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ADDRESS OF
**HIS EXCELLENCY SHEIKH PROFESSOR ALHAJI DR.
YAHYA A.J.J. JAMMEH BABILI MANSA
PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**

ON THE OCCASION
OF THE
**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 71ST SESSION
OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

DELIVERED BY
**HER EXCELLENCY AJA DR. ISATOU NJIE-SAIDY
VICE PRESIDENT AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS
OF THE
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**

NEW YORK
WEDNESDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER 2016

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,

**Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies,
Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In the name of Allah, The Almighty, I bring you fraternal greetings from the people of the Islamic Republic of The Gambia.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate Mr. Peter Thomson, on his election to the high and coveted position of President of the Seventy-first Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your election is an eloquent testimony to your diplomatic acumen and I assure you of the support of the Gambian delegation during your stewardship.

In the same vein, I wish to express deep appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Morgen Lykkesøft, for the able and efficient manner in which he conducted the affairs of the last session of the General Assembly. He will be remembered for the bold and major initiatives that were launched during his tenure as President.

I also wish to extend sincere thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts in pursuit of world peace and economic progress over the last decade.

Mr. President,

The world is at crossroads. Since our last General Assembly, global peace and security have steadily deteriorated. Wars in the Middle East have intensified with alarming ferocity and unprecedented human casualties. In Africa, fratricidal wars in the Horn of Africa and in Libya, pose the greatest threat to peace and stability in the continent.

It is also a source of great concern, that in spite of the dangerous situations in Syria, Iraq and Libya, geo-political interests continue to over-ride humanitarian considerations. Unless concrete action is taken now, places like Aleppo, Mosul and Tripoli will soon cease to be human habitats.

In Africa, the protracted war in Somalia and the armed conflict between political rivals in South Sudan continue to blight the political landscape with untold human suffering. To complicate an already difficult situation, the impasse in Darfur and the frequent outbreaks of fighting in the Central African Republic and Burundi, pose a serious threat to the civilian population, particularly women and children.

I appeal to my brothers and sisters in these African countries to eschew violence and embrace reconciliation. As leaders of our people, we must always remember, that history will only judge us kindly, if we are

magnanimous and devoted to the welfare and wellbeing of our people.

Mr. President,

We cannot discuss international peace and security, without addressing the lingering and unresolved Palestinian problem. The time has come; indeed it is long overdue for Israel to heed the overwhelming international consensus for a two state solution as the only viable option that can guarantee peaceful co-existence between Israel and Palestine.

Mr. President,

The fragile peace we enjoy is being seriously undermined by terrorism, which has assumed a global dimension, killing and maiming innocent people. Today we remember with sadness all victims of terrorism who have been gunned down or maimed by bombs in Paris, Brussels, Bamako, Ouagadougou, Pakistan and other places. It is not an exaggeration to say that the world is in grave danger and that our human existence is under serious threat. Collective action is the best way to fight this global scourge.

We are also gravely concerned that certain rogue politicians and pseudo intellectuals with nefarious intentions, are using the terrorist card to revive and propagate the notion of a “clash of civilizations,” in which Islam is at war with the West. Their incendiary rhetoric lambasting Islam is unacceptable and can only serve to further polarize the world.

The evil actions of a group of individuals claiming adherence to Islam, cannot be taken to represent the convictions of the majority. There is no clash between Islam and the other Abrahamic religions of Christianity and Judaism, and there is certainly no war between Islam and the world. We condemn the renegade forces of terrorism and we reject the campaign to create a nexus between terrorism and Islam.

Mr. President,

While we express anxiety over global insecurity, we must equally focus on global economic conditions. A world that is marked by disparities and divided into zones of the affluent and the poor cannot enjoy durable peace and security. A world in which the conspicuous consumption of the few over-shadows the abject poverty of the majority, can only be a world of the powerful against the weak, and a world of mutual animosity, mistrust and tension.

It is for these reasons and our quest for a just and equitable world, that we support the theme of this year’s General Assembly: “The Sustainable Development Goals, a universal approach to transform the

world." Under the Millennium Development Goals, The Islamic Republic of The Gambia registered significant progress in its development agenda. I am happy and proud to state that hunger has been eradicated in our country and the level of under-nourishment has gone from thirteen percent to three percent. Our ultimate aim is to make agriculture attractive and profitable through our "back to the land" policy, so that our people can work and live in dignity.

The future of Africa and indeed the world is inextricably linked to women and the youths. Unfortunately, Africa is losing its young population because of migration. Our villages, towns and cities are being deserted as youths attempt to sail to what is wrongly perceived as the new El Dorado. Thousands have perished at sea while thousands more are languishing in detention centers in Europe.

This is an unprecedented depletion of our human resources and is bound to have disastrous consequences if allowed to continue. Against this disturbing phenomenon, international cooperation that would create Jobs for the youths should no longer be a slogan, but a calculated strategy to keep them at home in gainful employment, that will enhance their wellbeing and ensure the development of their countries.

Mr. President,

The Paris Agreement on Climate change, which The Islamic Republic of The Gambia signed together with the entire membership of the United Nations, is a landmark event in our human evolution. It shows that in spite of the imperfections of our organization and our ideological differences, we are capable of forging a global partnership to resolve a common danger. The negotiations were protracted and at times, acrimonious, but in the end, our common desire to save our planet prevailed. I wish to pay tribute to all the men and women who worked with dedication and sacrifice, to ensure the success of the negotiations.

Although the Paris Agreement on Climate Change was a success, its magnitude and the complexities of other challenges facing the world, has again brought into sharp focus, the role of the United Nations, and its capacity to address and advance international peace, security and development. This brings to mind the repeated calls by Member States for Security Council and broader UN reforms to enable the organization confront new and emerging challenges.

The current composition of the Security Council with five permanent members holding veto powers is undemocratic and the system is akin to minority rule. A situation in which five countries dictate the political

and economic agenda of the world and can over-ride international consensus by veto is indeed an anachronism.

Mr. President,

Africa has the highest representation in the General Assembly, yet this continent with over 1.2 billion people has been denied the right to have a permanent seat in the Security Council. The Islamic Republic of The Gambia is therefore once again calling for the expansion of the Security Council to facilitate the allocation to Africa of two permanent seats with veto powers and two other non-permanent seats. Africa's legitimate demands have been well documented and articulated in the Ezulwini consensus and the Sirte Declaration.

A well- structured and fully inclusive United Nations is what the world needs and Africa is ready to take its rightful place and play a more effective role in world affairs. The significance of the reforms being envisaged calls for boldness and strong leadership. This is why we attach great importance to the election of the next Secretary-General. It is our hope that he or she will combine the rich legacies of his or her predecessors with new qualities of vision, fair play and equity.

We expect the new Secretary-General to be the people's Secretary-General and not the servant of the "Powerful Five." The Secretary-General of the United Nations must be the voice of the voiceless and the Chief Advocate of the people of the world. We therefore look up to the new Secretary-General to provide a visionary leadership that will settle old problems and disputes, and usher in a new era of peace, progress and prosperity.

Mr. President,

Failure to address and settle age-old injustices is responsible for some of our major problems in the world today. Here, I am referring to the historical injustices of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism. For far too long, slave trading nations and colonialists have stubbornly defied good conscience to acknowledge the evil nature of their actions and atone for the atrocities that were committed against Africans and People of African descent.

The African Continent was plundered and pillaged while millions of its inhabitants were trafficked to North America and the Caribbean. For centuries, they were exploited through slave labor in plantations, feeding the industries of the slave-owning countries. These acts of enslavement and forced labor provide empirical evidence that the economic foundation of western economies were built by enslaved Africans.

There is also irrefutable evidence, that in spite of providing free labor, African slaves suffered discrimination, exploitation, torture and death at the hands of ruthless owners. The effects of the inhumane treatment they suffered can be traced to their off-springs. Even today, the slavery syndrome continues to impact and shape the lives and circumstances of Africans and people of African descent. To us who are affected, slavery is a painful legacy. Yet, there are those who question the merits of reparation.

Mr. President,

Although there are pleas of innocence, there have been notable pleas of guilt. In 2006, Tony Blair, then British Prime Minister, apologized for his country's role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. In 2007, Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London at the time, acknowledged that wealth generated from the slave trade was responsible for the economic prosperity of England.

But perhaps the best illustration of guilt was the proposal of General William Sherman, that "every freed slave should be given forty acres and a mule as compensation." Sadly President Andrew Jackson and the United States Congress rejected the idea.

This was the beginning of the resistance against reparation. Yet overtime, America, Britain, Germany and Japan, have seen the need and prudence of paying reparations for crimes committed against other countries. Germany has paid \$60 billion dollars to survivors of the Holocaust and there is the Jewish Reparation Fund. The United States has paid \$20,000 each to ten thousand Japanese Americans who were sent to internment camps.

Similarly, the United States compensated native tribes for broken treaties. Japan has paid World War II reparations to its former colonial possessions such as Korea. It should also be noted, that Britain has paid reparation to the Maoris of New Zealand for damage done during colonial times. More recently, Iraq has paid compensation to Kuwait for damages it caused during its invasion and occupation of that country in 1990. Why then should Africans and People of African descent be ineligible for reparation, after suffering the historic injustices of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism? Apart from historical precedence, there is merit in the call for reparation for damages caused during colonialism.

Many of the problems confronting former colonies today are the direct consequences of actions by former colonial powers. A vivid example of how colonizers destroyed Africa is the way in which the continent was divided and shared. The balkanization of Africa did not respect

the territorial integrity of countries nor did they consider tribal boundaries or trade routes.

The division of Africa was arbitrary, taking only into account, the best interests of the colonizers. As a result the geography of countries was altered. Kin and kin separated, customs and traditions destroyed and the most valuable artifacts carted away to western museums. Africa was indeed torn apart, its people displaced and disintegrated and the continent weakened forever.

Reparation is therefore justified because it would demonstrate remorse and symbolize the healing of the wounds of colonialism. Reparation would also be an effective way to correct the global economic imbalances caused by colonialism.

**Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,**

It is with a sense of mission and guided by moral imperatives, that I urge this General Assembly to accept the case of slavery and colonialism as a global issue, which should be redressed without equivocation. The African Union has given the matter its full support and all well-meaning people around the world expect a favorable response from the International Community to this legitimate course.

In preparation for the discussions and debates that are expected to follow, we recently concluded consultations at an International Colloquium in Banjul, where a road map has been reflected on the way forward.

Already, the African Group at the United Nations is working on a resolution on slavery, the slave trade, colonialism and reparation to be tabled before this august body during this session. I appeal to you all to support the adoption of this resolution and restore the dignity of our African ancestors.

I enjoin you to use this opportunity to address the burning issues of our time. The people of the world are in need of durable peace. We need inclusive dialogue to resolve our differences and forge partnerships that will improve our human condition. The security of our world can only be assured if we establish genuine and friendly relations based on mutual respect for the dignity of our people and the sovereignty of our nations.

I thank you all for your attention and wish you a successful General Assembly.