

*Check Against Delivery*



**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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VICE PRESIDENT  
AND  
MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS  
REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**

**AT THE**

**GENERAL DEBATE  
OF THE 66<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2011  
NEW YORK**

**Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Your Majesties,  
Excellencies, Distinguished Heads of State and Government,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We praise the Almighty God for making another gathering of world leaders possible. Allow me to warmly congratulate you on your election as the President of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your proven leadership and competence will be in great demand as we collectively confront some of the daunting challenges of our time. My delegation also views your election as a demonstration of the strong commitment of the brotherly State of Qatar to the fashioning of a stable and just world order. You will have our full support in the discharge of your mandate.

**Mr. President,**

Your predecessor, H.E. Joseph Deiss of Switzerland deserves our praise for the sterling work that he did as President of the General Assembly. We wish him well in his future pursuits. We also congratulate H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations on his re-election and wish him a fruitful second term. My delegation will render him all the support that he would need as he helps to tackle the issues that are dear to us, especially, the achievement of MDGs and the resolution of conflicts in Africa.

**Mr. President,**

The United Nations was founded as a world body to primarily maintain international peace and security, and for this reason it is therefore apt that the theme: "The role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means" is chosen for the 66<sup>th</sup> session. My delegation is a strong believer in the role of mediation as a conflict resolution mechanism at both the national and international levels. Mediation produces results and that is what our experience in West Africa tells us. At the national level, we have instituted the Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism with a view to settling disputes between and among our peoples and institutions.

**Mr. President,**

For us in Africa, mediation of conflicts with a view to amicably solving them, has always been part and parcel of our rich cultural heritage and customary law. We must revive those time-honoured dispute resolution traditions of our forefathers. Experience has shown that with strong regional and sub-regional leadership many of the intractable civil, political and electoral conflicts that

plagued Africa could be resolved through mediation. Regional ownership of mediation processes is also very essential. Recent conflicts in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau were all resolved through a combination of interventions by ECOWAS, United Nations and the African Union. We must always give mediation a chance before resorting to the use of force or threat of the use of force. The international community must therefore give priority to mediation in any conflict before the use of threats of military invasion or outright military intervention without giving mediation a chance. It costs less to mediate than to launch a full scale military intervention.

**Mr. President,**

Over the last decade, the leadership of West Africa, in close collaboration with the international community, invested so much in terms of material and human resources to bring the conflicts that affected the region to peaceful ends. Today, the region enjoys relative peace but that does not mean that spoilers have given up attempts to derail the peace. The evils of drug trafficking, piracy, trafficking of illicit goods and arms trafficking have reared their ugly heads across the sub-region. The nature and extent of these crimes call for swift international action to nip them in the bud before it is too late. As these crimes feed on each other and sow the seeds of terror, economic sabotage and the collapse of social order, we must pool our resources together in the areas of detection, surveillance, law enforcement and prosecution in order to deny the culprits safe havens. In order to do this, we must come together and agree on a framework for cooperation with the support of the international community. We look forward to greater United Nations engagement with regional and sub-regional leaders and organizations in stamping out these menaces.

**Mr. President,**

The Gambia will always be an agent of peace through mediation and shuffle diplomacy in West Africa and beyond. As we have done in the past, we will support all efforts aimed at peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes within our sub-region. We will also continue to contribute to United Nations peacekeeping Missions around the world.

With strong African leadership, we continue to witness the amicable resolution of many civil conflicts that plague the continent. The key lesson in most of these situations is early intervention of leaders who mediate between stakeholders. Regional leaders should always be put at the forefront of mediation efforts. For this reason, we salute the untiring leadership of the AU in bringing about peace in Sudan. We equally salute the leadership of Sudan for their magnanimity in implementing the Comprehensive Peace Accord which led to the independence of South Sudan. My delegation encourages both sides to invest

in their shared future through a negotiated settlement of the pending issues. Let me also take this opportunity to encourage our brothers in Guinea and Niger, after successful democratic transitions, to bury the hatchet and move forward as united peoples. National reconciliation efforts should be diligently pursued by all stakeholders. We therefore, call on the international community to render them all the support they need as they try to bring peace and development to their countries.

**Mr. President,**

As a developing country, we have our eyes widely set on the countdown to 2015. The Gambia and the entire international community have only a few more years before we can tell how many of the MDGs we have met. What is evident from all the reviews is that we are on track to meet some of the MDGs, but struggling to meet others. We know for certain that the critical element towards achieving all MDGs on the target date will remain international donor support. We have just embarked upon our new Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE) which we earnestly believe will be generously supported by our partners.

**Mr. President,**

It is no secret that the ongoing financial and economic crisis, worsened by market volatility, is taking a huge toll on the meager economic gains our fragile economies are making. In view of our situation as LDCs and the vulnerabilities that we continue to encounter it is therefore urgent that we all support the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action. We must not allow it to suffer the fate of its predecessor and become just another blueprint to be remembered for its weak implementation. It is our hope that our partners from the North will do all in their power to support the enhancement of our productive capacities. We also call on the emerging economies of the South to enhance their cooperation with us in ways that will render true meaning to South-South Cooperation.

My delegation is ready to forge meaningful partnerships across the North and South in order to bring food security to our people, tackle youth unemployment through education and skill development and enhance the quality and coverage of our healthcare delivery systems. In addition, we have to revisit the various programmes and strategies that we adopted at the Food and Agricultural Organization and other fora in order to comprehensively address the food security needs of developing countries. The small scale farmer must be placed at the centre of the new Green Revolution.

**Mr. President,**

The impact of climate change continues to pose a formidable challenge to all of us. The solutions to reversing the negative impacts of climate change through adaptation and mitigation initiatives are well-known. Our problem today is the refusal of the biggest polluters to assume their responsibilities in reversing the negative trends of climate change occasioned by human activity. We cannot afford to be in denial for long. The science is solid; the solutions are clear; so let us embrace them by fulfilling our international obligations. RIO+ 20 should be about the implementation of commitments and not about renegeing on them. It should also be about the announcement of workable initiatives and not about the re-packaging of previous unfulfilled commitments. Rio+20 should ultimately be about binding commitments. Let us bequeath to our children an earth that is resilient.

**Mr. President,**

My delegation would like to congratulate the delegation of Libya, especially the leadership of the National Transitional Council, for being steadfast in their drive to rescue Libya from the brink of the abyss. We have faith in your leadership as we are convinced that you will institute the necessary reforms that the Libyan people have so valiantly fought for. As you embark on the crucial task of reconciliation, reconstruction and nation building, we, as the first African country to officially announce The Gambia's recognition of, and support for the NTC, would like to assure you of our full collaboration and solidarity.

**Mr. President,**

The conflicts in the Middle East, both recent and longstanding, require fresh and honest mediation efforts with a view to stabilizing the region. The disorderly change that is sweeping across the region is a cause for concern as livelihoods are shattered, industries like tourism destroyed, thereby creating more unemployment and entrenching endemic poverty. With regards to the Arab Spring, my delegation fully supports and hereby salutes the leadership role of the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Gulf Cooperation Council in finding peaceful resolution to these conflicts through mediation, diplomacy and brotherhood. In the same vein, we salute the role the AU has been playing in bringing to an end some of the most violent conflicts in human history on the African continent through mediation and in some cases, through military intervention as a last resort. We have used former Heads of States as mediators in Africa and some of these efforts have been successful.

**Mr. President,**

One of the most intractable conflicts of our time is the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. The sad reality is that numerous United Nations resolutions continue to be flouted by Israel. The daily killing, collective punishment and humiliation of Palestinians are going on unabated. Denial of humanitarian assistance, essential medical supplies and construction materials to Palestinians has become the norm. To this end, my delegation not only supports but recognizes an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the confines of the 1967 borders. An independent Palestinian state with full rights and privileges like any other is long overdue. This is the only guarantor of lasting peace in that region.

**Mr. President,**

The Islamic religion which is synonymous with peace is misunderstood and misrepresented in certain quarters. We condemn those who turn themselves into suicide bombers to kill innocent people or conduct inhuman behavior in the name of Islam as such acts are contrary to Islamic values and teachings. Muslims, Christians, Jews and peoples of other faiths must all join hands in fighting terrorism of all shades. We must equally be tolerant and respectful of each other no matter our beliefs and live side by side in peace and harmony as one human family.

**Mr. President,**

In the case of Syria, we call on the international community to encourage and support the Syrian Government and people to resolve their internal problems through diplomacy and peaceful means. Poverty should not be a pretext for violent and disorderly change of government in the developing world.

**Mr. President,**

The need for constructive dialogue in finding lasting and timely solutions to trans-boundary problems, wherever they exist, is more urgent today than ever before. Let us avoid postponing the search for a permanent solution to the decades old conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. It is therefore the responsibility of the International Community to work with a greater sense of urgency to address the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict without further delay.

**Mr. President,**

The developments in Cuba continue to demonstrate to the world the inhumanity of maintaining the decades-old embargo imposed by the United States on this friendly country. The embargo is a manifestation of intolerance of

other people's right to a political system of their choice. There is universal agreement that the embargo needs to come to an end without preconditions and be replaced with good neighbourliness, tolerance and respect for the legitimate rights of Cubans to have a political system of their choice. We therefore once again, call on the United States of America to lift the sanctions and embargo on Cuba now!

**Mr. President,**

The case of Taiwan deserves a better scrutiny by the international community. Taiwan with a population of 23 million continues to play an active and positive role on the international stage in a highly integrated and interconnected world, almost all issues demand the full participation of, and cooperation among all nations. Taiwan's efforts in promoting peace in the Asia-Pacific region deserve commendation and further encouragement by this Assembly. For example, in the past three years, Taiwan has engaged mainland China in dialogue on a wide range of issues from agriculture and health to intellectual property rights and economic and commercial cooperation. Furthermore, since 2009 Taiwan has been invited by the WHO to attend the World Health Assembly as an observer. This practice and the related arrangements have established what has been termed the "WHA Model" which sets a useful precedence for Taiwan's greater participation in the UN system.

Given that Taiwan is today one of the leading technological and economic powerhouses in the world, her participation on global affairs is quite relevant bearing in mind that the issues we collectively confront such as climate change, terrorism, natural disasters, epidemics, financial meltdowns and many others which require the engagement of every member of the international community. We therefore urge the UN to find a suitable way to allow for Taiwan's meaningful participation in the specialized agencies and mechanisms of the UN system, including the ICAO and the UNFCCC immediately.

**Mr. President,**

Reform should be a permanent feature on the agenda of all international organizations. Cosmetic reforms or the deliberate stalling of overdue reforms seriously undermine the effective responsiveness of organizations. In 2005, a draft of reform measures were introduced by the General Assembly, which led to reforms in management of the Secretariat, Human Resource Administration, the creation of the Human Rights Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the elaboration of new norms.

The then Secretary-General remarked that no reform of the United Nations is complete without reform of the Security Council. Let us not delude ourselves.

The Security Council urgently needs comprehensive reforms. A major element in the reform of the Council is the glaring underrepresentation of Africa in all its categories of membership. Africa needs to be adequately and properly represented and we will not give up on what is a very legitimate demand. What is even more appalling is that negotiations are progressing at snail's pace. Although we are mindful of other positions, we are convinced that negotiations must lead to a just outcome. Security Council reform is long overdue, and the lack of it is undermining the credibility of the organ and the legitimacy of its decisions.

**Mr. President,**

My delegation would like to repeat what we said before; that the reform of the UN must recognize the geopolitical realities of the African continent and its peoples. Africa is no longer the colony of any country and must be respected and treated as such. The system of veto power and flawed representation in the Security Council can no longer be tolerated and in fact runs counter to the spirit and letter of the basic principles of equality and fair play as enshrined in the UN Charter.

**I thank you for your kind attention and God bless you all.**