National Human Rights Commission of The Gambia

Statement of the National Human Rights Commission of The Gambia at the Official Opening of the 48th Session of the ACERWC

Chairperson
Honourable Members of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of The Gambia, I have the honour to address the 48th Session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. We thank the Committee for convening this Session and for its leadership in advancing the rights and welfare of children in Africa.

The Gambia has made progress in strengthening the protection and promotion of children's rights. However, gaps in implementation continue to affect children's enjoyment of the rights guaranteed by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, particularly children with disabilities and those in vulnerable situations. The NHRC will highlight key developments and areas requiring further attention.

Progress by the State: The **NHRC** notes the Government's development of the National Children's Policy 2025-2030, National Child Protection Strategy and Plan of Action 2025-2030 and the National Child and Vulnerable Groups Online Protection Policy (2024). These frameworks provide an important basis for strengthening the protective environment for children in The Gambia. A comprehensive legal gap analysis of the Children's Act 2005 was undertaken in 2025 to inform the review of the legislative framework for children. This provides an opportunity to address gaps in the existing framework and strengthen coordination among institutions responsible for children.

In education, the launch of The Gambia Madrassah Integration Strategy 2025-2029 is an important step towards improving the quality and relevance of Madrassah education, which combines Islamic religious education with formal learning and strengthening pathways between Madrassah education and the wider education system. The NHRC also recognises

the Government's continuing efforts to strengthen birth and civil registration with the enactment of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Act 2026, as well as existing platforms for child participation, including the Children's National Assembly. Continued investment in these areas is important to ensure that children have legal identity and meaningful opportunities to express their views on matters affecting them.

Progress by the National Human Rights Commission: NHRC has continued to strengthen child rights monitoring and engagement with children and duty bearers. In December 2025, the NHRC, with the support of UNICEF and in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, established a Child Rights Monitoring Unit. Through school engagements in the North Bank, Lower River and Central River Regions, NHRC has supported children and teachers to popularise the African Children's Charter and the CRC, strengthen child participation and support the establishment of reporting mechanisms in schools.

NHRC also commemorated the Day of the African Child 2026 through a child-centred engagement on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. Children, including children with disabilities, engaged with duty bearers on WASH challenges in schools and communities, resulting in a child-informed communique with recommendations for improving access to safe and inclusive WASH services. NHRC has also progressed its Child Rights Monitoring Framework to strengthen systematic monitoring and generate evidence on progress and gaps in the implementation of children's rights. In preparation for the Committee's review of the State Report of The Gambia, the Commission submitted a Complementary Report on The Gambia's Combined Initial, First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Reports during the Committee's 47th Session. The Report highlights the progress made by the State in terms of legislative, institutional and policy development in advancing the rights of children in The Gambia but also emphasises the challenges that continue to hinder the full realisation of children's rights in The Gambia.

Key Challenges: Violence, abuse and exploitation of children remain major concerns. Children continue to face risks of physical and sexual violence, child labour, trafficking and exploitation. The NHRC also notes that there is currently no National Child Participation Policy or National Plan of Action on Prevention of Violence Against Children. Stronger protection, referral and accountability mechanisms are required, particularly for children living in vulnerable settings, including Majalis, residential care settings and street-connected situations.

The situation of children living in Quranic Memorisation Schools, Majalis and other institutional settings requires particular attention. In 2025, at least 57 children at Daara Madina Suwaneh were diagnosed with scabies. UNICEF linked the outbreak to overcrowding and unhygienic conditions and limited access to water. UNICEF also raised safeguarding concerns following a fire in a Majlis in Sinchu in which two children died. These concerns highlight the need for stronger oversight, regulation and safeguarding in such settings. Access to quality and inclusive education remains uneven, particularly for children in rural and disadvantaged communities and children with disabilities. Barriers include inadequate infrastructure, limited resources and accessibility challenges.

NHRC remains concerned about access to and quality of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene services. According to SDG6 data cited by UNICEF The Gambia in its 2026 Day of the African Child statement, only 48 per cent of the population uses safely managed drinking water, 28 per cent uses safely managed sanitation and 13 per cent has a handwashing facility with soap and water at home. These conditions have direct implications for children's health, education, overall development and dignity. Health and nutrition also require sustained attention, particularly for children in vulnerable communities. Gaps in access to quality health services, nutrition, WASH and preventive care continue to affect children's survival and development. NHRC is also concerned about harmful traditional practices, particularly Female Genital Mutilation and child marriage. The continued practice, despite legal protections and prevention efforts, demonstrates the need for sustained enforcement, community engagement, survivor-centred responses and stronger protection of girls at risk. NHRC also draws attention to birth registration, nationality and documentation challenges. In Ghana Town, West Coast Region, children continue to face challenges relating to citizenship and nationality. Appropriate legal and administrative measures are needed to ensure that children can establish legal identity and access their rights and services. Children with disabilities continue to face barriers to equal participation and access to education, healthcare, information and other services. Sustained implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 and related measures is required to ensure that children with disabilities are not left behind.

NHRC Recommendation

NHRC encourages the State to strengthen implementation of existing laws, policies and strategies through adequate financing, effective coordination, reliable child rights data and regular monitoring. NHRC further calls for stronger oversight and safeguarding of children in Majalis and other institutional settings, improved access to inclusive education and essential services and implementation of measures to ensure universal birth registration and legal identity. Greater attention is also required to prevent and respond to violence and harmful practices against children, strengthen child-friendly justice and referral mechanisms and ensure that children, including children with disabilities and those in vulnerable situations, meaningfully participate in decisions affecting their lives.

NHRC remains committed to monitoring implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and working with the State, children, communities, civil society and other stakeholders to strengthen the protection and realisation of children's rights in The Gambia.

I thank you for your kind attention.