



Check Against Delivery

STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

**HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON THE COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS
ACHIEVED IN REALIZING THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT ON HIV/AIDS
AND THE POLITICAL DECLARATION ON HIV/AIDS**

**FRIDAY 10TH JUNE 2011
NEW YORK**

**Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his many reports on HIV/AIDS prepared for this High-Level Meeting, and for the many relevant recommendations we believe will help us all map the way forward in our drive to contain this resilient pandemic.

The reports clearly highlight the centrality of international solidarity in the global response to winning the battle against the scourge. This forum should serve to strengthen and further galvanize more national and international action and also see the recalibration of all the strategies and best practices that have borne fruit over the past decades. Let us not begin to rest on our oars. The battle is not yet won. Allow me to recognize the sterling role being played by the UN system as a whole, but more particularly, UNAIDS and the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis.

Mr. President,

The 2011 UN High Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS marks yet another unequalled global opportunity for countries and partners to critically review, reinforce and improve the performance of the last three decades of the epidemic. Thirty years since the HIV epidemic started and ten years since the landmark UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, there is strong commitment and will towards universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support to HIV and AIDS. This august gathering is well-timed and crucial for world leaders to revisit and re-energize their commitment made in HIV and AIDS response.

Mr. President,

In the Gambia, there is a strong political will and commitment to the HIV and AIDS response which is amply demonstrated by the creation of the National AIDS Council (NAC) chaired by the President His Excellency Sheikh Prof. Dr. Alhagi Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh and the establishment of the National AIDS Secretariat to coordinate and monitor the overall national response guided by the "three ones principle".

The Government of The Gambia is vigorously championing partnerships across the entire social spectrum in the fight against HIV and AIDS and related problems. The agenda for our deliberations is among the top most priority concerns for government. HIV and AIDS is by far the single biggest threat to our development and a big concern for our collective security. These facts were vividly endorsed by the United Nations General Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001 and re-affirmed in 2002 by the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in New York.

Mr. President,

The prevalence rates in The Gambia are relatively low. However, in our latest Sentinel Surveillance results 2008, HIV 1 prevalence showed an increase from 1.4% to 1.6%. In addition, over 2,500 people with advanced HIV infection are currently receiving Anti Retroviral Therapy and about 3,000 orphans and vulnerable children are receiving free basic external support and over 5,000 PLHIV are provided with care and support services in the country.

The above country statistics is an indication that we need to do more through collective effort and action in pursuance of the objectives of our universal access declaration on HIV and AIDS.

Mr. President,

Resource mobilization is a key strategy in the National HIV/AIDS Strategic Framework 2010 – 2014, but it is also a major challenge. In addition, gender inequalities, socio-cultural factors, poverty, stigma and discrimination concerns are major deterrents to effectively respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country. Poor maintenance of human rights particularly of people living with HIV contributes to denial, fear, stigma and discrimination and is inimical to the engendering of effective responses to HIV/AIDS. To address these vulnerabilities, we are integrating HIV/AIDS response in our development strategies. Investments in our health systems and capacity building for our personnel will remain drivers for eradicating the scourge as we march towards achieving the MDGs by 2015.

Over the past few years our response led to wider participation of Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society and Faith and Community Based Organizations in the national response towards HIV and AIDS. Although this multi-sectoral approach is commendable and very positive in scaling up access to services, but more efforts are still required to continually improve and sustain the gains realized since the commencement of the epidemic.

Mr. President,

Let me highlight some of the initiatives of our First Lady as another example of the high-level political commitment in our efforts to control the pandemic.

The OAFLAA Gambia, under the auspices of the First Lady, has been both instrumental and supportive of HIV and AIDS responses, focusing on the implementation of the Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT) services in The Gambia. In our drive to attain zero infection rates for babies born to positive women, OAFLAA-GAM has launched and declared acceleration and full integration of PMTCT into Reproductive & Child Health (RCH) program. This commitment and support witnessed the expansion of PMTCT centers from 5 in 2004 to 31 in 2011. This significant progress has increased access to 43%.

Mr. President,

In recognition of the important role of resources in the HIV response, The Government has recently supported a partnership forum for two Municipalities in the country with a view to mobilizing more resources locally to effectively respond to the epidemic.

As we work towards strengthening our partnership efforts on HIV and AIDS, I wish to solicit the continued support and commitment of all partners, bilateral, multilateral, private sector, etc. in providing the needed resources to support our well grounded programs. We have invested so much in creating the structures at all levels. However, we need to do more to consolidate the gains that we have registered. The Government of The Gambia is very much committed and considers HIV and AIDS as one of its main priority areas. Therefore, this forum should also explore potential opportunities to support The Gambia and other developing countries with additional resources, especially in the areas of prevention, treatment, care and support services.

Mr. President,

Before concluding my statement, I wish to state that the environment has improved tremendously towards the prevention of HIV in our society with the renewed political commitment. We must continue to improve this environment so as to facilitate our collective action and support. We must encourage and facilitate the translation of knowledge into positive behavioral change.

There is need for tolerance, compassion and care and support for people living with or affected by HIV. We must accelerate our cooperation with all stakeholders so that the next decade may be looked back on as the decade that WE collectively broke the back of HIV/AIDS!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.