



The National Human Rights Commission, The Gambia

PRESS STATEMENT

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Statement of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on the Commemoration of International Women's Day 2021

The National Human Rights Commission joins the rest of the world in commemorating International Women's Day 8 March 2021 on the theme "*Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world.*"

The theme recognises the need to build on equal future for our women and girls and we commend the great leadership role of women and girls in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and their great efforts in supporting families and communities to better cope with the impact of the pandemic. In the Gambia, women are effectively playing their quota in this fight, as caregivers, frontline health workers, doctors, community mobilisers and educators, and providers of essential PPE materials in their communities.

It is recognised that where women lead and their voices recognised and respected, peace prevails, families grow and countries progress. It is also a fact that in The Gambia, women, and girls form about 52 percent of the population. However, despite their numerical strength, women in the Gambia are severely underrepresented in elected decision-making bodies at the national and local levels. Of the 58 members of the National Assembly, only 6 are women; while only 4 women are in a Cabinet of 18. Women comprise less than 15 percent of the 144 elected councillors while only one of the eight Local Government Authorities and only one of the five Administrative Regions are headed by women. There are no women District Chief (Seyfo) and very few Village Heads (Alkalo). None of the State-Owned Enterprises is headed by a woman.

Patriarchy, illiteracy, and socio-cultural and religious beliefs continue to militate against women's political participation and socio-economic advancement and also exacerbate the discrimination, exploitation, and violence they suffer in both the public and private spheres. It is said that one out of three women in the Gambia is a victim of one form of gender-based violence or the other. Sexual harassment is prevalent in the workplace. Maternal mortality also remains high, at about 400/100000 live births.

As a country that is going through a political transition and strengthening its democratic and governance structures, we must insist on the active and full political participation of women in our decision-making processes. Our women must be at the political table speaking for themselves and articulating their own needs, concerns and aspirations. We cannot continue to have a society more

than half of whose members face discrimination, exploitation, harassment, and violence at the hands of those who are supposed to be caring for them and in places they are supposed to be safe and protected. The laws that protect women, such as the Women's Act 2010, Domestic Violence Act 2013, Sexual Offences Act 2013, and Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 must be effectively enforced and implemented.

To effectively build on an equal future for our women, the NHRC wishes to recommend the following to the State, as the primary duty bearer:

1. Institute measures, including through legislation, for gender quotas in all elective bodies at local and national levels, by allocating a minimum of 30 percent of seats to women;
2. Appoint more women in senior management positions in the Public Service, including in State-Owned Enterprises;
3. Effectively popularize, enforce and implement legal instruments such as the Women's Act 2010, Domestic Violence Act 2013, and Sexual Offences Act 2013; and Trafficking in Persons Act 2007;
4. Accelerate efforts, in line with SDG 3, to drastically reduce incidents of maternal mortality;
5. Ratify ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Sexual Harassment adopted at the ILO General Assembly in June 2019 and popularise among the populace;
6. Enact a comprehensive law that addresses sexual harassment in the workplace and effectively implement and popularise it;

The Commission salutes the gallantry and contributions of our women in the fight against COVID-19 despite the huge burden they carry and the hardship they endure daily. We pledge our support in promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls and challenging and calling out any discrimination, exploitation, and violence they face.

Signed: Emmanuel D. Joof

Chairperson