



**STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA, MINISTER OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS
AND CHAIRPERSON DISASTER MANAGEMENT GOVERNING
COUNCIL ON THE OCCASION OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE
GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION 16-19 JUNE
2009, IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND.**

Y.E. The Secretary General of the United Nations,

Heads of Governments present here today,

Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Chair of the Global Platform and indeed Chair of the International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction,

Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative for Disaster Risk reduction,

Heads of UN Agencies, Regional Organizations, Multi-lateral and Bi-lateral Organizations and Institutions here present,

Representatives from NGOs, Civil Society, the Private Sector and other actors in Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Affairs,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must first and foremost extend to the Secretary General of the United Nations, special greetings and best wishes from His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Gambia on this auspicious occasion of the Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk reduction. Indeed, the Gambia will be fully participating in this Second Session at the level of Ministers and experts and the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Copenhagen, December 2009) which will adopt a successor to the Kyoto Protocol.

The participation of the Gambia at these two important international meetings provides an important window of opportunity for the Country to join other developing Countries and the International Community to mobilize support for the integration of Risk and Vulnerability reduction to disasters and Climate extremes into contemporary development policies and programmes at national, regional and global levels.

Mr. Chairman,

More recently, the realization that disasters also arise from man-made hazards and human vulnerability and not to natural hazards alone, has gained increased prominence on global and national development agendas. This has led to a wider conceptualization of disaster management, with more attention given to actions to address factors that make societies and communities vulnerable to hazards in the first place.

It can be argued, strictly speaking, that natural hazards by themselves do not cause disasters. It is the combination of exposure, vulnerability and ill-preparedness of nations and communities to deal or cope with hazard events that result in disasters. A key consideration in disaster risk reduction, therefore, concerns the abilities of nations and communities to cope with existing levels of hazards and risks of exposure to disasters.

Mr. Chairman,

An important issue worth mentioning is the need to link disaster risk reduction with climate change adaptation as the two are mutually reinforcing. The link between climate change and disaster risk can be established through two main pathways:-

1 through weather extremes and hazardous climatic conditions;
and

2 through increases in the vulnerability of people and communities to the effects of climate change.

Disaster risk reduction and preparedness should therefore pay attention to the increase in hazards expected to arise from climate extremes/global warming, as well as human vulnerability to climate change-related risks such as infectious diseases, water shortages, food insecurity, population displacement and forced migration and ecosystem degradation. Through these pathways and impacts, climate change-related disasters can undo decades of development efforts and reduce gains in poverty reduction

Linking DRR with Climate Change and development therefore requires the existence of integrated mechanisms at national level to coordinate multi-sectoral policy issues and action programmes; to ensure that strategies and policies are communicated to and acted upon at the local/community level; and to disseminate information and report progress to the population, international development partners and the UN and international community. It may be necessary to develop and strengthen existing national institutions and mechanisms, in order to build capacities for boosting resilience to natural and man-made hazards.

Mr. Chairman,

In my capacity as Minister for Women's Affairs in the Gambia, I am indeed a strong advocate of women's strong contribution to national development and the need to institutionalize the concept of women in decision-making at all levels and sectors of society. In many developing societies, women make a sizeable and disproportionate contribution to livelihoods both in the household and the community. Natural and man-made hazards put women and their inherent resource capacity at risk. When disasters disrupt the functioning of societies and communities, and devastate homes and family lives, significant losses occur with respect to the resources used by women to support livelihoods.

Yet in many developing country settings, women are still marginalized and excluded from participating in development planning, decision-making processes, especially at the community level where the impact of environmental factors are direct and greatest. Without the participation of women, and their valuable experiences of natural resource management, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation initiatives and strategies

will not be meaningful with respect to the entire community and nation in developing countries.

Therefore, given the complexity of the process of DRR as mentioned when linked with climate change adaptation and sustainable development, the process of disaster management will certainly require coordination of national efforts involving a variety of stake holders and policy-making at a very high level of government. The allocation of the responsibility of National Disaster Management to the Office of the Vice President in the case of the Gambia aptly illustrates this point.

Mr. Chairman,

The Gambia Government has given more attention, in terms of raising public awareness, political commitment and national policy and action to disaster and climate risk management. This might have to do, in part, with the fact that the country's geographical location and human settlement patterns put at greater risk to environmental hazards than many other countries in the region. But, at the same time, the level of commitment and efforts by the Government to put in place institutional structures and arrangements and mobilize people and resources to address disaster risks and climate change effects are noteworthy particularly given the limited resources of the country.

Responsibility for disaster risk reduction is entrusted in the Office of the Vice President, which gives the process a 'heavy weight' status in the machinery of government and underlines the importance attached to disaster management and preparedness in national development. The pivot of the disaster management system in the Gambia is the National Disaster Management Governing Council chaired by the Vice President, my humble self

and which coordinates disaster management activities across sectors at national level.

The Council is serviced by a technical Secretariat, the National Disaster Management Agency a semi-autonomous institution under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Vice President. Thus the location of the disaster management programme within the Presidency and the personal involvement of both the President and the Vice President in the execution of the programme, is an indication of the Government's determination to deal with disaster management as a development imperative and priority.

The National Disaster Management policy of the Gambia actively promotes disaster prevention culture through access to knowledge and information both in the formal and non-formal educational systems, as well as through the activities of community-based organizations. Priority is highly placed on disaster prevention and preparedness as the fulcrum of disaster risk reduction and of course working with humanitarian actors to give our National Adaptation Plan (NAPA) a human face.

Mr. Chairman,

The Gambia recognizes the ISDR as the main organ within the UN system for promoting disaster risk reduction and for working with member states to reduce disaster losses in lives and in social, economic and environmental assets on nations and communities. Of significant importance is the role of OCHA and other UN agencies to deal with the humanitarian consequences of disasters. Therefore our continued involvement in the ISDR System will help to ensure that disaster risk reduction remains a national and local priority in the country's quest for sustainable development, as well as provide assurance regarding access to technical and

material resources to support a strong institutional basis for implementing the policies and strategies of the country's National Disaster Management Programme.

I wish to take this opportunity to inform the ISDR and indeed other partners such as the BCPR, the World Bank and others that the Gambia is in the process of finalizing with the support of ISDR and the UNDP Country Office, a National Programme for Disaster and Climate Risk Management 2009-2012 and financial and technical assistance are actively sought to implement this important programme.

Our participation at the Second Global Platform will provide an opportunity for the country to share experience on disaster risk reduction and management approaches and strategies, and to obtain guidance and assistance within the framework of the ISDR system towards the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

I thank you all.