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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL DURING THE 48TH SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP SESSION

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

21ST JANUARY 2025

**Thank you Mr. Vice President**

**Members of the Human Rights Council**

**Esteemed Delegates**

**My name is Dawda A. Jallow and as** the Attorney General and Minister of Justice of The Republic of The Gambia, it is my profound honour on behalf of His Excellency Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia, the Government and people of The Gambia, to present our national report under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process for the period 2020–2024.

**This report is presented as The Gambia concludes a successful first term as a member of the Human Rights Council (2022–2024). During this term, we actively contributed to advancing the Council's mandate through initiatives that demonstrate our unwavering commitment to promoting human rights both globally and domestically. Our experiences over the past three years have enriched our understanding and strengthened our resolve to lead by example as we embark on our second term from 2025 to 2027, reaffirming our dedication to the Council's principles and fostering global cooperation.**

 I am joined by my colleague Mrs Fatou Kinteh, the Honourable Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, and a distinguished delegation comprising representatives from the National Assembly, key ministries and agencies, reflecting our shared commitment to advancing human rights in The Gambia. The delegation includes:

1. **H.E Prof Muhammadou M.O.Kah- Permanent Representative of The Gambia in Geneva**

**3. Mr. Baboucarr Jobe- Permanent Secretary- Ministry of Finance**

**4. Mr. Demba Sowe= Assistant Inspector General of Police**

**5. Hon. Madi MK Ceessay- National Assembly Member**

**6. Mr. Louis Moses Mendy- Permanent Secretary , Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education**

**7. Dr. Yusupha Touray- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health**

**8. Mr. Kajali Sonko – Deputy Permanent Secretary- Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare**

**9. Ms. Aji Adam Ceesay- Curator of Intestate Estate- Ministry of Justice**

**10. Ms Harriet Bass- Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare**

**11. Ms. Bintou PA Njie – Office of The President**

**12. Ms. Isatou Camara- Satate Counsel- Ministry of Justice**

**13. Ms Bafou Jeng- Counsellor for Human Rights Matters at the Permanent Mission of The Gambia in Geneva**

This report offers an opportunity to review the progress made since our last UPR in 2019, highlight ongoing challenges, and outline future commitments as we endeavour to build a just, inclusive, and democratic society.

**Mr Vice President President**

**The Universal Periodic Review mechanism has been instrumental in fostering a spirit of collaboration and accountability among member states. The Gambia values this process as a vital platform for advancing human rights and sharing lessons learned globally.**

During the last UPR cycle, The Gambia accepted 207 of the 22**2** recommendations made by member states. These recommendations have served as a roadmap for our reform agenda, focusing on transitional justice, institutional strengthening, gender equality, and socio-economic rights. Despite challenges posed by limited resources and emerging global crises, The Gambia has made commendable strides in implementing these recommendations.

Our report was developed through a highly participatory process, involving consultations with government institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners. We deeply appreciate the contributions of all stakeholders and are committed to ongoing collaboration with the Human Rights Council and member states to further our shared goals.

**Constitutional, Institutional, and Legislative Reforms**

In line with our commitment to aligning with international human rights norms, The Gambia has ratified all nine core UN human rights treaties and key optional protocols. Domestically, several legislative reforms have been enacted, including the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, and the Labour Act 2023.

The Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia Promulgation Bill was laid before the National Assembly last December and it is expected to be considered during the next session of the National Assembly in March 2025. The 2024 draft Constitution which enshrines fundamental rights and freedoms, is a cornerstone of our governance reform. **The draft Constitution reflects inputs from an extensive public consultation process, including civil society, youth, and women’s organizations. This inclusivity underscores our commitment to participatory governance**. Key provisions include the abolition of the death penalty, the introduction of a term limit for the president, expanded protections for vulnerable groups, affirmative action for increasing women and other vulnerable groups’ representation in the National Assembly, and strengthened mechanisms for accountability.

The establishment and operationalization of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) have significantly bolstered our institutional framework for protecting human rights. The NHRC has attained “A” status under the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and continues to play a critical role in addressing human rights concerns nationwide.

**Mr Vice President,**

**(Transitional Justice and Accountability)**

The conclusion of the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC) represented a critical milestone in our transitional justice journey. Out of the 265 recommendations provided by the TRRC, 263 have been accepted, and efforts to implement them are currently underway through the Post-TRRC Unit within my ministry. **To date, approximately 16 percent of the TRRC recommendations have been implemented, including key legislative reforms and victim support initiatives**. The government's implementation plan encompasses a broad array of areas, including Justice and Accountability, Victims Reparations, Institutional and Legislative Reforms, as well as Peacebuilding and Reconciliation.

The justice and accountability segment, which involves the prosecution of nearly seventy individuals recommended by the Truth Commission, is being executed under the Special Accountability Mechanism Act. This act established three important entities: the Office of the Special Prosecutor, the Special Criminal Division of the Gambian High Court, and the International Tribunal in partnership with ECOWAS.

The total expenditure for establishing the special tribunal is estimated at USD 60 million. Once 60% of the necessary funding is secured, the process of establishing the tribunal will commence in earnest. Notwithstanding, the government plans to operationalise the Special Prosecutor's Office by June 2025, to initiate domestic prosecutions where feasible.

Furthermore, the government has made significant progress in collaborating with international partners on a bilateral basis to prosecute individuals accused of gross human rights violations in The Gambia. This is achieved through the application of the Universal Jurisdiction principle, highlighting our steadfast commitment to justice and accountability.

Victim reparations remain a key priority for the Barrow government, and this is evident in the recent enactment of the Victims Reparations Act 2023. The names of the Commissioners for the Victims’ Commission, who were identified through an open, transparent and impartial process, have already been confirmed by the National Assembly, and they will soon be appointed and sworn in by the H.E. the President. This Commission will very soon assume the responsibility and management of all the affairs of the victims including the administration of the Reparations Fund.

**Civil and Political Rights**

Freedom of expression and media freedom have improved markedly. The Access to Information Act 2021 established the Access to Information Commission, which became operational in 2024. Our efforts have been recognized globally, with The Gambia ranking 10th in Africa on the 2024 World Press Freedom Index.

To guarantee judicial independence and enhance human rights within our security forces, we have implemented measures that promote oversight and ensure that justice is served without governmental interference. The current independence of our judiciary can be seen in landmark cases illustrating our commitment to impartiality and justice. Despite challenges, our judicial reforms aim to expedite legal processes through digitization and solicit the support of partners in this endeavour.

Efforts to combat torture and ill-treatment have been reinforced through the enactment of the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Act 2023, which criminalizes acts of torture and provides safeguards for human dignity in line with international standards.

These efforts are complemented through human rights training for law enforcement officers and the ongoing revision of the criminal justice framework. The Police Bill, currently awaiting parliamentary approval, will introduce robust oversight mechanisms to prevent abuse and ensure accountability.

**I am pleased to highlight that these reforms have been supported through partnerships with UN Agencies and other development partners which have provided technical and financial assistance.**

**Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights**

The Gambia continues to prioritize the right to health through substantial investments in healthcare infrastructure and services. The National Health Policy 2021–2030 aims to ensure universal health coverage, with a focus on maternal and child health, infectious disease control, and mental health services. Renovations and expansions of healthcare facilities, particularly in rural areas, have improved access to quality care for underserved populations.

**The National Health Policy has led to an increase in maternal healthcare coverage, with [number of clinics or hospitals] upgraded in rural areas. These efforts have significantly reduced maternal mortality rates**

Education remains a cornerstone of our development agenda. Budgetary allocations for education have increased, and inclusive policies now ensure that children with disabilities and those in marginalized communities have access to quality education. Efforts to promote Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) have further enhanced opportunities for youth empowerment.

**Rights of Specific Groups**

The Gambia has taken decisive action to protect the rights of women and children, combat gender-based violence, and promote gender equality. Several legislative amendments have been undertaken during this reporting period which were meant to address discriminatory practices and strengthen protections against violence.

In combating child marriage, we have adopted a multi-faceted approach through criminalization, prevention, education, and dialogue, especially engaging religious leaders as recommended by the CEDAW Committee. We recognize the importance of awareness and implementation to eradicate this issue effectively.

The rights of persons with disabilities are being upheld through the implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, and continued efforts to implement advice from the National Human Rights Commission are believed to be crucial in addressing social challenges such as caste-based discrimination.

In addressing environmental challenges, The Gambia has achieved notable progress through the National Environment Agency (NEA). We have established a hyperlocal, real-time, georeferenced air quality monitoring network. Just two years ago, The Gambia lacked public ground monitoring capabilities for air quality. Today, we proudly maintain numerous air sensors situated in key population centres nationwide. The first Beta Attenuation Reference Monitor (BAM) in The Gambia underscores our commitment to world-class air quality management for our people. The Gambia now stands among the few African countries with such an extensive air quality monitoring network.

The initiative to expand rural water supply systems includes the implementation of solar-powered boreholes and piped water systems in rural and remote areas, aimed at increasing access to sustainable and clean drinking water. This effort is supported through partnerships with international organizations and development partners to finance and bolster rural water infrastructure projects.

Concurrently, the National Sanitation Improvement Plan focuses on expanding sanitation coverage in rural communities by promoting community-led total sanitation. Additionally, there is significant investment in upgrading urban sanitation infrastructure to reduce aquifer pollution and improve wastewater management in densely populated areas. This is complemented by the implementation of the National Water Resources Management Policy to enhance governance, protect water sources, and regulate water quality standards, along with integrating climate adaptation strategies to protect water resources from pollution as well as the impacts of droughts and floods.

Gambia has made significant strides in environmental protection by developing the Climate Change Policy, updating the Gambia Environment Action Plan (GEAP), and creating the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBSAP). It has also reviewed the National Environment Management Act (NEMA), Environmental Impact Assessment procedures, Environmental Quality Standards, and regulations on hazardous chemicals and pesticides. Additionally, Gambia is committed to international agreements such as the Paris Agreement, the BRS Conventions, CBD, and UNCCD Conventions. These efforts highlight Gambia's leadership in pursuing a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment in alignment with the Paris Agreement.

Recognising environmental challenges as a global issue regardless of economic status, The Republic of The Gambia is eager to collaborate with other countries and organisations. These partnerships aim to enhance efforts towards making the planet a better place for current and future generations, emphasising environmental sustainability as a fundamental human right.

**Mr Vice President,**

**(Emerging Challenges and International Cooperation)**

Climate change, youth unemployment, and digital rights are emerging challenges requiring innovative solutions and international support. **In 2021, the Gambia was recognized as one of the few countries whose climate action plans are compatible with limiting global warming to 1.5°c, as set out in the Paris agreement. This recognition highlights our commitment to climate resilience and sustainability.**

The Gambia is committed to implementing adaptive measures to mitigate the impact of climate change, including reforestation and sustainable resource management. **Through initiatives such as the expansion of solar-powered water supply systems and the advancement of community-led sanitation programs, we are also addressing the intersection of environmental and socio-economic challenges.** Recognizing the global nature of these issues, The Gambia is eager to strengthen partnerships and mobilize international support to ensure a sustainable and inclusive future.

While significant progress has been made, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring adequate resources for implementing reforms. **We call on the international community to support our transitional justice efforts, particularly through funding the special tribunal and strengthening victim reparations programs. Additionally, partnerships are crucial to addressing youth unemployment through skills training and promoting digital inclusion in underserved areas.**

**Conclusion**

Mr. **Vice** President, distinguished delegates, The Gambia stands steadfast in its commitment to upholding human rights and fostering a society rooted in justice, equality, and dignity. We deeply value the UPR process as a mechanism for shared accountability and collaboration.

**As we navigate these challenges, The Gambia aspires to serve as a beacon of hope and resilience in the promotion and protection of human rights. Our achievements, including advancements in transitional justice and environmental sustainability, reaffirm our dedication to building a just and equitable society.**

We welcome your questions, recommendations, and partnership as we continue this journey toward a brighter future for all Gambians.

Thank you.