



Check Against Delivery

STATEMENT

BY

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OF THE
REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

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**Mr. Chairman,
Members of the Commission,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
All other protocols respectfully observed.**

It is indeed an honour and great pleasure for me and my delegation to be given this opportunity to share with the distinguished delegates the experience of the Gambia in addressing matters relating to adolescents and youth.

My delegation wishes to extend messages of goodwill from Her Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of the Gambia who champions the course of women, adolescents and youths in the Gambia.

We are indeed delighted to be associated with this noble endeavour that seeks to tackle head-on challenges faced by the younger generation of our population and overall improve the wellbeing of our people. In this respect, the Gambia reaffirms its commitments to all charters and protocols that advance the agenda of providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all young people and meaningfully engaging them in all levels of decision-making.

In fulfilling its commitments to the above course, The Gambia in its constitution and various development policies and programmes upholds the right of adolescents and youth to access information and services related to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health.

In further demonstrating its commitment to improving the lots of the adolescents and youth, the Gambia has formulated a national youth policy with a supporting SRH programme for the youths. Further, we have made strides in giving weight to adolescents and youths RH issues in the Health and National Population Policies and the Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment.

Mr. Chairman,

In view of the principles and ideals contained in the above, my Government has invested over the years in human, materials and financial resources in addressing adolescence and youth issues which have yielded results. For example, the 2003 Population and Housing Census has shown a decline in TFR from 6.01% to 5.4% during the period 1993 to 2003. However, other demographic indicators e.g. HIV infection among the younger population, teenage pregnancy, baby dumping and maternal deaths especially among the youths are believed to have declined over the years but lack of up-to-date and reliable data makes it difficult to prove this.

To this end, efforts are well underway to conduct a demographic and health survey and a population and housing census in order to address the data paucity for critical demographic indicators that could be used for measuring progress made in the attainment of the MDGs.

The government of the Gambia strongly believes in the principles of universal access to reproductive health and services including HIV/Aids, and believes that adolescents and youths have a right to decide freely when to have children and should be given the means to do so through information, education and communication. The government of the Gambia continues to demonstrate high political will in providing health services to all Gambians at affordable prices and most importantly the provision of free maternal care to all women, the provision of adolescents and youth friendly RH centres in the regions and the introduction of life skills programs in schools.

Mr. Chairman

While counting successes in implementing our various development programmes, we continue to face a number of challenges which include socio-cultural believes/practices resource inadequacies and the youthfulness of the population. Over 45% of the Gambian population is below the age of 15 years and 22 per cent aged between 15 and 24 years. This youthful age structure means a high potential for rapid population growth in the future as well as a high dependency burden which has the potentials of social disorder. Health, sexuality, education and employment are but a few of the areas of particular concern to this segment of the population. In the Gambian context, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and unemployment are worthy of mention as they inhibit the realization of the full potential of young people.

In addition, growth in the job market is not keeping pace with the high turn-over of school leavers and as a result there is high unemployment among the youth. This provides clear evidence of the need to consider the population factor in economic development strategies

Adolescent fertility has been a growing problem with far-reaching social and economic consequences. Although teenage pregnancy is believed to have declined over the years, it is still a concern as it compounds the health risk and socio-economic situation of girls and young women. The incidence of illegal abortions and dropouts among school girls can be attributed to unwanted and teenage pregnancies. The 2000 Adolescent/Youth Survey shows that sexual activity was prevalent among adolescent/youth in that 41.5 per cent had experienced sexual relationship at least once. About 15% of the sexually-active females had been pregnant at least once. Half of the pregnancies reported were unwanted and most occurred to young school girls who had to leave school as a result.

Mr. Chairman

It is worth noting that unless the international community and governments fulfil their funding commitments towards addressing adolescence and youth and other population and development issues the developing countries in particular will find it difficult to tackle challenges posed by our populations especially the youthful generation.

Despite all the challenges outlined above, the Government of the Gambia is still committed to managing the population resource in order to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development and ultimately improve the quality of life of all Gambians.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.