

Statement to be delivered by Hon. Claudiana A Cole, Minister of Basic and Secondary Education  
Republic of The Gambia  
During the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCO General Conference  
Paris, France, 12 – 27 November 2019

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To be delivered: 13<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2019

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.**

I have the honour to deliver this statement at the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference on behalf of the people and Government of The Gambia.

It has been three years since our country reached a new milestone in the process of democratization and the consolidation of its freedom. It is true that the scars from 22 years of human rights violations and dictatorship cannot be erased in that short a time, but so is our commitment unshakable to consolidate the culture of good governance in delivering a New Gambia that is at peace, and is law abiding and prosperous.

Our pledge as reflected in our National Development Plan is unwavering: ***“Delivering good governance and accountability, social cohesion and national reconciliation and a revitalised and transformed economy for the wellbeing of all Gambians”***

The establishment of the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) speak to this. They are significant strides towards building a free Gambia.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are convinced that our drive to build a caring and progressive society lies on improved education service delivery. We are consolidating our gains on access to education at all levels with a special focus on Early Childhood Education. Exploration continues into other forms of learning experiences

with national languages in formal and non-formal settings. All our strategic policies and curricula have been revised to align with the SDG4 framework to ensure quality learning relevant to life and livelihoods skills in the 21st century. A Ministerial Steering Committee has been set up to coordinate TVET related activities for youth empowerment and employability, with a particular focus on returning migrants.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

We acknowledge the transformative power of culture for sustainable development and peace, especially in this time of healing and reconciliation. Our government has significantly increased its financial support to the National Centre for Arts and Culture to enable the institution to fulfil its mandate to preserve, promote and develop the intangible and tangible cultural assets of the country.

This year, through UNESCO's support, we were able to embark on a training programme to support the growth and development of the culture and creative industries in The Gambia.

I am pleased to report that, in 2019, The Gambia was able to fulfil its reporting obligation under the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. We are proud that our report is the very first UNESCO Quadrennial Periodic Reporting (QPR) under the Convention prepared by a State Party using the new Monitoring Framework of the Convention. We hope that our experience with this pioneer work will offer invaluable insights to other State Parties when uploaded into the Policy monitoring platform and Global report series.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

In The Gambia, we recognize youths and women as critical enablers for our sustainable development. In taking action for their fullest empowerment we have key achievements to show that put gender equality and women empowerment on a sound legal and institutional footing. Gender parity in access to primary and secondary education has been achieved and critical

bills related to sexual offenses, gender discrimination and domestic violence have been enacted. UNESCO has supported women legislators and newly elected women councillors in training on gender sensitive programming and advocacy.

Over the last two years the government has been implementing the recommendations of the STEM and Gender Advancement (SAGA). Legal and regulatory instruments are being developed to strengthen STEM skills in socioeconomic sectors with special emphasis on the increased participation of women in STI.

### **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is true that much remains to be done in The Gambia to create a solid basis of ICT penetration and easy access to reliable information. However, by working with our partners we have made significant progress to harness the benefit of ICT and Government is to enhance internet connectivity to schools and remote areas of the country. The Government is putting the legal framework to establish our first National Technology Park to catalyse research and development and promote the growth technology-based enterprises.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

As the Focal point for the Africa electoral group at UNESCO to the Steering committee of International Year of Indigenous Languages, The Gambia holds dearly the **Strategic Outcome Document of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages and its key conclusions and recommendations** with the conviction that it will be adopted by all and sundry. Urgent actions are required in recognition of the importance of Indigenous languages within UNESCO's effort to deliver the SDGs.

### **Chairperson,**

I wish to reiterate our appreciation of the efforts of UNESCO to forge new partnerships in support of Priority Africa activities and in the provision of

strategic guidance for the implementation of the programme activities of the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa.

It is with pride and great pleasure that we in The Gambia can boast of our relationship with UNESCO. It has stood the test of time over the several decades and the people and government will continue to stand by the ideals of UNESCO and make our world a better place for all of mankind.

**I thank you for your kind attention.**