



# REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

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STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR GENERAL, DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY, THE GAMBIA,

ALH. BAKARY GASSAMA

DELIVERED AT THE 63<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS

*H.E. Chair of the 63<sup>RD</sup> Session of the Commission on Narcotics Drugs.*

*Her. Ex. Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,*

*Excellences, Colleagues, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Let me begin by congratulating on behalf of the Government of The Gambia, Ambassador **Mansour Ahmad Khan of Pakistan** on his election as the Chair of the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, as well as to the other elected members of the Bureau. I would like to assure him of The Gambia's full support to his leadership.

**Mr. Chair,** The Government of The Gambia through the Ministry of Interior has since early 2017, design and implement strategies that creates an environment of law enforcement cooperation particularly in the area of drug trafficking and transnational organized crime vis-à-vis the security sector reform currently under implementation.

Bearing in mind our responsibility under the international drug conventions, the drug control act has been overhauled and will be table before the national assembly later this year. The bill take due conscience of the complex nature of drug abuse by introducing non-custodial sentencing measures for cannabis abusers. It further provides a strong safeguard against using the drug control law in a way that will compromise or violate the rights of individuals. Human rights remains a cardinal consideration in our drug control efforts.

This move was influenced by the pressing demand for a holistic response to the disturbing surge of illicit drug trafficking and abuse in The Gambia, and to contribute effectively to international efforts to counter the world drug problem.

**Mr. Chair,** Records revealed that the trend of cannabis abuse and abuse of control and prescription drugs is consistently on the increase resulting in many of our youth experiencing disorders that are drug induced. To mitigate this, the Drug Demand Reduction Directorate is implementing a robust strategy in engaging the public particularly the youth who constitute the majority of the victims.

Series of school outreach activities in the form of symposiums, drama, debate and quiz competitions were conducted alongside the establishment of Anti-drug clubs in several schools across the country. Our community outreach programs targeted

various communities across the country. Traditional and opinion leaders, youth and women groups are principal beneficiaries.

**Mr. Chair,** Like many other countries in the world particularly Africa, controlled drugs continue to find their way into the illegal market in The Gambia resulting in many young people having access, thus the increase in misuse and abuse.

For these reason, the Gambia have noted with serious concern the rescheduling recommendation on cannabis and would urge the commission not to rush the decision. There is no dispute that cannabis remain the most commonly abuse drug in the world and many African youth fall victim to it. Therefore any decision relating to cannabis must be meticulously considered and weigh against its potential disadvantages and eminent dangers.

Meanwhile, the Gambia Government is once again reiterating and unequivocally stating its total opposition to any attempt to reschedule cannabis. As a country, Cannabis is our most problematic drug responsible for most drug related crimes. Our youth are highly vulnerable to cannabis abuse leading to an increase in the number of youth with drug induce psychosis. I therefore call on the CND to take a stronger and realistic position in tackling the problem of cannabis abuse, which does not in any way include decriminalising or rescheduling.

In view of this, the Gambia Government will continue to commit resources (within its means) to support the implementation of the national drug control strategy (2019-2023) and as well call on our bilateral and multilateral partners to support the financing of this strategy in a bid to address the pressing logistics and capacity constraints to nurture a more efficient and professional core of staff.

**Mr. Chair,** on international cooperation, several bilateral and multilateral partners were engaged to fully exploit the opportunities presented by genuine international cooperation. Our strategy to collaborate with partners internationally is triggered by the need to synergize and coordinate efforts in countering illicit drug trafficking and abuse, money Laundering and other forms of organize crime.

Recent trends suggested that, The Gambia continue to be used as transit/storage for Cocaine, Heroin and Cannabis originating from source countries and the sub region entering the country through the Sea, land, and Air borders.

International cooperation as advocated by the three drug conventions is a key tool in countering international drug trafficking, I am happy to report that last October; DLEAG cooperated and coordinated with Senegal and other law enforcement agencies in an operation leading to the seizure of 750kg of cocaine off the coast of

Senegal and the arrest of several individuals. Two of the suspects linked to this case were arrested in the Gambia and handed over to Senegal for trial.

The Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force (JAITF) was established in The Gambia under the auspices of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP). JAITF-Banjul was officially launched in October 2014 following the signing of a Letter of Agreement between the Government of the Gambia and UNODC, and the subsequent signing of an inter-agency Memorandum of Understanding by the participating local agencies. This multi-agency has reinforced our airport interdiction efforts with the use of INTERPOL and WCO tools in profiling of high-risk passengers travelling by air from sourced countries and to destination countries.

The increased capacity and knowledge of trained personnel has led to the expansion of the team's scope of operation to cover the multiple threats targeting airports, including all illicit drugs, illicit goods (such as wildlife, counterfeit medicines or weapons) and, as of late, terrorism and trafficking in persons.

In this regard, we will continue to pursue our international cooperation agenda by engaging bilateral and multi-lateral partners for possible signing of cooperation

agreements particularly in the area of Intelligence sharing, Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition.

**I thank you for your kind attention.**