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STATEMENT

BY

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AT

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Madam President

My delegation extends to you, our heartiest congratulations on your election to the presidency of this august body. Your election signifies a most welcome re-balancing of the General Assembly towards greater gender parity and will certainly bring along with it a whiff of fresh air in our deliberations. We hope also that it will help our Organisation address those issues of war, conflict, oppression, deprivation and terrorism which dog today's world, with the kind of compassion and sensitivity known only to mothers. Be assured, Madam President, of my delegation's fullest cooperation and support at all times.

Madam President,

Your predecessor Mr. Jan Eliasson, applied all his wisdom and vast diplomatic experience in presiding over a session fraught with difficult and exceedingly complex organizational reform issues. We thank him for guiding us deep into the process and wish him well in his new assignment.

We should not delude ourselves into thinking that reforming the United Nations is a task that can be achieved quickly. The issues are contentious and multifaceted, and only deep reflection and determined negotiation over time will see us through. For that reason, we should not feel disheartened that one year after the World Summit, we have still not concluded the process. We should congratulate ourselves on having achieved a breakthrough with the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Peace building Commission. Management reform is problematic, but the desire to achieve it in a fair and balanced manner will remain a key demand of developing countries. A selective approach to reforming the organization will work in no one's interest. Some reforms are long overdue and sorely needed. For us in Africa, Security Council reform is urgent and must be concluded as soon as possible. Recent events have demonstrated that the old dispensation is ill-equipped to grapple with the complexities of the world we live in today. Reform, I repeat, is urgent, if today's Security Council is to be seen to be poised to take on the new global peace and security challenges which mankind faces.

Madam President,

We are gathered together at a time of great uncertainty and, for many, of despair over our collective inability and lack of will to abide by the guiding principles of our founding fathers. We have not been too successful in preventing the scourge of war, or of addressing the factors that give rise to war. Rather than abating, the situation in the Middle East continues to fester and in fact, deteriorate, as the Road Map leading to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem further eludes us. My delegation has repeatedly decried the lack of will on the part of the protagonists to work towards a speedy solution to this problem, which continues to spawn many other conflicts in other regions of the world. It is a matter of deep regret that this

world body watched almost helplessly as a member state, Lebanon, was attacked and made to suffer extensive destruction to infrastructure, property and human life. Although we have been able to bring about a cessation of hostilities, we cannot claim to have achieved peace. All the conditions for a resumption of the conflict remain intact. We must more resolutely address those conditions. We must also do everything within our power to ensure that the problem between Hezbollah and Israel does not pull in other countries of the region and lead to full scale war between them and Israel. The consequences would be disastrous for us all.

Madam President,

My delegation condemns in the strongest terms, Israel's continued illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and Arab lands; its intensive military campaign in the West Bank and Gaza which has resulted in untold civilian casualties and extensive destruction of infrastructure; and its arrest and detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians and their leaders. The Hamas Government in Palestine was elected democratically by the Palestinian people, who, by the tenets of democracy which we all claim to espouse, are the only ones who may freely choose their leaders. Or are we to understand that this basic tenet of democracy should apply only if the leaders chosen are to our liking and meet with our approval? I urge all peace-loving and democratic members of the international community to assist the Hamas government play its role as a representative of its people in a responsible, democratic and dignified manner.

In Iraq, the unresolved conflict has now become uncontrollable and has all but degenerated into civil war. We must look for imaginative ways of stabilizing that situation and bringing the widespread killings, destruction and suffering to an end.

Madam President,

We must show leadership. Double standards have affected the effectiveness of our response to the peace and security needs of this region for far too long and have only muddied the waters further. The people of the Middle East must now have some respite and be allowed the space to pursue their development in an atmosphere of peace, tranquility and security. It is becoming increasingly clear that the only remaining honest broker that can bring this about, is the United Nations. We must step up to the plate.

In the Asia region, violence in Afghanistan appears to be re-escalating. The United Nations must join hands with NATO and other partners to engage all concerned in dialogue, with a view to addressing the factors that are driving the hostilities among the long-suffering people of this great country. And while we must obviously intervene to contain and arrest raging conflicts, we must also not be oblivious to the need to pay equal attention to nascent conflict situations. One such situation is the one prevailing across the Taiwan Strait, where the People's Republic of China has

openly threatened Taiwan with military intervention, should it as much as express an intention to declare itself independent. In addition, the PRC has increased its arsenal of missiles trained on Taiwan, to over 800 war-heads. It goes without saying that a deterioration of the situation into all-out war, will only provoke an unwelcome mix of responses from allies within and outside the region – responses that could cause a conflagration that would make the Middle East situation pale into insignificance.

In Africa, the good news is that peace continues to spread. From Sierra Leone and Liberia to Uganda and the DRC, we are witnessing a growing preference for non-violent approaches to conflict resolution. We should persist, so that this trend continues and embraces countries such as Somalia, and Sudan, with the Darfur imbroglio. In Somalia, the central Government should be assisted to stand firmly on its own two feet and exercise control over the entire Somali territory. The international community must take every precaution to prevent Somalia from becoming a haven for terrorists and other extremists. In the case of Sudan my delegation appeals to the brotherly people of that great country to intensify dialogue with the international community and accept the hand of partnership and friendship in its quest for a resolution of the Darfur crisis. In reaching a final decision on whether or not the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) should pass the baton to a UN peacekeeping force, Sudan should take a leaf from our experience in West Africa where on two occasions, first in Liberia and then in Sierra Leone, an African peacekeeping force joined hands with a UN force and eventually handed over completely to it. We are certain that with a bit more effort on all sides, a way will be found out of the present impasse.

Madam President,

While we must all work in concert to fight terrorism, we must also endeavour not to lose respect for fundamental human rights and civil liberties in the process. In addition, we must increase our cooperation in this fight and strengthen political and diplomatic interventions in order to win it. No matter how much resources or firepower is committed to combating the phenomenon, without international cooperation of this type, our efforts will come to naught. Recent developments in countries like Iraq have shown this to be the case.

Madam President,

Last year, we all rededicated ourselves to the full implementation of the Millennium Declaration. There are ample indications today that the MDGs are not likely to be met in most of sub-Saharan Africa if present trends continue. It is clear that we must all do more to identify and help remove the bottlenecks inhibiting progress towards them. We must address the serious capacity constraints that circumscribe the development efforts of many an African country. We must help stimulate economic growth through enabling policy measures that empower our countries for

greater and more meaningful participation in world trade. We must make real progress on the Doha round. We must increase foreign direct investment into the African economy. We must honour our commitment to increasing ODA to 0.7% of GNI. And we must in partnership, attack the great health scourges of our time: HIV/Aids and malaria.

In The Gambia, UN and other independent assessments indicate that on many fronts, we are making steady progress. We remain committed to achieving the MDGs as well as the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development. We have reversed the spread of HIV/Aids. We have already achieved gender parity in education and by extension, registered significant progress in gender equality, equity and women empowerment. We have brought potable water and good sanitation to over 70% of our people. We have reduced the prevalence of malaria and the incidence of maternal and under-5 mortality. We have attained 100% child immunization coverage. We have significantly increased access to education at all levels and shall meet the basic education goal, God willing, by next year or the year after. Our sharpest focus is on poverty-reduction and we are determined to attain that goal before 2015. We have been able to achieve these gains in spite of the severe resource constraints that we face, because of a determined and committed leadership and our strong resolve to live up to our commitments to the international community.

According to the expert assessments of United Nations agencies, The Gambia is among the very few African countries that will achieve the MDGs on target, if present trends continue. Our achievements on the development agenda have been made possible only through strong and genuine partnerships which we hope will continue and grow to meet the task at hand.

The trade policy of our Government continues to be guided by the principles of liberalisation, deregulation and investment promotion. We have brought about a progressive reduction of tariffs, and continued improvements in infrastructure to increase our competitiveness as a production and trade gateway into West Africa. We regard the private sector as an important engine of growth. Therefore, to further enhance its development our Government has formulated policies for the systematic strengthening of the Small and Medium Enterprise sector of our economy. It is our hope that implementation of these policies will lead to the creation of conditions conducive to the speedy attraction of high levels of foreign direct investment, which will, in turn stimulate the growth of employment and incomes and lead to significant reductions in the incidence of poverty among the Gambian people.

We are conscious of the need for all our development partners to speak to us with one voice so as to increase coherence in the partnership. To this end, we have this year encouraged our major multilateral partners – the World Bank, the IMF, UNDP and its Millennium Project – to work together with us in crafting a coherent

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper which will form the basis for a coordinated framework of partnership in development.

There are many commendable programmes and initiatives designed to assist countries like The Gambia. The G8 initiatives for Africa, the World Bank and IMF HIPC initiative, the Blair Commission for Africa, the Millennium Challenge Account, TICAD III and others, will only have an impact if they do not raise the bar too unrealistically high, such that the countries they are meant to assist are unable to meet the stringent criteria for accessing the funds. For aid to be meaningful it has to be accessible, predictable and not fragmented. Also, a well-designed aid architecture that involves the recipient in critical aspects of decision-making, is part of the answer to the much sought-after effectiveness in ODA, the subject of concern of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Yet while these programmes and initiatives may encourage many least developed countries in their hopes for early relief, in reality the accompanying enablers have not been forthcoming. The Doha Round is in limbo, our modest economic growth is being threatened by unpredictably high energy prices and debt relief is still in the distant horizon. For many of us, it is one step forward, before world economic trends take us two steps back. Of even greater concern is the fact that this plethora of initiatives has made hardly a dent on the poverty situation in our countries. The blueprints are manifold, the responses, too few. Unfulfilled promises only dash our hopes, leave us frustrated and diminish our faith in the effectiveness of international partnerships for development.

Madam President,

We in The Gambia continue to deepen our democracy. Just four days ago, the Gambian electorate went to the polls to once again choose their leader in a free and fair manner. Let me take this opportunity to convey the thanks and appreciation of His Excellency Dr. Alhaji Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, to the many delegations that have extended their congratulations and best wishes to him at his resounding victory at the elections. His Excellency The President considers this victory as a mandate from the Gambian electorate, for him to continue his service to the Gambian people and indeed to the international community at large. Our electoral process has been acclaimed world-wide for its openness, fairness and transparency.

Our balloting system is rig-proof and highly recommended for replication for use by democratic systems in other parts of the world. We invite any Government that wishes to demonstrate to the whole world that its electoral system is transparent, fair, inclusive and rig-proof, to come and take a leaf from our tried and tested system of over fifty years.

Madam President,

The subject of our high-level dialogue just a few days ago, was international migration and development. For the very first time, we have had the courage to address this issue within the walls of the United Nations. And rightly so, for international migration has been at the core of human history. It has driven the spread of human knowledge and civilisation. It has enriched cultures and societies, and caused mankind to make great leaps in science, technology, engineering and overall social and economic development. We are all migrants. Therefore, let us approach the issue of international migration with humanity, tolerance, respect and compassion.

Attempts to penalize or criminalize international migration will not work. In our globalized village, international migration is an undeniable, positive and indispensable force for keeping the wheels of national economies and human society in motion. We must look to the positive side of this natural human activity and desist from actions that trample on the dignity of migrants, as well as from acts of racism, xenophobia and abuse of human rights.

Madam President,

As the saying goes, "injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere". For decades, extensive illegal and extra-territorial measures have been pursued against Cuba – a small, friendly, democratic nation. They have not worked and will never work. My delegation joins the vast majority of the members of the international community in calling for the lifting of the decades-long embargo against Cuba, and allowing the hard working people of this great country to pursue their development aspirations in an atmosphere of peace. Let us all strive to live and let live. And by this same token, we must also urgently address the question of Taiwan. The legitimate quest of the people of Taiwan for a voice and standing in the United Nations must no longer be ignored. Taiwan is an important actor in our global economy and contributes immensely to global peace and security. It must be formally granted recognition as a responsible member of the international community. And the simple way of granting that recognition is to give Taiwan its rightful place in the United Nations.

Madam President,

Before I vacate the podium, let me salute, commend and bid farewell to one of Africa's outstanding personalities, H.E. Mr. Kofi Annan, since this will be the last General Assembly of his tenure as UN Secretary-General. President Dr. Alhaji Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh had the honour of paying tribute to him during the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Banjul, The Gambia last July. Allow me therefore only to say that the Government and people of The Gambia salute his leadership, his astute diplomatic skills, his demonstrated

commitment to international peace, security and development, and his unswerving faith in the international system.

Mr. Annan may be ending his appointment as Secretary General of the United Nations, but I am sure he will continue to be there for us, and will willingly come to the rescue when we need his wisdom and vast experience in mediating complex global problems. We wish him well in his future endeavours and also wish him and his family continued good health and happiness in their new life.

I thank you for your attention.