

Highlights of Presidential Diaspora Policy Speech

By H.E. President Adama Barrow

The speech was delivered on 23 September 2017 at the Gambian Diaspora Town Hall meeting, held at the Harriet Tubman Learning Center, NYC, USA. The event was scheduled as part of the government's official trip to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Warm Greetings from The Gambia

Fellow Gambians, let me begin by thanking the Almighty Allah for granting me this opportunity to once again stand before a gathering of Gambians in the diaspora, away from home soil. This turnout, I must admit, is the largest ever gathering of Gambians in the diaspora that I have ever had the privilege to address. I thank you all for the warm welcome. I meet you as fellow citizens, greet you as friends, and see you as partners in Gambian development. Fellow Gambians, it is my singular honour and privilege to engage with you. I bring to you, the warmest family greetings from our beloved country. Some of you are regular visitors to The Gambia, and others have suffered the pain and isolation of exile, caused by 22 years of dictatorship. Yet, all of you, through different ways, have maintained your emotional and developmental ties with our great country.



My administration strongly believes that a government that listens and learn is a government that improves and succeed."

Let us be ready and willing to engage in productive dialogues, constructive criticism and to make wise compromises within an environment of mutual respect, even if we disagree

Gratitude and Commitment

On behalf of the government and the people of The Gambia and indeed on my own behalf, I express gratitude to you for your continued and enormous contributions to national development. During the last two decades of dictatorship, you may have hated the brutal government, but you continued to love your country. The diaspora contributed ideas and finances, demonstrated fortitude and tenacity, and used its networks and privileges to help deliver our country from oppression. As a result, you have covered yourselves in glory, and history will attest to your courage and commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, now that we are in an era of democratic transition, I have no doubt that your commitment to national development will increase.

Diaspora Engagement

I strongly hope that you will be able to work closely with the coalition government, so that your inputs and efforts are enhanced and multiplied, leading to inclusive and sustainable development. I am here in New York, attending the Seventy-Second session of the United Nations General Assembly. The UN recognises the connection between migration and diaspora-development, a fact reflected in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is therefore appropriate for me to take the opportunity of this official trip, to outline how my government plans to work with the diaspora, for Gambia's development.

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT ACTION POINTS

In the past six months, I as president, the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other ministers and officials of the government have had many meetings with groups and individuals from the diaspora. We have listened to your hopes and aspirations. We have heard your concerns and frustrations. Now, we are working with experts and partners, who have helped us develop meaningful 'Diaspora Engagement Action Points' as part of our programme for 'Migration and Sustainable Development in The Gambia'. The immediate and the short-term diaspora engagement activities include, amongst other proposals:



1. Research and consultation exercise with the Gambia diaspora, regarding drafting of a **10-year Diaspora Strategy (2018-27)**;
2. Identification of **priorities** within the Diaspora Strategy, to be **implemented within a 3-year time period (2018-21)**;
3. Design and structuring of a **Diaspora Directorate**, as a service-delivery unit, to facilitate interface between government and the diaspora;
4. **Budgeting and resource mobilisation** for the Gambia Diaspora Directorate **for the 2018/19 fiscal year**, tapping central government and partner funds;
5. **Training** for senior government officials and other stakeholders **on how to support the diaspora**;
6. Launching of an **initiative by Central Bank of The Gambia** and partners, **to reduce the transaction cost of remittances** to the minimal level possible;
7. Inauguration of an annual **'Stake in the Nation Forum'**, to mark the declaration and start of **'Gambian Diaspora Month'**, to take place every year between **15 December to 15 January**.

***"I am an example of one of the returning Gambians..... who took the risk to go home at a time of great uncertainty.....
.....decided to establish a real estate firm.....giving me the opportunity to employ and empower many Gambians financially
Being self-employed I was able to engage in community work and participate in grassroots politics aimed at defeating the dictator through the political process"***

Fellow Gambians, the importance of remittances in boosting both family livelihoods and the national economy cannot be overemphasised. Yet Gambia will benefit significantly more, if Gambia had Diaspora Bonds, and other viable forms of Diaspora Direct Investment. These will pool together diaspora finances, to fund specific national socio-economic and medium-scale infrastructure projects – whilst generating returns for the individual diaspora investors. I hope that in the coming years, the Gambian diaspora will have increased confidence in our local financial institutions, such that they will keep a significant part of their savings in the country, thereby benefiting the national economy.

I congratulate the many Gambians in the diaspora who have taken up jobs in Gambia in the past few months. The need for their skills and experience is immense. I look forward to seeing an effective Gambia Diaspora Directorate which helps to attract many more Gambian in the diaspora set up commercial and social enterprises, and other ventures which create decent jobs.

"Gambia is open for business, and I therefore encourage you all to consider taking part in the development of our beloved country in any positive way you find suitable."

<p>MSDG is a Technical Cooperation Project (TCP), financed by: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC):</p> 	<p>The TCP was designed by GK Partners, implemented by GKP, in partnership with the Government of The Gambia (GOTG):</p> 
---	---