

**2025 STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS  
(SONA)  
DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA,  
HIS EXCELLENCY, MR. ADAMA BARROW**

**VENUE: THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,  
BANJUL**

**DATE: 19th June 2025**

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Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,  
Your Excellency, the Vice President,  
Your Worship, the Chief Justice of The Gambia,  
Excellencies, Former Vice Presidents,  
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and  
Consular Corps,  
Senior Public Officials and Service Chiefs,  
Party Leaders,  
Venerable Religious Leaders,  
Distinguished Personalities,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

## **Introduction**

1. In accordance with the Constitution of The Gambia, I feel profoundly honoured and uniquely privileged to deliver the **2025 State of the Nation Address** before this esteemed Assembly.

2. This year holds exceptional significance, in view of the sixtieth (60<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of The Gambia's attainment of political independence - a milestone symbolising six decades of sovereignty and collective progress.

3. This Diamond Jubilee reflects the tenacity and values that characterise our nation's journey over the years. During the period, we have learnt that charting a stronger, enduring, and brighter future for a nation comes with difficulties and choices to make.

4. Guided by the **Recovery-Focused National Development Plan, YIRWAA (2023-2027)**, we have embarked on a strategic course to foster inclusive and sustainable development. As a blueprint, the plan serves to consolidate our gains and accelerate socio-economic transformation across all sectors.

5. Honourable Speaker, to objectively reflect on the performance of my administration during the 2024 calendar year, it is necessary to acknowledge both our achievements and the challenges that confront us. Importantly, however, our commitment to unity, democratic principles, and progressive policies remains unwavering, as we strive to enhance the well-being of every Gambian.

6. In this spirit, I present to this august body a summary of the nation's current state of affairs, highlighting key accomplishments, ongoing challenges, and our strategic priorities for the future. These feature in the themes discussed ahead, and I will begin with our international engagements.

## **Diplomacy and International Cooperation:**

7. Honourable Speaker, The Gambia continues to strengthen its international presence and diplomatic engagements to advance our national interests, enhance global cooperation, and promote peace and development. We remain committed to expanding bilateral and multilateral partnerships, improving diaspora engagement, and ensuring the protection of Gambian citizens wherever they may be.

8. The Gambia's international presence has been magnified by the successful hosting of the 15th OIC Summit in 2024 and my assuming the Chairmanship of the Organisation.

9. Furthermore, the country's eligibility for the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund has been renewed for another five years. In addition, we have been successfully re-elected to the Human Rights Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council.

10. In the same year, The Kingdom of Morocco opened its embassy in the country to strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation, whilst the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire established an Honorary Consulate here. Additionally, over thirty (30) Ambassadors and Diplomats presented their credentials, signalling increased international interest in engaging with The Gambia.

11. These developments will continue to position the country as a respected and resourceful member of the international community.

12. Honourable Speaker, we proudly maintain our status as the Human Rights Capital of Africa, hosting the continental human rights institution. Thus, in October of last year, we hosted the eighty-first (81<sup>st</sup>) Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, further solidifying our role in regional human rights advocacy.

13. Internationally, The Gambia has steadfastly championed human rights and justice on the global stage. This includes our active involvement in the International Court of Justice on the plight of the Rohingya, the legal struggles of Palestine, and essential climate change actions.

14. Honourable Speaker, as Chairman of the OIC, I express grave concern over the recent escalation of Israeli attacks on Iran, resulting in the killing of military and non-military officials. I call for restraint and a return to peace in the region. Dialogue is the ultimate solution to our global concerns and we must endeavour to pursue it.

15. In January 2025, my government participated in the Universal Periodic Review and presented the country's human rights record before the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. This marked a significant milestone in reinstating our nation's rightful global standing.

### **Legal and Judicial Matters:**

16. The Ministry of Justice made significant strides in 2024 by reinforcing the rule of law, protecting human rights, and ensuring justice for all.

17. Key achievements in this area include the completion and tabling of the revised Draft Constitution, the passage of the Victims Reparations Act, and the establishment of the Special Accountability Mechanism to address past human rights violations.

18. We have also seen progress in combating human trafficking through NAATIP's initiatives. An all-day hotline and the Blue Heart Campaign, which is a global initiative to combat human trafficking, are now in operation.

19. I am pleased to inform this August Assembly that both the Victims Reparations Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission, established through legislation passed by this Assembly, will commence operations in this legislative year.

20. The Criminal Division secured convictions in numerous cases, while the sexual and gender-based violence unit of the Ministry of Justice provided critical legal support and raised public awareness on such matters. The Registrar General's Department has upscaled digitisation efforts and now operates an online marriage registration portal, thus enhancing efficiency and accessibility.

21. Despite these successes, challenges remain, particularly in digitalising our legal processes. We are committed to addressing such gaps through continued reforms, capacity building, and international collaboration.

22. Honourable Speaker, all these reflect my government's dedication to fostering a just, transparent, and accountable legal system and to ensure that the rights of all Gambians are protected and upheld.

## **National Security:**

23. Honourable Speaker, I submit that we recognise the remarkable transformation of our Security and Armed Forces. Today, they proudly exhibit a respectable degree of professionalism and preparedness, hence honouring their duty to safeguard our independence and territorial integrity.

24. The dedication of our citizens in uniform echoes the resilient spirit of our people. Their commitment to peace and security continues to reinforce national security and safeguard public order.

25. Progressively, the Government is strengthening internal security, modernising our national identity card management and national security infrastructure. The digitalisation of our national documents is in progress, and we will soon replace the concession contract for the National ID system.

26. The ID cards will be integrated with the Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, passport, and other identification databases to create a unified digital ID system that is locally designed, built, operated, and managed by our services. This initiative will expand our revenue base, improve national security, enhance service delivery, and ensure knowledge transfer and ownership.

27. Honourable Speaker, in collaboration with the Ministry of Works, the Ministry of Interior is reviewing the Motor Traffic Act to introduce appropriate action against road offences.

28. Meanwhile, plans are underway to install CCTV systems along the OIC Highway and other strategic locations. These will be linked to a traffic management centre for real-time monitoring and law enforcement.

29. A New Highway Patrol Unit is already in operation to enhance road safety. In addition, modern surveillance equipment worth thirty-eight million Dalasis (GMD38 million), secured from the German government, has been installed in strategic locations, to reinforce crime prevention.

30. Also, the West African Police Information System is in use to digitise paper-based police records for easier access, sharing, and utilisation.

31. Mr. Speaker, while our law enforcement agencies have intensified crime prevention, challenges persist with irregular migration, border security, drug trafficking, and other offences.

32. I call on the general public to support the security services in their security intelligence gathering operations, investigation, and prosecution of criminals.

33. Honourable Speaker, a draft Gambia Immigration Department Bill (2023) to enhance border control and management has been submitted for Cabinet review. The proposal aims to update the 1965 Immigration Act and align it with current migration governance procedures.

34. Modern border posts are fully operational at Amdalai, Kerr Ayib, and Giboro, and plans are afoot to build one more on the Soma-Seleti border.

35. Although the Immigration Department and law enforcement agencies have increased patrols and surveillance, they need to deploy modern security technology and intelligence-sharing mechanisms for improved efficiency.

36. To show the magnitude of the fight against drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking, our Drug Law Enforcement Agency recorded over one thousand (1000) drug cases in 2024 and secured one hundred and twenty-six (126) convictions.

37. Honourable Speaker, our resolve to safeguard our territorial integrity is evidenced by the improvement of our soldiers' welfare through their revised terms and conditions of service.

38. The increased provision of modern patrol boats and artillery tanks, the logistical support to enhance military professionalism and prepare our troops for military duties, and their participation in international missions have uplifted the image, competence, and performance of the security services.

39. Beyond defence, The Gambia Armed Forces (GAF) contributes to various areas of national development, such as agricultural engagements, infrastructure development, and disaster response.

40. GAF, for example, has launched a twenty-hectare (20 ha) rice pilot project at Jahaly Pacharr to support national food security efforts. They have also established a fully operational poultry farm in Yundum, together with a vibrant vegetable garden that serves the local community. ECOMIG is equally engaged in rendering impressive social services. We appreciate and thank them both.

### **The Economy:**

41. Mr. Speaker, we remain resolute in implementing our YIRIWA Development Plan and are more committed than ever to enhancing our economy through sustainable and resilient practices.

We are determined that all Gambians benefit from the economy.

42. Despite global and regional challenges, the growth rate was five-point-eight percent (5.8%) in 2024, with a projection made of five-point-nine percent (5.9%) by December 2025.

43. Inflation dropped significantly from seventeen-point-three percent (17.3%) in 2023 to ten-point-two percent (10.2%) in 2024. This strong performance was realised through solid growth in financial services, trade, construction, and mining.

44. On the other hand, renewed global trade troubles, geo-political tensions, and instability in commodity prices continue to pose significant risks to this outlook.

45. Initial balance of payments estimates indicate a modest improvement on the current account balance of 2024, supported by a rebound in tourism, private remittances, and official inflows. The domestic foreign exchange market also continues to function smoothly.

46. Private remittance inflow, which is a major source of foreign currency, remained robust and amounted to seven hundred and seventy-five million, six hundred thousand US Dollars (US\$775.6 million) in 2024. This is almost a four percent (4%) increase over the seven hundred and forty-six million, eight hundred thousand US Dollars (US\$746.8 million) reported in 2023.

47. The Central Bank continues to hold comfortable levels of international reserves, which stood at five hundred and fifteen million US Dollars (US\$515 million) in January 2025.

This was sufficient to finance over four-point-six (4.6) months of prospective import of goods and services.

48. Honourable Speaker, despite the strong revenue performance in 2024, the overall deficit, including grants, was six billion, seven hundred thousand million Dalasis (GMD6.7 billion), equal to four-point-seven percent (4.7%) of GDP.

49. In parallel, as of December 2024, the national debt-to-GDP ratio declined to seventy-one-point-eight percent (71.8%) from seventy-five-point seven percent (75.7%) in 2023. This is against the seventy percent (70%) debt sustainability threshold.

50. The economic outlook for 2025 and beyond shows even better prospects, with a projected growth rate of five-point-nine percent (5.9%) in 2025 and inflation falling to nine-point-six percent (9.6%) by end-2025 from 17.3% in 2023.

51. Additionally, my government has adopted measures to stabilise basic commodity prices to lower the cost of living, maintain a market-driven exchange rate, and implement climate sensitive policies for a sustainable future.

52. Honourable Speaker, our partners and the Gambian Diaspora continue to contribute meaningfully to our national progress. Their support fuels our development endeavours and underscores our collective resilience and enterprise.

53. To accompany this, Public financial management reforms remain central to our governance agenda of building a more resilient, competitive, and sustainable economy that would uplift the lives of all Gambians.

54. The revised 2014 Public Finance Act and the Public Procurement Regulations have modernised our financial oversight framework, strengthened efficiency and transparency in public procurement processes, and ensures accountability in financial resource management.

55. The State-Owned Enterprise Commission, now active, recently signed a performance contract with NAWEC, further enhancing fiscal discipline and governance across state institutions.

56. Honourable Members, while economic growth has remained steady, inflation and the rising cost of living continue to impact household incomes. In response, the Government has implemented salary reviews for civil servants and social protection programmes to alleviate the suffering of low-income earners.

### **Transportation and Infrastructure Development:**

57. We are laying the foundation for a stronger, more competitive, and prosperous Gambia by building and developing our roads, ports, public transport, and the aviation sector.

58. We maintain that infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth and national connectivity. It facilitates mobility, trade, and services, thereby fostering prosperity and improving the quality of life for Gambians.

59. Already, we have made significant progress in both urban and rural road development. In 2024, we completed Phases One and Two of the twenty-two-kilometre (22km) OIC Highway and launched Phase Three as part of the historic diamond jubilee celebration. This attractive infrastructure has transformed the face of urban Gambia forever.

60. By the end of the third quarter of 2025, we expect to complete the OIC fifty-kilometre (50 Km) Urban Roads, the Kiang West Roads, and the Niumi-Hakalang Road. Hopefully, a significant portion of the three hundred and sixty-five kilometres (365 Km) of roads nationwide will be completed by the end of the year.

61. The concession contract with Albayrak Company Ltd became effective in February 2025, with the taking over of the port terminal by Alport Banjul.

62. This is a joint venture between The Gambia Port Authority, representing the Government, and Albayrak. Alport Banjul will expand and, eventually, move its operations to Sanyang, after completion of the deep-sea port terminal construction due to start this year.

63. Apart from re-establishing the two ferries in service, we await the delivery of two new procured green ferries. Private ferry services operated by Negmar Ferry Company will also commence soon on the Banjul-Barra route. These initiatives will guarantee reliable, safe, and affordable ferry services on this route.

64. Mr. Speaker, as part of efforts to decentralise governance, my government has started the infrastructural work needed to provide a new Governor's Residence and Office Complex in the Upper River Region (URR).

We have a similar plan for the Lower River Region (LRR), and the project is due for completion early next year.

65. On air transportation, The Gambia International Airlines recorded a net profit of fourteen million, eight hundred thousand Dalasis (GMD 14.8 million) in 2024. This is its first profitable year in many years. The airline now works with Gewan Investment Solution and Holdings to reintroduce a Gambian national airline and, thereby, enhance air access to destination Gambia.

### **Energy:**

66. Honourable Speaker, the energy sector remains central to our national development objectives for economic growth, industrialisation, social modernisation, and progress.

67. We have made significant progress in expanding electricity access nationwide. Recent assessments indicate that, by end 2025, ninety percent (90%) of Gambians will have access to electricity.

68. In 2024, the country unveiled the first-ever utility-large scale solar park of twenty-three (23) Megawatts (MW) in Jambur. Furthermore, a tender is underway for an extra fifty-Megawatt (50 MW) solar plant in Jarra Soma, which can be scaled up to one hundred and fifty Megawatts (150 MW) of renewable energy.

69. To provide additional support towards universal electricity access, my administration introduced a subsidy programme and reduced the cost of electricity meters from eight thousand, five hundred Dalasis (D8,500) to five hundred Dalasi (D500) within the project-covered areas.

This facilitated seventy-two thousand (72,000) new household connections by December 2024.

70. The Cabinet has also approved the splitting of NAWEC into separate water and electricity companies. The strategy is to improve service delivery, ensure accountability, and enhance operational focus.

### **Petroleum:**

71. Mr. Speaker, to regulate the growing mining and mineral sector, the Ministry of Petroleum, Energy, and Mines validated Quarry Regulations in August 2024 and reviewed the Mines and Quarries Act 2005 to align them with new industry developments and best practices.

72. My government will continue prioritising investments in electricity generation, renewable energy, petroleum exploration, and mineral resource management to ensure sustainable energy security for all Gambians.

73. Mr. Speaker, the search for Oil and Gas continues. A total of five wells were test drilled in The Gambia, two of them under my administration.

74. In a Partnership of FAR and Petronas, the two drilled during my tenure are named Samo-One Well, drilled in 2018, and Bambo-One Well, drilled in 2021. The drilled wells under my government cost \$100 million. Although the results from both wells are very promising and positive, no discovery was made. The companies exited The Gambia licences after fulfilling their obligations, which were primarily to drill the wells.

75. In 2019, BP was granted the A1 license. They paid the government a ten-million-US-Dollar (US\$10 million) signature bonus and a thirty-million-US-Dollar (US\$30 million) penalty for exiting without fulfilling their license commitments. It was as a result of their policy shift from oil and gas exploration to renewable energy that BP exited The Gambia at the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic.

76. For the time being, we are building the necessary institutional and legislative foundation to attract investors in Oil and Gas exploration on our shores.

### **Trade, Industry, and Employment:**

77. Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration, and Employment (MOTIE) continues to drive policies and initiatives to strengthen trade, foster private sector development, and create employment opportunities.

78. In this regard, The Gambia Trade Logistics Charter was officially launched in November 2024 to facilitate trade and improve efficiency at various locations. Following this, the Trade Logistics Council was inaugurated on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025 to oversee and monitor the implementation of the Charter.

79. With the support of ECOWAS, a modern Lumo Market has been constructed in Wellingaraba, LRR, to enhance cross-border trade. This initiative is part of the Lumo Modernisation Programme, which aims to build modern market infrastructure to facilitate domestic and regional trade.

80. Honourable Speaker, the Trans-Gambia Corridor Special Economic Zone Project is progressing well, as part of the wider Praia-Dakar-Abidjan-Lagos Multi-modal Corridor.

81. The study for this project was done with support from the African Development Bank and ECOWAS. The National Industrial Policy and the GIEPA Act 2015 are now being updated. The objectives are to support industrialisation initiatives, attract investment, modernise our industrial ecosystem, and promote value-added production to enable private sector growth and expand job creation.

82. To enhance employment opportunities abroad, the Government continues to work closely with our bilateral partners in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Spain, and cruise ship liners to expand our placement quotas, while ensuring that our young people have safe and productive employment abroad.

83. To conclude, through legislative reforms, infrastructure investments, and digital transformation, we are laying the groundwork for an inclusive and competitive economy to integrate The Gambia into regional and global trade networks.

### **Agriculture and Food Security:**

84. Honourable Speaker, Agriculture provides livelihoods for the majority of Gambians and plays a crucial role in attaining food security, employment, and rural development.

85. As outlined in The Gambia Agricultural Transformation Programme (2020 - 2030), the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Security is focusing on increasing rice yields from two (2) to four (4) metric tons per hectare and maize from two (2) to three (3) metric tons per hectare.

86. The 2024 cropping season marked significant improvements in agricultural input support for farmers. We registered increases in the provision of fertiliser and certified seeds and increased matching grants for the farmers and youths.

87. To explain further, my administration procured twenty-eight thousand tons (28,000) of fertiliser and reduced the price from two thousand, five hundred Dalasis (D2,500) per bag to one thousand, one hundred and fifty Dalasis (D1150) per fifty-kilogramme (50kg) bag and one thousand, one hundred Dalasis (D1100) per fifty-kilogramme (50kg) bag in the last two farming seasons, respectively.

88. In addition to this, through various agricultural projects, the Government distributed eight thousand, six hundred and ninety-seven (8,697) metric tons of fertiliser, over one thousand (1000) metric tons of certified rice seeds, three hundred (300) metric tons of certified maize seeds, and one hundred and forty thousand (140,000) litres of herbicides to farmers across the country, free of charge.

### **Livestock:**

89. On livestock production, significant improvement was realised in the past year, with about four thousand (4000) small ruminant fattening and breeding schemes implemented nationwide.

90. The Ministry of Agriculture also handed over five (5) abattoirs, five (5) livestock markets, seven (7) meat stalls, a mini dairy with two (2) collection centres, and pasture equipment.

91. We persist in promoting mechanised land preparation for upland and lowland farming by procuring the required machines. One hundred and eighty (180) tractors and twenty (20) Rotavator boats have been procured for deployment during the 2025-26 cropping season.

92. My government encourages private sector participation in rice production and other crops by facilitating access to farmland and related support schemes.

93. These include the introduction of integrated rice parboiling and milling machines, irrigation and mechanisation of cereal harvesting, and easy access to agricultural financing or credit matching grants.

94. By increasing access to finance, mechanisation, value chain enhancement, and irrigation expansion, we are ensuring that agriculture is a sustainable and profitable sector that boosts the quality of life here, supports a higher employment rate, and enhances livelihoods in rural communities.

### **Fisheries:**

95. Honourable Speaker, the fisheries sector is another important source of revenue for the government and food for the population. In 2024, revenue collected from fishing licenses, fines, landing fees, and permits exceeded one hundred and forty-two million Dalasis (GMD142 million), with an additional outstanding eighty-eight million Dalasis (GMD88 million) due for collection.

96. To address the primary challenges in the Fisheries sector, my administration is conducting a comprehensive review of the fisheries and aquaculture regulations, funded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation. The review will modernise fisheries laws, strengthen enforcement, and combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

97. Through the European Union Sector Support Programme, fisheries co-management is being expanded in the North Bank Region (NBR) to support twenty-one (21) oyster harvesting communities.

98. This is to ensure sustainable management of oyster resources and greater economic empowerment for coastal communities. Under the same programme, two additional fish landing platforms are being constructed in Kartong and Sanyang.

99. To enhance local fishing and support rural fishing communities, the Government distributed twenty (20) well-equipped Fishing Boats in January 2025.

100. Honourable Speaker, we are bent on optimising opportunities in the fisheries sector through laws, expanded programmes, improved aquaculture infrastructure and strengthened trans-boundary water cooperation.

### **Environment and Climate Change:**

101. Honourable Speaker, the Government remains steadfast in protecting the environment, strengthening climate resilience, and ensuring sustainable natural resource management.

102. Through robust policy reforms, enhanced disaster preparedness, and expanded conservation programmes, we will continue to build a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable society, as enshrined in the Banjul Declaration (1977).

103. To strengthen governance in environmental management, we are advancing key legislative reforms for environmental protection. This includes carbon trading and waste management frameworks. To strengthen all these, in 2024, designated officials were deployed to monitor environmental violations and ensure compliance.

### **Reforestation and Biodiversity:**

104. The Government continues to prioritise reforestation and biodiversity conservation to enhance climate resilience and safeguard natural habitats.

Last year, twenty-nine (29) community forests, covering an area of two thousand, five hundred and ninety-one hectares (2,591 ha) were brought under government protection.

105. Through the UNESCO Network of Biosphere Reserves, The Gambia's first designated biosphere reserve, the Niimi Biosphere Reserve, was launched in January 2025.

106. It covers over one hundred and ninety-six thousand, six hundred and sixty-five hectares (196,665 ha). Along with the UNESCO World Heritage site of Kunta Kinteh Island, we are reinforcing The Gambia's global conservation efforts.

107. Honourable Speaker, the impact of floods, deforestation, and environmental degradation continues to threaten food security and livelihoods.

108. Although the National Disaster Risk Management Policy (2024-2033) and sustainable environmental programmes are key to mitigating these risks, my administration will pay more attention to constructing better climate-resilient infrastructure.

### **Tourism:**

109. Honourable Speaker, the tourism sector remains a key catalyst of The Gambia's economic growth, generating employment, foreign exchange earnings, and business opportunities. As a result, my government is resolute in expanding and diversifying the sector through strategic partnerships, infrastructure development, cultural promotion, and capacity building.

110. In 2024, we recorded two hundred and twenty-seven thousand (227,000) tourist arrivals, representing a ten percent (10%) increase, compared to 2023. This growth reflects our marketing efforts, improved international connectivity, and strategic partnerships. These efforts have led to new flights to The Gambia, including those from Scandinavia and Nigeria.

111. The projection for 2025 is a further increase in the number of visitors, and we are on track towards achieving the RF-NDP target of three hundred and thirty-six thousand, seven hundred and eighty-seven (336, 787) arrivals by air.

## **Arts and Culture:**

112. Mr. Speaker, to maintain and build on our competitiveness, attraction, and cultural preservation efforts, we have introduced the Janjangbureh bicentenary and Kankurang festivals and revived the Roots Homecoming and Footampaf festivities, in addition to internationalising Gambian cookery and river cruising. Furthermore, we will give more attention to bird watching and wildlife parks.

113. With support from the World Bank, we are determined to complete the eco-tourist resorts and hunting camps nation-wide.

114. Honourable Speaker, for the first time, The Gambia has conducted a comprehensive demand and destination assessment of all major tourism sites. Ten key sites have been prioritised for investment.

115. Regarding our national heritage, The Gambia Government has submitted the UNESCO Convention of 1954 on the Protection of Heritage in Times of Armed Conflict to the National Assembly for ratification. Once ratified, The Gambia will be a signatory to all existing UNESCO conventions and, thus, solidify the government's commitment to protecting and preserving our national heritage.

116. Mr. Speaker, we also launched the Report of The Gambia's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Landscape and the National ICH Register in November 2024, with support from the Heritage Management Organisation.

117. With the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the tourism sector stands on the edge of having an element of the Gambian heritage nominated for inscription into the UNESCO Safe Guarding List of ICH. This would be a remarkable step towards protecting and valorising the Gambian heritage.

118. Honourable Speaker, my administration is evaluating both the human resource and equipment capabilities for the Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute (GTHI) through the support of the World Bank. To this end, GTHI is expanding student accommodation and providing its students with hands-on training experiences. Besides this, in alignment with market demands, a new Curriculum will be developed for GTHI to take care of emerging trends in tourism.

## **Communication and Digital Economy:**

119. Mr. Speaker, the digital economy has become a key driver of national development. It creates employment, improves service delivery, and enhances economic opportunities. So far, the expansion of mobile broadband connectivity has exceeded sixty percent (60%), and it is steadily progressing towards the national target of eighty-five percent (85%).

120. The telecommunications sector contributed twenty-two percent (22%) of the total tax revenue collected in 2024. The rollout of The Gambia's second subsea cable is ongoing, and it is due for completion in 2026. This initiative will increase bandwidth availability and provide redundancy to the first subsea cable, thus ensuring reliable internet connectivity across the country.

121. Notwithstanding the expanded and ongoing general infrastructure development in various areas of development, like transport efficiency and urban social services, the demand for reliable power, as well as bandwidth and digital access, remains high. The rollout of the second subsea cable and the digital infrastructure projects are expected to address these challenges.

122. The National Digital Addressing Initiative reported here before has been completed in Banjul and Kanifing Municipality, and it is being rolled out in the West Coast Region.

123. As another initiative, to strengthen cybersecurity and digital protection, my government introduced a Child and Vulnerable Groups Online Protection Policy and developed a 2024 Cybercrime Bill.

124. Honourable Speaker, the restructuring of GAMTEL, GAMCEL, and GAMPOST remains a high priority for my government. In this respect, the World Bank has committed six million, four hundred thousand US Dollars (US\$ 6.4 million) for the GAMTEL/GAMCEL Social Plan. This will provide compensation packages for over seven hundred (700) affected members of staff. It also includes other areas of support for the employees.

125. Efforts are underway to clear a combined tax liability of seven hundred and eighty-nine million Dalasis (GMD 789 million) owed by GAMTEL and GAMCEL. Addressing these liabilities is necessary to restore the financial stability and market competitiveness of the companies.

126. The Gambia Postal Services Corporation, on the other hand, is digitising its activities to improve its operational efficiency and financial performance.

127. The corporation is working on deploying a sim-skin mobile wallet technology that will enable users to send and receive money without using the Internet. This technology will enhance financial inclusion, especially for the rural population.

128. With these initiatives, we will continue to pursue an inclusive and technology-driven economy that benefits all Gambians.

### **Media and Broadcasting:**

129. Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Information plays the vital role of ensuring transparency, public engagement, and access to timely and accurate information. To enhance public understanding of government policies and programmes, the Ministry launched several key communication initiatives last year.

130. Among them is the Mansa Kunda (Ministerial Town Hall), a bi-weekly public engagement programme that creates direct interaction between the public and government ministries.

131. For the purpose of enhancing transparency and access to information, the Ministry, in partnership with Freedom House and other stakeholders, developed and validated the Consolidated Access to Information (ATI) Implementation Roadmap in 2024. The roadmap outlines roles, responsibilities, and timelines for full enforcement of the ATI Act.

132. This year, the Government will pursue the amendment of the GRTS Act and expand the Digital Terrestrial Television towards full transition from analogue to digital broadcasting.

133. I assure this august Assembly that the Government remains fully committed to strengthening press freedom, expanding access to government information, and modernising public broadcasting services.

### **Infrastructure and Human Capital Development:**

134. In pursuit of sustainable development on a grand scale, our administration prioritises infrastructural development that guarantees equitable access to education, healthcare, universal access to electricity, and safe reliable transportation for our people.

135. This far, we have paved about nine hundred and ten (910) kilometres of roads and expanded our power grid, aiming to ensure that electricity reaches every Gambian home by the end of 2025.

136. These infrastructure advancements are complemented by impressive progress in education, as seen in our revamped schools and increasing enrolment rates.

137. Honourable Speaker, it is worth noting that four hundred and twenty-four (424) new schools have been built, accompanied by six thousand, four hundred (6,400) new classrooms, thus providing learning space to accommodate the increasing number of Gambian children. Consequently, our education sector has experienced significant advances, with gross enrolment rates rising to one hundred and two-point-eight percent (102.8%) at the Lower Basic level, seventy-seven-point-six percent (77.6%) at the Upper Basic level, and fifty-five-point-nine percent (55.9%) at the Secondary Education level.

138. The statistics highlight our steadfast dedication to removing obstacles, enhancing access to quality education, and fostering opportunities for every Gambian child to excel.

139. At the upper level of our training and skills development programme, during the year under review, my government made significant progress in expanding higher education infrastructure to meet the growing demand for tertiary education and skills training.

140. The University of The Gambia Schools, Faraba-Banta faculties, and the campus are providing a conducive learning environment for students. I am glad to report that it is attracting students from the regions as education tourism.

141. Construction work of the University of Science and Technology Campus in Brikama and a multipurpose Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Centre in Wassu is ongoing. These interventions are aimed at expanding technical and engineering education in The Gambia.

142. The transformation of Gambia College into the University of Education and the Management Development Institute into the Civil Service University is expected to improve teacher training programmes, public service delivery, and governance, respectively.

143. Further still, my government is establishing specialised Training Centres of Excellence to equip the youth with practical expertise in agriculture in Sapu and Fisheries Centre of Excellent in Tujereng to enhance their employment and employability.

144. Through sustained investments, policy reforms, and innovative education programmes, we will continue to empower Gambian students and our youth with the knowledge and skills they need to compete and succeed.

### **Healthcare:**

145. Honourable Speaker, the Government will continue to build a resilient and inclusive healthcare system that ensures quality care for all Gambians. Our investment in Farato General Hospital, the rollout of the National Health Insurance Scheme to thirteen (13) public health facilities nationwide is reducing financial barriers to healthcare.

146. The construction of the National Emergency Treatment, Blood transfusion, Diagnostics and Imaging centres, as well as the Food and Drug Quality Control Laboratory around the Brusubi-roundabout, is nearing completion.

147. These, together with the ongoing construction of six new health facilities in various parts of the country and the expansion and refurbishment of both Brikama Ba Health Centre and Bwiam Hospital, will certainly ensure improved healthcare outcomes.

148. Meanwhile, five (5) X-ray machines have been installed and in use in our regional hospitals. Eleven (11) laboratories are now solar powered and one thousand, one hundred (1,100) household latrines have been constructed across the country to improve sanitation and hygiene.

149. We are also building a new warehouse for drugs and a medical supply storage to improve the availability and distribution of essential medicines.

150. To further enhance reliable transportation and service delivery, particularly in the rural area, we have procured thirty-two (32) new ambulances, seven (7) trucks, and sixty-one (61) motorcycles to replace the ageing fleets of vehicles and improve emergency response time.

151. Over the years, there have been significant improvements in healthcare infrastructure development, medical equipment provision, and National Health Insurance coverage; nonetheless, access to specialised care and the shortage of healthcare personnel remain areas for further investment.

152. All our healthcare reforms are meant to build a resilient and inclusive healthcare system that guarantees quality care for all Gambians. To realise this, I urge the health sector to reform our drug chain management regulation for ready availability of reliable and safer quality drugs.

### **Unemployment and Poverty Reduction:**

153. Honourable Speaker, equally important is our resolve to reduce the incidence of unemployment and poverty. Initiatives, such as the recently launched Skills, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship (SIE) Fund, with an initial allocation of three hundred and ninety-six million Dalasis (GMD396 million), the Women's Enterprise Fund, and the GIEPA Agriculture Investment initiatives now play a pivotal function in empowering our youth and women by providing them with skills and greater opportunities to prosper.

154. We acknowledge the challenges before us, particularly those facing the youth seeking opportunities abroad. We assure them that pathways to success are continually being created for them at home through safe and official migration pathways.

### **Gender, Children and Social Welfare:**

155. Honourable Speaker, the empowerment of women, protection of children, and social welfare are essential for a prosperous society. Through policies, economic programmes, and social protection initiatives, we are ensuring that women, children, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable communities have equal opportunities and support systems to improve their lives. We will continue to make significant strides in promoting gender equality and women empowerment.

156. In the area of gender-based violence, child protection and people living with disabilities continue to be a priority for my government, but these require more awareness, legal enforcement, and victim support systems.

157. To succeed, in November 2024, the National Gender Policy (2025-2034) and Action Plan (2025-2030) were launched. The policy serves as the framework for coordinating and harmonising gender mainstreaming efforts across the country.

158. Because women's participation in economic activities is vital for national development, my administration has expanded financial inclusion and access to resources for female entrepreneurs.

159. Between June and December 2024, for example, the sum of fifteen million, eight hundred and eighty thousand Dalasis (GMD15.88 million) was disbursed from the Women Enterprise Fund to support one hundred and thirty-eight (138) women groups across the country. Twenty-six-point-three percent (26.3%) of the amount disbursed was successfully recovered during the period.

160. Honourable Speaker, the Government continues to implement critical interventions to combat malnutrition, promote food security, and enhance social welfare. The National Social Protection Act (2024), for instance, has established a centralised social protection fund to finance initiatives across the five priority areas of the National Social Protection Policy (2015-2025).

161. This has been operationalised in the 2025 budget and will be used to expand the government-funded initiative of mainstreaming social assistance to vulnerable households through the Family Strengthening Programme. The programme supports vulnerable persons, such as orphans, the elderly, female-headed households, and people living with disabilities.

162. In 2024, under the Gambia Resilience, Inclusion, Skills, and Equity (RISE) Project, thirty-one million US Dollars (US\$31million) was allocated to the NAFA cash transfer programme. The programme will add twenty thousand (20,000) more beneficiaries to the existing sixteen thousand, six hundred and ninety-nine (16, 699) beneficiaries.

163. On disability support, half a million Dalasis (GMD0.5 million) was allocated to the National Disability Advisory Council. Institutional support of one million Dalasis (GMD1 million) was also provided to The Gambia Federation of the Disabled and ten (10) Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to support disability programming in government and civil society.

164. There will be an additional three thousand (3000) beneficiaries to the existing two thousand and eleven (2011) individuals, raising the beneficiaries to five thousand and eleven (5011) persons. The programme continues to progress by the year.

165. Honourable Speaker, it is gratifying to mention that The Gambia is now one of the first countries to complete a census approach Social Registry on the continent. Consequently, the National Social Protection Agency is transforming social assistance in the country through a data-driven approach to target potential beneficiaries.

166. More than ten (10) programmes across MDAs, UN Agencies, and NGOs have utilised the data to support individuals and households. The Government is building the structures to ensure that we leave “no one behind.”

## **Youth Welfare:**

167. Mr. Speaker, my government will continue investing in youth advancement so that young people can participate maximally in national development and experience a vibrant ecosystem that caters for their development needs.

168. In August 2023, I launched the pilot phase of the National Youth Service Graduate Programme implemented in collaboration with the University of The Gambia. The programme equips and prepares young university graduates for the job market. Today, I am pleased to announce that, so far, eighty-eight (88) youths have completed their national service programme.

169. While the NYSS will maintain recruiting young people for the Apprenticeship Training Programme, The Gambia Songhai Initiative will equally continue training young persons on integrated farming systems, with less environmental impact.

170. Alongside these developments, a National Youth Service for university graduates has commenced, with one hundred (100) UTG students placed in various institutions, as part of their civic responsibility to the nation. Two hundred (200) senior school graduates are also undergoing a two-year Technical and Vocational Education and Training, fully funded by Government. Other ongoing training plans are in place to make this National Service mandatory.

171. On entrepreneurship training and access to start-up grants and loans for young people, NEDI has, over the past year, trained more than one thousand (1000) young people, among whom are "backway" returnees. Some of the trainees were provided with grants to set up or scale up their businesses.

172. In a similar development, NEDI has opened two Business Formalisation Centres, one in Soma to serve the North Bank and Lower River Regions and another in Basse to serve the Central and Upper River Regions. This year, NEDI will maintain direct support to about fifty (50) young entrepreneurs through business grants and loans.

## **Sports:**

173. To put it briefly, it is reassuring that our athletes are keenly participating in various international competitions and are doing well in many respects.

174. On infrastructure development, the Ministry of Youth and Sports recently opened the Farafenni Youth Centre after a major rehabilitation exercise. In addition, the Serekunda Central "Mboyoy Field" is being transformed into a standard mini stadium to host various sporting activities. Our determination to provide more facilities around the country has led to ongoing discussions to build a second national stadium in Lamin.

175. In the interim, the upgrading of the Independence Stadium to meet CAF standards is in its final phase. The remaining works are to do with the tracks and around the main bowl.

176. Mr. Speaker, on 21st January of this year, The Gambia successfully hosted the interregional African Ministerial Meeting on anti-doping in sport. That significant event brought together ministers, experts, and key stakeholders from across Africa and international organisations to discuss effective strategies to combat doping, ensure fairness, and protect the integrity of athletes.

177. Hosting such a high-level political platform demonstrates my government's readiness to lead this agenda. Our position is grounded in the ethical values of sports and our commitment to strengthening partnerships and networking with bilateral and multilateral bodies.

178. On the legislative front, the National Sports Policy (2024-2034) has been adopted to enhance sports governance and athletics development. The Ministry has also formulated The Gambia's new Sports Bill and Youth Bill and will amend the PIA, NYSS, and NEDI Acts. The Bills will be submitted to the National Assembly for better regulation of the sport and youth sector and for better performance.

### **Land and Regional Administration:**

179. Mr. Speaker, land governance and local administration remain critical to national development and social stability. For the first time in The Gambia's history, my government is developing a National Land Policy under the West African Coastal Area (WACA) Project.

180. A key component of this policy is the establishment of a digital land information system that will integrate specific parcel data with ownership records. The objective is to ascertain secure land tenure and simplify land ownership procedures.

181. In a related development, a new real estate regulation is being designed to address challenges, such as unclear property ownership, unregulated land sales, fraudulent transactions, and weak enforcement of property laws leading to disputes. I am optimistic that the work on the first draft of the real estate regulation will be completed this year.

182. That aside, a Multi-Sectoral Taskforce was established on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024 to investigate illegal land transactions and violations in government layouts, reserved lands, wetlands, and along the Abuko bypass road corridor. We look forward to the reports to guarantee transparency in land governance.

183. As we strive to address housing challenges and improve living standards, my administration remains steadfast in promoting transparent land governance and strengthening local government structures through fair and transparent initiatives.

### **Public Service Management:**

184. A well-functioning civil service is fundamental to national development; hence, my government is working diligently to ascertain that the public sector operates efficiently, delivers quality services, and supports national growth.

185. As part of the Civil Service Reform Programme (2018), the administration has prioritised efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. Consequently, last year, the Government conducted a comprehensive salary and allowance review for government employees.

This led to a significant pay rise for all civil servants in government, effective January 2025.

186. Among other issues, the review was to make sure that salaries keep pace with inflation and the rising cost of living.

187. To strengthen Payroll Integrity and Workforce Management for accountability and financial prudence in government institutions, several payroll integrity measures have been introduced. One of them is the successful staff audit of the entire Civil Service conducted to identify and stop wrongful salary payments.

188. This aside, payroll-based electronic time attendance machines are being installed to prevent absence at work and unlawful salary payments. Salaries of absentee employees have been stopped and relevant financial institutions asked to return all wrongful payments to government.

189. Honourable Speaker, my administration is working hard to maintain a professional, efficient, accountable, and motivated civil service that upholds integrity and delivers quality services.

190. We recognise the need for further stabilising measures to elevate the welfare of the hardworking personnel in the public sector and will pursue this with vigour.

## **Partnerships:**

191. Mr Speaker, we recognise the invaluable role of bilateral and multilateral institutions, donor agencies, foreign governments, and development partners in advancing our national agenda. On behalf of the Gambian people, I extend our deepest gratitude to all of them.

192. The Diaspora Gambians' remittances and investments significantly contribute to the country's economic stability and growth. They have definitely reinforced their position as an integral part of our socio-economic progress, and we thank them.

193. The Gambia remains committed to maintaining these partnerships, as we work towards sustainable and inclusive national development. So, with deep appreciation, I extend a renewed hand of collaboration to all our development partners.

## **Concluding Remarks:**

194. Honourable Speaker, Honourable National Assembly Members, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, my address has shed light on the journey we have collectively embarked upon for reflection, inspiration, and rededication to our dear nation. It borders on various development dimensions, ranging from our ever-growing international engagements and economic growth to our resounding governance reforms.

195. The imposing new road infrastructure across the country and other numerous life-changing social welfare enhancement initiatives, for instance, demonstrate that The Gambia is on a far-reaching progressive path.

196. This has been made possible through our national development plans, with the objectives and strategies of the current National Development Plan, Yiriwaa, paving the way for the realisation of our national vision.

197. Honourable National Assembly Members, my government has exhibited, through concrete action, the political will to realise our development policies and programmes. National plans and programmes, however, require national execution for national results. All citizens and sectors have a role to play for everyone to reap the benefits.

198. We need our development partners to complement our efforts, but the transformation of our communities and progress of the nation are principally our responsibility.

199. There is no magic formula for national development. In unity lies our strength and success. Conversely, disunity exposes us to obstacles and troubles. During our Diamond Jubilee celebration, my government re-echoed its call for solidarity, because our defence, survival, and advancement depend on it.

200. We cannot change our land area, but we can harness and transform social, economic, and environmental factors for us to evolve out of poverty and underdevelopment. Our degree of success depends on how closely and productively we work and how determined we are to translate our vision into tangible results.

201. Together, we must look far beyond the present to scale up industrial production, attract massive investments, and step out of the usual to innovate and take a giant leap into the future.

To succeed, we must aim much higher, act much faster, and act together.

202. With my government's current political will and enthusiasm to work, coupled with the willingness of our development partners to support us and the huge potential of our citizens, our capacity to fast-track the execution of our development agenda is enormous.

203. As a developing country transforming its institutions to sustain democracy, we have demonstrated our ability to engage in peaceful politics, despite our divergent views. The spirit is that when the interest of the country is at stake, we must always stand together.

204. Distinguished Members, our international standing and rankings indicate a keener international focus on the country. My administration is strongly determined, therefore, to make The Gambia a shining example of a flourishing small state on the African continent.

205. To this end, I call upon all Gambians to remain steadfast in our collective mission to build a better nation. Let us work together across all odds and social divides to initiate success, embrace inclusivity, and nurture the youth. I urge further that we safeguard our democracy, uphold our values, and protect the dignity of all Gambians.

206. The Gambia now stands out as a land of optimism, resilience, and opportunity. As we move forward, my government will focus devotedly on policies and programmes that will lead to economic self-sufficiency and rapid development. The state of our infrastructure has the potential to sustain this.

207. With tolerance, social inclusion, sustainable development, and fortitude, we will surely succeed in building a prosperous Gambia for all.

208. I express sincere gratitude to the security forces, including ECOMIG, for reaching out to the people, in addition to executing their routine work.

209. I equally thank all public servants, the private sector, civil society organisations, and all public institutions for your cooperation and service to the nation.

Similarly, I salute our women and youths for their positive involvement in building a peaceful and prosperous Gambia.

210. To all the vulnerable members of our society, I reaffirm our unwavering commitment to your empowerment and encourage you to stand and be seen and heard.

211. Given the need to recognise the basic rights of these minority groups as Gambian citizens, I advise that we allow them more space to participate in all social, economic, and political processes.

212. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of this August Assembly, I thank you sincerely for your cooperation over the years. Together with the Judiciary, I advocate that we collaborate more closely in the interest of the people we collectively and passionately seek to serve.

213. I urge this August body further to rise above party politics and put The Gambia first. We are accountable to the people who put their trust in us to manage the affairs of the nation. The institutions through which we serve them define our various mandates.

214. Thus, I plead that we aim higher to advance our governance processes, administration, and monitoring strategies.

215. With faith, perseverance, and a shared vision, we will successfully drive The Gambia forward into a future of prosperity and peace. I invite all Gambians, partners, and friends to join us in this regard.

216. Ladies and gentlemen, I am thankful to every citizen and resident in the country for the peace and stability we enjoy.

217. Finally, I thank everyone present for your attendance and attention. May God continue to bless The Gambia and bless us all.