

Statement Delivered by the Chair of the Gender and Children's Welfare Committee of the 6th National Assembly of the Gambia at the IRI Capacity Building Training for Female Parliamentarians

Preliminaries:

Honourable Speaker of this 6th Legislature

Honourable Former deputy Speaker

Honourable Members of the National Assembly current and former

Ms. Aissata De, Country Representative of the UNDP

Jimmy Sankaituah, Resident Director and staff of the IRI

The Clerk of the Assembly, Mr Momodou Sise

Members of the Press, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen our facilitators

First of all, I'll like to Thank you Mr Jimmy Sankaituah. the Resident Director of the IRI and your entire team for convening this very important forum for Parliamentarians, to discuss this pertinent topic of interest to any progressive person. The topic of women representation or should I say underrepresentation is not only limited to The Gambia, but it has become a global issue and every Country is finding its own way to deal with the subject.

Let me note without trying to boast that I have travelled far and wide all my life, but over the past five years, I have travelled and have met with many world influencers. In those meetings, I have always discussed something really close to my heart, something of the most pressing issue of our time, something that if not corrected would continue to be the greatest threat, the greatest obstacle to our democracy. This issue is the under representation of women in decision making and in leadership but especially so, in elected positions.

Wherever I represent my beloved country, I have often made it a point to raise the importance of equal or proportional representation of women and girls. It is my believe that addressing gender equity and equality is essential to addressing every other challenge that we face in all other aspects of democratic consolidation and human endeavor.

It is a known fact that we are all witnesses to the downward trajectory of democracy around the world as the consequence of corruption and mismanagement of it to our planet, resources, climate, human, etc or even war in extreme circumstances. It is not women and children that suffer the most?

Unfortunately, the trend continues whilst the other gender gets more and more powerful and access to opportunities to get leadership. It is thus time, 25+ years after the Beijing conference in which governments participating declared their determination to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity. Two and half decades later, women still lack behind in achieving their dream of living in a world of equal opportunities.

According to UNWomen, "The complex and fast-moving political, social, economic, and environmental changes of the past decades have brought welcome steps forward in some areas of women's and girls' lives." But, according to the same UNWomen report, "we have also seen powerful pushbacks, with damaging reversals of hard-won advances in women's rights and the broader development agenda. To name just a few of the reversals:

Poverty, discrimination, and violence are strongly present in the lives of women and girls.

Under-representation in power and decision-making is still the norm

Unequal implementation of the provisions of women advancement that has made some countries to be ahead while others lack behind

Male domination of the productive sectors of the economy therefore giving them access to resources that they can use to gain success in politics and public life

Limited educational opportunities for girls and young women in society especially in developing societies

Honourable speaker, UNDP Representative, Honourable Former Speaker, Honourable Members of the National Assembly current and former, Resident Director of IRI, members of the Press, It is important to note that there are many notable factors that influences Women's Representation which will need to be considered in every aspect of our humanity:

Firstly, Women's representation will be higher under a more proportional electoral system than under a less proportional electoral formula

Secondly, Countries that have legally imposed quotas or in which several parties have implemented quota clauses are more likely to have more female representatives than countries where there are no quota clauses. The classic example are two sisterly countries - Senegal and The Gambia. The former with a legally imposed quota system have 44% female representation in Parliament as compared to the latter with no legal quota imposed and with a mere 9%.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to encourage us to end this training and the opportunity to come together reflecting on how we as current and former members of Parliament and as male members

both former and current that are champions of female representation can work together to reduce the gaps in female underrepresentation.

The first step to achieving this is to join the advocacy for the speedy reintroduction of the failed constitutional amendment to enlarge the Parliament to accommodate more seats for women. This must start at this very moment Honourable members.

Our Honourable Speaker here present, though male, is a female advocate and I know he would love to leave a legacy of this much required need addressed in his term in office.

As chair of the Gender and children's Welfare Committee, I and my colleagues will make it a priority for the committee to come up with a committee bill to this effect with the support of the leadership of the Parliament under the right Honourable Speaker.

It is important to acknowledge the support of the International Republic Institute to the National Assembly and the new energy that the new Resident Director brings to the conversation by bringing current and former NAMs to sit together and think through what needs to be done about women underrepresentation in the Gambia. This topic should be kept on the front burner, and I appreciate IRI for the opportunity to think together as leaders in how to address these critical gaps. Our coming together as current and former NAMs should re-energize our motivation to push harder for a Gambia that increase the opportunity women's political Participation and Decision Making

Please allow me to end here after leaving you all with this message and food for thoughts – Honourable Speaker, Distinguished Honourable Members, ladies, and gentlemen and all those present today. Together as women in leadership and as male champions of female leadership I know, together we can

I thank you all!