



State House Newsletter

July, 2017



President Barrow delivers statement at state opening of the National Assembly.

Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

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Acknowledgement

These have been a challenging but exciting six months. Through sheer dedication, we have been able to publish this maiden newsletter from the Office of the President of The Gambia. Many thanks go to all those who helped make this endeavour possible. The Statehouse media team deserves special mention. Appreciation goes specifically to Sulayman Touray for the beautiful photographs. Thanks also to our communications consultant Richard Uku for taking time to edit the final draft of this newsletter. His input is appreciated. We are grateful to everyone for the cordial and friendly atmosphere in which we work. We couldn't possibly wish for a better team environment. This is what made it possible to overcome the challenges during some of the tense times that we experienced. We pulled through together and are stronger as a team for it.

Overview

This maiden newsletter is one of the tools for shoring up visibility for President Adama Barrow in our communications strategy. It highlights his activities during the first six months of his administration. It gives an overview of the issues that he has dealt with over this period – both proactively and in response to matters that have arisen. It also provides a forum to share information with different stakeholders in government, civil society, the private sector and among our development partners.

Initially, a lot of effort was put into the planning and development of a strategy that would build on existing structures for communication with the public. Many found the process slow. But while it seemed to crawl along, it was a period of careful reflection and planning, as there had been no proper handing over of the media unit at the Office of the President from the former to the current team. It was, therefore, important to study the situation and understand the dynamics at play.

It is an immense pleasure and privilege to have been given the responsibility to work with a team of dedicated people to bring President Barrow's vision to the public.

In this maiden edition, the State House newsletter brings to light the international image building missions that President Barrow undertook to Europe and a number of sister ECOWAS and African Union states, among others.

The Statehouse newsletter is one of the tools being used to make strategic communications central to our operations in the Office of the President. In this regard, the Office of the President seizes the opportunity to thank the United Nations and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in the USA for the technical support that they have both provided to the media team here. It is through the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in Dakar, and the UN Resident Representative's Office in Banjul that a resident consultant in the person of Richard Uku is supporting us for a period of six months.

I hope readers will find this newsletter about President Barrow's engagements over his first six months in office informative.

Amie Bojang-Sissoho
Director of Press and Public relations
Office of the President

The Transition



Coalition Executive during transition. Photo credit: Coalition media team

Over the past 22 years, thousands of Gambians were forced into exile due to poor governance at home and an oppressive system that made many of them victims or potential victims of tyranny. They fled a system that denied press freedom and freedom of expression generally, which abused citizens' human rights and which was intolerant of political opposition.

The victory for democracy in December 2016 ushered in a new era for The Gambia. President-elect Barrow's calendar of daily engagements immediately became packed with meetings with well wishers from different groups and communities, with civil society representatives and diplomats. Some Gambians abroad flew home specifically to celebrate his victory on Gambian soil and to reassure their new president that no amount of resistance or threat would change the decision that Gambians had taken. From December 2016 to January 2017, he received a steady flow of visitors, who came on a daily basis, to both his temporary office at Kairaba Beach Hotel in Banjul and to his residence to pay their respects

The patriotism and dedication of Gambians, including the Gambian media and human rights defenders in particular, kept Adama Barrow in the media spotlight. They all played an important role keeping the public informed. Gambians had regained their courage to resist dictatorship. They felt liberated. The power of togetherness took away their fear and gave them back their voice. Adama Barrow called on Gambians and friends of The Gambia to work together and take part in the reconstruction of their country.



President Barrow surrounded by Gambians

There was, of course, the brief period of political impasse, following the sudden about-turn by former President Yahya Jammeh, who after earlier conceding defeat, abruptly decided that he would not relinquish power after all. During this impasse, President-Elect Barrow went, temporarily, to Dakar, Senegal, where he met with development partners and civil society members living in Senegal and urged them to re-engage with The Gambia.

From Dakar, President-Elect Barrow continued to engage in diplomacy to return The Gambia to its rightful place in the international community. He received courtesy visits from twenty-two ambassadors accredited to The Gambia. They called on him to congratulate him and convey their best wishes. The President-elect told the diplomats that The Gambia was back to reconnect with its friends and to break its isolation from the democratic world. He received goodwill messages from heads of state and government from around the world. There were similar messages of support from the development partners, including the United Nations, the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and many others. Potential investors as well as Gambians resident in Senegal also expressed their support.

Trial in leadership

Mr Barrow has shown mature leadership, having to immediately manage the emotions of a nation outraged at the former president's decision not to leave office. He called for calm and encouraged Gambians to be patient and law abiding.

The Gambia's new leader took a strategic decision to work closely with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on a peaceful transition. He left for Liberia, then Mali, where he met most of the ECOWAS leaders, consulting with them on the sidelines of the Francophone summit in Bamako. He discussed the way forward with his regional counterparts. In Bamako, he was very much the "man of the moment," as everybody wanted to meet the newly elected Gambian President - the person who, with the overwhelming support of his people, succeeded in removing Yahya Jammeh from power without violence.



President Barrow consulting with ECOWAS leaders in Mali. Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

The President-Elect later left for Senegal. Sadly, while in Dakar, Mr Barrow lost his young son to an attack by dogs back in The Gambia. It was a trying moment for his family but he kept his faith and said of his bereavement: "The death of my son is part of the struggle, and a test of my faith. I wanted him and his siblings to be safe and they were taken to a family compound where we thought they would be safer but we can't question fate."

January 19, 2017 - Swearing-in

At his swearing-in ceremony at the Embassy of The Gambia in Dakar, President Barrow said: “Violent change is banished forever from the political life of our country. All Gambians are therefore winners. There is no loser in the Gambian election. It is a fact that we contest elections on the basis of political diversity but we build nations on the basis of national unity. We are assembled here as one Gambia, one nation, and one people.”



Gambia Bar Association President, Sherrif Tamedou swears in President Barrow at the Gambian Embassy in Dakar.
Photo credit: Coalition media team

On that historic day, Mr Barrow described Gambians as architects of a democratic republic that was built on the pillars of good governance, rule of law and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms.

Following his swearing-in ceremony in Dakar, President Barrow met with Gambians at a reception organised there. He congratulated the Gambian community for their support for change in the New Gambia, and urged them to continue to work together to rebuild the country.



Reception with Gambians in Senegal during the political impasse. Photo credit: Coalition media team

ECOWAS, the African Union and the UN Security Council all provided significant support to the efforts to restore democracy in The Gambia. ECOWAS deployed a contingent of security forces. The ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) helped stabilise the political impasse. Today, ECOMIG forces continue to work closely with Gambian security services to ensure that normality returns to the security sector and to the country generally. By and large, that has happened, even though ECOMIG's mandate has been extended for another year.

Barrow at 52 inaugurated at the 52nd Independence Anniversary

The Gambia gained its independence from Britain on the 18th of February 1965. The 18th of February 2017 marked the nation's 52nd anniversary. It was also the day that 52-year old Adama Barrow was inaugurated as President of The Gambia on Gambian soil. Mr Barrow was just three days old at independence.



Inauguration of President Barrow at the Independence Stadium in Bakau. Photo credit: Coalition media team

President Barrow used the occasion to thank Gambians for their astuteness and for exercising their civic rights in a peaceful and non-violent manner – during the campaign, on election day and after the elections. He acknowledged both Gambians at home and abroad. He said: “I would not do justice without recognising and expressing my sincere appreciation to Gambian in the diaspora. Like Gambians at home, they also spent time and resources to support my candidacy on social media. They encouraged family members and friends to vote for me. This is a victory for democracy. It is a victory that belongs to all Gambians. It was the decision of Gambians to use the ballot box to change their government - to remove an oppressive government that had entrenched itself to one that would represent them.

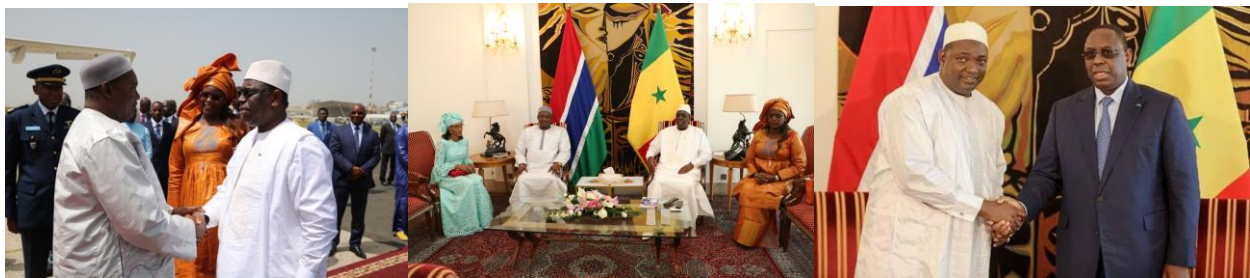
“The Gambia has changed forever. The people are fully conscious that they can put a government in office as well as remove it. No government will ever again be able to entrench itself against the will of the Gambian people.”

Mr Barrow was well aware of the many challenges that lay ahead of his administration. He noted: “We have inherited an economy that has declined because of political uncertainty. During the political impasse, businesses were shut down and offices and schools were closed. Foreign missions scaled down their staff and 50, 000 people left the country while over 126, 000 people became internally displaced.”

The new President said that these and many other challenges could not be overcome overnight but that with the determination of all Gambians and friends of The Gambia, strong foundations would be laid to address them. He said no effort would be spared in putting best practice to work for The Gambia.

Official Visit to Senegal

President Adama Barrow made his first official visit to Senegal from the 2nd to 4th of March 2017. The visit gave him and his host, President Macky Sall, the opportunity to consult with one another on areas of cooperation between their two countries. They were joined by their ministers and technical teams for these consultations. It was also an opportunity for President Barrow to thank the government and people of Senegal, as well as the religious groups there, for their support and prayers during the political impasse in The Gambia.



Senegalese President Macky Sall and First Lady Mariam Faye-Sall receive President Adama Barrow and his delegation upon their arrival in Dakar. Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

The Dakar visit gave President Barrow the chance to express his gratitude to the leaders and people of Senegal for their support during his presidential campaign and the political impasse period. Some 50,000 Gambians sought refuge in Senegal during this period. Mr Barrow thanked President Macky Sall for his tenacious engagement in helping to bring peace and stability to The Gambia.

Tour of Diamniadio Industrial Area

Accompanied by Senegalese Prime Minister Abdul Latif Krubally, President Barrow was taken on a tour of a number of development projects in the Diamniadio Industrial Area of Dakar. He and his delegation were shown around a modern low cost housing development site aimed at meeting the housing needs of the urban population in Dakar and its environs. Managing Director Marr Thiam, explained that the housing project was a significant outcome of Dakar's urban planning efforts. Mr Barrow found the project to be one worthy of emulation in The Gambia as his new government set about planning for infrastructure strengthening, job creation and the improvement of living conditions for Gambians.



MD Marr Thiam explains the Diamniadio housing project to President Barrow and his team.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

President Barrow was also shown a research centre under construction at the Diamniadio industrial site. When completed, the sub-regional research body will promote regional integration and south-south cooperation through collaborative partnership in scientific research. Like the Gambia's Medical Research Council, the centre will focus on maternal and child health.

Visit to Places of Worship

President Barrow paid courtesy calls on various religious leaders in Senegal during his official visit. He called on the Tijani at Tivavon, the Sheikh Omar Futi Tall Family at Louga, the Mourit at Touba, the Niassen at Kaolack, ToubaSanoh and the Layen in Yoff Jama Laye.

The Gambian President emphasised the historic relationship between The Gambia and Senegal, and called on the religious leaders to strengthen this relationship even further.

European Visits

In March, President Barrow was invited for a state visit to France by then French President Francois Hollande. He visited France from the 14th to 16th of March. From there, he proceeded to Brussels for a two-day official visit.

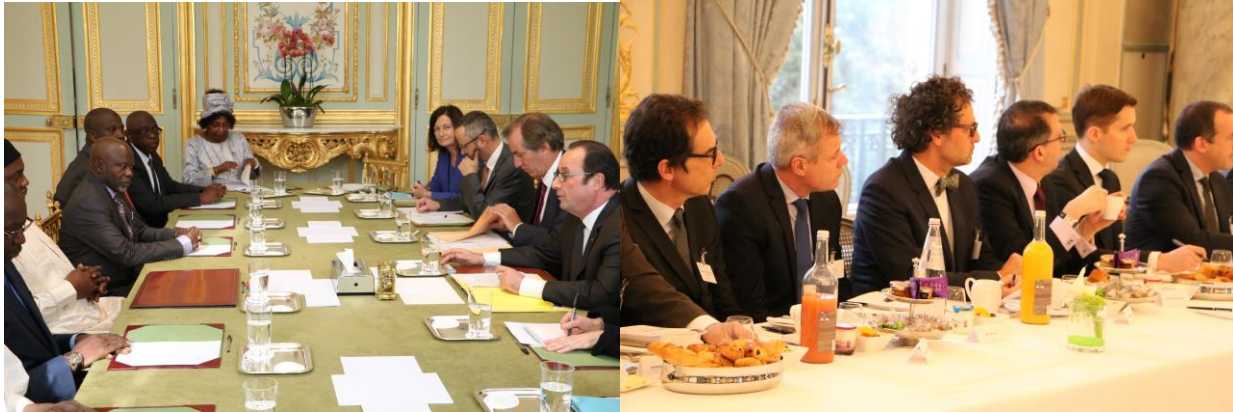


President Francois Hollande receives President Barrow to the Élysée Palace.
Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

In France, in addition to meeting with President Hollande at the Élysée Palace, Mr Barrow and his delegation held several meetings with French government officials, including then French Foreign Minister Jean Marc Ayrault and then Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drain. They also met with members of the French business community.

Then National Assembly President Claude Batolone hosted Mr Barrow and his delegation to a meeting with French parliamentarians and to lunch to his honour. As is customary on state visits, President Barrow was honoured at a ceremony at the Hotel National Des Invalides.

Marketing the New Gambia



President and Gambian delegates with French business community.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray State House Photographer

In France, President Barrow devoted time to marketing the new Gambia and selling the prospects of investment to the French business community. He and his team were received by the France-Eastern Africa Business Council (MEDEF), which promotes French companies abroad. Council President Momar Nguer said some of its companies were already active in The Gambia. He said they were aware of the economic challenges and that MEDEF could invest in the areas of agriculture, tourism and energy.

French Ambassador to Senegal Christophe Bigot said President Barrow's visit to France was significant. He noted the importance of security and reconciliation and said that France would work through the European Union and the World Bank to support The Gambia. He said he was optimistic that more investors in Senegal would visit The Gambia and explore the business opportunities available.



French Ambassador to Senegal, Christophe Bigot and President Barrow at meeting with business community in Paris.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

In a presentation to the business community, Gambia Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Alieu Secka set the socio-economic context and policy environment for potential investment in The Gambia. He also spoke of the potential for transit trade within the sub-region, and gave assurances of security for investment.

Visit to the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris

At the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, President Barrow gave a talk on the subject: “The Resolution of the Crises and the Major Stages of the Reconstruction of The Gambia.”

The President explained the context of the crises from the Gambia’s first to the second republics, with focus on the 22 years of the Yahya Jammeh dictatorship and their impact on the lives of Gambians. He spoke of the efforts made to resolve the crisis through mature politics and diplomacy at national, regional and international levels. The final part of the talk highlighted the major steps in the reconstruction of The Gambia.

Meeting Donor Partners in Brussels

In Brussels, President Barrow called on the King of Belgium, His Majesty King Phillippe at the Royal Palace. He later had a series of private meetings with Prime Minister Charles Michel, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign/European Affairs Minister Didier Reynders, European Council President Donald Tusk, and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

The Gambian President also met with European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs Frederica Mogherini, EU Commissioner of International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica, and European Commissioner of Trade Cecilia Malmstrom.

President Barrow held additional meetings with the Secretary General of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states. He encouraged the ACP ambassadors to strengthen the relationship between their respective countries and The Gambia by expanding bilateral cooperation in any of many sectors, notably: tourism, agro-based industries, rural development, transportation, energy, health, gender, education and training, governance, security, climate change, water and sanitation. The President emphasised the need for economic growth and development for people to regain their dignity.



Meeting with EU and ACP officials in Brussels. Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Media Advocacy

France

The French media engaged enthusiastically with the Gambian leader. France 24, Radio France International (RFI) and TV5. All have broad global audiences. Each conducted one-on-one interviews with President Barrow on various issues, including freedom of expression, human rights and the Gambian economy and Gambia-France bilateral cooperation.



President Barrow with international media. Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Senegal

At a press conference held at Statehouse in Dakar, Presidents Sall and Barrow fielded questions from the media covering a wide range of issues. These included the strengthening of relations between Senegal and The Gambia, the Senegambia bridge, defence and security, fisheries, foreign affairs, tourism and culture, and the issue of peace in the Cassamance region.

Congo

On his visit to Congo, the Gambian leader told journalists that the purpose of his visits to African states was to strengthen the relations with his African counterparts. Responding to questions on the nature of his visit to France, he explained that the visit had been a state visit at the invitation of the French President.

Sierra Leone

In an interview with the BBC's Umaru Fofana in Sierra Leone, President Barrow spoke about civil service reform, the need for patience, youth employment and his cabinet's role in taking government programmes forward. He also spoke about discussions with the EU to support The Gambia. Speaking about the pursuit of justice, he said that the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be key to reconciliation among Gambians. He emphasised that people could only reconcile with the establishment of the truth.

On his visits to Liberia and Ghana, President Barrow also spoke of the same issues in his engagement with the media.



L- R President Barrow with President Macky Sall, with President Sassou Nguesso and with the media Liberia.
Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Visit to Congo (Brazzaville)

President Barrow visited the Republic of Congo from the 14th to the 16th of April. He and President Denis Sassou Nguesso held private discussions on bilateral, regional and international relations as well as on specific matters of interest to the promotion of peace, stability and economic development in Africa.



President Denis Sassou Nguesso welcomes President Barrow in Congo.
Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Thank You Visit to ECOWAS States

Gambians summarily brought 22 years of dictatorship to an end in a non-violent manner by voting President Adama Barrow into power in December 2016. The election brought worldwide focus to the tiny West Africa nation. But given the political impasse that ensued in January 2017 with the volte-face move by former President Jammeh to stay in power despite having earlier conceded defeat, the successful transition from one administration to the other could not have been possible without the collective support of the Economic Community of West African States states. The support of the broader international community through the United Nations and the European Community was also important. It was in this context that President Barrow undertook a number of thank you visits to some ECOWAS states to begin expressing his appreciation to his colleagues for standing by Gambians.

President Barrow cited an African proverb to describe the visits to his ECOWAS counterparts. He said: “If you want to thank a farmer for a job well done, you have to meet him or her on their farm to express appreciation.” Mr Barrow visited Presidents Macky Sall of Senegal, Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana to thank them for their personal stands and those of their countries to ensure that Gambians regained their freedom and democracy.

In Sierra Leone, President Koroma said it was both an ECOWAS and a bilateral responsibility to have come to the defence of democracy in The Gambia. He spoke about the historic, language and family ties between Sierra Leone and The Gambia and said it was only through working together that the two governments could deliver the quality of life that their people expected.

In Liberia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf expressed similar sentiments. Mayor Clara Doe Myogo provided Mr Barrow with the key to the city of Monrovia and declared him an honorary citizen.

Receiving Mr Barrow in Accra, President Akufo-Addo said Ghana had agreed without hesitation to contribute troops to the ECOWAS initiative to ensure a smooth political transition in The Gambia. He said the region should continue to consolidate democracy in order to achieve sustainable development. President Barrow pointed out the similarities between his government and his Ghanaian host’s noting that they had both come from the opposition to win their respective elections. He said the difference was that Ghana went through a smooth transition while The Gambia’s was obstructed by greed for power, which had warranted ECOWAS’ intervention.



President Barrow during thank you tour in Freetown, Monrovia and Accra.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Summits

51st ECOWAS Summit

The 51st ECOWAS Summit in Monrovia, Liberia gave President Barrow the opportunity to meet and interact with his peers as head of state. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf welcomed him warmly to the ECOWAS family. She said she was elated that under her leadership, the sub-regional body supported by the African Union, European Union and the United Nations, had been able to work hard to end the impasse in The Gambia. She affirmed that ECOWAS would continue to support the new administration.



President Barrow delivered the vote of thanks at the conclusion of the ECOWAS summit.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

President Barrow delivered the vote of thanks at the conclusion of the summit. He said ECOWAS owed its success to the dedication and professionalism of its members. He commended the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and technical experts for investing in the planning that went into the technical meetings in preparation for the summit.

Arab Islamic American Summit

President Barrow was one of some 55 world leaders who took part in the Arab Islamic American Summit in Riyadh in June. Saudi Arabia organised the meeting to enable discourse on cooperation between the Muslim world and the United States on ending terrorism and extremism.

The Gambian President joined his host, King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, the US president and other leaders to inaugurate the Global Centre for Combating Extremism, based in the Saudi capital.



King Salman receiving Barrow during the Arab Islamic American Summit in Riyadh.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

President Barrow pledged The Gambia's commitment as a continued partner in global cooperation to end terrorism and extremism. Commenting on the summit on his return to Banjul, he said: "As a nation with a sizeable Muslim population, it was important that The Gambia be represented at the highest level at this important summit, which is why I was honoured to accept the kind invitation of King Salman. A collective commitment to ending terrorism and extremism is important, and it was useful to share ideas and pledge our common resolve to counter threats to peace in our society."

African Union Summit

The 29th Session of the African Union (AU) Summit took place in Addis Ababa in June. It was Mr Barrow's first AU Summit as Gambia's new Head of State. The summit's theme was: "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth." This was a theme which resonated with The Gambia, given the country's huge youth bulge. Young people make up 60 to 65 percent of the country's population, and tackling youth unemployment is an important area of focus for the Gambian President. The summit also covered such issues such as peace, security and providing a secure future for African youth through strategic interventions, including silencing the guns on the African continent. The AU challenged its member states - governments, the private sector and civil society - to invest in the youth.



President Barrow attending the AU Summit in Addis Ababa.

Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

The AU is undertaking reforms to promote good governance. The AU's Peace and Security Council report cited the success of democracy in The Gambia as one of the examples of best practice. It encouraged member states to respect the will of their people in the promotion of democratic values.

The President held bilateral meetings with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al Jubeir. He also briefly exchanged courtesies with Foreign Minister Agapito Mba Mokuy of Equatorial Guinea, amongst other dignitaries.



Bilateral and networking on the side lines of the AU summit.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Honouring The Gambia's Founding President

As part of his engagements at the African Union Summit, President Barrow was given the honour of adding the portrait of The Gambia's first Head of State, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, to the Gallery of the Founding Fathers at the AU Headquarters building. President Barrow said it was interesting that he was born in the historic year that the AU was founded, and he felt extremely honoured to add the portrait of Sir Dawda to the gallery.



President Barrow adds the portrait of The Gambia's first Head of State, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, to the Gallery of the Founding Fathers at the AU Headquarters building in Addis Ababa.
Photo credit: Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Meeting with Gambians in The Diaspora

President Barrow's travels abroad accorded him the opportunity to meet with Gambians in the diaspora.

During his visits to France, Belgium, Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia, Gambians that he met all expressed appreciation for the change of government. They shared their views, concerns and their expectations of the new government to facilitate consular and immigration issues (such as immigration controls and the return of illegal immigrants) and the lack of non-direct flight to The Gambia.

Gambians resident in France told the President that one of the consular challenges that they faced was the cumbersome process they had to go through to renew or replace their Gambian passports. They explained that it sometimes caused them to miss out on the opportunity to normalise their stay in France and Belgium.



Gambians in France welcome President Barrow. Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Through President Barrow, Gambians in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ghana thanked their host countries for the hospitality extended to them. They also expressed concern about the difficulty they experienced in travelling to The Gambia, about renewing their travel documents and about the high cost of residence permit fees.



Gambian community in Sierra Leone welcoming President Barrow.
Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer



Gambian community in Saudi Arabia. Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

While in Addis Ababa for the 29th Ordinary Summit of the African Union in June, President Barrow met with the Gambian community in Ethiopia. He reminded his fellow citizens of the importance of togetherness in achieving the desired change in The Gambia. The President told them that his government had inherited a poor financial and economic situation, and he encouraged them to join all Gambians in contributing positively to the country’s development. He specifically urged Gambian intellectuals to invest in the advancement of the nation.



Gambian community in Addis Ababa – Ethiopia. Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

President Barrow used the occasion to present the African Gender Award 2017, which he had earlier received from the AU, to his accompanying Minister of Trade, Industry and Employment, Dr. Isatou Touray. Dr. Touray is a leading gender activist in Africa and in The Gambia in particular. In presenting the award to her, President Barrow acknowledged her as “a strong woman who had been fighting for women, and who deserved even more recognition.” Dr. Touray said it was indeed fitting that President Barrow had been selected to receive the award himself. She thanked him for the kind honour bestowed on her.



President Barrow handing over the gender award to Dr Isatou Touray, Minister of Trade and Industry.
Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Gambian Ambassador to Ethiopia Mass Axi Gai spoke with appreciation of the cordial relationship among Gambians in Addis Ababa. He paid special tribute to Dr. Yankuba Gassama, the AU Director of Medical Services, for his outstanding contribution to the AU and to the community.

Speaking on behalf of the Gambian community in Ethiopia, Alhajie Sambou Gassama said Gambia had earned the respect of the international community and provided valuable lessons for other nations. He spoke about the efforts that the Gambian community had made to give visibility to the change in The Gambia, and he called on the former president to respect the will of the people.

Ida Jallow, a Gambian lawyer in Ethiopia, said that while The Gambia was small in size and population, its intellectuals were in positions of leadership in the international community. Kalipha Manneh of the AU described his compatriots in Ethiopia as a true family.

In his vote of thanks, Mr. Lawally Cole congratulated the Gambian government for creating the environment for freedom of expression and for bringing back democracy. He called for youth empowerment and urged his fellow expatriates to return home and to invest in the youth.



Gambian Community speaking in Addis Ababa at The Gambian Embassy. Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Addis Ababa is home for many Gambian nationals, and they came to the event in large number to express their appreciation to President Barrow and the Coalition government.

Other members of the presidential delegation to the 29th AU Summit included First lady Fatou Bah-Barrow, Foreign Minister Ousainou Darboe, Health Minister Saffie Lowe-Ceesay, and Secretary General Dawda Fadera.

Travels Strengthen Relations, Promote Tourism and Investment

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad, Mr Ousainou Darboe, advised Gambians at home and in the diaspora to be law abiding and to do away with tribalism. Mr Darboe said Gambians can forgive but could forget the atrocities committed by the Jammeh regime. He called on Gambians abroad to sustain the freedom for which they had fought. He reminded them that they represented the image of The Gambia abroad. Mr Darboe promised that his office would review and address the consular issues raised as early as possible. He said illegal migration could not be used as a political issue, and emphasised that if Gambian immigrants in foreign countries could not legalise their status abroad, it was best that they return home.



L- R: Ousainou Darboe, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Hamat Bah Minister of Tourism.
Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Three Lessons from December 2016 Elections

In his meetings with Gambians abroad, President Barrow thanked his countrymen and women in the diaspora for their contributions that brought change to The Gambia. He reminded them of how political maturity had resulted in political victory. He said there were three takeaway lessons from what happened: first, it became clear to the former president that it was the people who had the power to vote him out of office. Second, the people could use the same power to vote him (President Barrow) out of office if they do not want him anymore. And third, Gambians have now realised that together they can make the change they want.

President Barrow reminded Gambians in the diaspora that it was only when all the opposition parties came together that they were able to effect the desired regime change. He informed them of the poor financial and economic situation that his government had inherited, and he encouraged them to all contribute positively to the country's development. He appealed to Gambian experts working abroad to contribute with ideas to develop the country, and he urged investment in The Gambia. He said that investment in different regions of the country would promote decentralisation, rural development and tourism.

Governance

The processes for constitutional, legal and institutional reforms began as soon as the new administration came into office. The new government immediately began to lay the foundation for good governance and the strengthening of institutions.

President Barrow took special care to balance the membership of his cabinet between politicians and technicians in order to achieve the desired governance environment. Gender representation in the cabinet was also taken into consideration with four females and 14 males.



President Barrow chairs a cabinet meeting. Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

The Trade, Industry and Employment ministerial portfolio drew particular attention because for the first time in the history of The Gambia, this portfolio is being handled by a female minister. Another gender-sensitive decision was the nomination of three females out of five nominees for the National Assembly. One of these National Assembly members is a visually impaired woman. It is also a historic achievement that two of the nation's five regional governors are females.

The President assigned the overseer of the Office of the Vice President to lead the transition team that worked with the cabinet of the former regime. The United Nations provided technical support for this endeavour.

Staff audits also featured as an important step in the institutional reform programme. There have been staff audits in both the civil service and the security forces. The head of state also approved the setting up of several technical committees to review wrongful dismissal, Hajj operations, and the International Gateway project amongst others.

Senior judges have been sworn in to engage in the judicial reform processes. The President launched the Gambia National Think Tank, a body of experts, to advise government on specialised areas in the development of the nation.

In an effort to institutionalise democratic accountability, cabinet ministers were requested to declare their assets. A commission of enquiry was also established to look into the financial activities of certain public bodies, enterprises and offices as well as the accumulation of assets by former Gambian President Yahya Jammeh and his associates.



L-R: Sourahata Semega Janneh takes the oath as chairman of the commission of enquiry into the financial activities of certain public enterprises and individuals; and Gambian Judges.
Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Other areas of governance in progress are the finalisation of the country’s National Development Plan, which was developed during the first six months of the administration. Initiated by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, the plan will be validated by the Gambia National Think Tank.

State Opening of the National Assembly

In his maiden statement to the National Assembly on the 24th of July 2017, President Barrow recognised the power of Gambians unifying for change that brought hope. He called on them to jealously guard the freedom and dignity they had fought for in striving to build the new Gambia. President Barrow committed the government to working towards the fulfilling this goal. He congratulated the regional and international partners for their support and he commended Gambians for bringing back democracy. The President’s address shed light on the government’s different sectoral programmes and plans.



President Barrow gives his maiden address to the National Assembly. Photo credit Sulayman Touray, State House Photographer

Information and Communications

The administration has taken concrete steps to ensure a free flow of information to the public and to also listen to what the public is saying. It has introduced new communications measures to have regular press briefings by the Media Unit in the Office of the President, the Minister of Information and Communication Infrastructure, and bi-annual news conferences by the President.



Media briefing at State House

The Media Unit at the Office of the President has been providing regular information on the President's engagements. This is reflected in a steady flow of media advisories and news releases directly to local, regional and international media. These documents are also available on the State House website, statehouse.gov.gm.

Social Media

Social Media played an important role in the presidential campaign that brought about regime change. President Barrow has acknowledged this publicly on many occasions. During both the campaign and the political transition period, campaigners in the diaspora made use of such social media platforms as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter to garner support for President Barrow and the Coalition 2016 movement. Gambians and friends of The Gambia are to be commended for their contribution to the fight for democracy, freedom and liberty of the people.

In April 2017, after Mr Barrow's transition from Candidate to President, the Office of the President opened official social media platforms for the President. In July the official Facebook Page is **10K** followers and **9943** likes. The official Twitter handle is **@BarrowPresident** with **1286** followers at this time.

One of the social media challenges that the Office of the President has had to overcome is helping the public to distinguish between the official social media platforms of the President and those that claim to represent him and/or the Office of the President. The public is advised that the aforementioned Facebook page and Twitter handle are the only official ones.

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