



THE GAMBIA

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STATEMENT

BY

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VICE PRESIDENT

AND

MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

AT THE

**56TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN**

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Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with utmost pleasure and delight, that I deliver a statement, on the occasion of the 56th Session, of the Commission on the Status of Women. First and foremost, I extend heartfelt felicitations and best wishes from my President H.E. Sheikh Professor Alhagie Dr. Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, a great supporter of Women and Girls Empowerment, the Government and people of The Gambia to you all on this auspicious occasion. By the same token, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and congratulations to you Madam Chairperson and the Bureau, for the excellent work, in the conduct of this meeting. Please allow me to also thank the Secretary-General for his insightful report on the priority theme and for the recommendations contained therein as well as the Executive Director of UN Women and her team for their invaluable support. This year's theme – empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and other challenges is apt and timely as the clock ticks closer to the MDG target date of 2015.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The attainment of gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women, have long been recognized, by the Government of The Gambia, as an important pre-requisite, for sustainable development and progress. We therefore support the outcomes and conclusions of the Fourth world conference and the 23rd Session of the General Assembly on women particularly the 12 critical areas of concern. In this respect, significant advancements have been made, anchoring heavily on closing the gender gaps, and empowering our women, with particular focus, on rural women.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the Gambia, about 65% of the agricultural labour force, are women and more than 89.94% of these, live in the rural areas. Agriculture remains the main source of employment and livelihood, for most women in the rural areas. Rural women play a paramount role, in food and agricultural production, hunger and poverty eradication

The back to the land initiative, spearheaded by His Excellency, Sheikh Professor Dr. Alhagie Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, President of the Republic of The Gambia, himself an eminent farmer, plays a significant role, in improving rural women's productivity, by increasing access to agricultural inputs, such as farm machinery, training, seeds, fertilizers and domestic labour saving devices, e.g. Milling Machines, de-hulling and decorticating equipments, tractors and power tillers.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Government continues to support resource-poor rural producers, with special attention, to women horticultural, poultry and livestock farmers. Through the Livestock Horticultural Development Project, twelve thousand farmers, most of whom are women, are directly benefitting from this support. This initiative, is an integral part, of the Gambia Government's Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE) aim at attaining the overall development goal, of reducing rural poverty, by raising rural food security, and incomes, on a sustainable basis.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In relation to the financing for gender equality, and the empowerment of women, Government, with support from development Partners and the private sector, have over the years, implemented activities, culminating in increases, in women's access, to education, productive resources and credit. Significant increases have also been registered, in the number of women, in decision making positions in politics (43% of the current cabinet are women; 13% of the National Assembly Members are women; and increasingly, women continue to occupy top management positions in the civil, and public services and the private sector). Capacity building, for potential women leaders, to increase their participation, in productive ventures, continues to occupy centre stage, in all our endeavors for women's empowerment. A Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual Offences Bills are being finalized, for enactment. Capacity building, in Gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, project planning and management Monitoring and Evaluation have been carried out, for Ministers, Members of the National Assembly, Heads of institutions, the staff, of the Gender Machinery, and the Gender Focal Points in Government Ministries, the Private Sector and NGO's.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The empowerment of rural women, and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, however, are not without challenges. Gender inequality, has persistently existed, especially, with access to, and control over productive and financial resources. A good number of rural women, still lack ownership and control over productive and financial resources, and therefore, cannot boost their production, or even venture into large-scale commercial farming. Consequently, this has impacted negatively on food self-sufficiency and security.

Concerted efforts continue to be made, in advancing gender equity, equality and empowerment of women. The Gambia has made significant achievements, in MDG 3 having achieved gender parity, at Basic levels of Education, thanks to the President's Empowerment of Girls Education Project (PEGEP), Girls Empowerment Trust Fund and Jammeh Foundation for Peace among others. Young people, especially girls, are being funded by Government, to pursue higher levels of education. The challenge remains to be the rate of transition, from Basic to Senior Secondary and Tertiary levels, for girls. Affirmative action including scholarships for girls has been put in place, to encourage the retention, of girls to higher levels.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

From all the foregoing, it is quite obvious that rural women are part of the solution in overcoming developmental challenges, including poverty, food insecurity and environmental sustainability. In this regard, my delegation calls for efforts to be made by all concerned, including the United Nations entities, Member States, Civil Society and

the Private Sector, to continue to support and finance the critical needs of rural women and girls. We must not relent in our concerted efforts to address and eliminate the discrimination faced by rural women and girls.

In conclusion, my delegation calls for the integration of the perspectives of rural women as per our discussions during this meeting into the preparatory process and subsequently the outcomes of and follow-up to the Rio + 20 Conference slated for June 2012.

We would also confirm to the Commission, The Gambia's unflinching commitment to, and recognition of, the role of rural women, in poverty and hunger eradication, as well as empowerment.

With those few words, I thank you for your kind attention.

