry is recommended to shed light on at least five different points including how the medications were imported and distributed in the country, the measures currently in place for medicine control and the effectiveness of the different health and regulatory institutions as well as plans to prevent such inci-

dents from reoccurring. Most importantly the statement ends with three demands for the government to “robustly pursue the Indian Manufacturer, Maiden Pharmaceutical Ltd — to ensure that the manufacturers are held accountable, and the victims are adequately compensated”. The second demand is to “hold accountable any party or authority complicit in the importation, sale, and distribution of the substandard medications attributable to the deaths of the children”.

Finally, the organisations called for the government to “leave no stone unturned to ensure there is accountability and justice for the victims of this travesty through the pursuit of legal action against the persons and institutions responsible for the importation and distribution of the substandard medicinal products”.

### **NHRC Calls for Legal Actions & Effective Remedies for AKI Victims'**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) wrote a letter addressed to the Ministry of Health (MoH) highlighting “grave concerns” over the AKI deaths on 7th October 2022.

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