



Check Against Delivery

STATEMENT

BY

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

AT

THE HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK
15 SEPTEMBER 2005

Mr. President

*Your Excellencies Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Five years ago, we gathered in this august assembly, and adopted the Millennium Declaration. We set out some time-bound development goals, whose achievement would significantly improve the lives of the hundreds of millions of dispossessed people of the world. Now with the first five year review, we are all still very much committed to the MDGs, and are still agreed that, with focus and will, they are indeed attainable by the target date of 2015. We must admit, however, that the overall scorecard, especially, for Sub-Saharan Africa, is not all too encouraging because very little progress is being made towards some of the critical goals.

There is no gainsaying that much more has to be done, particularly in the area of resource mobilization, to clear up the pathways for faster and smoother progress towards the attainment of the MDGs, especially for the developing world. We must improve the flow and quality of Official Development Assistance, including an early attainment of the agreed target of 0.7% of Gross National Product.

We must strive to reduce leakages from the economies of the developing countries, and open up significantly more markets for commodities from the developing countries in order to help stimulate a faster rate of growth and development in these countries. We must do more to help ease the strangulation of debt on our already weak and fragile economies, and resolve to immediately see a total cancellation of the debt of the least developed countries. If we do not wish to suffer failure in our quest for a just and happier world, or see the cost of achieving the MDGs skyrocket, we must go beyond commitments and mere words, and ensure that the resources the developing countries require are adequate, predictable and available without any further delay. The world must take initiatives to redress the imbalances in the area of Information, Communication and Technology, for this area has become a source of power and opportunity in today's globalized world. We must, therefore, do everything to reduce the digital divide between the North and South. It is only in this way that the noble intentions expressed in New York, Monterrey and Johannesburg will find expression in ways that touch and transform the lives of the world's dispossessed people to the extent that they can live in a better world devoid of despair and destruction.

Mr. President,

Regarding progress in the MDGs, I wish to inform this August gathering that the commitment of The Gambia, to the Millennium Development Goals is not in doubt. The MDGs provide the benchmarks for all our development endeavours and have been integrated into our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), and our national development strategies. In this regard, we have been able to use them as the main components of our Poverty Monitoring System. We have been making steady- in some cases, rapid - progress, towards attaining the goals. Both the UNDP Human Development Reports and Reports from the Economic Commission for Africa indicate that The Gambia is among the very few countries that are on course towards attaining, by the target year of 2015, the goals of reducing child malnutrition and mortality, as well

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as maternal mortality; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; achieving environmental sustainability through a reversal of the loss of environmental resources, and increasing access of safe drinking water. As we continue on this course, we recognize that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the protection of reproductive rights are critical in achieving the MDGs. The Gambia is also one of the four countries in Africa that are ahead in meeting the goal of achieving universal primary education and gender equality in education by the year 2015. We have been able to register these successes, in spite of the serious constraints, thanks to my Government's adoption of sound and appropriate policies and programmes for economic growth and development since 1994 for the betterment of the Gambian people.

Mr. President,

I must hasten to add that, in spite of the achievements already indicated, the challenges that lie ahead are enormous. The Gambia still faces the challenges of inadequate resources to implement the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), inadequate funds to finance agricultural development, lack of effective market access and a host of other difficulties. To compound these problems, we spend 40% of our budget in debt repayment.

Mr. President,

The resolution of the lingering conflicts in the African continent should continue to receive high priority from all of us gathered here today with the recognition that Peace and Security are a Sine Qua Non for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Against this backdrop, we, in The Gambia, are unreservedly committed to the realization of a peaceful, stable and conflict-free Africa. I therefore, call on the international community to provide "Special Opportunities for Africa" through increased foreign direct investment; better and less restrictive trade policies and practices; and also significantly greater volumes of Official Development Assistance to Africa.

Mr. President

We are about to enter the critical decade leading to our target year 2015 with high hopes for the realization of the many commitments we made before, and those we shall make now. Ours is a world whose attention needs to be continuously and persistently drawn at every turn to the realities of excruciating poverty, famine and disease. We must not let slip the opportunity to revive the world's interest and determination to confront these problems. It is my hope that the partnerships that we have forged for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals will again be reinforced and together we will work towards achieving this noble mission with a strong, reformed and revitalized United Nations at the centre.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

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