

STATEMENT

BY

H.E. MR. ADAMA BARROW

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

OPENING OF THE 2021/2022 LEGAL YEAR

6TH FEBRUARY, 2022

BANJUL

Your Excellency, the Vice President,
Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,
My Lord, the Chief Justice,
Justices of the Superior Courts,
Magistrates and Cadis,
Honourable Cabinet Ministers,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Members of The Gambia Bar Association,
Members of the Judicial Service Commission,
District Chiefs, also serving as Presidents of the District Tribunals, and Members of
District Tribunals present,
Staff of the Judiciary,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with immense honour, as President of the Republic, that I preside over the official opening of the **2022 Legal Year**.

I must take this opportunity, right away, to extend warm felicitations to all the dignitaries and eminent guests present in this august gathering.

Ladies and gentlemen, since the year 2019, the world has been battling a pandemic that continues to affect the socio-economic fabric of society, including judicial systems; however, this has not stopped our Judiciary from dispensing justice as required by law.

Bearing in mind that the rule of law is the bedrock of society, my government continues to support the country's Judiciary to sustain a healthy and stable democracy. We maintain that the Judiciary must remain resolute, independent, and strong enough to facilitate good governance and the rule of law.

On this occasion, it is proper, therefore, to celebrate the heroes of The Gambia's Judicial system, who continue to work courageously to administer justice and enrich our law system.

Together, we have successfully laid solid foundations in the areas of good governance, respect for human rights, the rule of law and women empowerment, which we now need to develop and extend.

Your Lordships, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will recall that, in December 2017, by an Act of the National Assembly, my government established the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) to investigate and provide a fair and accurate historical record of the human rights violations committed in the country from July 1994 to January 2017.

We took this informed decision to establish the truth, promote accountability, deliver justice, mediate reconciliation and pay reparations, where necessary.

The TRRC accorded the victims of injustice the opportunity to relate their experiences for redress, and it provided a platform for willing offenders to confess and repent, hoping this would bring about closure and healing to unite the nation.

The TRRC completed its work and submitted its report to me on 25th November 2021. A White Paper will be released within six (6) months from the submission date to outline the Government's position on the Commission's findings and recommendations.

I urge every Gambian to exercise restraint, as we continue reviewing the report to take suitable action and ensure that the "Never Again" mantra is entrenched in The Gambia.

My Lords, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its establishment in 2017, the National Human Rights Commission has been fully functional to promote and protect human rights in the country, and to make sure that we observe human rights standards.

The Commission also networks with other Human Rights bodies and institutions to strengthen partnerships. As a government, we remain resolved to respect the independence of this important Commission.

That aside, I am proud to state that The Gambia is in full compliance with its reporting obligations, and will continue to fulfil its international reporting commitments.

In respect of such obligations, as expressed in the National Development Plan, we achieved nearly seventy percent (70%) of our reporting target from 2018 to 2021, by submitting reports on various human rights issues to international treaty bodies.

My Lords, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Within the last two years, the ECOWAS sub-region experienced several conflicts and military take-overs. The developments in Mali, Guinea and, recently, Burkina Faso undermine the democratisation process and achievements made in the sub-region. These actions are against the letter and spirit of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and should be controlled.

It needs to be emphasised that taking over power in any country must be done only through free, fair and transparent elections, which the citizens of The Gambia laudably demonstrated in the December 4th Presidential Election.

At the global level, The Gambia continues to pursue the court case against Myanmar for violating the rights of its Rohingya Muslim minority. To seek justice for the Rohingya, we filed the case on 11th November 2019 at the International Court of Justice with the support of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

My government is committed to fighting the case to its logical end to restore the rights of the Rohingya, who continue to suffer from genocidal crimes.

My Lords, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will recall that, last year, I launched the Judiciary Strategic Plan, 2021-2025. The Plan provides the road-map and framework to enable the Judiciary to discharge its functions as a key player in protecting our constitutional democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

I sincerely thank the International Community for attending the Donor's conference on the Plan, and I call upon them to support this noble initiative further and, by extension, the Judicial sector as a whole.

My Lords, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fittingly, let me pay special tribute to the men and women in the Judiciary for serving justly and devotedly under the able leadership of the Chief Justice, Honourable Hassan Bubacarr Jallow. We are fully conscious of the sacrifices you make to protect the peace and stability of this country.

I am pleased to disclose that the Government will review the salaries, allowances and other benefits of the sector staff. Furthermore, the Judicial Officers Bill will be finalised and tabled before the national assembly by the end of this year.

Finally, I express profound thanks and gratitude to the district Chiefs present. For ages, the Chiefs have been playing a very significant role in administering Justice, especially within our local communities. Today, as Presidents of the District Tribunals, they continue to exercise similar responsibilities, thereby enhancing peace and order in our communities. We are thankful for this.

My Lords, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

With these remarks, it is my pleasure and honour to declare the **2022 Legal Year** officially open.