

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA,  
MR. ADAMA BARROW GMRG  
AT THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN ULAMA AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS  
MINISTERS  
HELD ON 6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2022 AT THE SIR DAWDA KAIRABA JAWARA  
CONFERENCE HALL –  
THE GAMBIA**

Your Excellency, Secretary General of the Muslim World League,  
Honourable Minister of Lands, Regional Government, and Religious Affairs,  
All other Honourable Ministers present,  
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,  
The International and National Ulama,  
Venerable Religious Leaders,  
Senior Government Officials and Service Chiefs,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

*Asalaamu alayekum wa rahmatullah wa barakaatuhu*

On behalf of the Government and People of The Gambia, including my humble self, I most heartily welcome you all to this important conference.

This event has brought together people from different regions and countries, as well as different social and professional backgrounds to network and deliberate around the theme ***“Promotion of Peace, Understanding, and Unity among Communities and Nations.”***

As wars and conflicts of various types ruin lives and bring suffering to the global community, there could be no better theme for the occasion than this.

Before proceeding, I must pay special tribute to the Muslim World League for sponsoring the conference. To their credit, this philanthropic organisation has consistently engaged in tremendous life-changing activities around the world. We are particularly thankful that they identified The Gambia to host this significant conference.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The complexities confronting us globally have a telling effect on religion, making the tasks of the Muslim Ulama profoundly complex and enormous.

Because life is wholesome, it is impractical to divorce religious beliefs from culture and social settings, or religious obligations from civic responsibilities. We must blend and balance the two sides of life harmoniously to succeed both ways.

Reflecting on the continent, Africa has been the object of infiltration and exploitation of various forms. It has been a battleground for contending world powers and the epicentre of ethnic rivalry and conflict, leading to the fluidity of our cultures and values.

With the infiltration of various influences, Muslims continue to be divided into different sects and even fight each other like enemies.

Despite all fears and challenges, there are lots of opportunities to reverse these trends. Formal educational institutions, for instance, have the potential to strengthen Islamic knowledge and complement efforts to preserve the main teachings of Islam.

Muslims, especially the youth and elite, also have many options to build their capacity, balance their worldview and values, and resist adopting non-Islamic ways of life.

Through these openings, more African Muslims, including scholars, can serve as agents of peace and unity to further fortify Islam and the fabric of African communities and nations.

There is no doubt that Islamic thought and practice continue to influence our socio-economic, political, and legal systems. This notwithstanding, the sharp divisions and divergent views and interpretations among the *Umma* undermine solidarity among Muslims on the continent and beyond.

The dilemma, therefore, continues to centre on how to leverage the progressive aspects of science, technology, digitisation, modern thought and best practices without compromising on the basic principles of Islam.

Without trying to pre-empt the deliberations that will follow this opening ceremony, I urge the African Ulama to collaborate more closely within and with their counterparts in other parts of the world to be truly part of the global community yet protect the basic principles of Islam.

Let us harness the media to repel attacks waged against Islam, while educating and creating better awareness of the beauty and good that this great religion brings to humankind.

It is our collective duty to run institutions that effectively educate the people to make them better world citizens, better Muslims and better human beings who can live with their neighbours and compatriots peacefully and productively.

Furthermore, we must leverage global Agreements and structures to promote, establish, and sustain peace, understanding, and unity on the continent and the world as a whole.

These are among the many issues that the Ulama need to examine thoroughly to bring about deeper insights into the religion and generate knowledge application in accordance with Islamic principles and in compliance with global commitments.

Honoured Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Islam provides a package for a complete life style. It propagates tolerance and compassion, and teaches how to relate to oneself, family, neighbours, fellow citizens, the opposite sex, and people who share or defer with our thinking, opinions, and beliefs.

As human beings, we should accept and accommodate the reality of our similarities and differences. Such characteristics should remind us to acknowledge each other's strengths and weaknesses and, most significantly, the Oneness of Allah.

Our beliefs and differences should not translate into undue hostility or be used against innocent people to denounce or shame them. Hate speech and the abuse of one's influence, the media, and the platforms at our disposal should be condemned and unanimously discouraged.

Our strong commitment to our beliefs should indicate the level of our steadfastness but must not be used to condemn divergent beliefs and faiths. Most religious conflicts result from intolerance and, sometimes, the pursuit of worldly interests.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our survival as a species and our development efforts, progress, and spiritual journeys as communities and nations depend on peace and stability. Both of these are influenced by understanding and unity.

For humankind to succeed together, we must communicate, cooperate, share positively, trade among ourselves and allow everyone to live comfortable lives.

As a community, Muslims have to confront challenges to stability in our various countries, security of lives and property, intellectual pursuits, and enjoyment of freedoms, rights and privileges.

On the global stage, crisis management calls for legitimate collective action. In fostering this, we need to harness the necessary channels to address matters of common concern. Formal and non-formal institutions, structures, and organisations are examples of the channels to utilise in this respect.

To promote peace, understanding, and unity, it is a precondition to promote love and respect, fight hate, quell conflicts, and recognise the dignity and honour of every human being.

Likewise, we can effectively foster understanding through genuine dialogue, communication, and productive and peaceful engagement.

The Ulama have a huge role to play in all of these. Upon them is entrusted the task of interpreting the teachings of Islam, handling emerging issues, enhancing inter-faith dialogue, and settling hostilities.

Although it is tactically prudent to avoid subjecting others to outright condemnation, the Ulama have to be firm on the fundamentals of the religion.

In the Muslim world, the Ulama are the feelers, mouthpiece and trustees of the *Umma*, hence they bear the biggest responsibility on religious matters. Indeed, people look up to them as role models of exemplary character.

This is an enormous responsibility, but it is the most honourable task any servant of Allah can shoulder. I am certain that all of you are aware that carrying out these noble tasks implies providing guidance that harmonises spiritual and worldly matters, as Islam is a complete way of life.

In order to preserve the positive image of Islam, it is wise to leverage the tools and opportunities available, share knowledge, hold regular consultations, monitor media content, and review relevant printed matter and curriculum material on Islam.

Ministers responsible for religious affairs in our respective countries have a role in facilitating these processes. They should work towards creating an enabling environment, through their various governments, to accommodate religious tolerance. Their Ministries should avail themselves and their good offices and services to all religions for responsible and inclusive religious governance.

All citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, should feel accommodated and cared for by their governments which, in turn, would generate confidence and trust in our governments.

We have a common ground in that we are all human beings, and no creature ranks higher than being a servant of Allah; thus, this should unify us.

Islam invites all of us to the path of peace, grounded in self-submission. It upholds the principle of non-compulsion and spreading the Word of the Almighty Allah through wisdom and knowledge, based on a sound understanding of the *deen*.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In The Gambia, we are fortunate that, although over ninety per cent (90%) of the population are Muslims, we co-exist peacefully despite our religious differences. We thank Allah for this blessing and commend the people for their religious tolerance. Our institutions, laws, policies, and programmes are blind to religion and all citizens enjoy equal rights, equal privileges, equal status and equal services.

We have mutual respect for one another and do not interfere in the religious acts of the people, provided that they do not contravene the law. These factors engender peace, understanding and unity.

We appreciate and commend the religious leaders and all Gambian citizens for their contribution to preaching and spreading peace and tranquillity in the country.

I urge all of us, especially the Ulama, to exploit the good and best practices learned and linkages created here as a means of fostering religious tolerance in Africa and the world at large.

Eminent scholars, we appreciate your efforts, respect your views, honour your status in society, and encourage you to remain steadfast and focused. The fact that there are Ministerial portfolios for religion on the continent indicates that you have the support of your respective governments. May the relationship between the two bodies remain healthy, strong and productive for the greater good.

I invite you, the international guests, to enjoy all that The Gambia offers. Feel at home and come back as often as you wish. We welcome you with open arms and pray that you have very fruitful and blessed deliberations that will contribute to making the world a better place for humankind.

With these reflections and words of welcome, I have the singular honour of declaring this conference of African Ulama and Ministers of Religious Affairs officially open.

May Allah bless us all.

*Asalaamu alayekum wa rahmatullah.*