**Statement by Mrs. Fatou Kinteh**

**Hon. Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare**

**The Republic of The Gambia At The Universal Periodic Review Working Group Session- 21st January 2025**

**Mr. Vice President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

It is an honor to address this esteemed gathering and share The Gambia's commitment to advancing gender equality, safeguarding children, and ensuring inclusive social development.

The Gambia has taken significant strides toward ensuring the right to social and inclusive education for all children. Through the establishment of the Inclusive Education Directorate under the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE), we are working to guarantee that children with disabilities have access to quality education. This effort is further supported by the deployment of itinerant teachers, the provision of assistive technologies such as Braille machines, hearing aids, and lenses, and the introduction of incentive programs to increase teacher availability in rural areas. By decentralizing teacher training to rural regions like Basse and introducing hardship allowances, we aim to bridge the education gap between urban and rural areas.

Access to education for persons with disabilities has been further bolstered by the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 and the development of the Disability Policy 2022, which focus on addressing persistent challenges, including accessibility to buildings, adaptable public transportation, and adequate educational facilities for children with special needs.

Child protection remains a priority for The Gambia. We have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and made significant amendments to the Children’s Act 2005 to enhance protections against child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Key legislative measures, such as the Cybercrime Bill 2023 (currently before the National Assembly), the Sexual Offences Act 2013, and the Labour Act 2023, further strengthen protections against exploitation and abuse.

The National Child Protection Strategy and Plan of Action, revised to align with the National Social Protection Policy 2015-2025, includes robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and is currently being implemented nationwide. Additionally, plans are underway to develop a comprehensive National Children’s Policy to complement these strategies.

The government has also taken concrete steps to enhance child safeguarding through the establishment of Child Protection Units across security agencies, the judiciary, and other relevant institutions. These units work collaboratively with key bodies such as the Child Welfare Unit of the Police, the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Unit at the Ministry of Justice, the Directorate of Children’s Affairs, and the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (NAATIP). Together, these institutions form a comprehensive network to address and mitigate violence, abuse, and exploitation against children.

Complaint mechanisms have been significantly enhanced through the establishment of toll-free helplines, such as 1313, complementing the existing 199 helpline. These services, supported by the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare (MoGCSW), in collaboration with UNFPA, civil society organizations, and private partners, ensure confidential and cost-free reporting of child abuse cases.

Community structures also play a critical role in child protection. Community child protection committees, supported by government agencies and legal assistance through the National Agency for Legal Aid (NALA), actively monitor and report cases of abuse and exploitation. The MoGCSW has worked to strengthen its coordinating role across sectors to ensure a unified approach to child protection and continued sensitization of communities on these issues.

Legal measures are robust and comprehensive. Key legislation such as the Children’s Act 2005, the Tourism Offences Act 2003 and its amendments, the Domestic Violence Act 2013, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, and the Women’s Act 2010 provide a solid foundation for protecting children from abuse, exploitation, and harmful practices. To address emerging challenges, the Children’s Act is currently being reviewed and amended to incorporate provisions for combating online sexual exploitation, complemented by the development of comprehensive cybercrime legislation.

For children in institutional care, revised standards emphasize temporary residential care as a transitional measure pending reintegration with families or foster families. A detailed compliance checklist ensures that care homes uphold child safeguarding standards.

**Mr. Vice President,**

While challenges remain, The Gambia is resolute in its efforts to safeguard the rights of children and promote gender equality. Through strong partnerships, comprehensive legal frameworks, and community-driven approaches, we aim to create a safer and more inclusive environment for every child and every citizen.

**Thank you.**