



# THE GAMBIA

*Check Against Delivery*

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

**H.E. AJA DR. ISATOU NJIE-SAIDY  
VICE PRESIDENT  
AND  
MINISTER OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS  
REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**

**AT THE**

**54<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE  
STATUS OF WOMEN**

**NEW YORK  
1<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2010**

Mr. Chairperson  
Secretary General of the UN/Under Secretary General  
President of the General Assembly  
Representatives of UN Agencies  
Representative of the African Commission and  
Distinguished Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen

**Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies,**

Once again, I bring you the best wishes from H. E. the President of the Republic of The Gambia, the people, especially women and children. On behalf of my delegation, let me congratulate the Bureau of the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 2010, for their excellent work in putting together the arrangements for Beijing +15.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

The Government of The Gambia is fully aware of the fact that there cannot be any meaningful development without the full and active participation of all its citizenry, particularly women and girls, in the national development process. In this connection, the attainment of Gender equity and equality and women's empowerment still remains a critical goal to be achieved. The Gambia Government therefore reaffirms its commitment to Beijing Platform for Action, particularly the attainment of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and this is amply demonstrated through the formulation of national policies, legislation and the ratification of key international and regional women's rights conventions and treaties, notable among them the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Protocol to the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of women. After implementing a national policy for the Advancement of Women and Girls 1999 to 2009, The Gambia is now formulating a gender and women empowerment Policy for a new decade 2010 to 2020.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

In November, 2009 The Gambia hosted the 8<sup>th</sup> African Regional Conference on Women **Beijing +15**, which provided the forum for African Countries to determine the extent to which their governments and development partners have met their commitments to implement the BPfA. The African review process took stock of the implementation of both national, regional and international conventions such as the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the African Women's Protocol); the 2009 Gender Policy of the African Union (AU); the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004); and the Africa-wide campaign to end violence against women (VAW). The outcome of the Regional Meeting, the Banjul Declaration, will contribute in no small way to the advancement of the African woman at this meeting.

*Statement by H.E. Aja Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy  
Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs  
The Republic of The Gambia  
54<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW  
New York, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010*

**Mr. Chairperson,**

The Banjul Declaration, contains 7 priority areas agreed on by the ministers for accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Platform namely; economic empowerment of women through poverty reduction, employment creation, social protection and use of information and communications technology; Peace security and development; Violence Against women; Representation and participation of women in all decision making processes; Sexual and Reproductive health and HIV/AIDs; Climate change and food security and Financing for Gender equality. I strongly acknowledge the importance of these 7 critical areas. Let me also acknowledge the critical role that the ECA-Economic Commission for Africa played in the Africa review process, particularly in helping us reach a consensus on the priority areas.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

On the implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern of BPfA, may I share with you some key achievements, good practices and challenges of The Gambia. Women constitute 51% of the total population of 1.5 million Gambians and are active in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Poverty reduction, economic empowerment and social protection policies and programmes have been the main priority areas of The Gambia Government since 1994. The Government is implementing a National Development Strategy, i.e. the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) which was largely informed by the principles of the Gambia's development blue print also known as the Vision 2020 and the MDGs. Key interventions include the development of favorable Macro and Micro Economic Policies, provision of micro credit, labour saving devices, expansion of market outlets, livelihood skills development and career development for women employees. As a result, women's participation in both formal and informal sectors is improving. Women are running major businesses in the trade, export and import sectors, as well as, in the services and tourism sectors. Women continue to constitute the majority, in subsistence agriculture, and in the mostly impoverished informal sector, of the economy, and in various fields.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Regarding education, His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia is personally involved and has since been supporting girls' education by way of offering scholarships to girls. The Gambia has proven to be very effective and responsive, towards ensuring gender equality through the establishment of several interventions such as the earlier mentioned President Empowerment for Girls Education Project (PEGEP), the Scholarship Trust Fund for Girls, Financial Assistance and Sponsorship for boys, Access Programme for Girls at tertiary institutions and the Re-entry programme for Girls and Boys to reduce school dropouts. Gender parity was achieved at the basic level in 2005. Gross enrolment rates for upper basic and senior secondary level has increased significantly from 61% to 92% and 18% to 30% respectively from 2000 to 2009. The transition level from lower to upper basic is from 69% to 82% and from Upper Basic to Senior level is 51% to 68% from 2000 to 2009 respectively. The focus now, is on relevance, quality and affordability.

*Statement by H.E. Aja Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy  
Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs  
The Republic of The Gambia  
54<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW  
New York, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010*

Mr. Chairperson,

In accordance with our Health Policy, high priority is being accorded to women's reproductive health. Public sector health service delivery operates at three levels – primary, secondary and tertiary. Physical access to health services continues to improve with the upgrading and building of new facilities and the provision of trained health personnel. Safe motherhood, reduction of maternal and child mortality and morbidity is ensured through the provision of free maternal health care, recruitment of competent and skilled birth attendants, and an efficient referral facility for obstetric care in emergency cases. According to the 2007 PRSP Progress Report, between 85% and 97% of the population live approximately within 3km and 5km to a basic health facility and primary health care post respectively. The percentage of deliveries attended to by skilled health personnel increased from 56.8% in 2006 to 64.49% in 2008. Maternal mortality ratio has over the years reduced significantly from 1050 to 730 per 100,000 live births between 1990 and 2001 and further reduced to 556 per 100,000 in 2006. Infant mortality ratio has dropped from 84 per 1000 to 75 per 1000 between 1992 and 2003.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the area of promoting and protecting women and girl's rights, a Women's Bill has been drafted and is at an advanced stage in its enactment process. The enactment of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2007, the Children's Act 2005 and the establishment of a Children's Court are clear manifestations of the Government's commitment to promoting women's rights. A national plan of action has been developed as a follow up to the study on the Commercial and Sexual Exploitation of Children in 2004 to address the critical issues raised, including sensitization campaigns regarding early marriage, sexual exploitation and related issues. Capacity building, sensitization and awareness creation workshops are conducted for teachers, law enforcement agents, nurses, social workers, religious and community leaders as well as women and children. Gambian women soldiers, police and immigration personnel have participated in a number of peace-keeping missions both within and outside the region. This is an important requirement under UNSCR 1325. The number of women at top decision making levels has increased gradually since the second Republic. In recent times, there is an increase in the number of women seeking elected positions in both the National Assembly and at the local Government level. For the very first in the electoral history of The Gambia, 20 women contested at the Local Government elections and 15 won their seats. In the area of Women and the environment, media and the girl child significant efforts have been made by Government and its development partners.

Mr. Chairperson,

On the way forward, allow me to recognize the significant contributions of civil society and the global NGO community for their outstanding partnership with governments towards the full realization of the goals of BPfA and the gender-related MDGs. This is a partnership that has endured, and it is a partnership that holds the key to the further implementation of the BPfA. For this reason, we would have loved to see the active participation of Taiwanese women NGOs. They have partnered with us at various moments and we believe that they have a

*Statement by H.E. Aja Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy  
Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs  
The Republic of The Gambia  
54<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW  
New York, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010*

significant contribution to make towards the Beijing +15 review process. They are in town, and nothing but politics has denied their participation in our deliberations today. We call on all those who stand for the active participation and inclusion of women in global forums that discuss matters affecting women the world over to join us in making sure that this exclusionary approach does not happen again.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

In conclusion, the various global crises, from the financial and economic, to food insecurity and climate change, pose a huge new threat to the BPfA after 15 years. These events should rather serve to galvanize us all to push even harder for gender empowerment, equality and advancement of women. From all indications, many developing countries are still facing series of challenges in their efforts to attain the MDGs and BPfA. As I said last year, we have a long way to go and there is the need to intensify our efforts and ensure continuity of the achievements in the face of the growing economic and political challenges. I want to seize this opportunity to express my government's appreciation to all development partners who have over the years supported and continue to support our struggle towards the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment not only in The Gambia, but throughout the world.

**I thank you all for your kind attention.**

*Statement by H.E. Aja Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy  
Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs  
The Republic of The Gambia  
54<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW  
New York, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010*