



Statement by His Excellency, Mr. Adama Barrow
President of the Republic of The Gambia
at the
Fourth Stake in the Nation Forum (SNF4)
(Delivered by the Vice President, H.E. Dr. Isatou Touray)

Theme:
‘Looking Back, Moving Forward’

Date: 9th January 2021

Online Event, Live-streamed on Multiple Platforms

Cabinet Ministers,
Secretary General and Head of the Civil Service,
Members of the National Assembly,
Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission,
Ambassador of Switzerland to The Gambia,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Governors and Mayors
Professor Gibril Faal, the MSDG Director,
Mrs Elizabeth Sosseh Sisay-Banya, the Diaspora Keynote Speaker
Members of the Gambian Diaspora,
Religious and Community Leaders,
Members of the Media Fraternity,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
All other protocols duly and respectfully observed.

Three years ago, in joyful celebration and great anticipation, I inaugurated the **First Stake in the Nation Forum**. On that occasion, Gambians from all over the world happily gathered with the intention of meeting in person in their motherland, free from the repressive grip of dictatorship; to dialogue and discuss matters of national interest with Ministers, government officials, representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations and other stakeholders, and built relationships for development ventures. On that day on 13th January 2018, I was given the honour to

declare the Gambian Diaspora the Eighth Region of the Country, as acknowledged in the Gambia National Development Plan (NDP).

Three years on today, as I open the **Fourth Stake in the Nation Forum** virtually, it is appropriate that we look backwards, to learn lessons that will help us move forward, to attain sustained economic growth and sustainable development in The Gambia. The excitement that 2018 had ushered may have faded, but freedom and democracy remain vibrant in our beloved Gambia. As it is said, *“the price of freedom is eternal vigilance”*. Therefore all Gambians must cherish, preserve and develop the democratic dispensation that gives us the much anticipated freedom galore, through active and constructive dialogue, facilitated by this forum, and other platforms.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen;

In the past three years, the Gambian diaspora has increased immensely, its contribution to the socioeconomic development of this country. As indicated by the Governor of the Central Bank, in 2020 the diaspora sent **over Half a Billion Dollars** in remittances to The Gambia. This amount is higher than the inflow of development assistance from international partners. The diaspora sends these amounts of money to support families and communities year in, year out, without much fuss or celebration. They see it as a duty and responsibility, irrespective of the hardships and difficulties they face in foreign countries where they live. As the President of the Republic, I again say on behalf of the Gambian people, ‘Thank You’ for your patriotism, immense financial support and other development contributions.

In addition to remittances, we are aware of the businesses set up by the diaspora, the local jobs you have created, the amounts of foreign exchange you have generated, and the partnerships you have established with NGOs and community organisations. We are also aware of the difficulties you face in acquiring relevant documentations from agents of government in pursuing certain ventures, projects and programmes. These problems have worsened in 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the diaspora has continued to have a foothold in our development process. Supported by the **Migration and Sustainable Development in The Gambia Project (MSDG)**, the Gambian diaspora charity institutions from across the world, their networks and contacts secured face masks and other equipments in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. We express our thanks and gratitude for all donations received during this dark epoch of our epidemiological history, from Gambians at home and abroad. We are therefore encouraging similar positive diaspora efforts and actions.

As we look forward to a post-pandemic period in 2021, I renew the government's commitment to work closely with the MSDG project and others, to facilitate expanded and enhanced diaspora contributions. Through the Office of the President, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other Ministries, Departments and Agencies, we will redouble our efforts to resolve implementation bottlenecks and operational challenges.

Distinguish Participants; Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is now my privilege to formally open the **Fourth Stake in the Nation Forum**, and I wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to receiving updates and recommended actions, I thank you all, and wish you a happy and memorable New Year.