

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY,
PRESIDENT ADAMA BARROW, AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2024
GEORGETOWN BICENTENARY FESTIVAL**

**VENUE: JANJANBUREH,
CENTRAL RIVER REGION**

5TH - 7TH JANUARY 2024

His Excellency Prime Minister of the Republic of Senegal

His Excellency Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia

Her Excellency, Former Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia

President of ECOWAS Commission

Right Honourable Secretary of the Commonwealth

His Excellency Mr. Secretary General of the UNWTO

Excellencies,

Honourable Guests,

Distinguished Personalities,

Public Officials Present,

Members of the National and Local Organising Committees,

Traditional and Religious Leaders,

The Cultural Groups Present,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted and privileged to welcome you all to Janjanbureh, especially those who travelled long distances to attend this historic event.

In particular, allow me to welcome the Senegalese Prime Minister, His Excellency, Amadou Bah and the high level delegation representing my dear brother and colleague, His Excellency, Mr. Macky Sall, President of the sister Republic of Senegal.

The presence of this Senegalese high-level delegation, once again, manifests the bond of friendship and good neighbourliness President Sall holds for The Gambia.

I must reiterate our shared belief that the people of Senegal and The Gambia are one people in two States, with similar values and cultures, and stick by each other in thick and thin. To you, Son Excellence, Monsieur Premier Ministre, I warmly say, "dalen, ak Jamma."

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

History teaches us that, about 200 years ago, the Island of Janjanbureh was transformed from a peaceful Gambian settlement to a trading centre by the British, under Queen Victoria. It eventually hosted many French and British firms and was renamed McCarthy Island, with a part of it called Georgetown.

As we have it on record, thousands of Africans who were freed from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade bound for Freetown, Sierra Leone, were re-settled here in Georgetown.

We are in this historic town, therefore, to celebrate its bicentenary on an island where hope was restored to captured Africans who were unjustly seized, unjustly treated, and unjustly removed from their homeland and families without any regard for their rights and dignity.

On account of this, it is with mixed feelings that we have organised this historic festival to remember the events of the mid-nineteenth century. Because of the cruel acts of that dark era, Africans have been forced to demand reparations from those who took part in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

It is a welcome development that the African Union, the United Nations, and some African countries have already started to ask for reparations.

The African Union, for instance, has in the past two decades led a strong and persistent campaign on reparations for slavery as a basic human right for Africans.

Coming home, in 2022, at its 73rd Ordinary Session held in Banjul, The Gambia, The African Commission on Human and People's Rights agreed to set up a committee that would establish a case for reparations.

The Gambia will seize the MacCarthy Island Bicentenary celebration to use its diplomatic, intellectual, and cultural advantage to promote the reparations agenda.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Last October, I observed that it is rewarding for a nation to reflect on the past in order to chart the way forward for a better future. For this reason, my Cabinet worked closely with the National Organising Committee, stakeholders, and the communities of the area to hold this grand commemoration.

As a result, among other attendees, the Festival has brought together Gambians at home and those in the diaspora, in addition to friends of The Gambia, historians, and tourists to participate in the healing, re-connection, and reconciliation process through our shared history and heritage.

I am pleased that the organisers have involved not only artists in The Gambia, but also those in the sub-region and beyond in the activities for peace and reconciliation.

It is highly commendable that regional unity and integration will be highlighted during the festivities. This will reinforce the intensity of the messages and impact of the event, which future generations will surely acclaim forever.

Distinguished Guests,

Besides the expressed objectives of the Festival, we are celebrating hope over despair and indifference, growth and progress over stagnation and submission, and unity in diversity over intolerance and instability. This is an important message for everyone, especially the African youth.

The Westerners who landed in Janjanbureh two hundred years ago made the best out of a very bad situation and ended up building homes and careers for themselves and their offspring. The lesson for our youths is that we must strive to succeed in the country. As we put it, Tekki Fi.

The risk of boarding boats to cross the rough waters of the Atlantic for life abroad is most unnecessary. Like the Western settlers, 200 years ago, let us stay in our homeland and exploit the numerous opportunities available to build better homes, uplift our lives, and support our families.

My government is aware of the role that our heritage and culture can play in job creation and the economic well-being of our youth. This partly explains our commitment to the Festival, and it will not end here. We will build upon the lessons and success stories of the Bicentenary and further promote the heritage and artistic sectors for the gainful employment of the youth.

Through support from UNESCO, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture has developed regulations for The National Endowment For Arts and Culture. The instrument will attract funding, through grants, for artistic and cultural projects.

The Island of Janjanbureh will also continue to receive the attention of The Gambia Tourism Board so that all the interesting heritage sites and cultural products will be fully upgraded and valorised to generate jobs through heritage tourism, foster national unity, and project a positive image of the people.

Esteemed Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The moment affords me the opportunity to convey gratitude to all the committed people who worked work to make the Festival a success. They cooperated with the National and Local Organising Committees, for which I thank every one of them. Their efforts are warmly appreciated, and the list includes the Honourable Minister for Tourism and Culture for his strong leadership, the Chief and elders, the women, youths, inhabitants, and descendants of Janjanbureh.

To The Gambia Tourism Board, the NCAC, the Governor, and all the very able partners, sponsors, and artists, I express profound thanks to you for a job very well executed.

With these remarks, it is my honour to declare the Janjanbureh Bicentenary Festival officially open. I pray that we have a peaceful and successful celebration, marked by memorable festive moments on this historic island.

Thank you for your attention.

