

The Role of Women Parliamentarians in Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

- The Honorable Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon Momodou LK Sanneh
- Her Excellency, High Commissioner of United Kingdom to The Gambia, Ms Sharon Wardle
- Her Excellency, UN Resident Coordinator in The Gambia, Ms Seraphine Wakana
- Hon Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Defense and Security of the National Assembly, Hon Halifa Sallah
- Hon Members of the Standing Committee on Defense and Security of the National Assembly and Members of Parliaments of various countries from across Africa
- Clerk and staff of the National Assembly
- Members of the Media Fraternity
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
- All other Protocols duly and respectfully observed

Good morning to you all.

On behalf of the government and people of The Gambia, I have the singular honor and privilege to chair and welcome you all to the National Assembly of the Republic of the Gambia.

The Gambia, especially to those of you who are visiting us for the first time, is called the smiling coast of Africa. This is not because of its geographical landscape, but mainly because of its beautiful people and culture of its diverse citizens, which I believe the resident members of the diplomatic corps here with us today, will attest to these attributes as a rare treasure unequal to any place else in the world.

Honourable Members, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

We are gathered here today to discuss and promote the

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To be able to do that, we, first of all, one has to know the problem, by aligning oneself to the root cause(s) of the same problem. We have to appreciate the realities, particularly from an African point of view, by invoking our past history and some of the most significant factors that affected our collective quest as states and nations, but more so, as a continent.

We all know that Africa, is hampered by three significant tragedies that brought about our political, social and economic degradation. These factors are necessary to know and understand, in order to be able to address the way forward.

The first was **SLAVERY**. For centuries, Africa as a continent is deprived of its resourceful human capital, taking away our strongest sons and daughters turning them into slaves, leaving behind the old, the young and the weak.

Second was **COLONIZATION**, when in year 1886, our colonial masters met in Berlin, called the Berlin Conference, to demarcate and divide Africa into states and nations, depriving Africans of their true identities and heritage.

Third and still the case today, is **THE EXTRACTION/ EXPLOITATION OF AFRICA'S NATURAL RESOURCES**. It is believed that the existence of mineral resources, such as oil and diamonds, as well as rich endowment of wildlife is the source of the illicit trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in conflict areas, Biological and even the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction by Non-State Actors across Africa. Rebel groups use these resources to finance and arm themselves to propagate their aggressions and propagandas. Because of these, West Africa is one of the most unstable sub-regions on the African continent. Since 1960's, there were 37 successful military coups in the region.

Hon Members, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

To address these issues and other related matters, institutions like the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), CPA and PGA emerged with a mandate and responsibilities, amongst other things, the promotion and advocacy for individual states and nations to adhere to international instruments like the UNSCR 1540 (Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction) adopted in 2004, BWC (Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention) which was adopted in 1972, the Arms Trade Treaty, which concentrates on the fight against the Illicit trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons. PGA is very active in this role as they engage partners on weekly and monthly issues. So to Peter, Marion and the rest of the PGA team, thank you for bringing this auspicious gathering to The Gambia.

It is good to note that, The Gambia is a State party and a subscriber to both the BWC and UN Security Council Resolution 1540 adopted in (2004). The Gambia ratified the BWC in May, 1997, and I believe the last time we deposited any instrument of implementation on any convention as a country was in 2005, which is over 14 years ago. So I believe through partnership between the National Assembly through the Standing Committee on Defense and Security, the PGA's

Implementation Support Unit (ISU) in Geneva, and other relevant stakeholders like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we will before the end of this year, be depositing the necessary instruments.

This brings me to the Theme of today's meeting, which is

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Africa has a population of 1.216 billion, with women constituting to more that 50% of this number. And, according to a research conducted by **WOMEN MATTER AFRICA**, it indicates that companies and institutions with a greater share of women on their boards of Directors and Executive positions, tend to perform better both financially and otherwise.

To this end, my sincere take on this issue is that promoting gender equality in our leadership roles towards the attainment of an all-inclusive sustainable development, peace and security cannot be overemphasized. For Africa to be an equal partner with the rest of the world to achieve a global peace and stability, we have to harness the demographic dividend of Women, bringing along different perspectives. Despite the low statistics in Women Representatives, Undoubtedly, these challenges can be overcome, as long as the correct remedies are identified and are applied.

Once again to PGA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway who sponsored this program, the Clerk and staff of the National Assembly for creating an enabling environment, the media, I thank you and if any of my remarks inspired anyone of you to support this crusade, then there is still hope for rhetoric.

THANK YOU