



THE GAMBIA

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STATEMENT

BY

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THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**

AT THE

**53RD SESSION
OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**NEW YORK
2ND MARCH 2009**

**Madam Chairperson
Excellencies**

I bring you the best regards and wishes from the President of the Republic of The Gambia and the Government and people, especially the women and children.

I wish to join my colleagues in congratulating the Bureau of the 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 2009. May I also take this opportunity to commend H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations on his report on 'Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.'

Madam Chairperson,

I cannot agree more, with the key findings of the report, in that, the attainment of gender equality requires the promotion of equal sharing of responsibilities, including care responsibilities between men and women. It therefore follows that men and women, boys and girls together should support each other, be given equal opportunities in both the social and productive sectors, as well as participate in decision making and political life of their societies.

It is pertinent to note here that, although these issues have been extensively discussed at various international fora, the current debate under the auspices of this august body, is indeed relevant, especially, in view of the current global financial and economic crisis and its potential impacts on development in general and women's issues in particular.

Madam Chairperson,

All over the world, women do not have equal opportunities from society when compared to men, particularly in the areas of education, employment, and decision making, although women care for the sick, elderly, the disabled and do housework. Unless and until this imbalance is addressed, we will continue to experience gender inequality and underdevelopment, particularly, in the developing countries. Lack of equal opportunities amongst men and women, boys and girls, hampers poverty reduction strategies, access to quality education for all, reduction in maternal mortality, access to productive resources by women and other related challenges.

Madam Chairperson,

In The Gambia, much has been achieved, especially in the areas of policy making, legislation and programming. We are committed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and we have signed and ratified major international instruments such as CEDAW, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, on the Rights of Women, the Commonwealth Plan of Action, the African Union Gender Policy, ECOWAS Gender Policy and many more.

The Gambia has just adopted a new five-year comprehensive Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, which puts a lot of emphasis on prevention, care and support programs. This plan is intended to provide unlimited access to comprehensive HIV services.

Madam Chairperson,

In 1999, the Department of State for Women's Affairs formulated and adopted the policy for the Advancement of Women and Girls 1999 – 2009. It focused on the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW, as well as, other national commitments. The implementation of such a Policy resulted in women being given greater opportunities in education, health and the productive sectors. Gender parity has been attained at primary school level and health indicators have improved a lot. Women continue to hold leadership positions in the Government, currently both the Speaker of the National

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Assembly and Secretary General and Head of Civil Service are women; the position of the Vice Presidency since 1997 has been held by a woman. Of recent, H.E. the President of the Republic of The Gambia has committed himself to also appointing women to Ambassadorial positions. Significant gains have been made in women's participation in decision making. Both Government and Non-Governmental organizations continue to accelerate efforts to mainstream gender perspectives in their policies and programmes.

Despite the progress registered, we do face familiar challenges, in the area of effective employment in the private sector; women continue to form the majority of the unskilled workers. In the formal sector, more women are now being given opportunities to lead, and in fact, some are managing major businesses in the country.

At the local and household level, the same prevails; women and girls lack the opportunities as men have when it comes to decision making, access to productive resources, institutional support and social services.

This year, the National Assembly will be presented with a Women's Bill, with the clear objective of ensuring the harmonization of all our international commitments in an overarching piece of domestic legislation.

Madam Chairperson,

At the heart of this debate on the sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS, is the issue of prevention of the spread of the HIV/AIDS infection by giving youths and women access to information on its prevention and effective methods of protecting themselves against the disease. It is evident that sexual violence and other forms of abuse committed against women and girls are a major contributing factor to the disparity in infection and mortality associated with the pandemic.

When it comes to sharing of responsibilities including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS in The Gambia, care and support activities do reach those infected and affected at all levels of service delivery with a view to ensuring that the highest level of care and support is available as part of the continuum of care.

Outreach strategies have been enhanced to increase access to services by the wider community, from both the private and basic health facilities located across the country. Coordination and collaboration are promoted between Government Agencies, CSO's and CBO's to enhance mobilization and involvement of communities, families and PLHIV in the decision making process.

In The Gambia, however, we also encounter gender inequalities and discrimination when it comes to care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. Mainly, it is women and girls who take up the bulk of responsibilities in care-giving, in the context of HIV/AIDS as well as caring for the sick, the disabled and the elderly. This is the result of the gender stereotyping where women and girls are traditionally assigned the roles of caregivers, household workers or home aides.

Madam Chairperson,

My delegation strongly believes, that public awareness campaigns on the social benefits of equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, through public education and promotion of equal treatment of girls and boys are critical. Respect for girls and women must be instilled in boys from an early age. Male responsibilities in family life must be included in the education of children from the earliest age, with special emphasis of the prevention of violence against women and children,

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reduction of the burden of women regarding household work, farming and other related economic work.

Also, we must step up efforts in the formal and non-formal education of the girl child and women, as education is a very effective tool against those gender based norms and behaviours that maintain the unequal division of responsibility between women and men, girls and boys. Education and training will give women and girls the confidence and self-esteem to assume critical roles in families and communities.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all the donor agencies and development partners of The Gambia, in particular, the UN Agencies (UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF). Last year, The Gambia also benefited from funding provided by the Spanish Government through NEPAD, towards enhancing women's economic empowerment. We are grateful for this generous assistance.

Madam Chairperson,

In conclusion, one of the biggest challenges in the relationship between men and women is attitudinal change. The reality is that it takes generations to change attitudes and that change must be preceded by deliberate and concerted efforts by all stakeholders backed by sound policies, investment and political commitment. The Government, under the able leadership of H.E. the President Dr. Alhaji Dr. A.J.J. Jammeh and all its partners who support the attainment of gender equality would like to assure the commission of our continued commitment to the full realization of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. We would also like to encourage all our development partners and donor agencies to redouble their efforts so that when Beijing Plus 15 comes around next year, we can have more positive results to report on its progressive implementation.

We still have a long way to go to attain the stated goals and those related to the MDGs and other critical areas of concern, especially to women and children.

I wish you all a successful 53rd Session.

Thank you for your attention.

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