



# 94-09-12: Statement of Gambia, H.E. Mrs. Fatoumata C.M. Tambajang

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REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO, 5 -13 SEPTEMBER, 1994

STATEMENT BY

THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE AND

WOMEN'S AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

MRS. FATOUMATA C. M. TAMBAJANG

12 SEPTEMBER, 1994.

Mr. President;

Your Excellencies;

Honourable Ministers;

Representatives of Inter-Governmental Organizations;

Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with profound pleasure and honour that I am given the privilege to address this important Conference on Population and Development, a Conference which represents our commitment to similar conferences held in Bucharest and Mexico in 1974 and 1984 respectively.

Please allow me to start by congratulating His Excellency, President Hosni Mubarak on his well-deserved nomination as President of such an important International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP). There is no doubt that this Conference is opportune and that it marks a landmark in our African history and willingness to rise to the development challenges of our continent. My delegation, comprising high level Government and NGO officials join me in wishing you success in the deliberations of the Conference.

I would like to seize the opportunity to thank you on behalf of the Government of The Gambia, for the wonderful hospitality of the Government and people of this great land of Egypt; the cradle of civilization, accorded to us since our arrival in Cairo.

We recognize and appreciate the commendable efforts of your Government, those of Dr Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of UNFPA and Secretary

General of the ICPD with the Secretariat for turning what seems to have been a dream at the onset into reality. Your Excellencies, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been following with great interest this transparent Conference with your candour and objectivity. I thank every one of you for taking the bull by the horn to set the prospective world human development agenda for the 21 st Century..

Your Excellency, distinguished representatives and delegates, we gather here today to discuss the Draft Plan of Action that will guide population related interventions in the next twenty years in the light of the serious challenges high population growth is posing in our endeavour to attain socio-economic progress throughout the world. Even though population increase for some countries may lead to increases in the size of their national cake, the population growth usually supersedes the economic growth implying that the share of the cake will be smaller and smaller as the trend continues.

It is an impeccable fact that the world's population currently estimated at 5.7 billion and growing faster than ever is leading us to the cross-roads of serious socio-economic development crises. The world population growing at 93 million per annum, implies that as I speak, nearly 200 persons are added to this planet per minute who should have inalienable fundamental rights such as shelter, food, clothing, education and other services.

According to the United Nations, it took 123 years for world population to increase from 1 billion to 2 billion, succeeding increments of 1 billion took 33 years, 14 years and 13 years respectively. The transition from the fifth to the sixth billion, currently under way, is expected to take only 11 years and to be completed by 1998. Your Excellency, I cannot agree more with Dr Nafis Sadik, when she remarked

"we meet at a time when, driven by unprecedented growth in human numbers, and wasteful consumption, many of the basic resources upon which future generations will depend for survival are being depleted, when environmental pollution is intensifying and when widespread poverty and social and economic inequality persists".

Dr. Sadik's wise words are loaded and they represent formidable challenges for us as facilitators of development and implementation of appropriate global and national actions.

Your Excellency, distinguished representatives and delegates, the economic and demographic situation of Sub-Saharan Africa to which The Gambia belongs, is not encouraging. According to estimates, it will take only 35 years for this region to double its population. In the last decade, population growth has superseded economic growth by 1 per cent. This situation is being further aggravated by debt servicing, unfavourable pricing of our export commodities and the unfavourable world economic environment. The Government of The Gambia adopted an Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) in 1985 with the objective of addressing the macro-economic imbalances in the economy. Despite the positive results of this programme after five years of implementation, it had negative impact on the standard of living of Gambians.

In 1990 the Government launched a Programme for Sustained Development in collaboration with the development partners in order to consolidate the gains of the ERP and mitigate the social effects of the adjustment.

The population of The Gambia as indicated in the 1993 Census Provisional Report is 1,025,867. With a land area of 11,000 sq kilometres, the country has a population density of 93 persons per sq kilometre - the

fourth highest in Africa. The population has grown by an average of 4.1 per cent per annum between 1983 and 1993. The rate of natural increase accounted for 2.9 per cent of the growth and net international migration 1.2 per cent.

Mr President, if this growth rate persists, my country would double its population every 17 years. It could be noted that the rate of natural increase is disproportionately high given the size of the country. However, the main contributing factor responsible for this unprecedented increase in the size of the population is high levels of fertility combined with falling mortality levels. The total fertility rate is currently estimated at 6.00 live births per woman, whereas Infant mortality and Maternal mortality rates are 90 and 10.5 per 1000 live births respectively.

The high rate of rural - urban drift is another great concern for my Government. The out flow has contributed towards aggravating congestion, deteriorating sanitary conditions, increasing unemployment and its effects on youth, and excessive pressure on social infrastructure in the urban areas. It has also resulted in labour shortages in the rural areas.

Mr President, the inter-relationship between population and development has received and continue to receive increasing attention in the context of not only Gambia's development, but Africa as a whole. Both Africa's Priority Programme of Economic Recovery (APPER) and the United Nations Programme of Action for Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAERD) call for the adoption of an integrated population and development planning approach. In 1989, the Council of Ministers of Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) also adopted the Njamena Plan of Action on Population and Development in the

Sahel which recommended the initiation and adoption of population policies by member countries.

It is the recognition and appreciation of population factors in socio-economic development that led the Government to initiate the formulation of a comprehensive Population Policy in 1988, with the main objective of slowing down population growth and ensuring a balanced spatial distribution of the population. The first step in the policy formulation process was cooperation and collaboration among various agencies concerned with population issues. Consultations were also made through workshops at national and divisional levels with a view to ensuring that the policy document is culturally and socially acceptable to the Gambian people.

After reaching a consensus on the elements of the policy, Government in 1992, promulgated the National Population Policy for Socio-Economic Development which emphasizes linkages between population and other major social and economic issues.

As a clear demonstration of political will, a Population Commission, chaired by the President of The Gambia was established for the coordination of the Policy. A three-year rolling programme framework was prepared to guide population activities for the period 1994/5-1996/7. The programme is built around six major components: Enhancing maternal, child and reproductive health; mainstreaming of women and youth; strengthening the population information system; information Education including Religious education and Communication; The Local Initiative Fund as a participatory development initiative under the Strategy for Poverty Alleviation; Migration; and Population Policy Implementation.

Mr President, Health is a fundamental right of all citizens and my Government recognizes the promotion and protection of the population's health standards as essential ingredients to sustainable economic and social development. As a signatory to the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978, Primary Health Care now forms the backbone of our health care programme. My Government has also embarked on the Bamako Initiative, a strategy that fosters the active participation of the communities in the decentralization, management and financing of the health services.

My Government is also committed to the National Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Gambian Children which is in response to the targets/goals set at the World Summit for Children in 1990. However, contraceptives are not given to unmarried girls below the age of 18 years without the consent of their parents. Abortion is illegal in the Gambia except in cases where there is sufficient evidence that either the mother or the child's health is endangered. Although, my Government recognizes the principle that all couples have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the means to do so, abortion is not recognized as a method of family planning.

Mr President, the need for a holistic approach to population and development planning necessitated my Government to formulate other population related policies/action plans such as: The Health Policy, Strategy for Poverty Alleviation, The Environmental Action Plan, Education Policy and Family Planning Policy.

The Government recognizes the critical role women can play in the development process and it is against this background that a National Women's Council and Bureau were established in 1980 with the objective of ensuring policy and programmes responsiveness to gender roles and

needs with a view to ensuring equity and gender balance.

In the recent political development of The Gambia, I am pleased to inform you that the Government of The Gambia has made a breakthrough in increasing women's leadership in the development process by appointing four female ministers, including my humble self, for key sectors of the economy, namely; Education, Youth Sports and Culture, Information and Tourism as well as Health, Social Welfare and Women's Affairs.

A significant progress has been made in the efforts to enhance the status of women and their families regarding access to basic education and vocational training, information and communication, maternal and child health care, agriculture and commercial credits. You will agree, Mr. President that the education is a critical component in the empowerment of women as it enables them to participate effectively in the decisions that affect their lives. In this connection, girls education is receiving an increasing priority of my Government under its new Education Policy. My Government launched a multi-disciplinary and participatory Women in Development Programme ((WID)) to respond to the complex needs of women through safe motherhood, productive capacity building, programme design and management.

The Government will continue its efforts to meet the formidable challenges of women and their families in the years to come. Mr. President, as we move towards the closure of the 20th Century and formidable challenges that lie ahead of us in the 21st century, my Ministry has been facilitating the preparation for the World Social Summit and Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in 1995. I can assure you that The Gambia will prepare substantive and accurate report on our women's achievements and constraints and will continue to develop



and implement appropriate strategies for further enhancement of their status.

Mr President, allow me, once more, before I conclude, to extend my delegation's tribute and my personal recognition to Dr Nafis Sadik, ICPD Secretariat and the Preparatory Committee for their excellent work in the organization of the Conference and production of the Draft Programme of Action. My Government has carefully reviewed this Draft Programme of Action, but lack of clarity on a few issues made it impossible for an equivocal stance on all aspects of the document. As soon as clarification is received, our position on them will be taken.

Mr President, my Government is fully committed to the Kilimanjaro Plan of Action and the Principles and Objectives of the Dakar/NGor Declaration. We accord an unconditional supports to over 90 per cent of the draft Programme of Action. I am delighted to note that my delegation has contributed positively to the discussions on the finalization of this document and I hope the final document will be acceptable to all delegates.

Mr President, the implementation of this 20 year Plan of Action requires political will and commitment to mobilize the required domestic and external resources for the effective implementation of the Plan. In this regard, we are happy to learn that a number of countries have pledged further support for population programmes. We can assure them of our effective cooperation based on the fundamental principles of sound governance and mutual accountability for desired results.

Mr President, distinguished representatives and delegates, I would like to express my Government's appreciation to the United Nations and its Secretary General, Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, UNFPA, World Bank, IPPF

and other development partners for their invaluable assistance to population activities in The Gambia.

In conclusion, Mr President, I would like every one to join me to diffuse the world's super population bomb which is on the verge of ignition. If we allow this bomb to explode, it will be devastating for all mankind. May Allah Almighty guide us in steering the ship in the right direction in the interest of humanity.

I thank you for your indulgence !

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