

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT AND
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES AT
THE HANDING OVER AND COMMISSIONING CEREMONY
OF
THE SPANISH-DONATED PATROL VESSEL
TO GAMBIA NAVY**

DATE: 19TH DECEMBER 2023

Honourable Minister of Defence and Cabinet Ministers here present,
Senior Government Officials
Chief of Defence Staff,
The Spanish Charge D’Affairs to The Gambia and Honoured Guests from the Kingdom of Spain,
Service Chiefs,
Commodore of The Gambia Navy,
Officers and Ratings of the Navy,
Distinguished Personalities,
Members of the Media

I am delighted to be here today to officiate over the handing-over ceremony and commissioning of the Fast Patrol Vessel recently added to The Gambia Navy’s Fleet.

In line with my government’s development agenda and our vision of becoming one of the most prosperous and peaceful nations in the world, we place a high premium on national security. This incorporates maritime security and maritime resource generation and protection.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The high dependence of The Gambia’s economy on the maritime sector and the sector’s enormous potential to contribute to food security and employment generation, make the assurance of effective maritime security imperative. For these reasons, as the lead maritime security agency, The Gambia Navy deserves all the support it needs to effectively carry out its mandate.

In this regard, despite other pressing demands, my administration will continue to support the Navy to become better equipped and trained not only as a military force at sea, but also as a highly competent Maritime Law Enforcement and Security Service. This is one of the objectives of our Security Sector Reform Programme.

Distinguished invitees,

The new vessel in focus will be one of five patrol vessels in service to crack down on illegal fishing and smuggling. It is expected to significantly strengthen the Navy’s fleet to curb the many risky departures of migrants from The Gambia’s coastal waters.

This Fast Patrol Vessel, GNS FANKANTA, a High Endurance Fast Patrol Vessel, is the first offshore patrol vessel in our Navy’s fleet since 1989.

At the time, two Coastal Patrol Vessels of almost the same size were donated to the former Marine Unit of The Gambia National Army by the People's Republic of China.

I thank the Kingdom of Spain for their close and fruitful friendship with The Gambia, and I equally thank the Spanish Guardia Civil for making this occasion a reality. It is worth mentioning that similar support, in the form of operational platforms and training from the Kingdom of Spain to The Gambia, was offered in 2008. Ever since, our cooperation has been gathering momentum, with the Navy training and working with Spain's Guardia Civil to strengthen sea safety and security.

At this point, I will acknowledge the significant role of Retired Lt General Yakuba A Drammeh and all the Senior Military Officers of Gambia Armed Forces in the process of acquiring this support and to strengthening the existing Bilateral Cooperation between our countries in the area of defence.

I am confident that this event will further deepen the long-standing cooperation between The Gambia and the Kingdom of Spain, especially in the area of maritime safety and security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is remarkable to note that this coastal platform, GNS FANKANTA, has the capacity and endurance to stay at sea for a longer time than any other of the current fleet of vessels. Our ability to prevent various forms of illicit or irregular activities at sea will thus be considerably enhanced henceforth.

On the other hand, GNS JAMBARR, previously called LOMS-52, was impounded during an operation in 2019. After a long legal process, the platform was forfeited to the State, and I directed the Office of National Security to hand it over The Gambia Navy.

To determine her seaworthiness and endurance, on 6th February of this year, the Navy tested the vessel's performance during a Shakedown Cruise or Trial Run.

Renamed GNS JAMBARR, the vessel is deployed to execute fisheries inspections, conduct patrols, and provide escort duties and other short-range coastal missions.

I would like to use this occasion to express my government's desire for more progress in the Navy's development and capabilities, as well as broader collaboration with the Kingdom of Spain for the mutual benefit of our respective countries.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

This ceremony gives me the opportunity to reaffirm my confidence in the competence and commitment of the officers and ratings of The Gambia Navy.

I am glad to publicly acknowledge the achievements of the Navy in the fight against illegal fishing.

With these added patrol platforms, however, I urge the Navy to take up the fight against the rising trend of unauthorised and irregular ship-to-ship transfer of fuel and other goods at sea.

Notably also, narcotics and human trafficking, smuggling of irregular migrants to Europe through the unsafe conditions of locally constructed boats, in addition to other maritime crimes, require closer attention and more drastic action.

I reassure the Navy that, either directly or through our friends and partners, my government will not waver in supporting the on-going capacity building efforts.

For your part, as a Navy, we expect wise and productive use of the assets in your custody to guarantee the much-desired maritime security aspirations of the nation.

On this note, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is my honour to officially hand over **GNS FANKANTA** to the Navy for operations. I wish the officers and ratings, particularly those who will sail on board these vessels, fair winds and calm seas.