



**Eighth Africa Regional Conference on Women Beijing +15
The Mid-Decade Review of the implementation of the Dakar and
Beijing Platforms for Action
*BANJUL (The Gambia)***

UNECA Experts Meeting

Monday 16th November 2009

At 9.00 AM

**OPENING OF THE CWD AND THE EXPERT SESSION OF THE 8TH AFRICA REGIONAL
CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (BEIJING +15)**

**Presented By: Mrs. Fatou Jassej- Kuyateh
The Permanent Secretary Office of the Vice President**

November 2009

Madam Chairperson

The Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs, H. E. Dr

Ajaratou Isatou-Njie Saidy,

Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly representing the

Speaker

My Lord the Chief Justice

Hon. Ministers, here present

Hon. Members of the National Assembly, here present

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, and

Development partners.

Representative of UN Agencies

Service Chiefs

Chairperson and Members of the National Women's Council

Staff of the Women's Bureau

Women organizations,

Distinguished delegates

The Press

Distinguished, ladies and gentlemen,

All other Protocols duly observed

It is with pleasure and honour that I deliver the opening statement, during the Committee on Women and Development (CWD) and the expert session of the 8th Africa regional conference on women (Beijing +15) on this day the 16th of November 2009, in Banjul The Gambia.

On behalf of His Excellency Sheikh Prof. Dr Alhaji Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh President of The Republic of The Gambia, Her Excellency Dr Isatou-Njie Saidy, The Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs, and the entire Government and people of The Gambia. I would like to express our deep appreciation and thanks to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and its African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGSD) for the invaluable efforts undertaken to efficiently coordinate and convene this conference.

Our gratitude and appreciation, goes to H. E. Sheikh Prof. Alhaji Dr. Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh, President of the Republic of the Gambia, who is the number one advocate for women's

advancement, and the attainment, of Gender equality, not only through official means, but at a personal level. He sponsors girl's education through PEGEP and the Girl's Education Trust Fund and these have significantly contributed towards the attainment of gender parity in education.

Through the Jammeh Foundation for Peace, several projects have been implemented, in the areas of health, education, agriculture and environmental management, to name but a few, which have yielded benefits, to women and girls. He has also initiated a Women's Empowerment Programme, for girls and women's participation, in state matters, decision-making and politics, has improved over the years since the advent of the Second Republic. Her Excellency the First Lady Madam Zineb Yahya AJJ Jammeh through OFLAGAM and Operation Save a Baby has contributed towards improving maternal and child health, survival and development.

I also thank the Experts and Member of the CWD who have taken time from their busy schedules to attend this historic conference. I know that there are many challenges ahead of us. But your decision to attend the experts meeting of the Eighth Africa

Regional Conference on women (Beijing +15) is testimony of your devotion to the promotion of gender equality in Africa.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

We African women, should ask ourselves, what actions, we ourselves have taken? What we have done, to advance our own status, and what the outcomes of these actions are. Again let's question what is yet to be done, and how we can do better. Answers to these questions would form the basis for our strategic thinking to address the (12) key critical areas of concern, which I hope, will be useful, during your discussions, and in coming up, with critical recommendations, for the effective implementation, of the strategies, of the Beijing Platform for Action , and other Gender related policies, declaration, programmes, resolutions, and protocols.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguish participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Apart from these achievements at national level, we remind ourselves with this year's post Beijing +15 **Slogan from *Commitment to Action***. The main objective of this meeting is to discuss and strategize on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action BPFA. As this relates to the Gambian experience, we are doing a lot that could be associated with the implementation of the platform in the area of policies, legislation and programmes. As a result, women are serving in Decision-making and in Political positions.

As you can see both the Vice President and Speaker of the National Assembly, 3 Ministers, 1 Deputy Minister, 3 other National Assembly Members, Deputy Managing Directors in Parastatals and Director Generals are women. We now have women serving as Ambassadors and others in decision-making positions in various sectors of Government, the private sector, security services, other international bodies e.g. at the AU Commission, as well as community leadership, such as Village Heads. In the past, women were not contesting for elections but

now we have started seeing some brave women contesting elections at the levels of area councils and parliament e.g. out of 20 female candidates during the last Local Government Elections, 15 were elected and many more nominated by Government .

Madam Chairperson, Distinguish participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Regarding education, the education system, in The Gambia has proven to be effective and responsive, towards ensuring quality education for all. A lot of investment has gone into girls' education, and now we have achieved gender parity, at Basic level. The challenge now is, maintaining these achievements, ensuring quality and relevance, for all and at all levels. In the area of skills training, a lot of facilities and services are put in places which have given girls a second opportunity to develop their careers. Women's career development also needs further attention, especially on courses, meant for those in the lower and middle levels of employment.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

In the Area of Health, The Gambia Government has been vigorously pursuing policies that seek to address the health, nutrition and demographic needs of the population. There has always been a conscious effort to strike a balance between population growth and socio-economic development. The National Health Policy “Changing for Good” 2001-2006 was adopted and it aims at providing quality health care services within an enabling environment, delivered by appropriately and adequately trained, skilled and motivated workers at all levels of care. A key component of this policy is the essential care package, which aims at addressing the common causes of morbidity and mortality, especially for women, children and the underserved. This policy has been replaced by The National Health Policy “Health is Wealth” and Health Master Plan. The health sector policies currently being implemented include National Reproductive Health Policy, National HIV/AIDS Policy, The National Nutrition Policy and the National Population Policy and Plan of Action.

Public sector health service is delivered at three levels – primary, secondary and tertiary. The number of Government hospitals increased from two to five over the decade. There are forty health centers at the secondary level, and a network of 492 primary health posts spread across the country. 34 private and NGO clinics complement Public Health Services. These developments have greatly improved access for women to health care and encouraged them to develop positive health seeking behavior.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguish participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

In the economic sectors, yes the participation, of women, has improved a lot, but the numbers need to increase. Women are running major businesses in the trade, export and import sectors, as well as, in the services and tourism sectors. In the banking sector, women are also in key positions. However, whilst there are positive successes in political and economic empowerment indicators, of women, reflected by the high positions they hold both in the public and private sectors, more needs to be done. Women still constitute a significant minority, at the higher levels of wholesale related enterprises, control and ownership of

industrial company, top managerial positions of private sector institutions. Women continue to constitute the majority, in subsistence agriculture, and in the mostly impoverished informal sector, of the economy, in various fields. These statistics are not in keeping, with the demographic proportions of women, and their potential positive impact in the national drive to fighting poverty, and improving overall socio-economic growth. To effectively reverse these trends, sustained gender parity, towards empowerment, is the continuing challenge, which forms the bedrock, of the current Women's Empowerment Strategy of The Gambia, and all related policy and programme interventions, emanating from its implementation.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguish participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Regarding violence against women and girls, this is another critical problem, we are faced with, and we must do something towards ending Violence against Women. This is why in The Gambia; we welcome the global campaign, to end violence against women.

May I caution that, this requires concerted efforts, from all stakeholders, due to the fact that gender and women's empowerment programming, needs to be given the required attention, resources and positive coordination.

In this regard, in The Gambia a national programme on accelerating the elimination of Gender-based Violence, prevention and management, will be developed, and this programme, will incorporate strategies, on the situational analysis, to establish the facts, and identify capacity gaps, after which a related plan of action will be drafted on Violence against women and girls. Other activities of the programme will include training on the prevention and management of skills for stakeholders, particularly, law enforcement agents, both at the local and national levels.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

With regards to women and security, once again all of the above surely cannot be achieved in the absence of peace and security. This is why the BPFA, re-enforcing the effective implementation of

the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on women, peace and security, is welcome, by all, particularly, women in conflict and post conflict zones. Whether we are affected or not, we should be haunted, by the atrocities of violence, against women and girls, particularly, in times of conflict. We should ensure that women and girls, are protected, from abuse, and are empowered to play a vital and rightful role, in helping their countries prevent, end and recover from conflict.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

In conclusion, I wish to encourage the gender experts here present to critically look at all the issues, one by one, and come-up with critical and sustainable recommendations that will successfully avail us the opportunity to effectively implement the BPFA.

I have no doubt in my mind, that we will do our utmost, and therefore, on behalf of the experts I assure you all, of our commitment, to formulate sound policy decisions that could be implemented in the interest of African Women and promise you

that the outcome of this meeting, will be conveyed, to the Ministerial meeting on the 19th of November 2009.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguish participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

May I also seize this opportunity, to thank all the members of the Coordination committee, for their efforts, I would also like to express special thanks to the Government Departments, especially the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, and others key partners, for assisting in the successful hosting of the Eighth Regional Conference on Women Beijing+15. My appreciation also goes to all the women and men from Government, Regional Governors and Mayors, the Private sector, the National Women's Council and Women's Bureau, Security Officers, Drivers and women's organizations, all over the country, who have been very busy, facilitating logistic for a successful Banjul - Beijing +15 meeting.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguish participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of Government and all Gambian women, I wish this meeting a resounding success and now, have the singular honour, and privilege, to declare the CWD and the expert session of the 8th Africa Regional Conference on Women (Beijing +15), officially open.

Thank you and May GOD bless you all.