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**STATEMENT
BY
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THE GAMBIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
AT THE
COMMISSION FOR POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates.

I have the honour to align my delegation with the statement delivered by the Republic of Congo on behalf of the Africa Group.

The Gambia reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The Gambia has one of the fastest population growth rates (3.1%) per annum in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2021, it has an estimated population of 2.1 million with projected figures indicating that the population will be 3.5 million and 4.5 million by mid-2035 and mid-2050 respectively. Due to high rural-urban migration, more than 50% of the population lives in the western part of the country which constitutes an urban sprawl. Women account for over 51% of the population, adolescents aged 15-24 years and youth age 15-35 years account for 21.4% and 38.5% of the total population respectively.

Mr. Chairman,

The Gambia has registered much progress in reducing poverty and creating the enabling environment for improving the lives of its people. However, despite the progress made in recent years, poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition still continue to be a challenge. This is partly due to major disease outbreaks and their impact on the tourism industry, which accounts for more than 20% of GDP, and further exacerbated by climate-related successive shocks such as droughts and floods. In 2017, crop production fell by 26 percent because of long dry spells. Equally, fluctuating market prices for food items has detrimental effects on vulnerable households who spend about half their income on food. The latest blow to the economy came as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic with its devastating effect on all sectors of the economy.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of The Gambia recognizes that for sustainable development to be achieved, the nutritional and food security of the population should be guaranteed. A long-term investment in the agricultural sector cannot therefore be overemphasized, agriculture being the key sector for investment to achieve long-term food security as well as reducing poverty levels, as aspired in the National Development Plan (2017-2022). In order to achieve these goals, various strategies and programmes have been put in place to transform the agricultural sector from subsistence farming to market-oriented commercial enterprises. Among these key strategies are:

- The Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) in The Gambia which supports community organization and specific food security activities such as water harvesting, improved and diversified production including poultry, small ruminants, aquaculture, mushrooms, exotic fruits, cashew and rice to achieve local food security.
- The Agricultural Transformation Programme (ATP) which has the objective of defining a sector investment plan that supports agriculture production enhancement to achieve sustainable food security, reduced malnutrition and cereal import balance. This will eventually lead to enhanced economic growth through increased contribution of the agricultural sector to the Gambian economy.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of the Gambia also recognizes nutrition as a critical component of sustainable human, social and capital development, as nutritional well-being is a prerequisite for a healthy and productive living. The Government of The Gambia places nutrition high on the national development agenda as enshrined in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2017 – 2022. The Gambia is currently implementing the structural reforms and projects outlined in the NDP that would accelerate growth in the area of nutrition to achieve the objective of enhancing the nutritional status of the Gambian populace, thus significantly reducing or totally eliminating the rate and the number of stunted children in our society. In order to achieve this, the Government of The Gambia through the National Nutrition Agency, Ministries of Health, Basic and Secondary Education and Finance and Economic affairs have set a target under the Strategic Priority 4 of the NDP to decrease prevalence of underweight and stunting among children under 5, from 16% and 22.9% to 8.5% and 12.5% by 2021 respectively.

In addition to the aforementioned strategies, the Gambia Government in response to the socioeconomic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, is collaborating with its development partners to provide financial support to vulnerable households in order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. This is critical for not only mitigating the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, but also helping the vulnerable households during the lean period when food and nutrition security is low, leading to an increase in the prevalence of malnutrition. The Programme targeted approximately 83,000 households in 30 districts. With the prevailing COVID-19 situation, an additional 10 other districts covered by the Social Registry supported by the Social Safety Net Project were included.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to conclude by assuring the United Nations Commission on Population and Development of The Gambia's commitment to ensuring adequate nutrition and food security for sustainable development.