

## **Beauty pageant winner accuses ex-Gambia president of rape**

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Fatou 'Toufah' Jallow says sexual assault at hands of Yahya Jammeh happened 4 years ago.

***In this Sept. 25, 2014, file photo, Gambia's then-President Yahya Jammeh is seen at United Nations headquarters.Â Â (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II, File)***

**DAKAR, Senegal:** A Gambian beauty pageant winner has accused the country's former dictator Yahya Jammeh of raping her four years ago, the latest allegation of human rights abuses committed by the ex-president now living in exile in Equatorial Guinea.

Fatou "Toufah" Jallow, now 23, made an announcement to journalists Tuesday and said she plans to testify later this year before Gambia's truth and reconciliation commission, which is investigating abuses committed under the Jammeh regime.

Gambia's attorney general, Abubacarr M. Tambadou, called Jallow "brave" for coming forward and asked others to speak out if they had similar accusations about events that occurred during Jammeh's 22-year regime.

"It is only through speaking up and exposing such despicable acts, especially by those in positions of power, can we effectively combat the scourge and menace of sexual violence against women and girls in our society," Tambadou said Wednesday.

The former dictator is accused of ordering opponents tortured, jailed and killed. The sexual abuse allegations raised by Jallow and others directly implicate him in personally committing violence against Gambians.

Jallow and other young women interviewed by Human Rights Watch say the president was a sexual predator who coerced young women into sexual relationships by promising scholarships and even putting some on the state payroll.

Jammeh is reportedly living a lavish but reclusive life in exile in Equatorial Guinea, where he is protected from extradition by the dictator in charge of the oil-rich country.

Jallow, who wanted to come forward publicly, said the president began lavishing gifts on her and her family after meeting her when she was crowned queen of the Miss July 22 Pageant as an 18-year-old in 2014.

Jammeh took a special interest in her, she said, ordering the utility company to install running water at her mother's home, and having his cousin purchase the family expensive furniture.

While initially he expressed interest in funding her charity project, she said that Jammeh later asked for her hand in marriage. After she declined, he told her that as the pageant winner she had to attend an event at his official residence, State House, ahead of the holy month of Ramadan.

Once there, she said she was locked in a room and drugged by the president himself.

"He told me, 'No woman has ever rejected me. And who do you think you are?'" she said. "His face changed, his eyes were so red, different from the man before. He said, 'No woman rejects me. You think you can get away with it?'"

As she tried to leave, Jallow said the president told her: "If you make any move, I will kill you with my own hands."

The president then drugged her, shoved his genitals in her face and raped her before she blacked out, she said. Several days later she told her family she was going to the market to shop, and then fled to neighboring Senegal.

Jammeh later lost the 2016 election to now President Adama Barrow. After initially refusing to accept his defeat, Jammeh succumbed to international pressure, stepped down from office and fled to Equatorial Guinea. Gambia's new administration has estimated that Jammeh and his associates stole up to \$1 billion in funds from the state coffers.

- AP, TNYT, Newser