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STATEMENT BY

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VICE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

AT THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL DEBATE

21ST SEPTEMBER 2023

3:00PM – 9:00PM

8TH SPEAKER

Mr. President - Ambassador Dennis Francis,
The Secretary-General - Mr. Antonio Guterres,
Your Majesties and Excellencies, Heads of State and
Government,
Heads of Delegation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you warm greetings and a goodwill message
of peace, progress, and stability from His Excellency,
President Adama Barrow, and the Government and
People of The Gambia - Africa's Smiling Coast.

Mr. President, we congratulate you on your election
as President of the 78th Session of the General
Assembly and thank your predecessor, H. E. Mr.
Csaba Korosi for his sterling leadership during the
77th Session.

We also express our gratitude to Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of our organization, for his hands-on leadership during these heady and turbulent times the world over.

Mr. President,

The world is facing numerous crises and a multiplicity of daunting challenges that raise serious questions about the readiness and viability of our multilateral institutions and arrangements, in the event of another crisis or pandemic.

The priorities of our times urgently warrant our collective attention and action. We must, therefore, undertake major reforms and organize our institutions better to make them fit for purpose. Achieving this has to begin with renewing our faith in both the Charter of the United Nations and inclusive Multilateralism.

For these reasons, we believe that the theme for this Session, **“Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all,”** mirrors The Gambia’s national ethos of peace, progress and prosperity.

Our world is in dire need of rebuilding that lost trust, and our multilateral institutions must assist in regaining it by, first, reforming and retooling themselves. From underdevelopment to climate change, unsustainable debts to cost-of-living crises, and conflicts to marginalization, we need to cooperate better and share the burden of solutions equitably through greater partnerships and solidarity.

Mr. President,

We have seven more years before the Decade of Action ends, yet the story on our global attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is not very positive. It is a story of unfulfilled commitments, weak international cooperation, and lack of genuine global solidarity. It is a story that is all too common when it gets to implementing global commitments.

Consequently, we must recognize these global challenges and redouble our efforts by re-committing ourselves to the attainment of the SDGs in the Global South. If we remain on our current trajectory without effecting corrective action, the world's most vulnerable peoples would be left behind much further we can ever fathom. As LDCs, we call for the steadfast implementation of the new Doha Program of Action so that it would not be another lost decade of unfulfilled commitments.

Mr. President,

In view of the current harsh economic realities across the Global South, many developing countries are contending with unsustainable debt burdens that are compromising their ability to dig themselves out of poverty. In the quest for post-pandemic recovery, debt servicing is severely shrinking our economies, especially in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

It is essential to find ways to address this burden urgently, as most of our countries run the risk of being left behind. Our goal is to recover by building back our economies much better and faster and to create the policy space that would, once again, generate growth. With a deep sense of urgency, the international community should step up its efforts through new and existing initiatives towards finding durable solutions to the debt problem. In sum, we must get back on track to attaining the SDGs.

Mr. President,

The issue of debt relief for LDCs is linked to the necessity for greater reform of the international financial institutions (IFIs) and their decision-making mechanisms, particularly those relating to development finance and debt. We join other developing countries in calling for reforms that ensure our greater participation and a stronger voice in decision-making. Also, we would like to see mechanisms developed that adequately mainstream our concerns and interests in decisions that affect us.

In this context, we strongly welcome the recent designation of a permanent seat for the African Union at the G20 group. This will immensely amplify Africa's voice and participation in global geopolitical and development issues that concern the well-being of its people.

Mr. President,

One of the important global issues affecting Africa in negatively disproportionate ways is Climate Change. Africa is paying a very heavy price for global warming, even though it is the least contributor to climate change. Cataclysmic weather events that currently impact our world clearly make it imperative and urgent to undertake collective action to tackle climate change for a more liveable world.

The world is neither short of climate action commitments nor the financial resources to match our ambition, but we are short of the genuine political will to act decisively. When shall we meet the \$100 billion annual commitment to combat the phenomenon? Shall we ever agree on the modalities for the “Loss and Damage Fund” at COP28?

These are important questions to ask, considering the prevailing mistrust that continues to characterize the global dialogue on climate change and climate action. We have to act soonest and rebuild trust in our collective fight against global warming.

In The Gambia, through our Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, we are acting through various initiatives and projects to combat climate change. We call on Member States and the international community to fulfil their commitments toward mother earth with a greater sense of urgency.

Mr. President,

On behalf of the people of The Gambia, I extend our heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathies to the Kingdom of Morocco in the wake of the recent earthquake that have struck their nation.

Our thoughts are with the affected communities as they recover from these tragic events.

Additionally, we sympathize with all countries that have recently endured the devastating consequences of deadly floods, wildfires, and other natural disasters exacerbated by the effects of climate change. These events serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need for collective action to address the challenges posed by our changing climate. The Gambia reaffirms its commitment to working together with the international community to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Mr. President,

Our world is also facing a lot of challenges relating to maintenance of international peace and security.

In Africa, we continue to face the threat of terrorism, piracy, re-emergence of unconstitutional change of governments, civil strife, and armed conflicts across the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. The scenario is similar across parts of the Middle East.

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict is another matter of serious geopolitical concern, in view of its wider global impact. The institutional failures, human suffering, and huge number of lives lost should serve as a wake-up call for all Member States.

It is an understatement to state that the institutions, mechanisms, and processes we have created in the aftermath of World War II are inadequate, with reference to preventing the scourge of war. It is thus pressing to revisit our responses to conflicts and devise new and effective arrangements for conflict resolution and management.

Today, we are hamstrung by the weaknesses of our institutions and arrangements, largely exacerbated by mistrust and lack of true international solidarity. In the face of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, we call on the warring parties to give peace a chance.

We further call on them to respect the sanctity of human life. It is only through negotiation and political dialogue that such conflicts can end. We also call on our brothers and sisters in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa to choose peace over armed conflict.

Mr. President,

Since our political transition in 2017, The Gambia has committed itself to the consolidation of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Good governance, accountability, and institutional reforms are progressively taking root in our society.

Sustaining and building the peace that we have so heavily invested in will remain a priority for the Government. We have also instituted transitional justice mechanisms that have yielded substantial results, and we are fully committed to implementing the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) set up in 2018.

Mr. President,

West Africa is facing serious challenges in connection with development, democratic governance, the rule of law, peace, and security. As we grapple with these regional challenges, let me assure you that, in The Gambia, we are truly committed to nurturing our young democracy, institutional building, protecting and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as women and youth empowerment. We are now enjoying the dividends of democracy, and we believe it is the best form of governance for our people.

Furthermore, in our quest to inclusively deliver the dividends of democracy and build a more secure and prosperous Gambia, the Government recently developed a new Green Focused Recovery National Development Plan 2023-2027 as successor to the 2018-2021 National Development Plan (NDP).

While appreciating the support and partnership received during implementation of the NDP, The Gambia solicits the continuous support and partnership of all her friends, partners, and the international community to successfully implement its new development masterplan.

Mr. President,

The pursuit of peace around the world is one of the central pillars of the United Nations' work.

Adaptability of the organization to resolve ongoing, new or emerging peace and security challenges is worthy of sober reflection. Peacekeeping missions in situations where terrorism, violent extremism or gang violence is endemic demands serious dialogue within the organization.

No society should be held hostage because our institutional arrangements are ineffectively suited for action in such situations. Traditional peacekeeping has worked in a lot of situations, but it has come under enormous pressure in recent times. Such difficult experiences, as exemplified in some peacekeeping missions in Africa, flag the wisdom for reform.

As a demonstration of our commitment to peacekeeping undertakings, in support of the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), we have agreed with Bangladesh, through the support of the Secretariat, to jointly deploy a battalion in a suitable peacekeeping mission. This is an innovative arrangement where our two countries will collaborate to advance peace.

Mr. President,

Allow me to share some thoughts on topical international political developments and situations that require our attention. The maltreatment of migrants across the world is a matter of serious concern to my delegation. Migrants are human beings with human rights, and they deserve to be treated humanely.

We are appalled by the cruel and degrading treatment meted out to migrants at certain borders in Africa and beyond. We call on the United Nations to investigate these incidents and crimes committed against migrants, with a view to protecting them and their families. Criminalizing migration or treating migrants as criminals is unacceptable. Let us open legal pathways for migration and the regularization of the status of migrants in line with our international commitments, including those under the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Mr. President,

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been going on for too long. The conflict requires a lasting resolution. Settlement activities need to stop. We express serious concern over the ongoing loss of life and injuries suffered by Palestinians in the region.

We call for the repeal of all divisive laws and reject any inflammatory pronouncements that may exacerbate tensions. We call for a two-state solution along the 1967 borders with two contiguous states living side by side in peace and harmony, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. The absence of an ongoing peace process is a matter of concern to my delegation. We encourage the United Nations and the international community to reignite fresh diplomatic initiatives.

Mr. President,

The embargo against the people of Cuba has been sustained unnecessarily for too long. We call on the United States to lift the embargo. Good neighbourliness and friendly cooperation is the shared vision the whole world wants to see define the relations between the two countries.

Mr. President,

Allow me to commend the Kingdom of Morocco, once again, for the efforts they continue to undertake towards the resolution of the dispute in the Moroccan Sahara. The Gambia reaffirms its strong support for the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative, which we believe serves a serious, credible, realistic compromise solution that could resolve this dispute as affirmed in relevant UN resolutions.

Mr. President,

Our bilateral relationship with the Peoples Republic of China is founded on the principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and a commitment to mutually beneficial development. We therefore strongly endorse the One-China policy.

Mr. President,

Allow me to highlight that reform of the United Nations, especially that of the Security Council, is long overdue. Africa's marginalization and under-representation in the membership of the Council calls for corrective measures. After more than seventy-five years of existence, this body deserves urgent reforms to regain the world's trust.

In furtherance of this call, my delegation strongly supports the common African position on this important issue.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, rebuilding trust across the wide spectrum of issues that I have raised is a matter of topmost priority. The urgency of rebuilding trust in our multilateral institutions across the globe is glaringly evident.

To avoid exclusion of the most vulnerable members in this Decade of Action, The Gambia calls for greater international cooperation and renewed solidarity. We can all make a huge difference if we commit to rekindling global solidarity during these critical times. Concerted global action, sustained international solidarity, and increased partnerships are the antidote for our current global challenges.

Thank you for your attention.