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TITLE : SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

COUNTRY : THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

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Mr Chairman, the Director General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

Let me begin by bringing you warmest greetings and best wishes from His Excellency, Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, the President of The Gambia, the icon of our revolution, a master farmer, the architect of Vision 2016 “Food Self-Sufficiency” and the Government and people of The Gambia.

Mr Chairman,

On behalf of the President of the Republic of The Gambia, the Government and people of The Gambia, and on my own behalf, I wish to congratulate Professor Jose Graziano da Silva for his re-election as the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

The re-election of the Director General is a sign of confidence and trust that member states have in the FAO under his leadership. He is a true friend of The Gambia, my country, and we wish him more successes in his second term.

Mr Chairman,

We also join other speakers to congratulate you for your election as the Chair of the Conference and extend our appreciation about the way you are conducting the affairs of this Conference.

Furthermore, I thank the Government and people of Italy for the hospitality extended to me and my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful city of Rome.

Mr Chairman,

Since 1994, the Government of The Gambia under the pragmatic leadership of The President, continue to recognize agriculture as an important pre-requisite for socio-economic development and progress to the extent that a number of operations have been launched by the President himself and they are:

- Operation Feed Yourself
- Operation Go Back to the Land and
- Operation Feed the Nation.

Against this background, the Government continues to reposition agriculture in its development programme and provide as much as it can to ensure the full participation of Gambians, particularly women and youths in agriculture.

Mr Chairman,

Fighting poverty and achieving zero hunger is a major priority of The President, hence, The Gambia Government has introduced a number of initiatives to ensure inclusive social protection and sustainable agricultural development especially for the rural and peri-urban populace the latest initiative being - Vision 2016, which aims to make The Gambia a food self-

sufficient nation by 2016 and today Gambians are being encouraged to Eat what they Grow and Grow what they Eat as well.

It goes without saying that The Gambia's Vision 2016 is on course and when achieved, it will not only create significant employment for the youthful population of the country but will as well create wealth, generate foreign exchange and ultimately improve the livelihood of the population.

Mr Chairman,

As we all know, one of the greatest challenges to agriculture is climate change and vulnerability. Cognizant of this, the Government of The Gambia continues to work on mitigation/adaptation strategies that would minimize the impact of climate change especially in water availability, anti-salt dikes, introduction of new varieties of seeds, etc.

However, to ensure successful implementation of our programme framework in agriculture, we would need continuous support and partnership. We are therefore grateful to all those Development Partners who continue to support The Gambia in its food self-sufficiency drive and they include but are not limited to FAO, IFAD, WFP, IDB, ADB, Saudi Fund, Kuwaiti Fund, World Bank, etc.

As a country with a pragmatic leader who leaves no stone unturned to achieve positive results, we are very hopeful that with the support of our partners, we would achieve Vision 2016 objectives which will serve as an important building block for the attainment of Vision 2020 – Transforming The Gambia into a Middle Income Country.

Mr Chairman,

At the end of November 2014, the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia was here, to receive an award on behalf of President Jammeh and the entire Gambian population, in recognition of the achievement we made in reducing the percentage of the Gambian population classified as undernourished, from 13.3% in the early 1990s to 6% in 2014.

Only last Sunday, I was here in Italy to receive an award on behalf of our President, recognizing further gains made in reducing hunger in our country, from 6% in 2014, to 5% in 2015.

This further success under the leadership of President Jammeh, is due largely to the sustained political commitment at the highest level, which is a prerequisite, for hunger eradication, and the reduction of undernourishment. His Excellency's Government's provision of strategic material and administrative support to all players along the value chain, also contributed to the achievement of the target.

Mr Chairman,

President Jammeh can best be described as a farmer president, who is leading the way by engaging in agricultural activities in his spare time, greatly promoting agriculture as a noble and profitable venture.

Last week, The President concluded a month-long agricultural tour of the entire country, accompanied by senior officials including policy makers, law makers, local government administrators, technocrats and my humble self.

This latest tour has availed him the opportunity to see first-hand, the progress made in the implementation of Vision 2016 to-date and the constraints that need to be addressed, as we draw closer to the target date of 31st December 2015.

Mr Chairman,

We are certain that with FAO and other partners' continued support and partnership as we sustainably localize the SDGs particularly SDG2 - **“End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition, and Promote Sustainable Agriculture”** through optimizing the role of traditional rulers and local government administrators; diversified grassroots stakeholders; particularly rural women and youth, as enshrined in Vision 2016, we will meet these goals well before the proposed deadline of 2030.

Mr Chairman,

Once again, His Excellency President Jammeh appreciates FAO's recognition and support of The Gambia's efforts towards attaining Food Self-Sufficiency, and addressing hunger and malnutrition; and he commends and congratulates Professor José Graziano da Silva for his re-election.

Mr Chairman,

I will conclude by assuring the FAO and our other partners of The Gambia's continuous commitment in the noble fight to achieve zero hunger and poverty eradication in the world. May Allah the Almighty God continue to guide and bless us all.

Thank you.