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STATEMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY
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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

TO

THE 60TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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*Mr. President,
Your Majesties and Highnesses
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
The Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election to the Chair of the 60th Session of the General Assembly. I have no doubts that with your skills and vast experience, you will guide our deliberations to a successful conclusion. Let me also commend my dear friend His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, the out-going President of the General Assembly, for the excellent manner in which he directed the affairs of the 59^m Session. I commend The Secretary General for his leadership especially in advancing the United Nations Reform and revitalization agenda. My Country has full confidence in his integrity and competence which he has demonstrated over the years both as a member of staff and at the helm of the organization.

Mr. President,

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of our Organisation, we must pause and take stock of the record of our collective response to the many different global challenges that mankind has had to face. From only 50 at its inception, the membership of our organisation has grown to 191 today. This rapid expansion, together with the sophistication the United Nations has acquired over the years, calls for an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, with a view to rendering it more effective. It is no secret that the voice of the General Assembly has grown weaker over the years; the credibility of our human rights procedures and mechanisms has been reduced; democracy, accountability and transparency in the Security Council have become blurred, and the Economic and Social Council needs to be more relevant and effective.

On several occasions since 1945, we have witnessed instances of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Civil strife and terrorism are undermining human and state security. Poverty, hunger and diseases still decimate countless communities, while our capacity to respond to humanitarian crises needs to be reassessed and revitalized.

This is the backdrop of the challenges we as a global community face. They do not represent failure; they simply underscore what more needs to be done to make the world a safer and better place for all of mankind.

Therefore, as we celebrate our achievements, let us rededicate ourselves to our mission, and fashion a new vision that captures the realities of our world in the

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21st century. In this connection, my delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Secretary-General for the comprehensive reform agenda he has laid out in his report "In Larger Freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all". We agree that the world needs to focus on these larger freedoms.

The majority of the world's people are today in chains – the chains of poverty and underdevelopment. For them, development means freedom from want, freedom from fear, hunger and above all, freedom to live in dignity. Reforming the United Nations so that it is better poised to more effectively address humankind's quest for these larger freedoms, is a real and urgent necessity for the greater relevance and impact of our Organization.

Indeed, the following objectives should be our collective focus for the next decade:

- (1) absolute poverty and its attendant woes such as diseases , hunger and illiteracy must be eliminated from the face of the earth;
- (2) the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction must be halted, and a total ban on Nuclear Weapons should be imposed on all states;
- (3) peace must be allowed to reign throughout the world;
- (4) we must tolerate and respect our differences;
- (5) the world's eco-systems and natural resources should be judiciously conserved and utilized;
- (6) political systems must forge closer cooperation;
- (7) multilateralism should replace unilateralism in dealing with any conflict, dispute or disagreement between member states of our organization; and reconciliation should replace confrontation and conflict.

Mr. President,

If, in the next decade, we succeed in achieving these objectives, we would have provided for ourselves those larger freedoms which we crave today.

Mr. President,

While we must focus on those long-term objectives, we must also not lose sight of the imperatives of our time. We must continue working in concert towards the realization of global peace, assigning highest priority to those conflict situations that pose the greatest threat to the peace of the whole world. In this, we must begin with the Middle East. Without a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict peace will continue to elude the Middle East with consequences that affect the whole World. My delegation supports the vision of a two-state solution

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with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. We equally welcome Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank as a step towards a complete withdrawal from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Mr. President

The unstable situation in Iraq is causing undesirable ripples all over the world. The situation is, by no means, unconnected with the soaring price of oil, which is causing serious problems in the global economy, and threatening the economic gains already made by many developing countries. The sooner stability is brought to the region, the better it will be for the country and the rest of the world.

Mr. President

We are encouraged by the positive contributions of the United Nations and the African Union towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa.

The election of Nino Vieira as President of Guinea-Bissau constitutes an important milestone for that country and the West African subregion. After many years of trials and tribulation, the people of Guinea-Bissau have finally placed the country on a solid path to recovery, peace and development. As Chair of the Friends of Guinea-Bissau at the United Nations, as well as Member of the Ad-hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau, my delegation calls for an early convening of a Donors' Conference to show solidarity with the people of Guinea-Bissau and indeed a commitment to a lasting peace in that country.

Equally in Burundi, the democratic transition has just been completed with the recent election of President Pierra Nkurunziza. We extend to him and to the people of Burundi, our heartiest congratulations and best wishes for a new era of peace, stability and development.

This year has witnessed major strides towards sustainable peace in Sudan. My delegation commends the Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement for their commitment to that historic accord meant to bring lasting peace to the country. We are encouraged by the steps they have taken so far to implement the accord, and it is my fervent hope that their collective leadership will continue to tirelessly pursue the Sudan of their dreams. We sympathise with all the Sudanese people on the tragic death of their leader and Vice-President, Dr. John Garang, who did so much to advance the peace process. We are confident that his Successor will continue in his footsteps until all the pending issues are peacefully resolved.

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An underlying factor in all of these conflicts is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. We must commit ourselves to denying non-state actors, terrorists and organized criminal networks the acquisition of these weapons of mass terror. We shall have an opportunity to further refine our response to this scourge during the 2006 review of the United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Mr. President,

Our Organisation must be the ultimate defender of the rule of international law, to which all states in the committee of nations must adhere. Any attempt to weaken or undermine our rules-based international system should be rejected without compromise. An institution like the International Criminal Court, with a mandate to end impunity, deserves all the support it can garner from the international community. The Rome Statute is a beacon of hope to all of humanity, and my delegation appeals to those states that have not yet done so, to speedily consider becoming party to it.

My delegation strongly condemns the application of unilateral coercive measures as a means of settling disputes. These measures do have an adverse impact on the lives of innocent people who lack any means of recourse or redress. We therefore call for the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Cuba.

Mr. President,

As we clamour for reform and renewal of our organization, we should widen our horizon and undertake a sobering and dispassionate re-assessment of our policy towards the Republic of Taiwan. The concerns of the 23 million hard-working and peace-loving people of that great country continue to be ignored. The Republic of Taiwan is a Democratic Sovereign nation. Its democratically-elected government defends the interests of the people of Taiwan in the world. The Taiwanese people display the same concerns as all of us over global problems such as international peace and security, HIV/AIDS, the spread of diseases, environmental pollution, and all the other issues that engage us at the United Nations. Yet, they are not here at the table with us to contribute their share to the search for solutions to the problems that confront humankind today. We, therefore, call on all peace loving nations of the world to support participation of the Republic of Taiwan in all affairs of the United Nations as a full member without delay. The 21st Century United Nations should include all people the world over without any political discrimination, and the UN should also be committed to this: a 21st Century reformed United Nations that includes the Republic of China (Taiwan). Their plight is more sharply amplified by our

present pre occupation with the conflicts raging today that pose a serious threat to international peace and security.

Mr. President,

The reform agenda has been with us for decades now. Finally, this year, a number of reports, including one by the Secretary-General himself, seem to have spurred all of us to action.

My delegation fully supports the proposed reform of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and endorses the proposed establishment of a Peace Building Commission. In this regard, we hope that the wealth of experience that the United Nations has gathered over the years, especially with countries emerging from conflict, will be brought to bear on our discussions as we elaborate the structure, functions and mandate of the Commission.

We equally support the proposed reforms of the Commission on Human Rights. However, we should remember that Human Rights are the concern of all, and enforcement is not the prerogative of a select few. A smaller human rights body would reinforce that notion and entrench the credibility crisis that the current commission suffers from. While there may be structural deficiencies with the commission, it is the working methods that we must focus on in order to eliminate bias, subjectivity and selectivity.

Mr. President,

Revitalizing the General Assembly is equally long overdue. It is time for the Assembly to be more assertive within the mandate accorded it by the Charter.

Mr. President,

The reform of our Organisation would be incomplete without the reform of the Security Council. The current size and composition of the Council makes a mockery of the larger membership of the United Nations and the realities of the world today. No amount of politics or procrastination can silence Africa's legitimate quest for full representation on the Council. International peace and security are the business of all. Without reform and a thorough review of the Council's working methods, the legitimacy of the decisions it takes will increasingly be questionable. We shall also have to look into the veto once again. The purpose for which the veto was instituted and the grounds on which it was assigned sixty years ago, are no longer valid in today's world. In fact, Africa's position on the veto, which my delegation wholeheartedly supports, is

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that it should be abolished, and that the power of Veto should lie in the General Assembly by a majority vote. If this is done, the U.N. and the world can boast of a universal democratic system that would usher in a new and more peaceful world order. The Security Council as presently constituted is not helpful to the maintenance of world peace and security. If it cannot be reformed, it should be abolished and its mandate should be assigned to the General Assembly that should take decisions by a majority vote. If this happens, any action taken by the UN in any given situation will have been taken on behalf of all of us. This would put a definitive end to unilateralism in international affairs in general and dispute settlement in particular.

I thank you all for your kind attention.