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STATEMENT

BY

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PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

AT THE
GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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

With warm greetings to you all from the New Gambia, we thank the Almighty God for making this great gathering of global leaders possible once again this year. Allow me to formally congratulate the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary General of our organization for their leadership and commitment to the values of the United Nations.

~~After more than seventy years of existence, the United Nations undoubtedly remains the~~ ultimate international platform for finding solutions to global challenges, as we in The Gambia know all too well. Today, being my maiden appearance at this great forum of world leaders, let me take this opportunity to re-affirm The Gambia's firm commitment to the Charter of the United Nations. My Government fully appreciates the UN's central role in the pursuit of preventive diplomacy to avert crises around the world.

Mr. President,

The recent political crisis that took place in my country created a new democratic beginning and the experience taught us useful lessons that Gambians will not easily forget. We learnt that will power and national unity, decisive regional intervention as well as undivided and clear support of the international community could produce positive outcomes. Also of importance, was the coordinated international action inspired by our common values of solidarity, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law which was critical in sending the right message to the former President to respect the will of the people and leave without bloodshed.

During those difficult times, we knew we had friends, ones who came to our aid and who have since kept faith with us. We therefore would like to seize this great opportunity to thank the leaders of ECOWAS for their timely and firm intervention in bringing peace to The Gambia. We also thank all our regional and international friends who stood by us in our critical hour of need. Thanks to your collective efforts, The Gambia is now on a solid path to peace and good governance and ready to take over our traditional role among the champions of human rights and democracy. Gambians have made an irreversible choice to close a dark chapter in our history and today, our national agenda is one of reform and transformation.

Like any restored democracy, we are facing enormous challenges in the revival of our economy, a comprehensive reform of our laws, our administrative and judicial institutions. The modernization of our security sector, consolidation of the rule of law and human rights are part of our reform programme. It is only by overcoming these challenges that we can reinforce our democratic gains and my Government is committed to delivering a New Gambia that is fit for our children to be proud of.

Indeed, young people were all along at the forefront of our democratic transition and addressing youth unemployment, which is a top priority of my government, will no doubt create enormous opportunities.

Mr. President,

We also recognize the crucial role of Gambians in the Diaspora in contributing to the transformation of our motherland. Let me seize this opportunity to sincerely thank our development partners and friends for the invaluable budget and policy support they are providing to the Government to help address the challenges of job creation and youth irregular migration. My Government is committed to using such resources wisely for sustainable socio-economic development.

Mr. President,

We may be a small country but one with huge needs. As a matter of urgent priority, we have developed a New National Development Plan in line with the transformative agenda of the new Government.

This development blueprint is designed to put the country back on track to economic growth and prosperity following two decades of mismanagement, corruption and widespread human rights violations. This new plan is built on sound macro-economic and fiscal policies that will lead to stability and economic growth over the medium and long term. It has also incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals and other commitments contained in Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The Paris agreement is critically relevant for The Gambia because climate change means a lot more in our situation. When land productivity declines and water shortage intensifies, young people from rural areas are often sent away to ease the burden on the family and to find new sources of income. This sadly explains why many young Gambians have been forced to make the long and dangerous journey to Europe.

The journey is so risky that many perish at high seas and never reach their final destination. Countless others disappear into immigration detention centers or vanish in the sands of the Sahara desert.

Those who are able to complete the journey are often dismissed as economic migrants and sent back home. This sense of hopelessness and frustration also provides fertile ground for smugglers and extremist groups to recruit innocent youths into the criminal underworld.

Young people do not deserve this experience, they deserve the chance to enjoy a safe and prosperous future, at home. Creating new employment opportunities that provide young people with sustainable incomes and connect them to a revitalized land, healthy and productive environment is an investment in the future of the nation. This is a key priority in our National Development Plan.

Over the last decade, we lost many of our friends and development partners through wrong policy choices, but since the restoration of democracy and good governance, many of our long-standing partners are all coming back to work with us. We are in the process of rejoining the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court. We are also committed to be part of the African Peer Review Mechanism.

We are finalizing plans for a roundtable donors' conference to mobilize resources for the long-term development of the country. Your continued support, solidarity and partnership will be critical to the success of that conference.

Mr. President,

Although the Gambia did not go through armed conflict, the political crisis that we experienced came as a result of decades of bad governance, weak state institutions, rule of fear, and growing intolerance. We were on the brink of political violence and armed conflict.

We therefore express our deep appreciation to the United Nations Office for West Africa, United Nations Peace Building Commission and the Peace Building Support Office for the initial critical support that they have rendered to my country.

Your continued support in the areas of transitional justice and security sector reform will certainly go a long way towards entrenching peace, justice and democracy in The Gambia.

Mr. President,

There is neither a shortage of ideas nor that of resources to fix the major problems facing the human race. What has always been scarce is the political will and unless adequate resources are invested, the pace of development will remain slow and minimal impact achieved.

It is against that backdrop that I am calling on the private sector to emulate philanthropists for their generosity towards the most isolated, marginalized and deprived sections of the world, providing safe drinking water, roads, power, health care and education, key to regaining human dignity.

Mr. President,

The pursuit of peace and security in Africa and the world will always be a major foreign policy goal for The Gambia. We will pursue good neighborliness and cooperation with the sister Republic of Senegal and the countries of ECOWAS will remain strategic partners. West Africa is on the march towards the consolidation of its democratic gains but as a region we are facing serious threats to our peace and security. Terrorism, extremism, religious intolerance, organized crime and drug-trafficking are seriously undermining our development efforts. Recent attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and the Sahel in general underscore the urgent need for greater regional and international cooperation in addressing these challenges.

Mr. President,

The indifference, the injustices, and the indignities in isolated parts of the world create real threats to global peace, prosperity and democracy. We need to take bigger and bolder steps to close the gap between the North and South as the world is too imbalanced.

Mr. President,

We remain deeply concerned that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still defies resolution. My Government firmly subscribes to the idea of a two-state solution; for the two peoples to live side by side in peace and harmony. We therefore call on the UN Secretary-General to vigorously pursue this formula in the interest of lasting peace.

Mr. President,

In our foreign policy and as part of our historic friendship, we fully recognize the one-China policy. The People's Republic of China is the sole representative of the Chinese people and a true friend of The Gambia. Our two countries continue to strengthen cooperation on the basis of a win-win approach built on mutual trust and respect within the framework of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation.

Mr. President,

An organization like the United Nations, by virtue of its functions, would always require some level of reform of its management systems.

The inter-governmental character of the mandates entrusted to the Secretariat requires the existence of trust and accountability between member states and the Secretariat. As you embark on your proposed reforms, we stand ready to give you our full support in the interest of an effective and more relevant world body.

Lastly but not the least, one of the long-standing issues is the pending question of Security Council reform. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said that "No reform of the United Nations is complete without reform of the Security Council". That remains true today.

Africa will not give up its legitimate and historic quest for true representation on the Council and The Gambia fully supports the African Union's demand for the long overdue reform of the Security Council.

Mr. President,

I want to conclude by reaffirming my optimism and confidence in our collective ability to uplift mankind from the clutches of poverty; to institute a global order of peace, firmly held together by justice; loving, caring and tolerating each other. In tune with our National Anthem, we pledge our firm allegiance to these values we hold ever true.

With best wishes from the people of The Gambia – The Smiling Coast of Africa, I wish you all a successful 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

God bless the world, thank you.
