\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Statement by Dr. Yusupha Touray**

**Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health**

**The Republic of The Gambia At The 48 Session of The Universal Periodic Review Working Group Session- 21st January-2025**

**Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen**,

It is an honor to address this distinguished gathering and provide insights into The Gambia's ongoing efforts to protect the health and well-being of our population while addressing the challenges we continue to face in the health sector.

Over the years, The Gambia has developed laws and policies designed to protect the population from environmental hazards. Despite these efforts, ensuring access to adequate clean potable water and reducing air pollution remain significant challenges. In 2020, the government developed a Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Policy and Strategic Plan, which led to the establishment of a technical working group to coordinate the participation of relevant Ministries, Departments, and stakeholders in WASH interventions.

The primary aim of this policy is to create an enabling environment where all households in The Gambia are well-informed about the importance of safe sanitary practices and hygiene for improved health outcomes. Through these initiatives, The Gambia is striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals related to sanitation and hygiene, with a commitment to improving universal access to these essential services.

Significant legislative strides have also been made. For instance, the Anti-littering Regulation 2007 prohibits littering in public places, while the Tobacco Control Act 2016 enforces restrictions on smoking in enclosed spaces within 100 meters of public places, workplaces, public transport, and areas providing services to minors. These laws aim to reduce environmental hazards, including air pollution, particularly for children who are most vulnerable to such risks.

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with UNICEF, has made great efforts to prevent water and air pollution by establishing the Water and Sanitation Working Group. Together, we have constructed Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools, addressing the issue of open defecation and promoting personal hygiene among students.

**Mr. Vice President**

Access to healthcare has seen considerable improvements. In the past, pregnant women faced immense challenges, with some giving birth under discomforting and unsafe conditions, including on donkey carts. Today, the government has introduced a Community Ambulance System, bringing critical healthcare services closer to communities. Additionally, many health facilities have been refurbished, and new ones have been constructed, bringing us closer to achieving the target of ensuring that no community is more than a three-kilometer radius from a health facility.

We are still deeply remorseful about the Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) incident that claimed the lives of 73 innocent Gambian children. The Ministry's surveillance system quickly identified the problem, allowing other countries using the same medication to learn from The Gambia’s case and mitigate similar risks. To prevent such tragedies in the future, we are constructing a Food and Drug Laboratory, which is near completion and scheduled to be commissioned before August this year. Additionally, all drugs purchased for use in The Gambia now undergo a stringent registration process, including testing in WHO-accredited laboratories, either prior to shipment or before distribution.

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain. The government’s budget allocation for drugs has increased from 60 million Dalasi to 240 million Dalasi. However, this still falls short of meeting the country’s needs, forcing the Ministry to prioritize essential drugs while leaving out those that are more easily accessible. We are working closely with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, as well as our donor partners, to develop sustainable solutions to address the shortage of drugs.

Furthermore, the capacity of vendors to meet procurement requirements remains a challenge, but we are confident that the digitization of patient services will help streamline and improve this process in the near future.

**Mr Vice President,**

While the challenges are significant, we remain committed to improving the health and well-being of all Gambians. Through collaboration, innovation, and targeted investments, The Gambia continues to move closer to achieving its vision of equitable access to quality healthcare for all.

**Thank you.**