

STATEMENT^T

BY

HER EXCELLENC^Y MRS. ISATOU NJIE-SAIDY
VICE PRESIDENT AND, SECRETAR^Y OF STATE (ER) FOR
WOMEN'S AFFAIRS OF THE GAMBIA THE

AT

THE FORTY-NINT^H SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN

ON

THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING
PLATFORM OF ACTION

*Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

After four World conferences on women, we are here to review progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is fair to acknowledge that the responses throughout the world have been positive as Governments have made conscious *efforts* to advance the goal of gender equality, equity and women's empowerment through education, legislation and higher levels of political representation.

Commendable as the effort has been, we must acknowledge that the ideal has yet to be achieved. Much more needs to be done to attain full empowerment and protection of women against poverty, ignorance and *want; exposure to diseases such as HIV/AIDS; domestic and other forms of gender-based violence; discriminatory legislation and unhelpful socio-cultural practices; and unequal opportunity with men in society.*

In The Gambia, we have been keenly aware of the need for vigilance and for conscious efforts to be made to pursue the cause of gender equality, equity and women's empowerment. The President of the Republic of the Gambia, Dr. Alhaji Yahya A.J.J Jammeh himself is fully committed to this cause and has ensured that Government policy remains focused on its advancement. As a result, we have been able to register significant gains in our *efforts* to mainstream women and girls issues and concerns in the country's development process.

The adoption of our 1997 constitution marked a turning point in the empowerment of Gambian women and girls, as it accords them the right to marriage based on consent, full and equal dignity in marriage, and citizenship to children born outside The Gambia to Gambian mothers irrespective --of their father's nationality.

The Gambia has signed, ratified and submitted three progress reports on CEDAW and by the end of this conference would have ratified the AU Protocol On The Rights Of Women in Africa. The incorporation of related protocols into our national laws is being pursued vigorously.

The Gambia's VISION 2020, the PRSP and other national policies address the concerns of women and girls. Given the importance of health and education to the socio-economic development and empowerment of women and girls, the Government of the Gambia has committed over **20% of its national budget to the social sectors apart from contributions made** by Development Partners. This has resulted in marked improvements in education and health infrastructural development, service delivery, quality and accessibility.

With the existing network of health facilities country wide, coverage of health services averages about 80%, with 70% of the health facilities in rural areas within a radius of 5 to 7 kilometers.

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This has contributed to the improvement of the health status of women and children in the last decade as seen, for example, in the decline in the maternal mortality ratio from 1050 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 730 per 100,000 live births in 2001. The infant mortality rate of 92 per 1000 live births in 1993 declined to 84 per 1000 live birth in 2001, and the use of modern contraceptives increased from 6.7% in 1990 to 13.4% in 2001. The proportion of fully immunized children rose from 61% in 1999 to 84% in 2002, while malnutrition among under five declined from 21% in 1996 to 17% in 2004. Despite the challenges, the attainment of the MDGs related to maternal and child mortality is still within reach.

The enrolment of girls has increased dramatically following the policy drive to improve access, especially in rural areas. In 1995, enrolment for girls at the primary level was only 41%, 36% at Middle level and 26% at senior secondary level. These figures have increased significantly over the last decade to 49%, 44% and 37% respectively.

Women have had greater access to productive resources and institutional support services in the form of credit, inputs, technology and capacity building.

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Women are now playing key roles in politics and decision making at the national and local levels. The Vice President and a number of Secretaries of State in key Departments are women. The number of women who have held ministerial portfolios as well as other key positions has increased appreciably. The growth in the representation of women in the legislature is an indication of the heightened gender sensitivity of the people, and the Government's resolve to ensure that women participate more actively in political and legislative activities.

Of particular significance has been the creation of a Department of State For Women's Affairs under the Office of the Vice President; the gender focal points network in all the Departments of State, a cabinet sub committee on gender, and the formulation of the national policy for the advancement of women and girls.

In spite of the momentum gained in addressing gender equality, equity and women's empowerment, a number of challenges remain, key among them being socio-cultural practices and attitudes inimical to the welfare of women and girls, inadequate donor and local resources, and high debt service.

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The Government of The Gambia is committed to harmonizing its policies, programmes, legislation and plans in line with women-related internationally agreed instruments. The continued strengthening of the women's machinery as a whole is also a priority for Government. We will continue to advocate for attitudinal change through IEC and Behaviour Change Communication.

I thank you for listening.