



**STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS (SONA)  
DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
THE GAMBIA,  
HIS EXCELLENCY, MR. ADAMA BARROW**

**VENUE: THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, BANJUL**

**DATE: 27<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024**



Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,  
Your Excellency, the Vice President,  
Your Worship, the Chief Justice of The Gambia,  
Excellencies, Former Vice Presidents,  
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,  
Senior Public Officials and Service Chiefs,  
Party Leaders,  
Venerable Religious Leaders,  
Distinguished Personalities,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,



## 1. INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with section 77(1) of the Constitution, it is my honour to address this august body on the country's current state of affairs.
2. The address provides an update on my administration's performance during the 2023 calendar year, with focus on Government policies, programmes, legislative frameworks, and plans for the future. These will be linked to our national plans and the influence of global developments on the nation.
3. Departing from the traditional sector by sector presentation, my address today is thematised around the productive and social sectors respectively. It is concise but gives a clear picture of the nation's development trend.
4. With this short introduction, I will proceed to briefly situate our foreign policy within the global context.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 2. THE GAMBIA'S FOREIGN POLICY CONTEXT

Honourable Speaker,

1. We are in trying circumstances globally, facing geo-political events that breed distrust, enmity, and mounting despair to generate unified action for global peace and stability.
2. There is widespread unrest around the globe, and the presence of jihadists, terrorists, and rebels in the Sahel and in other parts of Africa continues to undermine progress towards democracy and development on the continent.
3. West Africa, in particular, has recently experienced mixed fortunes, with democratic transitions in Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and, lately, Senegal. In contrast, military disruptions in Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali have threatened constitutional order in the region.



4. Linking the international context to our national circumstances, with specific reference to our foreign policy, The Gambia remains committed to tackling global challenges through reinforced multilateralism, diplomacy, and promotion of global solidarity.

5. To safeguard our sovereignty and socio-economic ambitions, my government will steadfastly promote a foreign policy aligned with our national interests. Specifically, keen focus will remain cast on debt relief, climate financing, equitable trade, and fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure prosperity. Above all, security, peace, stability, and development will remain at the centre of our engagements.

6. Mr. Speaker, our resolve is to intensify engagements with global and regional bodies, such as the UN, AU, ECOWAS, and the OIC, to achieve our national development goals. In the process, we will pursue the renewal of The Gambia's membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council for two years.

7. As evidence of our increasingly successful foreign policy, the UN Secretary-General has declared The Gambia eligible to continue receiving funding, amounting to thirty million dollars (**US\$30 Million**), from the UN Peacebuilding Commission for another five (5) years.

8. Closely related to our international visibility is the Fifteenth (15<sup>th</sup>) OIC Summit we successfully hosted last month, during which I became Chairman of the Organisation for the next three years. The Summit has added great impetus to our international prominence.

9. I re-echo my gratitude to all Gambians and international partners who contributed to the successful hosting of the Summit. Proudly for us, the event was rated as one of the most successful Summits in the history of the Organisation.

10. At the bilateral level, we aim to deepen relationships with our partners and explore new fronts that would benefit the nation.

The establishment of two new embassies in Europe and one in Asia, as approved by this distinguished Assembly, is a move in that direction.

11. As confirmation of our growing friendship and bilateral relations around the world, thirty diplomats presented their letters of credence to me during the last year.



12. In strengthening good neighbourliness, we hosted the third biannual Senegalo-Gambian Presidential Council in August 2023 and the maiden working visit of the new Senegalese President last April.

13. Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in the process of validating its Draft Foreign Service Regulations and Draft Postings Policy, in addition to a Foreign Service Bill, which will be submitted to the Cabinet for review and approval. These are part of broader efforts to re-position our foreign policy, streamline foreign service operations, and enhance the professionalism and efficiency of our Foreign Service.

14. Our objectives at home and abroad would fail without a strong economy, reliable human resource, and the required infrastructure, programmes, and development efforts. I will, therefore, turn attention to the economy before moving on to the productive sectors that sustain it.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 2. THE ECONOMY

Honourable Speaker,

1. In 2023, the Gambian economy surpassed the projected growth rate for Sub-Saharan Africa and stood at 5.3%. This resulted from our commitment to economic growth and prosperity, reducing inflation and our debt vulnerability, while maintaining prudent fiscal policy.

2. Over the years, we have been implementing a series of public financial management reforms. These are reflected in such initiatives as the updating of the 2014 Public Finance Act and formulation of a new Public Procurement Bill.

3. We have also rolled out the Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS) to all local government authorities, created the State-Owned Enterprise Commission, and enacted the Anti-Corruption Act 2023. The reforms seek to increase fiscal transparency and accountability.

4. As a welcome development, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved a new hundred-million-dollar (**US\$100 Million**) Extended Credit Facility Arrangement with The Gambia, thereby further supporting our economic recovery and structural reforms.



5. In addition, different from the twenty-five-million-dollar (**US\$25 Million**) Threshold Programme to support our electricity and river transport development endeavours, The Gambia has been selected to develop a three hundred-million-dollar (**US\$300 Million**) development compact with the United States through its MCC.

6. Strategically, we recently launched a one-billion-dollar (**US\$ Billion**) Recovery-Focused National Development Plan ("YIRIWAA"), 2023-2027, which builds on the progress made during my first term in office. I am optimistic that the economy will continue to grow stronger.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 3. AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Honourable Speaker,

1. Agriculture and our natural resources are crucially important feeders of our economy. As one of the productive sectors, agriculture in the country did not perform badly in the 2023 season. It benefited from favourable weather and timely Government interventions, such as provision of free ploughing services, free seeds, and heavily subsidised fertilizers for many farmers.

2. Consequently, cereal production increased by 21%, rice by 27%, maize - 25%, millet - 14%, and sorghum - 17%. The cash crops also increased thus: groundnuts by 12%, cowpeas - 26%, findo - 9%, and sesame - 6%.

3. In all, last year, agriculture contributed 24.4% to the GDP. This indicates a slight decrease from 25.7% in 2022, translating into a decrease of 0.2 percentage points.

4. In the 2023/24 season, the Government allocated one billion, five hundred million Dalasis (**GMD1.5 Billion**) for purchase of groundnuts, acquiring about thirty-six thousand, six hundred and fifty-nine (36,659) metric tonnes. This marked a significant increase over the ten thousand (10,000) metric tonnes purchased in the previous season.

5. Looking ahead to the 2024/2025 cropping season, we plan to bring five thousand (5,000) hectares under rice cultivation, a target that could rise substantially, if ten (10) registered commercial farmers in the scheme commence cultivation.

6. In support of the national food security drive, Government will procure one hundred and eighty (180) tractors and twenty (20) rotavator boats for year-round deployment.



Additionally, we will enhance rice processing within the country's irrigated hubs through integrated equipment, training processors, and expanding irrigation facilities.

7. This year, my government will distribute rice, groundnuts, maize, and bean seeds to farmers to help them boost production. There is already enough fertiliser in the country, and it will be sold to the farmers at a subsidised price at different locations across the country.

8. To improve financial inclusivity, we plan to extend matching grant funds to microfinance institutions that operate close to the communities at grassroots level.

9. We also plan to integrate modern technologies, like ICT for internet banking and mobile phones, into the farming communities and establish at least five agricultural insurance schemes to mitigate risks in agricultural lending.

These schemes will be managed through public-private partnerships.

10. Among many other interventions, The Gambia Agricultural Transformation Programme, which seeks to bolster food and nutrition security through sustainable management of our natural resources, will strengthen both the public and private sectors across the agricultural value chain.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **4. FISHERIES AND WATER RESOURCES**

Honourable Speaker,

1. This is another productive sector that contributes to the economy. Due to several factors, however, the total revenue collected from the fisheries sector decreased from one hundred and thirty-one million, five hundred and ninety-five thousand, two hundred and sixty-nine Dalasis (**GMD131,595,269**) in 2022 to one hundred and ten million, eight hundred and two thousand, nine hundred and twelve Dalasis (**GMD110,802,912**) in 2023, representing a decrease of twenty million, seven hundred and ninety-two thousand, three hundred and fifty-seven Dalasis (**GMD20,792,357**) or about 15.8%.

2. To get the most from the sector, my government is actively reviewing its fishing license regime to increase protection for artisanal fishers and ensure fair and sustainable management of our fisheries resources.



3. Consequently, the Ministry of Fisheries, Water Resources, and National Assembly Matters has initiated the construction of twenty (20) fishing boats with fishing equipment to enhance the livelihood of the youth and women and reduce illegal migration. Also, the Ministry is constructing fish ponds in Kuloro, through a funding partnership with the EU, to boost fish production.

4. The twenty-five-million-dollar (**US\$25 Million**) Climate Resilient Fishery Initiative for the Livelihood Improvement Project, funded by the Green Climate Fund, aims to conserve and protect fisheries resources, while strengthening the climate resilience of fishing communities.

5. To minimise post-harvest losses and promote the hygiene and quality of fish products, during the period under review, the Ministry built two fish landing platforms in Gunjur and Tanji and constructed access roads linking these sites to markets.

6. Mr. Speaker, The Gambia has made significant strides in improving equitable access to safe drinking water, with ninety percent (90%) of the population provided with better water sources in 2023, up from eighty-six percent (86%) in 2010. I must observe, however, the figure stands at 83% in the rural area. Additional efforts are needed to bridge the gap by increasing access to safe drinking water in our rural communities.

7. In particular, last year, we implemented a mini-borehole drilling project, with a budget of ten million Dalasis (**GMD10 Million**) from the Government Local Fund. Fifteen (15) communities now have access to safe and high-quality drinking water through the project.

7. In collaboration with the African Development Bank Group and Japan, my government targets to install one hundred and thirty (130) large solar-powered piped-water systems to benefit one hundred and sixty-two (162) communities and an estimated two hundred and eighty thousand (280,000) people. To this end, twenty (20) boreholes were inaugurated in December 2023, fifty-five (55) are being installed, and the remaining fifty-five (55) will be completed in 2025. My Government will not relent in sustaining these efforts.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **5. TRANSPORT, WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Honourable Speaker,

1. Inspired by the principle that roads connect people and foster prosperity, our commitment to develop comprehensive transport infrastructure remains unwavering.



2. In accordance with our Recovery-Focus National Development Plan (RF-NDP) significant progress has been made in both urban and rural road development.

The Bertil Harding Highway and its feeder roads, for example, are nearing completion. The rural roads programme, stretching 365 km and fully funded by the national budget, is advancing smoothly.

3. In 2023, Mr. Speaker, we completed the Saloum, Nianija, and Sabach Sanjal roads. By the end of 2024, we expect to complete the Kiang West Roads, Niumi-Hakalang, and a significant portion of the three hundred and sixty-five kilometres (365 Km) of roads nationwide.

4. On water transportation, we are concluding a concession contract with Albayrak Company Ltd, which will further enhance port efficiency. The contract includes development of a New Deep Seaport in Sanyang.

5. Apart from refurbishing old ferries, we have procured two new ferries and are awaiting their delivery. These initiatives will guarantee reliable and safe ferry services on the Banjul-Barra route.

6. In addition, we have partnered with the private sector to upgrade the Banjul Shipyard to support the ferries as well as other craft and industrial fishing vessels. This will contribute to boosting skills development and job opportunities.

7. The transport sector contributes significantly to the economy. The Gambia Ports Authority, for instance, recorded revenue collection of one billion, five hundred and sixty-three million Dalasis (**GMD1.563 Billion**) in 2023, representing a two percent (2%) increase over the one billion, five hundred and thirty-four Million Dalasis (**GMD1.534 Billion**) collected in 2022.

8. Similarly, the Authority registered a 20.4% increment in its gross profit in 2023 of one billion, one hundred and ninety-nine million Dalasis (**GMD1.199 Billion**), compared to nine hundred and ninety-six million, one hundred and thirty-four thousand Dalasis (**GMD 996.134 Million**) in 2022.



Unfortunately, due to high operational costs and the negative impact of the Exchange Rate on the Authority's revenue, a marginal increase of just two percent (2%) in revenue was recorded for the year.

Honourable Speaker,

9. In the areas of aviation and maritime operations, aside from undertaking comprehensive reforms to align operations with international standards and best practices, we are investing in our human capital for a viable skilled workforce. In this respect, twenty-three (23) students are currently sponsored at the Regional Maritime University in Ghana, studying various engineering fields. All the first cohort of students graduated with distinction.

Mr. Speaker,

10. To conclude, The Gambia Transport Service Company has significantly improved public transport, offering safe, affordable, and reliable transportation options across the country.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 6. TOURISM AND CULTURE

Honourable Speaker,

1. The tourism sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience, growing in tourist arrivals over the past three years and making a significant contribution to The Gambia's economic development.

2. In 2023, there was a thirteen percent (13%) increase in tourist arrivals, totalling two hundred and six thousand, eight hundred and thirty-six (206,836), compared to one hundred and eighty-two thousand, seven hundred and ninety-five (182,795) in 2022.

The increase in arrivals has translated into revenue increase from one hundred and sixty-eight million, nineteen thousand dollars (**US\$168.19 Million**) in 2022 to three hundred and thirty-three million, twelve thousand dollars (**US\$333.12 Million**) in 2023. This reflects a robust recovery and growth in the sector.

3. In view of the importance of the tourism sector, we will not relent in improving our promotion strategies, infrastructure, products, and service. To improve access to major



hotels along the Tourism Development Area, therefore, three road projects are nearing completion. Other plans include further promoting community-based eco-tourism and domestic tourism.

4. In the cultural sector, the Ministry of Tourism established the National Endowment Fund for Arts and Culture in 2023. Following Cabinet endorsement, the fund will be operational in 2024 to provide a steady source of support for Gambian arts and cultural programmes.

5. On legislation, The Gambia has ratified two major UNESCO Conventions; namely: the 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Heritage and the 1970 Convention against Illicit Transfer of Cultural Goods. Both became effective on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **7. TRADE, INDUSTRY, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

Honourable Speaker,

1. Through the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration, and Employment, my administration remains committed to enhancing trade, fostering private sector development, propelling industrialisation, and ensuring the effective functioning of the labour market.

2. Recent measures to mitigate external shocks thus include stabilising prices and ensuring the availability of essential food commodities. Furthermore, we now give priority to vessels carrying essential goods to avoid undue charges and we provide subsidies for flour and fuel. We have also engaged with the Central Bank to ensure foreign exchange availability for essential commodity suppliers.

3. In 2023, the administration negotiated with the Government of India and secured a waiver for rice imports on a concessional basis, with a new extension granted for 2024.

4. This incorporates an allocated quota of one hundred and fifty thousand metric tonnes (150,000 tonnes) for The Gambia. Discussions to include sugar in this waiver support are progressing.

5. In collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the country secured a fifty-million-dollar (**US\$50 Million**) trade finance facility from BADEA to support the importation of essential food commodities and fuel. The facility is to facilitate continuous availability and affordability of these commodities.



6. Mr. Speaker, the People's Republic of China granted The Gambia Duty-Free Quota Free market access in 2017 for products like groundnuts, cashew, sesame, fish, and cassava. In 2023, this coverage was extended to include ninety-eight percent (98%) of the Chinese tariff.

7. To take advantage of the African Continental Free Trade Area, we have launched the "Green Industrial Transformation through Special Economic Zones and Agropoles" programme.

The objective is to establish a Climate Resilient Sustainable Special Economic Zone and three Agropoles to accelerate manufacturing and agricultural transformation.

8. I am happy to add that there is funding from the African Development Bank for a feasibility study to establish a Special Economic Zone along the Senegambia Bridge. An Indian consulting firm has been recruited to conduct the study.

9. Also, we have secured one hundred thousand dollars (**US\$100,000**) from the ECOWAS Commission to modernise the Wellingaraba Lumo for cross-border trade facilitation.

10. In the area of industrialisation, the construction of a Special Economic Zone along the Senegambia Bridge corridor is underway, with significant investments projected to create over one thousand (1,000) jobs.

11. In the same vein, The Gambia Standards Bureau has developed over one hundred (100) national standards to improve market access for Gambian products, and a food testing laboratory is under construction to support national quality infrastructure.

12. The Government has also launched the new Employment Policy, 2023-2028, and enacted a revised Labour Act to enhance employment conditions and productivity. These efforts reflect our commitment to strengthening the economy, protecting consumer rights, and ensuring fair competition. Besides this Act, there is a Legal Metrology Bill to replace the Weights and Measures Act of 1977.

13. Mr. Speaker, The Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Corporation administered one hundred and sixteen (116) consumer cases in 2023 and recovered



substantial amounts of money through its Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism. Despite this, there are plans to amend the Competition and Consumer Protection Acts and develop a Merger Review Regulation framework.

14. Relative to employment, a National Labour Force Survey to assess employment trends and challenges has been conducted. We are equally working hard to equip our youth with essential skills for gainful employment and entrepreneurship.

15. Likewise, we have signed bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia and the UAE to facilitate secure and transparent employment opportunities for our youth abroad.

16. These efforts are aimed at building our trade capacity, improving labour market conditions, and supporting the nation's economic growth. They will also contribute towards realising our target of creating one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) job opportunities over a five-year period.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **8. PETROLEUM AND ENERGY**

Honourable Speaker,

1. The Ministry of Petroleum and Energy has been actively engaged in issues of access, affordability, and sustainable utilisation of energy resources through regulation and various programmes and projects.

2. Inspired by the Government's Energy Roadmap 2021-2040, the National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC) has embarked on transforming energy and water provision nationwide. The roadmap targets universal access to electricity by 2025 and includes specific national integrated water resources management targets.

3. Notably, NAWEC is implementing a significant electricity access project to connect over 800 communities across the country to electricity.

4. In a major development for The Gambia's energy sector, the company commissioned a twenty-three megawatt (23 MW) solar power plant in Jambur. This significant addition to the grid is expected to generate more clean energy and reduce operational costs.

5. In the geological sector, the focus remains on the sustainable use of mineral resources essential for the construction industry. Specifically, the demand for sand in 2023 exceeded one million cubic meters due to extensive infrastructural development.



6. Altogether, the mining sector generated one hundred and seventy-two million, nine hundred and sixty thousand, nine hundred and twenty-two Dalasis (**GMD172,960,922**) as revenue during the reporting year. Sand, gravel, and other heavy mineral concentrates contributed significantly to this achievement.

7. The Gambia National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) continues to pursue energy security by exploring and developing the country's petroleum resources. It has engaged in power purchase agreements and partnerships for crude oil exploration and capacity development with entities like the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation and Guinea Conakry's SONAP.

8. GNPC is also participating in the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline Project, which aims to utilise West Africa's natural gas resources and provide alternative export routes to Europe.

9. Be assured that the Government will continue to pursue the profitable utilisation of the country's energy and geological resources.

10. Pertaining to water provision, a major water project under the OIC infrastructure development programme, valued at twenty-two million, five hundred thousand dollars (**US\$22.5 Million**), seeks to increase water production and accessibility to underserved areas. This initiative is aligned with the Global Goal on access to clean and safe drinking water.

11. Still, NAWEC is implementing an Emergency Water Project funded by the World Bank for thirteen million dollars (**US\$13 Million**). The project incorporates drilling boreholes to expand water access in the Greater Banjul Area and the North Bank Region.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **9. ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

Honourable Speaker,

1. On Climate Risk Management, the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Natural Resources is currently developing a legal framework to oversee the carbon trading market in The Gambia, aiming to better manage climate risks.

2. In this regard, the Environmental Impact Assessment Programme is to ensure that projects undergo environmental and social screening before implementation.



3. The NEA remains steadfast in taking the lead to protect the environment and ascertain the security of everyone in the country.

4. To succeed, the Agency is completing a state-of-the-art laboratory to analyse chemical and soil samples, among other functions.

The facility will support informed decision-making and timely action to protect the environment and public health.

5. Recent Cabinet approvals include the NEMA Amendment Bill 2022, the Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides Management Act Amendment Bill, and the Waste Bill. Their enactment will significantly strengthen efforts to tackle environmental challenges.

6. On Forestry and Wildlife Management, the Department of Forestry has supported six hundred and twenty (620) communities to enter into Preliminary Community Forest Management Agreements. This has increased the total forest cover under community schemes to forty-five thousand, two hundred and thirty-seven hectares (45,237 ha).

7. In line with my government's position on planting trees, efforts in this area extend to seed distribution of indigenous tree species and the planting of four hundred and sixty-eight thousand, six hundred and seventeen (468,617) trees across the country.

8. Overall, there has been a significant expansion of protected areas in the country, and the designation of the first Man and Biosphere Reserve is awaiting UNESCO approval.

9. Added to this, the EU Life Project has been approved for implementation in 2024. Complementing this initiative is an ongoing large-scale mangrove restoration project in various regions.

10. These comprehensive measures reflect the Government's devotion to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **10. POPULATION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION**

Mr. Speaker,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Through the Office of the Vice President, our National Population Policy has been updated and a Strategic Plan for 2024-2028 developed.



2. The policy is to leverage The Gambia's youthful population for economic growth and sustainable development, in line with YIRIWA, the Sustainable Development Goals, and AU Agenda 2063.

3. Mr. Speaker, the National Population Bill, which is crucial for establishing the Commission, its Secretariat, and an Observatory, has Cabinet approval for submission to this Assembly.

4. The National Social Protection Secretariat (NSPS) has coordinated the development of The Gambia Social Registry. This is an integrated database enhancing social protection services by effectively supporting the poor and vulnerable. The system has already facilitated identification of beneficiaries for five significant programmes. Among these are the Flagship Nafa Cash Transfer intervention and the World Food Programme's 2023 Lean Season Response.

6. Happily, The Gambia Social Registry is transforming social protection services to the people, and we hope to achieve nation-wide coverage by the end of the year.

Even at this early stage, the Registry has supported eight (8) programmes that include those run by NGOs, Development Partners, and various Government Ministries and Departments.

Honourable Speaker,

6. Let me officially announce the government-funded initiative of mainstreaming social assistance to vulnerable households through the Family Strengthening Programme. The NSPS has led this groundbreaking initiative through a group of multi-government stakeholders.

7. The Programme aims to enhance both the welfare of our citizens by increasing access to essential goods and services and fostering investments in human and productive capital. Currently, over two thousand (2,000) people benefit from the programme.

8. To lay the foundation for a sustainable social assistance sector, the National Social Protection Bill, now with the Legislature, is to establish a robust framework on social protection rights through a Social Protection Fund that will expand government support to the most vulnerable groups.



9. Following the 2019 Agreement with ECOWAS, the establishment of the National Early Warning and Response Mechanism Coordinating Centre has been initiated under the Vice President’s office. A Bill to formalise it will be presented to the National Assembly.

10. With Cabinet’s approval of the National Nutrition Policy 2021-2025, the National Nutrition Agency, supported by UNICEF and the World Food Programme, has formulated a Common Results Framework to monitor nutrition programmes and activities.

11. In addition to combat micro-nutrient deficiencies, the National Nutrition Agency launched a Food Fortification and Bio-fortification Strategy that targets critical deficiencies among women of child-bearing age and children under five.

12. Last year, the Nafa Programme under The Gambia Social Safety Net Project, supported by a thirty-million-dollar (**US\$30 Million**) grant from the World Bank, ended successfully with a significant impact. It has benefited sixteen thousand, nine hundred and sixty-six (16,966) households across the poorest districts. To build on this success, the programme will be expanded to include an additional twenty thousand (20,000) households.

13. To protect public health and facilitate both national and international food trade, the Food Security and Quality Assurance is implementing its decentralisation strategy by deploying food inspectors and safety officers at all national border points to ensure food safety in the country. A comprehensive country-wide Food Control System has thus been established.

14. Mr. Speaker, the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) recently updated the National Disaster Management Policy and Strategy to address disaster risks. Preparedness activities, including drainage cleaning and waterway dredging, are underway in flood-prone areas.

15. Last year, NDMA implemented cash transfers to households affected by mild drought and collaborated with WFP to provide essential food supplies to disaster-affected and food-insecure households during the lean season.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **11. LANDS, REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**



1. Honourable Speaker, land administration is indeed a matter of great concern to my government. We continue to have land disputes around the country that trigger tension and chaos. The trouble that erupted in Gunjur and Manduar, and the land disputes in CRR and URR are typical examples.
2. In the same way, the destruction of forest lands and reserved or protected sensitive wetlands threaten the peace in some communities.
3. Equally troubling are the communal boundaries and international border tensions, thus requiring attention. All these have a negative impact on our flora and fauna, in accordance with the Banjul Declaration of 1977.
4. Accordingly, the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, with assistance from the World Bank, is formulating the country's first-ever National Land Policy. The policy will introduce a land tenure system to ensure tenure security, equitable land access, and promote sustainable use of land resources. Also, it is designed to generate wealth, mitigate poverty, and reinforce resilience against environmental changes.
5. In another development, the World Bank has allocated ten million dollars (**US\$10 Million**) to support the development of a gender-sensitive, climate-informed national land policy to guide reforms in land tenure, governance, and administration.
6. Meanwhile, the process has started to develop an automated land resources management system under the West Africa Coastal Area Resilience Project. The scheme is to contribute to diversifying the economy, securing land titles, and resolving ongoing land disputes by creating detailed maps and land use plans.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 12. COMMUNICATION AND DIGITAL ECONOMY

1. Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy and stakeholders have formulated policies, strategies, and regulations to steer The Gambia's digital evolution.
2. Key instruments developed so far range from the Digital Economy Master Plan 2023, the Digital Addressing Policy, Fibre Protection Policy, and Open Data Policy to a Digital Strategy. For enhanced security and compliance, a registration system is equally in place to ensure that only authentic devices operate within the country.



3. In collaboration with the Public Utilities and Regulatory Agency and The Gambia Revenue Authority, we have engaged SIPCA, a company in South Africa, to implement a revenue assurance and traffic monitoring system. This system is to guarantee accurate taxation on both international and local voice traffic, including value-added services.
4. Significant progress in e-government initiatives has been made with the support of the World Bank through the Western Africa Digital Integration Programme.
5. This involves rolling out a second submarine cable to speed up connectivity and provide crucial international redundancy for The Gambia.
6. I have mandated the upgrading and rolling out of a national Digital ID system, which will harmonise identification systems within the country and assign a unique identifier to every Gambian. The exercise will coincide with the expiration of the current ID card and driver's license scheme.
7. Mr. Speaker, this year, we plan to present the Malabo Convention to the National Assembly for ratification. Once enacted, it will strengthen collaboration to manage cross-border cybersecurity.
8. To reposition GAMTEL and GAMCEL to achieve the targets set by the National Broadband Strategy and Policy, the World Bank has agreed to support the transition to allow private sector participation in the management and operation of Gamtel through a Special Purpose Vehicle partnership and outright sale of Gamcel. Cabinet has accepted this public-private partnership arrangement and will appoint a Transaction Advisor to assist the Government during the transaction process.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 12. INFORMATION

1. Honourable Speaker, as required in section 41 of the Access to Information (ATI) Act 2021, the process of appointing Information Commissioners is in progress. Subject to confirmation by the National Assembly, five distinguished Gambians have been appointed.
2. These appointments are necessary for the effective implementation of the ATI Act, which aims to address transparency and accountability issues. Our goal is to operationalise the Information Commission this year.



3. Mr. Speaker, equally important is the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Bill 2023. It has Cabinet approval and will be tabled here shortly. The Bill is essential for regulating personal data processing and protecting the rights and privacy of individuals.

4. Concurrently, the Government is drafting the Information, Media, and Broadcasting Bill (IMB), 2024. Among other objectives, it is to institute inclusivity, consultation, and partnership with media establishments, both public and private. The Bill will repeal the Information and Communications Act, 2009.

5. In the area of regulation, Mr. speaker, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority and the Ministry are finalising the Broadcasting Contents Regulation 2024. This regulation, pending the enactment of the IMB Bill 2024, will promote responsible broadcasting practices and ensure compliance with existing laws. Once published, it is expected to play a significant role in shaping broadcasting standards in The Gambia.

6. During the course of the year, the Ministry introduced a public engagement and popularisation of the Government Agenda initiative. This content development and multimedia broadcasting initiative is to foster constructive national dialogue on national socio-economic development matters.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **13. PUBLIC SERVICE**

Honourable Speaker,

1. The Ministry of Public Service is undertaking a comprehensive review of the functions of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to identify institutional overlaps, competing mandates, and redundancies.

2. Based on the employees of the Government Ministries and Departments, the Civil Service is forty-nine thousand, eight hundred and ninety-three (49,893) strong, twenty-seven thousand, nine hundred and forty (27,940) are male, whilst twenty-one thousand, nine hundred and fifty-three (21,953) are female. An estimated total of eighty-three thousand, one hundred and fifty-five (83,155) employees are in the entire public service.

3. There are eight thousand, four hundred and twenty-seven (8,427) vacant positions across the Ministries. Most of them are in the Ministries of Interior, Defence, and Health.



4. The primary challenges in filling the vacancies include the lengthy recruitment process in the security sector and a shortage of qualified personnel in the health sector.

The e-recruitment system also posed initial challenges, but it has since been improved.

5. The Ministry continues to implement the Civil Service Reform Programme through various strategies and approaches. Principally, for effective management of the public service, review of the Public Service Act 1991 is at the tail end.

6. Mr. Speaker, the Civil Service Reform Programme, 2018-27, is to devise a standard personnel administration system and maintain discipline and ethical conduct in the civil service.

7. Furthermore, it is to maintain proper remuneration packages and incentives for the civil servants, build adequate capacity for performance and accountability within the civil service, and institutionalise meritocracy.

8. In this direction, a major reform undertaken is the centralisation of pension administration under the Personnel Management Office (PMO), as mandated by the Public Service Pensions Act of 2022.

9. As part of the reform programme, the PMO is actively collaborating with stakeholders to enhance public service performance and service delivery through installation of Biometric Time Attendance Machines across all MDAs. This is to monitor attendance to address lateness and unauthorised absence from work.

10. In its endeavour to build capacity and strengthen the Civil Service, PMO awards scholarships to civil servants to address critical skills and knowledge gaps within the Public Service.

11. Aligned with the National Development Plan, the Ministry regularly hosts quarterly retreats for Permanent Secretaries to reinforce inter-departmental coordination.

12. Beyond this, the Programme for Accelerated Community Development, coordinated by the Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery in collaboration with UNDP, was launched to deliver essential services to rural communities, targeting clean water, electricity, and agricultural resources, is progressing.



13. The initiative is an offshoot of our commitment to inclusive development, as outlined in the RF-National Development Plan (2023-2027) and the Sustainable Development Goals.

14. Honourable Speaker, the Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery works with my office in executing my oversight responsibilities through monthly National Economic Council and the Presidential Delivery Forums. These internal accountability mechanisms ensure effective and efficient service delivery.

15. Honourable Speaker, all these developments are to make sure that the MDAs deliver as expected. The regular programme presentations conducted in my Office is evidence of this commitment. The Government's objective is to create a more effective and efficient public service system that can meet the needs of our citizens and propel the nation's development forward.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **14. NATIONAL SECURITY**

1. Mr. Speaker, as a nation, our survival and progress depend on our security and peace, hence the significance of the ongoing Security Sector Reform (SSR). I am pleased to state that the SSR is progressing, and we are committed to seeing it through.

2. The Office of National Security, through the National Security Adviser appointed to coordinate all security institutions, leads the SSR. So far, the Office has coordinated new policies and strategies that include seventeen (17) policing policies and standard operating procedures.

3. The Police Act of 1949 has been updated and new strategic frameworks formulated, such as the National Security Policy, National Security Council Bill, National Security Strategy, Security Sector Reform Strategy, and National Defence Policy. The GAF Bill has also been revised.

4. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, a draft veterans' policy is now available to honour our veterans and attend to their concerns.

5. For those in active service, there is a revised version of the Terms and Conditions of Service for soldiers and officers.

6. Later this year, my government will submit the Arms Trade Treaty Instrument for Accession to the United Nations agency for membership.



7. Alongside these developments, an Immigration Service Bill is underway to enhance border control and management. This is to be supported by significant technological investments that include the Migration Information and Data Analysis System. The draft Bill for The Gambia Fire and Rescue Services, aimed at enhancing rescue and firefighting capabilities, is also lined up for enactment.
8. The indication is that these comprehensive reforms have led to a significant reduction in human rights violations and abuses.
9. Honourable Speaker, on the crime rate, whereas four thousand, eight hundred and ninety-four (4894) crime cases were recorded in 2022, four thousand, five hundred and sixty-seven (4567) were recorded in 2023, marking a decrease of 6.6%.
10. Out of these, three hundred and forty-nine (349) major crimes were recorded in 2022 and two hundred and seventy-two (272) in 2023, implying a decrease of about twenty-two percent (22%). The decrease cuts across all crimes.
11. In 2022, one thousand and two (1002) traffic cases were registered, with nine hundred and twenty-two (922) registered in 2023.
12. The decline is linked to increased Police vigilance and community policing strategies. Notwithstanding the declining trend recorded during the last two years, the crime rate remains a grave concern to my government.
13. The Security Services have been charged to be more vigilant, hence a highway patrol mechanism, using modern technology, is in place around the Greater Banjul Area.
14. Mr. Speaker, in 2023, we inaugurated four model police stations, fully equipped with modern equipment, and constructed fifty-two (52) new accommodation rooms for the military in Farafenni. All were fully funded by Government.
15. To complement these efforts, we have commissioned two naval vessels, one funded by the Government of The Gambia and another donated by the Kingdom of Spain. This development has facilitated collaboration with the Republic of Senegal to combat cross-border crimes.
16. Mr. Speaker, The Gambia Immigration Department reported a significant increase in revenue performance in 2023, collecting over two hundred million Dalasis (**GMD200 Million**), as opposed to one hundred and four million, four hundred and seven thousand,



one hundred and thirty Dalasis (**GMD104, 407,130**) in 2022. The increase certainly indicates improved financial management and a more effective monitoring system.

17. I must observe, nonetheless, that migration remains a critical matter globally. My government is thus exploring legal pathways for Gambian migrants through Bilateral Labour Migration Cooperation.
18. I am grateful to the Gambian Diaspora for their significant contributions to national development. Remittances in 2023 equalled seven hundred and thirty-five million dollars (**US\$735 Million**). These funds contributed to supporting families back home and contributed to our national development efforts.
19. Moving on, our stance against drug abuse is underscored by impressive seizures and convictions achieved by the Drug Law Enforcement Agency.
20. The Agency is working actively with partners to establish a rehabilitation centre and has launched a drug demand reduction programme to educate the people, particularly young persons, on the dangers of drug abuse.
21. In the correctional system, plans are underway to close the Mile 2 prison property and integrate it into the Banjul port area. The entity will be transferred to Jeshwang or relocated to a new site in the Greater Banjul Area. This is in accordance with the TRRC recommendations and various human rights reports.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **15. WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WELFARE**

Honourable Speaker,

1. In 2023, the Gender, Women, and Social Welfare sector made substantial progress in several critical areas. They constructed shelter support services in Bakoteh to temporarily house survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). To accompany this, a GBV and child protection helpline (199) has been integrated with the Gender Management Information System.
2. In addition, the Government has introduced a victims' support fund to facilitate the rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of victims of sexual and gender-based violence.



3. Mr. Speaker, my administration has reinforced the legal framework to protect the rights of women, girls, and persons with disability through several Acts.
4. In 2023, we established special courts, specifically to handle cases related to child custody and other child-related issues.
5. In monetary terms, the Ministry of Gender, Women, and Social Welfare, in collaboration with the National Social Protection Secretariat has rolled out the Government-funded initiative of mainstreaming social assistance, rolled out substantial funding programmes, amounting to thirty million Dalasis (**GMD30 Million**).
6. Earlier this year alone, the Women’s Enterprise Fund distributed funds to eight thousand, four hundred (8,400) women across the West Coast Region, North Bank Region, and Central River Region. Also, financial assistance was extended to persons with disability from the Disability Fund.
7. Honourable Speaker, noteworthy is the Private Member Bill to repeal the Women’s Amendment Act 2015 currently under review by the Legislature. While awaiting its outcome, Government remains committed to enforcing the prohibition of FGM in The Gambia.
8. Moving forward, in 2024, we plan to expand the special court for children to handle more cases and set up a forensic lab dedicated to processing evidence in SGBV cases, specifically for rape.
9. To uphold women’s effective participation, I entreat the National Assembly to approve the Private Member Bill, which advocates a thirty percent (30%) governance quota for affirmative action.
10. These efforts demonstrate our dedication to transforming the social welfare landscape by creating safer and more equitable space for women and children in The Gambia.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 16. EDUCATION

Honourable Speaker,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,



1. Education and skills acquisition are fundamental rights for every citizen; therefore, my government places a high priority on the delivery of educational services.
2. On progress made from 2022 to 2023, we registered significant infrastructure growth, including the construction of over seven hundred and seven-five (775) new classrooms and one thousand and thirty (1,030) toilet cubicles for both conventional and non-conventional schools. This expansion is geared towards making quality education affordable and accessible nationwide.
3. Mr. Speaker, added to twelve new senior secondary schools established across the country, classrooms and facilities were rehabilitated in ten schools from 2022 to 2024.
4. There is a notable increase in enrolment, with enrolment at the Early Childhood Care and Development level rising from one hundred and thirty thousand, nine hundred and fifty-two (130,952) in 2022 to one hundred and thirty-six thousand, two hundred and eighty-three (136,283) in 2023. Similarly, enrolment at all levels have all shown upward trends
5. We are grateful for the partnership with organisations, such as the MRC Holland Foundation, the World Bank, and various UN Agencies.
6. Honourable Speaker, over the past three academic years, our post-secondary institutions, including TVET centres, recorded significant enrolment increases. In 2022, enrolment reached thirty-six thousand, seven hundred and ninety-one (36,791) students, compared to thirty-four thousand, eight hundred and ninety-four (34,894) in 2021.
7. Although it dropped slightly in 2023 to thirty-five thousand, two hundred and seventy-two (35,272), it still remained robust.
8. Linked to this, recently, I launched the Skills, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship (SEI) Fund to train our young people to utilise technical skills learned from the classroom in suitable business ventures.
9. Mr. Speaker, the number of graduates from our public institutions continues to increase, in view of the increase in the number of higher education institutions in the country. The University of The Gambia alone impressively graduated one thousand, three hundred and twenty-one (1,321) students in 2022 and one thousand, three hundred and twenty-nine (1,329) in 2023. Of course, its capacity to increase enrolment is constrained by several factors.



10. The Government supports students through scholarships both within the country and abroad. In 2023, we supported one thousand, five hundred and ninety-one (1,591) students with scholarships.
11. This far in 2024, we have already awarded 655 additional scholarships, totalling two thousand, two hundred and forty-six (2,246), to promote equitable access to higher education opportunities.
12. To ensure sustainable financing, a Student Loan Scheme, Research and Innovation Fund, and a Tertiary and Higher Education Trust Fund will be rolled out soon. Each of them has Cabinet approval and will be presented to this august Assembly.
13. Mr. Speaker, since 2017, my administration has increased access to quality tertiary and higher education, while promoting research, science, technology, and innovation.
14. The Ndemban and Kanilai skills training centres are now in operation. They offer skills training in relevant areas, and students receive Government scholarship to ease the financial burden on their parents.
15. Despite these achievements, plans are underway to open additional skills centres across the country to meet the skills needed at regional level and support local development.
16. Honourable Speaker, significant strides have also been made in infrastructure development. The University of The Gambia's Faraba Banta Campus is complete and in use. Completion of the construction of the new University of Applied Science Engineering and Technology is expected this year.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **17. LEGAL AND JUDICIAL MATTERS**

Honourable Speaker,

1. Since 2017, my administration has embarked on significant legal reforms. Our efforts include introducing a new Constitution, and we remain committed to pursuing it this year. It is hoped that a referendum on the new Constitution will be held in December 2024.



2. Mr. Speaker, among items of legislation enacted in 2023 is the Anti-Corruption Bill. Apart from robust frameworks to criminalise corrupt practices, specialised anti-corruption agencies have been strengthened to effectively enforce the law on corruption.

3. The Victims Reparations Act, aimed at providing reparations to victims of human rights violations from the past regime, has been enacted. To ensure integrity and accountability in Government, so has The Ban From Public Office Act been enacted to prevent individuals convicted of corruption or related offences from holding public office.

4. The Former Presidents Act, also enacted, acknowledges the services of the nation's former leaders. It provides for their dignified post-presidential life, while balancing it with the interests of the Gambian people.

5. Honourable Speaker, another piece of legislation is the Commission of Inquiry (Amendment) Act, 2023 to conduct thorough investigations and ensure justice and accountability within Government.

6. Several other Bills are now under consideration. Among them are The Criminal Offences Bill and The Criminal Procedure Code Bill, both are vital in building a more transparent and accountable society.

7. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Justice is acting on the TRRC recommendations, particularly through the drafting of the Special Accountability Mechanisms Bill and the Special Prosecutor's Office Bill.

8. These Bills are part of a broader strategy to establish a Hybrid Court, in collaboration with ECOWAS. The Court will apply both domestic and international law to TRRC cases.

9. The establishment of the Special Criminal Division of the High Court, staffed by distinguished Gambian judges, marks a huge step towards presiding over TRRC-related cases impartially and effectively.

10. As we continue to strengthen our legal and judicial systems, my government remains resolute in its commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensure justice for all Gambians.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **18. YOUTH AND SPORTS**

Honourable Speaker,



1. One of our objectives is to guide our youth toward entrepreneurship, employability, and leadership, foster widespread community and national sports participation, and strive for spotless international engagements.
2. The period under review marked significant strides in this direction. The revision of several legislative frameworks and policies and the effective coordination of related programmes across the nation, via satellite institutions, are notable aspects of this drive.
3. On further legislative efforts, with support from the UN-Peace Building Fund, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and their stakeholders have reviewed key Acts and developed the new Gambia Sports Bill and Youth Bill, alongside proposed amendments to other existing Acts. These will be presented to the National Assembly.
4. The Youth and Sports Development Levy has facilitated the construction of sports facilities in strategic national locations, and the implementation of the Youth and Sports Revolving Loan Fund. Several mini stadiums have been inaugurated, and there are more construction works and upgrading of facilities in the pipeline.
5. Mr. Speaker, our national teams have proudly represented the nation in recent international competitions, participating consecutively in the 2023 and 2024 Africa Cup of Nations and the All-Africa Games. We applaud them and wish them well in all future competitions.
6. The Ministry of Youth and Sports is continually initiating skills development and employment opportunities for the youth. The National Youth Service Graduate Programme, launched last August to prepare young graduates for the job market, is a clear example. Another is the ongoing training in sustainable farming practices, provided by The Gambia Songhai Initiative.
7. In 2023, the President's International Award Scheme celebrated the achievements of one thousand, six hundred and fifty (1650) young recipients. Likewise, we continue to support NEDI's training programmes, which have benefited over one thousand (1000) young people. The "backway" returnees, many of whom have started or scaled up their businesses, are participants in these programmes.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **19. HEALTH**

Honourable Speaker,



1. Without compromising on quality, my administration is dedicated to delivering healthcare services, putting emphasis on primary healthcare, efficient service delivery, a well-trained healthcare workforce, and strong health infrastructure.
2. In this direction, we recently inaugurated five new state-of-the-art health facilities in Salikenni, Kiang Jali, Chessay Majaw, Tumana, and Mankamang kunda respectively.
3. Construction of the Njau Health Centre is progressing with satisfaction.
4. With World Bank support, works are in progress on the National Food and Drugs Quality Control Laboratory at Brusubi, a new Biomedical Engineering Unit, and the National Emergency Treatment Centre in Farato. Completion is expected this year.
5. On a separate development, my government has allocated two hundred and fifty million Dalasis (**GMD250 Million**) to procure essential medicines to readily ensure treatment of common communicable diseases, especially for maternal and child health.
6. These aside, we continue to collaborate with the Global Fund to combat HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Accordingly, we have successfully secured a grant of twenty-three, million, four hundred and fifteen thousand, seven hundred and ninety-one dollars (**US\$23,415,791**) to fight these diseases and to strengthen the health system from January 2024 through December 2026, thereby continuing efforts from the 2020-2023 funding cycle.
7. Similarly, the Global Fund has committed two million, four hundred thousand dollars (**US\$2.4 Million**) to support the installation of a CT scan as part of our health system strengthening initiatives. For 2024, an additional grant of seven million, eight hundred and fifty-nine thousand and twenty-four dollars (**US\$7,859,024**) has been awarded to address unfunded demands in strategic areas that include Tuberculosis mitigation, enhanced surveillance and data systems, oxygen and respiratory care, laboratory systems and diagnostic networks, as well as community health worker programmes.
8. As we strive to meet and exceed the healthcare needs of the Gambian population, my government's commitment to enhancing healthcare infrastructure, expanding service delivery, and utilising international partnerships remains unwavering.
9. Meanwhile, our postgraduate medical and nursing training programmes are making a significant difference by strengthening our healthcare workforce.

\*\*\*\*\*



## 20. CONCLUSION

Honourable Speaker,  
Honourable National Assembly Members,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. My address clearly portrays a nation that is amazingly recovering from the devastation of a global pandemic that strangled the world economies, a nation in progress, and a nation whose development efforts are already yielding resounding results.
2. The address confirms that my administration's development orientation is visibly realistic, widely approved, and hugely far-reaching. The 5.3% economic growth and positive remarks in the latest World Bank report clearly support these conclusions.
3. The OIC Summit, our international ratings on press freedom and human rights, our growing bilateral relations, and the key positions we hold in ECOWAS, AU and UN vividly demonstrate our acceptance on the world stage and the restoration of the dignity of Gambians internationally.
4. Nationally, the expansion of our development programmes and unprecedented achievements in the provision of electricity, construction of roads, and access to clean water, single out my administration as evidently development oriented. Gambians who never had the privilege of gaining access to electricity, education, health care, or water facilities upcountry now enjoy this right.
5. All these, together with the social protection programme and other interventions that target the poor and vulnerable, testify to our resolve to fight poverty and guarantee equitable distribution of the nation's resources.
6. The scholarship packages, exceptional rise in the graduation rates of Gambians at degree level, the increase in tertiary and higher education institutions and the corresponding expansion in curricular programmes, as well as the employment and training initiatives for the youth and women, illustrate our commitment and care for equitable development and participation in the economy.
7. With such commitments, we have implemented well-defined and well-targeted programmes that have transformed communities and regions across the country.



8. The first set of roads constructed in the URR, right through to the OIC roads, are all very well-conceived and very timely-executed projects. In this way, we are translating our national vision into realistic, giant development strides.

9. Our experience over these years provides an example of how an under-resourced small state can be rescued from under-development to rapid progress, delivered from international isolation to global acceptance, and transformed from a dictatorship to an acknowledged model of democracy.

10. There is no turning back and no slowing down for us. We are development oriented and consciously guided by the plight, needs, and aspirations of the Gambian citizens, from whom we derive our legitimacy.

11. We will continue to leverage the advantages that come with friendship and partnerships built within the country and around the world to contribute to global peace and progress, while pursuing the interests of the Gambian nation.

Honourable Speaker,

12. Crime and the cost of living are indeed daunting challenges. Because crime is a terrible hindrance to peace, security, and progress, we condemn all types of criminal activities. I assure the nation that we are determined to reduce both the crime rate and the rising cost of essential commodities, although we are aware of the complexities embedded in these two global threats to peace.

13. The consequences of disrupting the peace, stability, and development of any community or nation are obvious. Our progress lies in peace and our togetherness, as well as our capacity for development.

14. All that my government solicits, therefore, is that our common identity and development aspirations unite us, commit us to the nation, and force us to work together, regardless of party affiliation, ethnic origin, or religious orientation.

15. Honourable Speaker, I thank you, together with the Deputy Speaker and all the Honourable Members of this noble Assembly, for our legislative achievements and the relationships established among us.



16. I am equally grateful to our development partners, the international community, and the entire Gambian nation, for without their collective support and efforts, we would not come this far.

17. I urge that the spirit of the last National Dialogue, the universal tenets of democracy, and our common attributes and values as human beings govern us and keep us together on track towards lasting peace, security, and accelerated development for us all.

18. Despite our successes, we will never be heedless, nor indifferent to the concerns and needs of the people. Thus, steadfastly, we will use our resources, time, and energy to develop the country, raise the standard of living, and strive to meet the basic needs of the population.

19. My belief is that investing today implies securing the future for ourselves and our offspring. Once we have the means to do so, we will continue investing in national development, and so shall we continue partnering with you, as legislators, to deliver on our development promises to the people. May the Almighty God be our Helper.

Thank you for your attention.