

## **Disposition of Remains**

### **Profile of Religions of the Host Country and Religious Services available to visitors:**

Country Profile: Major Religions: Islam 90% of population, Christianity and others 10%.

The government of The Gambia observes both Muslim and Christian holidays and in general its citizens practice religious tolerance.

### **Funeral Directors, Morticians, and Related Services:**

The Gambia has only one mortuary with cold storage capability, which is very basic and more closely resembles a morgue. It has limited capacity. There are no full-service mortuaries or funeral companies in The Gambia, and cremation is not available in The Gambia or the neighboring country, Senegal.

The Banjul Morgue is located near the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital (EFSTH), which is government-operated and located in Banjul. The morgue can hold thirty-two (32) refrigerated remains. There is one morgue attendant, an autopsy/embalming assistant, and a morgue caretaker. The morgue is available to everyone regardless of nationality or religion. There is a usage fee of 3,000 Gambian Dalasis (equivalent to about \$64.00) flat fee for non-Gambians. Gambians are charged on a daily basis for storage. Since Americans generally require lengthier stays while decisions about disposition of remains are being made overseas, the flat rate is usually a savings for American citizens. Most of the deceased are transferred to this morgue, especially if it is known that the deceased is a non-Gambian.

Embalming and autopsies in The Gambia are only performed by a pathologist at EFSTH, and are rarely done by Gambians. Embalming costs approximately 33,000.00 Dalasis (\$700.00).

Cremation is against the law in The Gambia, and no crematoriums operate in The Gambia. Cremation is also unavailable in the only country bordering The Gambia, Senegal.

An autopsy is required when the cause of death is suspect or when it is required by the family or the Embassy. Often the doctor performing the autopsy expects the presence of an Embassy official. It is possible that an autopsy can be avoided if the Embassy requests this in writing on behalf of the next-of-kin.

The pathologist is responsible for making findings regarding the cause of death and for issuing medical certificates of death. The official death certificate is issued by Medical & Health Department with presentation of the medical certificate of death.

Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital (EFSTH)  
Independence Drive, Banjul  
TEL: 011-220-301-6995, 011-220-624-7893  
Contact: Mr. Kekuta Tamba (morgue attendant)  
Quality of Facility: Standard

DISCLAIMER: The U.S. Embassy Banjul, The Gambia assumes no responsibility or liability for the professional ability or reputation of, or the quality of services provided by, listed firms.

Professional credentials and areas of expertise are provided directly by the funeral directors, morticians and other service providers.

### **Interment:**

Most remains are not embalmed if buried locally; Muslim law dictates remains be buried the same or next day, and Islamic burial generally occurs within twenty-four hours of death. Both Christian and Islamic burials may be arranged at relatively low costs, in rudimentary but dignified cemeteries. Muslim burials require neither a cement tomb nor a coffin; however, Muslim graves do have head stones and other grave markers.

Local interment costs may total approximately 30,000.00 Dalasis (\$638.00). This would include morgue storage at 3,000.00 Dalasis (\$64.00), remains preparation at 1,500 Dalasis (\$32.00), basic coffin at 22,165.00 Dalasis (\$472.00), and a Christian grave for 11,780 Dalasis (\$250.00). Cash is the standard for payment of services in The Gambia.

The Gambia's Law governing disinterment of remains permits disinterment with the consent of the next-of-kin and authorization from the Director of Medical and Health Services.

### **Transportation:**

Local transportation of remains (i.e. from morgue to cemetery or airport) can be arranged with the Banjul City Council using their van service. Their offices are located next to the EFSTH on Independence Drive in Banjul. The cost is approximately 750 Dalasis (\$16.00). Telephone: 011-220-422-7416.

Brussels Airlines is the only airline that can reliably ship remains via air to the United States from The Gambia. Due to the lack of direct flights to the United States, shipping remains to the United States is expensive and complicated. Brussels Airlines does not have a contract relationship with any airline that allows for direct booking of the remains to the United States. Therefore, it is necessary to arrange for a shipping agent in Europe to see the remains make it to the connecting flight. Brussels Airlines may be able to arrange this but there will be additional expenses involved.

Flights can vary with the season, but usually there are four per week. There are many charter flights to Europe from December to May, and it is possible, though not probable, that arrangements could be made with one of those carriers.

Brussels Airlines specifies the casket be lined with a copper lining and further enclosed in a box made of durable wood approximately one inch thick. These boxes are not available ready-made but the morgue may have them available for purchase, or can help arrange promptly for their construction. The shipping casket is then wrapped in heavy fabric for shipment.

Caskets that meet air shipment requirements are available through inquiries at EFSTH Morgue. A basic wooden casket costs approximately 16,000 Dalasis (\$340.00); however, export quality (double and lined with copper) costs approximately 31,000.00 Dalasis (\$660.00).

Embalming costs 30,000 Dalasis (\$638.00) and is performed only at EFSTH in Banjul. Embalming must be done when remains are to be exported.

Current Brussels Airlines cargo rates are charged per kilo rate plus surcharges. For example, remains

weighing 150 pounds with a 200-pound casket would be approximately US \$3,940.00 (Banjul to Los Angeles), or US \$3,607.00 (Banjul to John F. Kennedy/Dulles, VA) or \$3,607.00 (Banjul to Chicago/O'Hare).

The documents required for shipment of remains are as follows:

- 1) Death Certificate issued by Medical & Health Department, Banjul.
- 2) Certificate of Cause of Death (when applicable; see below).
- 3) Embalming Certificate (two copies).
- 4) Mortuary Certificate issued by U.S. Embassy Banjul.
- 5) The Consular Officer's Certificate of Casket Contents.

Nos. 1, 2, and 3 of the above-stated items are obtainable from the EFSTH Morgue. A Certificate of Cause of Death is issued in cases where death occurs outside of a medical facility and an autopsy or post-mortem is required in order to determine cause of death. The certificate is issued by a mortician (aka: pathologist) performing the autopsy or post-mortem and is the basis for the death certificate.

The Certificate of Clearance for shipment is issued by U.S. Embassy Banjul and certifies the remains have been examined, prepared, and sealed in accordance with the regulations of The Gambia.

The Embassy Consular Officer, after witnessing the placement of the remains in a casket, drafts a statement specifying the casket's contents.