



CheckAgainst Delivery

STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE
MID-TERM COMPREHENSIVE GLOBAL REVIEW OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES FOR THE DECADE 2001-2010

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Madam President,

The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. The economic and social development of these countries is an imperative that challenges us all, and which we must all rise up to, because these high levels of poverty, spread among so large a proportion of humanity, are in themselves, unsustainable and constitute a threat to global peace and security.

The development of these countries is hamstrung by factors such as inadequate human, institutional and productive capacity; acute susceptibility to external economic shocks, natural and man-made disasters; limited access to information and communication as well as to education, health and other social services; and poor physical infrastructure. We are all agreed that if the present development trends continue, most of the LDCs, especially those on the African continent will require more than a hundred years to attain the MDGs.

It is certain that even with the best efforts in the world, these countries will not be able to break the shackles of extreme poverty without the necessary props from the international community – props that come in the form of increased ODA and FDI; debt forgiveness; a favourable trade regime that eases their access to world markets; and assistance in better managing their environment.

Alas, five years after the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action, the expected level of support for the LDCs in these and other areas, to which the international community had committed itself, has in fact not been forthcoming, nor have the partnership promised been fulfilled.

The LDCs have done their part in carrying out the reforms they undertook to make, and in some cases, these reforms have translated into higher levels of growth. By and large however, the growth levels envisaged, have not been attained, thus further compounding the situation of poverty in these countries.

Madam President,

Of topmost priority in The Gambia's development strategies, is the attainment of the MDGs. We seek to do so not only through the appropriate interventions in the economy, by also through a massive investment programme in the social sector. We have devoted a large proportion of our budget to the health, education and rural sectors as a strategy for poverty eradication. This has produced very positive results as demonstrated in the significant improvements in the performance of indicators such as primary school enrolment, reduction of infant and maternal mortality, the reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS, gender

parity in education, access to potable water and sanitation, and arresting environmental degradation.

The Government of The Gambia continues to be relentless in its efforts to harness resources for investment in social infrastructure and services in order to enhance our human and institutional capacities which are major prerequisites for growth and development. What we need now is the increased support of our development partners in this endeavour.

Although The Gambia's economy has maintained macroeconomic stability in the last several years, major challenges in the fight against poverty still remain. The burden of public debt and debt servicing and a growing domestic debt, take away far too much of the resources we could otherwise have channeled towards poverty reduction programmes. And although we have been included in the category of countries that may be considered for debt cancellation under the HIPC initiative, it has not been easy for us to reach completion point to effectively benefit from the programme. For many of us in the LDCs, the criteria are too stringent and at times, beyond our capacity to meet. If HIPC is to truly serve the needs of the poorest of the poor, the conditions for benefiting from it will have to be reviewed.

Madam President,

Last year, we came to the end of our first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) implementation cycle. The implementation process has been hindered by a number of set-backs that has made the overall PRSP process not as successful as we would have wished. Capacity constraints were identified among the main factors responsible for this. We are in the process of finalizing our second PRSP programming cycle, which we intend to focus on the MDGs. We hope that we shall, this time, correctly anticipate the problems likely to constrain success and address them in a timely manner. We also hope that we will be able to count on the international community to provide substantially more resource support in the second implementation cycle.

Madam President,

Let me end by reiterating The Gambia's commitment to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, and call on all our development partners to show greater support for our efforts.

I thank you for your attention.