

**Statement by
His Excellency, Adama Barrow
President of the Republic of The Gambia
Launching of SOS Children's Villages Global
YouthCan! Project and 5-Year Strategy 2023-
2027**

**Venue: SDKJICC
Date: 25th SEPTEMBER 2023**

Honourable Ministers Present,
Representative of the National Assembly Select
Committee on Gender and Children,
Diplomatic and Consular Community,
SOS Regional Director for West, Central, and North
Africa,
SOS Representative for The Gambia,
National Director, SOS Children's Villages in The
Gambia,
Heads of Government Institutions, Business and
Private Sector,
Development Partners,
SOS family, Partners, Staff, and Friends,
SOS Children,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Media,
Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It is heartwarming to be present in this event and quite comforting to confirm that the SOS Children's Villages in The Gambia have partnered with the Government of The Gambia for over forty years now.

During this period, they have complemented Government efforts by supporting vulnerable children, young people, and families to make them happy and self-reliant persons.

It is widely known that the SOS Villages provide access to essential services, such as protection, education, health, emergency relief, and alternative care for children who either lost or are at risk of losing parental care.

In fact, this truly philanthropic group has supported the Government in its desire to meet its national and global targets in various ways. This has been achieved

through the enactment of Child and Youth-friendly laws or instruments in the country.

Enactment of the Children's Act 2005, the Sexual Offences Act 2010, the National Youth Policy 2019-2028, the Women's Act 2010, and the creation of the National Youth Council are examples of such instruments and bodies that have links with SOS. As many of you know, each of these is geared towards ensuring that our children and young people have maximum protection and are empowered to grow in a safe environment to become responsible and productive citizens.

These aside, the Government of The Gambia has given a lot of prominence to young people by creating a Ministry responsible for youths and youth-related matters. This shows the unflinching commitment of the Government to the wellbeing of young people.

Through the Ministry of Youths and Sports, significant progress has been made in terms of creating job opportunities and employability prospects for Gambian youths.

With the YEP Project and other projects, for instance, we are ably addressing the economic causes of irregular migration by supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship, providing employment opportunities and vocational training, supporting micro enterprises, and creating new jobs in selected sectors through value addition and market linkages.

My government will continue to make sure that young people have all the opportunities possible to be optimally productive and become self-reliant.

Distinguish Ladies and Gentlemen,

Government is aware that the SOS Children's Villages in The Gambia do not only work in the area of Alternative Care, but also have programmes and projects for youth empowerment and employability in the Upper River Region, Central River, Lower River Region, and the Kanifing Municipality. Through the family strengthening and Women empowerment for change projects, which aim at preventing family separation and ensuring that children stay in their family of origin, they have positively impacted all regions of the country.

In addition, my government acknowledges the collaboration between the Kanifing Municipal Council and SOS Children's Villages via the Hermann Gmeiner Fund Deutschland and German Federal Ministry. We have noted their involvement in a project at the Bakoteh dumpsite geared towards

sustainable waste management to reduce child rights violations. I have learnt that the project has been renewed for a second phase, which demonstrates the relevance and successful implementation of the project's first phase.

By virtue of our continued strategic partnership, today, we are here to launch the Global SOS Children's Villages Youth Can! Project and the Five-Year Working Strategy (2023-2027) of the SOS Children's Villages in The Gambia.

For those who do not know, the YouthCan! Project is a global initiative that supports young people who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing it to pursue career paths and lead independent lives. This project will strengthen their employability skills and, thereby, increase their self-employment chances and sustainability.

It is targeted that the YouthCan! Project will support more than five hundred (500) young persons with relevant employability skills in the next five years across the country.

We call on all the private and public sectors, CSOs, philanthropic organisations and UN agencies to support this important project geared towards empowering the bulk of our population.

The Gambia Government assures you of its support for the SOS Children's Villages and approval of this laudable project to ensure that young people realise their dreams and aspirations.

I re-echo my call on the private and business sectors to join the SOS Children's Villages' journey through their set programmes and activities. Please share your time, skills, expertise, and career stories that would enhance collaborative learning and break

down the negative social and physical barriers that hinder progress.

On behalf of the Government of The Gambia, I extend profound gratitude to the SOS Children's Villages for their services. We appreciate and endorse their special focus on children, young people, vulnerable communities, and families. Likewise, we thank and encourage their implementing partners for their dedication, perseverance, and achievements over the years in The Gambia.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is now my honour and pleasure to officially launch the SOS Children's Villages YouthCan! Project and the accompanying Five-Year Working Strategy, 2023 to 2027.

While I wish the SOS Children's Villages successful implementation of their programmes and projects

throughout The Gambia, I thank you all for your attention.