

**Statement by The Gambian Delegation to the 39th Session of
the UN Population Commission on International Migration**

Chairperson
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of Her Excellency, the Vice President and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs, Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy, who is also the Chairperson, National Population Commission, I wish to deliver this statement on Gambia's experience on international migration.

Please allow me to congratulate you and your Bureau on your election for this particular session. International migration is a critical component of The Gambia's population dynamics and thus continues to occupy centre stage in the management of our population and human resources.

According to the 1993 Census report, 14 per cent of Gambia's total population was non-Gambians with a net migration rate of 1.5 per cent pa.

For a country like The Gambia with a population of 1.4 million, land size of only 11,000 sq km and an average growth rate of 4.2% as in 1993, large influx of migrants poses a formidable challenge in the management of our population resources particularly the unskilled ones. We have two broad categories of in-migrants viz: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons and Economic migrants.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

In the mid 1990s up to the early part of 2001, The Gambia has experienced a high influx of migrants from neighboring countries as a result of the conflict in Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea Bissau. In fulfillment of its international obligation regarding the treatment of refugees, The Government in collaboration with UN Agencies, Red Cross and Local communities etc had elaborated so many emergency response strategies in addressing the needs of the refugees. The Disaster Management Committee under the Vice President's office is a case in point.

However, a significant number of these refugees have taken advantage of their cultural homogeneity with The Gambia and have since integrated into the Gambian families and communities.

It is also important to note that The Gambia is among those countries who adopted the ICPD Programme of Action and strongly believes that universal access to reproductive health is a pre-requisite to the attainment of MDGs. In this regard, migrant's access to reproductive health services has always been a priority.

Economic Migrants

The Gambia is often described as the Smiling coast of Africa and a safe haven. These in no little ways have attracted many foreigners to come to The Gambia for greener pastures. They are mainly engaged in trade, education, manufacturing and fishing industries. In addition to their significant contribution to the GDP, these migrants have played a crucial role in building the capacities of Gambians through skills training particularly in the informal sector. Migrants in the education Sector deserve special attention,

currently an overwhelming proportion of teachers in the Tertiary institutions are non-Gambians.

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Although reliable statistics on international migration are difficult to come by, estimates of emigrants run into thousands, most of who are found in the USA, Europe and other African Countries. Though their number may be relatively small, these migrants are providing invaluable services in the education and health sectors of USA and UK. The Gambian Diaspora maintains a strong social and economic links with The Gambia. For example, the annual turnover in remittances to families and other ventures is quite significant and continue to be a valuable source of foreign exchange earnings. In addition, Gambians abroad have either individually or in partnership with others have made tremendous investments in health, education and infrastructural development.

In conclusion, Chairperson, international migration in The Gambia has its merits and demerits. Recently, a concern has been raised over the increasing number of nurses leaving the Gambia for work in the West.

We would continue to optimize its benefits and mitigate the effects by adopting appropriate policies and strategies. The Gambia wish to associate itself with the statement delivered by South Africa on behalf of the G77 and China. International migration is a complex issue and addressing it, would requires a multi-faceted approach involving the international community, sending and recipient countries.

Having a coherent migration policy may go a long way in ameliorating the problem but due to diverse geo-political interests

within and among countries, formulating such policies would require enormous political will and commitment from all stakeholders. However, every effort should be made to ensure that not only are these policies formulated but operationalized. To counter the effects of international migration, a plausible alternative is for the sending countries to create the necessary enabling environment and to minimize emigration so that a critical mass of trained people will be available at any point in time to advance the course of development.

Chairperson, it would also be helpful if countries that do not have the capacity to collect routine migration data are assisted to ensure the availability of quality migration data which undoubtedly is a pre-requisite for the formulation of sound migration policies.

Finally, whilst remittances by migrants cannot be a substitute to ODA, it has a potential to contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty. International migration should therefore be mainstreamed in the development process given its relevance to the MDGs. Together, this complex issue can be addressed and we should all join the band wagon to find a common solution.

I thank you for listening.