

**Statement by  
The Secretary of State  
for Information, Communication and Technology  
Of the Republic of The Gambia**

**Hon. Dr. Bakary K. N'jie**

**ITU Plenipotentiary Conference (PP02)  
Marakesh Morocco**

**23<sup>rd</sup> September to 18<sup>th</sup> October 2002**

**Mr. Chairman,  
The Secretary General of the ITU  
Honourable Ministers and Heads of delegations  
Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

**I take this opportunity to thank the kingdom of Morocco and especially His Royal Highness , the King of Morocco for hosting this very important global conference**

**It is also my pleasure to congratulate the Secretary General of the ITU and his staff for facilitating and coordinating the activities of the conference Further, my delegation and I extend our heartfelt congratulation to you, Mr. Chairman for you election to the chair of this august body and our appreciation, indeed, in the manner in which this session is being conducted.**

**The government of the Gambia, under the able leadership of His excellency the president of the republic of the Gambia, Alhagi Dr. Yahya A.J J Jammeh, has developed keen interest in the telecommunications sector as a vehicle for socio-economic development and transformation. A crucial aspect of the initiative is our endeavour to promote national objectives for poverty reduction through the use and expansion of telecommunications infrastructure and services.**

**Mr. Chairman, since the last plenipotentiary conference in Minneapolis in 1998, individually and collectively, African countries have made important development strides in the area of telecommunications. However, the continent continues to lag behind in accessing basic telephone services and internet related IT applications in comparison to other parts of the world, notably, due to lack of adequate infrastructure, policy change and scarce financial resources .**

**A lot has been said to address the digital divide and some progress has been achieved in terms of attaining an appreciable degree of liberalization and opening of markets . Africa has now taken giant steps in meeting universal service obligations of providing access to basic telephone services as evidence by certain continental development programmes , such as , SAT3/SAFE fibre optic cable which has a landing point in Dakar, Senegal and accessible by the Gambia. Also the progress of work for phase 1 implementation of RASCOM project in 2003 will provide access to all level of users in both urban and rural areas of Africa at affordable tariff rates.**

**On the issue of Digital Divide there are fundamental gaps such as network, product and convergence gaps between the urban and the rural areas and between developed and developing countries. These gaps should be addressed if we are to register any progress.**

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**The underlying factor and strategy should be policy transformation to speed up infrastructural development adaptable to all levels of ICT applications , particularly in broadband usage for e-society**

### **Achievements:**

**In the case of the Gambia a new ministry responsible for communication, information and technology has been created to help streamline and provide strategic direction for the sector**

**The Gambia telecommunications company (Gamtel), the national operator, will in the very near future embark on a massive expansion programme geared towards increasing the use of telephone facilities nationwide. It is envisaged that over 200 thousand lines with multimedia services will be provided to all and sundry. This expansion will increase line penetration by over 20 lines per hundred inhabitants in the next two years.**

**Provision of Internet services is also increasing to cover the main centers of rural areas. The proliferation of Internet Cafes and Telecentres has also helped in providing access to telephone and internet services and also created self-employment opportunities within the communities.**

**Due to government liberalization policy, two cellular mobile operators are now operating in the Gambia with total customer base of over 100 thousand subscribers within one year of operation. This has helped immensely to increase telephone penetration in addition to fixed network capacity of over 40 thousand lines.**

**The company, Gamtel, has also embarked on providing as 400km fibre optic cable in the North bank division of the country to complete a circular loop with the existing South bank division fibre links thus providing self-healing backbone and high capacity for the transportation of voice , data and broadcasting services**

### **Global trends in ICT**

**My government's commitment to the advancement of ICT has been amply demonstrated by this newly created Ministry for the sector empowering it to set up strategic policy direction that would accelerate growth in the provision of service nationwide and also setting up the legal and regulatory framework for a level playing field.**

**Distinguished delegates, you will all agree with me that the 21<sup>th</sup> century has ushered the dawn of new era in information and communications technology, having a catalytic role in advancing human development and eradicating poverty**

**A single innovation can quickly and significantly change the course of our entire society and multiply the possibilities of what people can do with the technology . Today, ICT has made significant changes in the business environment , agriculture , health and education**

**It is important to note that, realization of the full potential of ICT is stamped by rigidities in national polices. The trajectory of technology and its convergence is quite swift, which makes its policies to be none perpectual and requires efforts to keep up amending policies as technology mandates it.**

**However, all these could only be achieved when the necessary legal and regulatory framework are put in place. I am happy to state that telecommunications law is being finalised to address all issues relating to telecommunications sector in the Gambia.**

**Distinguished delegates , it is therefore, our duty to respond to the call of “bridging the digital divide” by accelerating our national plans and regional network plans to maximize growth and regional access for true inter- African communications within networks physically located in Africa and linked to other regions with infinite wideband applications**

**African telecommunications operators in both private and public sectors have in the past two to three years forged regional alliances in fixed and cellular operations as way forward to enhancing meaningful growth and penetration in the continent . Such ventures have engaged key and genuine players committed to the development of telecommunications and ICT on partnership basis in Africa and also raising the level of technical managerial capacities and enthusiasm in this rather growing and lucrative market in the continent.**

**Mr. Chairman, my delegation and I would once again wish to congratulate the newly elected members of staff of the ITU My government will continue to honour its commitment to the development objectives of the ITU and will work effectively with its administration.**

**I thank you all**