

Statement Delivered by the Hon Claudiana Ayo Cole
Minister of Basic and Secondary Education
Republic of The Gambia
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Chairperson of the General Conference
Chairperson of the Executive Board
Madam Director General of UNESCO
Your Excellencies Ambassadors and Permanent Delegates
Distinguished Representatives of International Organisations,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by offering our heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to you, Madam Irina Bokova, for the invaluable services rendered to Member States and wishing you every success in your new endeavor. I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate Mrs Audrey Azoulay on her election as Director General of UNESCO.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, The Gambia is at a cross-road following 22 years of autocratic ruling. The country is undergoing a historical transformation to accelerate needed reforms to build a stable and democratic nation. These reforms focus on improving various aspects of national interest such as education, culture, information and communication, global citizenship, the rule of law and good governance. They engage all sectors and all segments of society especially women and youths.

Despite the enthusiastic engagement of the leadership of the country to demonstrate that the appealing dividends of democracy are worth pursuing, the country is threatened by several fragilities that could potentially erode its chances of achieving sustainable development and peace. The moment is challenging but, The Gambia recognizes the leadership role that UNESCO could play in catalyzing resources and expertise as critical to moving the country's overall development agenda.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

As The Gambia fully associates itself with the Africa Union 2063 Agenda and the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, our policy reforms and development initiatives are fully aligned with these international commitments.

Accordingly, the recently finalized sector wide education policy places strong emphasis on **“Accessible, Equitable and Inclusive Quality Education for Sustainable Development”**. In an attempt of “leaving no one behind”, the main thrust of this policy is the delivery of quality education particularly for the vulnerable and underprivileged population.

The Gambia is grateful to UNESCO for the invaluable support provided for the integration of the country in the Global Observatory of Science Policy Instruments (GO-SPIN) project.

The Gambia hopes to become part of the Science and Gender Advancement Project (SAGA) to better streamline the participation of girls and women in science.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

In the Gambia, culture as an essential tool to promote peaceful coexistence is streamlined and given prominence in all sectoral reforms. The promotion of cultural entrepreneurship and the fostering of trade relations to include cultural goods and services is vigorously pursued.

To date The Gambia has ratified three UNESCO cultural heritage Conventions. The country is working ardently towards the ratification of all other remaining cultural Convention.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The Gambia is appreciative of UNESCO’s critical role in promoting youth and women empowerment. Efforts to mainstream gender have resulted in the domestication of international protocols such as Maputo Protocol, the CEDAW among others.

My country has prioritized the participation of its youthful population to address challenges for society such as illegal migration, lack of adequate livelihood skills and youth unemployment. In order to mitigate these challenges, structural and institutional reforms for the development of essential skills for self-employability

and the promotion of global citizenship are put in place through sensitization and training programmes.

The 10th Year Anniversary of the African Youth Charter (Banjul+10) organized in the Gambia brought together hundreds of youths across Africa to discuss issues related to peace, youth empowerment and sustainable development. This important continental event was relevant and empowering as the outcome of the meeting fed into the AU 2017 road map on harnessing the African demographic dividend.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

In 2016, the Government of the Gambia initiated a major reform to reshape ICT environment in the Gambia and mitigate challenges that affect the expansion of ICT usage by all sectors. A policy is formulated to promote universal and affordable access services and cyber security measures.

The irreversible process in which the Gambia is engaged is that of peace, democracy and good governance. The role of media and freedom of expression is critical in that process. With financial and technical support from UNESCO and its partners, The new Gambia has engaged meaningful legislative reforms for the establishment of a vibrant professional media to consolidate a solid path to peace and good governance.

Chairperson

In conclusion, The Gambia is fully committed to the pursuit of peace and sustainable development. We would like to express our support for the UNESCO Flagship programmes identified within the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa, emphasising peace and education and the harnessing of STI and knowledge for the sustainable socio-economic development of Africa. We therefore ask UNESCO to maintain its visibility as the lead agent in promoting the development agenda for Africa in collaboration with the Africa Union.

I thank you.