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STATEMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY
ALHAJI DR. YAHYA A.J.J. JAMMEH
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

TO

THE 59TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

23 SEPTEMBER 2004
NEW YORK

Mr. President,

Please allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of the 59th session of the General Assembly. This session might well prove to be epoch-making in that this august body will be called upon to consider and make far-reaching decisions on what ought to be done to revitalize our Organisation, and have it better aligned to fit today's imperatives for global security, peace and development. I have no doubts that you will live up to our expectation and, with your wisdom and vast experience, will guide our deliberations to successful conclusions. Be assured, Mr. President, of my delegation's fullest cooperation.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to pay tribute to our most energetic and dynamic out-going President, your predecessor, His Excellency, Mr. Julian E. Hunte. He conducted the business of the 58th Session with gusto, dedication and courage and helped us address some difficult issues. My delegation wishes him all the very best in his future endeavours.

To our Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, I express my deep appreciation for yet another year of dedicated service to the Organisation, indeed, to humanity at large. Some of the problems that were laid before him were not easy to resolve, but as expected, resolved in fact they became. I hope his efforts to see the triumph of multi-lateralism as the overarching context for the resolution of disputes and the pursuit of meaningful cooperation among nations, will be further bolstered during this session that is just beginning.

Mr. President,

In these days of uncertainty, fear and near-despair in the face of the new threats to global peace and security that have emerged between, and among, nations and peoples, my Government's faith in the United Nations as the best forum for nations to respond in concert to global challenges, has never been stronger. Whether it be in the

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need to confront the evil of terrorism, or to quell the insurgency in Iraq; or to attack the HIV/AIDS pandemic frontally, or to resolve the crisis in the Middle East, or to register gains in the fight against poverty – whatever may be the global challenge - the United Nations is the surest place where the real answers may be found. It is our collective responsibility - a responsibility which we must exercise multilaterally within the context of the United Nations - to rise up to all these global challenges.

My Government therefore welcomes the ongoing efforts of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which was established by the Secretary-General to place before the General Assembly, a set of recommendations on the measures that should be embarked upon to sharpen the Organisation's readiness to more effectively deliver its mandate. We eagerly await the Panel's report in the hope that it will help position us to better respond to today's global needs for development, security and peace.

The fight against terrorism continues to elude the world. Recent attacks in the Middle East, Spain, Indonesia, the Russian Federation and elsewhere bear ample testimony to this fact. After the events of September 11 2001, we strengthened our resolve to deal with this scourge collectively and comprehensively, but our efforts continue to be thwarted. We condemn, totally and unequivocally, the barbaric onslaught on the small town of Beslan in Southern Russia. There is no cause, however worthy, that justifies the perpetration of violence of such magnitude against innocent civilians, especially children. My delegation once more extends our deepest condolences to the Government and people of The Russian Federation.

Terrorism is not for any one individual state to fight. It is a phenomenon that calls for strong inter-state collaboration and assistance. Among the membership of the United Nations, the will definitely exists. What may be lacking among some of the more vulnerable, may be the means and especially supporting resources to frustrate terrorist machinations. And while the needs of some countries, including mine, have been adequately identified, assistance has been slow in coming. My delegation welcomes the

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creation of a directorate to help give effect to resolution 1373, and looks forward to a speedy commencement of its operations, especially with regard to the assistance needs of member states.

Mr. President,

It is our collective responsibility to ensure respect for the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and a strict adherence to the rule of international law. My delegation therefore reiterates its support for the various Courts – including the International Criminal Court - that have been set up to try persons suspected of serious infringements of human rights and humanitarian law. We call on all member states to show strong support for these initiatives to promote the observance of international standards of justice throughout the world. We commend the International Court of Justice on its recent Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and call upon all concerned to observe the ruling of the Court. We should all avoid actions that worsen an already bad situation in the Middle-East. Instead, we should encourage the Israeli and the Palestinian people to work in good faith with the Quartet to implement the Road Map endorsed by the Security Council in its Resolution 1515 (2003), so that the vision of the two states living side-by-side in peace and harmony can soon be realised.

We take note with satisfaction, the developments leading to an imminent restoration of democracy in Iraq. It is a matter of regret that in the process, so many lives have been lost and so much misery and suffering have been visited on the innocent civilian population. The evolving political situation and the widespread insecurity in the country call for a more active engagement of the international community in supporting the transition. A process of national dialogue and reconciliation involving all stakeholders must accompany the transition, if the forthcoming elections in 2005 are to be free of problems, and considered legitimate, participatory and acceptable. The UN can play a pivotal role in making this happen.

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We welcome the appointment by the Secretary-General of a new envoy to Iraq, and urge the international community to speedily resume its humanitarian assistance and other activities in the country, so as to smoothen the transition and alleviate the pain of the Iraqi people.

In the same vein, Mr. President the transition process in Afghanistan continues to face serious challenges. If the gains in that country are to remain sustainable and lasting peace is to return, the international community must do more to improve the fragile security situation beyond Kabul. Without security the reconstruction of Afghanistan may suffer delay and the transition may be placed in jeopardy.

Mr. President,

That there can be no development in the absence of peace, is a truism that is not lost on any one, more so on those of us from West Africa, a region that is rich in natural resources, yet wallowing in poverty because, in large measure, of conflicts. The high priority accorded to the search for peace in that part of the world has received the commendation of all West Africans. The UN and ECOWAS worked admirably to respond rapidly to an impending breakdown of law and order in Liberia and to place the Transitional National Government firmly in charge. In Sierra Leone the peace achieved continues to undergo consolidation, and it is our hope that the dividends accruing therefrom will soon translate into visible social and economic benefits for all the people in that very well-endowed country. Now that the fires of war have subsided in these two countries, we should focus our attention even more sharply on the festering conflict in Cote-d'Ivoire. While the insurgents and the Government must find a way out of the current impasse in the implementation of the Linas-Marcourcis and Accra III Agreements, we must equally appeal to all the other interested parties to eschew positions and actions that end up exacerbating the crisis. So long as the conflict in Cote-d'Ivoire persists, sustained socio-economic development will continue to elude the people of West Africa.

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My Government commends ECOSOC and the Security Council for their joint efforts to stand by the sisterly-Republic of Guinea-Bissau, as it strives to consolidate its democratic and political transition under trying post-conflict conditions characterized mainly by a lack of resources and a drying up of donor assistance. The ECOSOC Ad-hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau in which The Gambia serves in our capacity as Chair of the Group of Friends of Guinea-Bissau, has performed admirably in the discharge of its duties. It has engaged Guinea-Bissau in such a way as to ensure that the country stays the course and avoids a slide back into conflict. But even more commendable is the efforts of the government and people of Guinea-Bissau themselves. They have shown a singular determination to succeed in restoring the country on a path of peace, security and development. We commend them on the peaceful and orderly completion of the first phase of the transition, which culminated in the holding of multi-party legislative elections, and the installation of a democratic government. The international community should recognize such an impressive demonstration of national commitment and self determination, and be forthcoming with the appropriate support and encouragement.

Let me place on record my Governments appreciation of the Security Council's efforts to strengthen cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa on issues of peace and security. We very much appreciate the initiative it took to work with us members of the Economic Community of West African States, in our search for solutions to the problems that drive conflicts in our sub-region – problems such as mercenaries, blood diamonds, the proliferation of illicit small arms, etc. We are also grateful for its cooperation with us on peacekeeping matters. We urge the Council to continue its efforts in this direction so as to lighten the burden on us and render conflict resolution processes more manageable.

Whilst expressing appreciation for the concern of the international community on the devastating consequences of the locust invasion this year on agricultural production in West Africa and other parts of Africa, there still exist great dangers if the required quantity of

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equipment and insecticides are not provided in a timely manner. We still hope for additional resources to address this natural scourge.

There are still daunting challenges in other parts of Africa. Recent events in the Great Lakes Region are a cause for concern. It is our hope that the parties will commit themselves once again to the pursuit of lasting peace and security. In the Sudan, while we welcome the progress made in implementing the Naivasha Accord, we join other Governments particularly those of the African Union, to urge the Government of Sudan to redouble its efforts and work in concert with all its partners in the search for a speedy solution to the problem in Darfur. We also call upon the United Nations and the international community at large to work with the African Union to speedily resolve the problem.

Mr. President,

We live in a world where endemic poverty continues to define the material, physical and mental well-being of millions of people. At the turn of the millennium we committed ourselves to reducing poverty by half by 2015. Preliminary indications of how close we, as a global community are, to achieving this target are anything but reassuring. The General Assembly intends to undertake a formal review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals during its 60th Session next year. On that occasion, we shall all have an opportunity to sincerely and honestly evaluate how much we have, severally and collectively, come to tipping the balance in solving the world's uneven development conundrum.

The recent breakthrough at the WTO Geneva trade talks and the WTO ruling on farm subsidies are gratifying. Through them we may entertain the hope that the pieces from Cancun can still be put back together. We must however do more to liberalise farm trade and open up markets for commodities from developing countries. This would be one way of ensuring that through trade, the poor in the developing parts of the world are enabled to increase their incomes.

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We must however, not forget the commitments made in the Monterrey Consensus. The evidence so far is that implementation continues to be weak. Most of our development partners are yet to meet the agreed minimum target of 0.7% of their GDP, which they should contribute as their Overseas Development Assistance to developing countries. How will we be able to realize our goals if we continue business as usual?

There is also a need for us to assess the quantitative and qualitative contributions of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and those of the Brussels Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries (BPoA). More importantly, we must ascertain beyond doubt that PRSPs are not designed in such a manner as to unwittingly constrict progress, and reduce our development endeavours to a mere exercise in the management of poverty.

Mr. President,

My Government has always assigned topmost priority to the empowerment of the Gambian people and to building their capacities to bring about rapid transformations in their lives. Our primary focus has been on education, health and agriculture, although we have also paid attention to the contiguous sectors of communications – telecommunications in particular – and the expansion and strengthening of our physical infrastructure.

We recently took stock of the performance of my Government since my administration assumed the mantle of leadership ten years ago. I am proud to say that our achievements have not been insignificant. An examination of the performance of the indicators in the UNDP's Human Development Reports from 1994 to 2004 in The Gambia, as well as UNDP's assessment of The Gambia's rate of implementation of the MDGs, shows that despite a serious shortage of resources, my Government has, by and large, delivered on the promises it made to the Gambian people and the international community.

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Performance on the various human development indicators in The Gambia has, over the past decade, shown positive trends. This indicates inter alia, that our meagre resources are being utilized effectively to meet the needs of the people of The Gambia. In fact, the overall value of human development in The Gambia, as measured by UNDP's Human Development Index, has risen from 0.215 in 1994 to 0.452 in 2004. Our position on the country ranking has also moved ten places up. This clearly shows that we have made progress and have significantly improved our performance in enhancing human development in The Gambia within the last ten years.

When we made the pledge to provide at least nine years of schooling of good quality to all children in The Gambia, only 44 out of every 100 children of the relevant age group were in primary school. In ten years, we have been able to bring that figure up to 91. The average rate for countries in my part of the world is only 69. And we are confident that we shall achieve universal primary education in The Gambia within the next two years, well before the MDG's target year of 2015. Transition from primary to secondary education has also been increased from 12% ten years ago, to more than 65% today. Higher education has been significantly bolstered with the creation for the first time, of a university in the country, the University of The Gambia! Furthermore, we have succeeded in more than doubling the adult literacy rate from 30% ten years ago to 63% today.

Equally, significant improvements have been registered in the area of health. The incidence of malaria, one of the main causes of death in the country, has been reduced markedly over the last ten years, from over 30,000 reported cases in 1994 to less than twelve thousand in 2004. The incidence of tuberculosis has also been reduced by approximately the same order of magnitude. In 1994, about 1,000 mothers (per hundred thousand live births) died during childbirth. By 2004, that number had been more than halved, as has the figure for under-five mortality.

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We have intensified our fight against HIV/AIDS. Although infection rates in the Gambia are far below those registered in certain parts of the continent, and even though the rate of increase has been decelerating, the percentage of adults living with the disease has grown from less than 1% in 1994 to 1.4% in 2000 and 1.6% today. My Government is determined to arrest and reverse the trend.

Our health manpower-to-population ratio has increased by a factor of ten, while our health infrastructure has undergone dramatic expansions throughout the country. Numerous health centers, clinics and hospitals, including a University teaching hospital have been built.

We have been able to provide clean and safe drinking water to almost 90% of our people up from about 70% ten years ago. We have thus already met the target of the Millennium Development Goals to “halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water”, more than a decade ahead of schedule. Similarly, the entire population has access to essential drugs, and almost each and every Gambian has access to improved sanitation.

Although The Gambia is still a least developed country, we have been able to increase per capita GDP to some US\$390.00 in the last ten years. Poverty levels have been brought down from 69% in 1998 to 45.8% today. Life expectancy at birth increased dramatically in just a decade, from 44 years in 1994 to 54 years in 2004. The addition of 10 years is a result of an overall improvement in the standard of living and the quality of life of the Gambian people.

This therefore is my Government’s record sheet, as portrayed by UNDP in its Human Development Reports for the years 1994 to 2004. It shows that with vision, determination and seriousness of purpose, and the goodwill of partners in the international community, great things can be done even with little, to transform the lives of people.

We have registered major successes in other areas as well. We have greatly strengthened our democratic governance structures,

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institutions and practices. The Constitution promulgated in 1996 widened the guarantees of human rights to encompass the rights of women, children and the disabled. It established, for the first time, an Independent Electoral Commission which has since, functioned efficiently and effectively in conducting elections at the national as well as the local levels in a free and fair manner. It set up a functioning Office of the Ombudsman and a National Civic Education Council. And we have adhered to its provisions in advancing the process of decentralization.

We have paid much greater attention to our rural folk who constitute the majority of our population but also have more than their fair share of poverty, ignorance and disease. We have significantly increased development investments among them, such as roads, water supply, culverts, bridges, ferries, irrigation systems, schools, hospitals, clinics, etc. These have mushroomed within their communities in a manner that could never have been dreamt of before. We have also reduced the distance the average Gambian has to travel to have access to a telephone from eighteen to just eight kilometers in ten years.

In spite of all these achievements, Mr. President, we are determined not to rest on our oars. We know that the challenges that we face are truly daunting. Like other developing countries, especially those in Africa, we are still at the margins of globalisation and cannot by any stretch of the imagination, claim to be enjoying its promised economic and social benefits. We continue to suffer from the constraints of size, a limited domestic market and a narrow resource base. The burden of debt weighs even heavier on a small LDC such as The Gambia. And the difficulties of access to commodity markets for our products, as well as the stagnation – If not decline – of resource flows into the country, combine to further compound our development problems.

But we know that we shall soon see the light at the end of the tunnel. The recent discovery of large quantities of oil in The Gambia, gives much hope that our fight against poverty and underdevelopment may soon be over. My Government will use the resources that will be generated from this new discovery to do even greater things for the

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upliftment of the Gambian people. We shall call for even stronger partnership with our friends in the international community, so that together we may more speedily realize the Millennium Development Goals in The Gambia.

Mr. President,

As a global community, we must all seek to be our brother's keeper. We are all highly conscious of the need to work in concert to address problems that affect or threaten our collective wellbeing, survival and development – problems that know no boundaries, nationality, religion or race. To successfully confront these problems, no nation should be left behind, for to do so would amount to breaking a critical link in the chain and frustrating the concerted efforts of all. That is why, Mr. President, now more than ever before we must bring The Republic of China, Taiwan, back into our family of nations. The twenty-three million people of that progressive, democratic and peace-loving nation are part of the universe, breathing the same air as the rest of humanity; susceptible like everyone else to threats from disease, biological and chemical weapons, terrorism and environmental pollution; and having the same aspirations like us all, for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Mr. President,

At a time when we are all agreed that the United Nations should be aligned to the realities of the 21st Century and be better positioned to effectively deal with threats, challenges and change, not to acknowledge Taiwan as an important economic, social, technological and political player on the world stage, would be a grave mistake. Taiwan can, and must be allowed to contribute its part to our quest for global harmony and balance and the strengthening of global security.

Mr. President,

There is nothing in the Charter of the United Nations that justifies Taiwan being barred from occupying its rightful place in our Organisation. It is sovereign; it is peace-loving; it is democratic; it is development-oriented; and it conforms fully to international norms of behaviour. It should be called upon to take its seat among us without any further delay. I therefore urge all peace-loving nations of the world to support Taiwan's bid to regain its membership of the United Nations and all its Specialized Agencies.

Mr. President,

Cuba, another great friend of The Gambia, continues to live under various forms of embargoes and restrictions. The unilateral application of punitive measures that adversely impact the lives of innocent civilians ought not to be pursued by any one of us. We call on all concerned to speedily resolve this long-running issue, by removing the sanctions unilaterally imposed on that country.

It is our hope that the desires and aspirations of the peoples of the Korean Peninsula will, one day soon, be realised. We therefore call on the Governments of the two Koreas to redouble their efforts at reconciliation, and reduce the dangers that the tensions between them pose to themselves and to their neighbours. Confidence-building measures from the international community must accompany these efforts if a lasting solution to this enduring problem is to be reached.

Mr. President,

My delegation notes with much satisfaction, the progress made on the question of the revitalization of the General Assembly. I do sincerely hope that the momentum generated will be sustained. The same cannot, unfortunately, be said about the reform of the Security Council, which is truly, long overdue. The process has been far too

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slow and needs to be speeded up towards closure, preferably during this session. The Council must be transparent, democratic and representative of all regions of the world in terms of its membership. We reiterate our position – indeed the position of the African Union – that Africa should be represented in both permanent and non-permanent categories of the Council’s membership. The legitimacy of the decisions taken by the Council would be further enhanced through a fair and equitable representation of all regional groupings, especially when extraordinary sovereign decisions of states are further required to give effect to them. Positions that challenge the principle of the equality of states should have no place in our organization.

Finally, Mr. President,

Let me reiterate my Government’s commitment to the principles and objectives of the United Nations – a United Nations that must grow stronger, not weaker in this very complex new millennium; a United Nations that is fully poised to address mankind’s problems of security and development; a United Nations that is totally dedicated to the service of all of humanity; a United Nations that embraces all nations, big and small.

I wish you all a very successful 59th Session, and thank you for your kind attention.