



**Statement by His Excellency, Mr. Adama Barrow
President of the Republic of The Gambia**

at the

Fifth Stake in the Nation Forum (SNF5)

Delivered by Honourable Badara Joof

Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology

Theme:

‘Consolidating and Accelerating National Development’

Date: 8th January 2022

**Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre
Bijilo, The Gambia**

Hybrid Event, Live-streamed on Multiple Platforms

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,
Honourable Ministers,
Members of the National Assembly,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Professor Gibril Faal, the MSDG Project Director,
Professor Amina Sillah, the Diaspora Keynote Speaker,
Members of the Gambian Diaspora,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
All other protocols duly and respectfully observed.

As we gather today for the **Fifth edition of the Stake in the Nation Forum**, one month after the presidential elections of 4 December 2021, we give thanks to the Almighty, for the continued blessing of peace and stability in our beloved Gambia. Once again, with great humility, and an immense sense of responsibility, I express my gratitude to the people of The Gambia for giving me the mandate to remain in office for another five years. I campaigned and contested the presidential elections as a party candidate; I will govern as a humble citizen, and a loyal servant of all the peoples of the blessed Republic of The Gambia.

I call on all citizens of all persuasions, and all friends of The Gambia, from the far reaches of the diaspora, to the villages and towns up and down the River Gambia, to join and assist me and my government, in continuing the noble work of nation-building and socioeconomic development of our dear motherland.

This Fifth Stake in the Nation Forum focuses on the theme of ‘**Consolidating and Accelerating National Development**’. At the first edition of this forum on 13 January 2018, I stated that ‘*we must be vigilant for the opportunity of infrastructure-led development and the opportunity of diaspora-development*’.

I made that statement barely a year into my presidency. Since then, my government has completed a number of major infrastructure projects in rural and urban Gambia. On the one hand, I am humbled by these developments, which positively improve and transform the lives and livelihoods of citizens and communities. Yet on the other hand, I am reminded of the urgent need for even more projects and programmes, so as to consolidate and accelerate regional and national development. I pledge and promise to maintain, expand and enhance Gambia’s infrastructure-led development programme; and I call all Gambians and friends of The Gambia to come on board for the common good.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Whilst meeting the Gambian diaspora in New York in September 2017, I made an observation, that “*a government that listens and learns is a government that improves and succeeds*”. I still believe in these words. Today in the post-election period, allow me to make another observation: ‘*honesty and transparency about difficulties, challenges and even failures, should not be used as a weapon to vilify and condemn; these should be used as tools to repair and improve*’. This is particularly important as we mature in our democracy and governance.

As is to be expected, the diaspora contributed time, resources and ideas to the work and campaigns of the different political parties and groupings in the presidential elections. However, the fact remains that we were not all able to vote, and be more engaged in the festival of democracy we witnessed as a nation. We acknowledge the technical collaboration between the MSDG Project and the Independent Electoral Commission, and the contribution of other stakeholders on the issue of diaspora voting. With humility and purposefulness, I urge all institutions of government and state, and all stakeholders and development partners to redouble efforts to make diaspora voting a reality.

In the past year, the Gambian Diaspora and Migration Directorate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became fully operational, and I congratulate the Ministry for this progress. As the Directorate leads the review and updating of the Gambian Diaspora Strategy in 2022, I urge all institutions to put more emphasis on timely and effective implementation of the commitments we make in our policy and strategy documents and plans. In many instances, our shortcomings are not due to the absence of good policies and plans, but the absence of effective implementation. The need for operational effectiveness is of paramount importance for all Ministries, Departments and Agencies, as well as the State Owned Enterprises.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

As individuals, organisations and businesses, the diaspora are a truly important partner in the noble task of consolidating and accelerating national development. As the figures of the Central Bank of The Gambia show, the trend is that remittance inflows to the country will reach the One Billion Dollar mark in the very near future.

I am optimistic that the collaboration between the MSDG Project and the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of The Gambia on structured diaspora finance and Diaspora Bonds will also progress in 2022. This work may benefit from the provisions in the recently passed legislation on Capital Markets by the National Assembly.

Every Gambian is touched directly or indirectly by the contributions of the diaspora. As Professor Gibril Faal stated at the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, the diaspora are (and I quote) “*bakers and bankers, cleaners and clinicians, who seek advancement and development for themselves, their families and communities.....the sublime diaspora memory of belonging, compels them to play their role in the development of the country of heritage*” (unquote). Whatever their income or be it little, be it large they share it with their families and communities in The Gambia. This is true in times of feast and in times of famine, as evidenced by their increased contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As always, I take the opportunity of this annual Stake in the Nation Forum, to express the thanks of a grateful nation, to her daughters and sons and descendants, who live and work far and wide, across countries, continents and oceans. I renew the government’s commitment to work closely with the MSDG project, the Government of Switzerland and others, to facilitate, expand and enhance diaspora contributions, through the Office of the President, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

It is now my privilege to formally open the **Fifth Stake in the Nation Forum**, and to wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to the **Sixth Stake in the Nation Forum on 14 January 2023**. The success of this forum will be judged not by the virtuous statements made here, but the promised kept, the commitments implemented, and the projects formulated.

I thank you all.