

**OPENING ADDRESS OF THE 46TH ORDINARY SESSION
OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND
PEOPLES' RIGHT**

**ON THE 11TH OF NOVEMBER 2009 AT THE SHERATON
GAMBIA RESORT AND HOTEL**

BY

HON ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE

- Your Excellency, the Acting Chairman of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights,
- Excellencies, Commissioners of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights,
- The Executive Secretary to the African Commission,
- My Lord, The Honourable Chief Justice,
- The Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs and Gambians living abroad duly, represented by his Permanent Secretary,
- Honourable Ministers of States here present or duly represented,
- Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
- State Delegates representing the Member States of the African Union,
- Representatives of National and International Human Rights Organizations,
- Representatives of Civil Society Organizations,
- Members of the Press,
- Distinguished Guests,

- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- All other protocols respectfully observed.

On behalf of his Excellency, The President of the Republic of The Gambia, Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, the Government and people of the Republic of The Gambia, and on behalf of the Honourable Attorney General and Secretary of State for Justice, I welcome you all to the 46th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

We are pleased to be holding this session and transmit my sincere sentiment of gratitude for responding en masse to this invitation and I say thank you for coming. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the African Commission on the series of activities it held in celebration of the International Human Rights Day and under a very apt theme as well.

I also want to commend and extend our gratitude to Commissioner Nyanduga, Acting Chairperson, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for a constructive and vibrant term of tenure as Commissioner. We appreciate the vital role Commissioner

Nyanduga has played a Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, IDPs and Migrants in Africa in the recent adoption of the Convention on Internally Displaced Persons and Migrants in African in Uganda.

On behalf of the Government and people of The Gambia, I wish to seize this opportunity to congratulate the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Right under the leadership of our able Acting Chairperson, Commissioner Nyanduga for the Harmonization of Rules of Court on Human Rights. It is demonstrative of our collective responsibility to ensure that our various governments shared our resolved to advance, promote, and protect the spirit, intent and objectives of the African Charter.

Mr. Chairperson.

It is crucial that as we end this year 2009 we assess and review the progress we have made and the challenges in realizing our goals. In doing this let us also focus on the need to nurture peace, political stability and good governance in our region.

In 2009 we have witnessed the resurreptions of coup d'états and internal unrests, summary executions and sexual crimes which have become tools and weapons in the hands of junta regimes. We therefore urge the African Commission to continue in working tirelessly with member states to implement its mandate to monitor, protect and promote human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

The promotion and protection of human rights in Africa is the primary responsibility of states because it is only when human rights are guarantee, promoted and protected, that one could say human security has become a reality.

Let me also take this opportunity to inform this august gathering that The Gambia in collaboration with United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) would be hosting the Eight African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing + 15) from the 16th this month.

Mr. Chairperson,

This brings me to the domestication of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and to urge Member States to domesticate same. This protocol provides exclusive guarantees for women's rights with a combination of protection, empowerment, prohibition and punishment and violence against women and the rehabilitation of women victims.

Mr. Chairperson,

My presence here today is also a testimony to the importance the Government of The Gambia attaches to the well-being, protection and development of human and peoples' rights. In this regard, many initiatives have been taken by the Government and its partners in 2009 for instance, capacity building, training for members of the Press and Media. Members of the Judiciary including Judges, Magistrates, Lawyers and Security Officers underwent various forms of training and sensitization seminars in pursuit of promoting greater constitutional democracy, good governance.

Mr. Chairperson,

In promoting and upholding religious freedom, The Gambia strives to uphold its unrivalled religious tolerance and the Government of The Gambia respects this right. The peaceful co-existence of all religious denominations and faiths without any persecution by the Government is a clear testimony.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Gambia as a developing nation is ready to learn from its difficulties and challenges in promoting human rights, but we are also unwavering in our desire and commitment to keep the peace and stability we are known to have and enjoy. The Gambia is ready and willing to learn and adopt best practices available to improve significantly on our human rights record and to best protect the human rights of people. We are and will continue to be committed to this cause.

Mr. Chairperson,

Before I conclude, let me reiterate again that as true promoters and protectors of human rights, we should also act responsibly in the way and manner we execute our functions/mandate and not to appear or be seen to make misleading and unsubstantiated claims

of alleged human rights violations or statements founded on other ulterior motives. I am sure we all do acknowledge the fact that human rights does not operate in the abstract but within the legal system of the State.

Finally, I wish to urge all participations to participate fully in the deliberations to follow because everyone's contribution is indeed very important towards ensuring the effective promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in Africa. This forum of the African Commission is the right place to genuinely and frankly discuss issues of human and people's rights that are of concern to all in our continent.

With these remarks Mr. Chair, it has now given me the singular honour and privilege, to declare the 46th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights OFFICIALLY OPEN.

I wish you all fruitful and successful deliberations. May God bless you all.

Thank you.