STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE AT THE EVENT OF THE ARAB-AFRICA REGIONAL PLATFORM MEETING, HELD IN TUNISIA, 9TH TO 13TH OCTOBER, 2018

Good morning/afternoon distinguished participants and all protocols respectfully observed.

Respected Chairperson,

1. Progress and achievements since the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

I am honored to join this team of dynamic and selfless individuals who are working enormously to make our world a better one through the reduction of disasters, resilience building and sustainability practices. Coming from one of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and a highly vulnerable nation to the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change, I must begin this statement by reminding this gathering that we have not lost hope to build a nation through a fundamental pillar of resilience building.
Since the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015, The Gambia has committed itself to invest on risk reduction through the improvement of government sectorial policies, enforcement and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that our national political and policy environment are supportive to the Sendai agenda. As a result, under the new development program, the National Development Plan 2018-2021, the government and stakeholders, through a series of consultations with citizens, including vulnerable groups have agreed that disaster management must be prioritized at all levels. For the first time in our development planning, the NDMA is directly tasked to report to the highest political authorities about its work, especially on community risk reduction and resilience building programs.

It is prudent to mention that my government is strengthening the DRR agenda and has prioritized the allocation of more resources to the country’s resilience programmes. Accordingly, the NDMA has received probably the highest budgetary uplifting for institutions under the Office of the Vice President. It goes without
saying that this move intends to increase more community presence of our work through awareness raising, simulation exercises, timely and easy dissemination of early warning information, building the interest of children and young people in disaster management and environmental sustainability. Through partnership with several partners such as the UN System, my government is supported in several areas that directly and indirectly improve our capacity to reduce disaster.

In 2017, the UNISDR built our capacity and introduced the Desinventar for tracking disaster loss and supporting high level decisions to track where investment is most deserving. In addition, The Gambia is also leading in the reporting of the Sendai Framework Monitoring through the formation of technical committee that has successfully submitted a report. The government is supporting this team to execute all relevant assignments to fulfill our reporting obligation. The African Union, ECOWAS, World Bank and the EU have also provided equally important support in knowledge generation and dissemination while our civil society also remains an active player.
2. Challenges in implementation and specific recommendations

In a post-dictatorship political environment, new risks and hazards, especially those related with natural resources are potential threats that can cause serious disasters if not properly managed. This also is closely related with challenges of low self-esteem, especially among young citizens, clash of interest over resources, weakened social cohesion, a culture of reactiveness to environmental issues, the lack of alignment of the national policy, law and strategy with the Sendai Framework and a serious resource gap for institutions that should support the national disaster reduction program.

Furthermore, it is also important to mention that The Gambia still struggles with inadequate human resource development in innovation, technology, research and overall academic development in disaster management of the 21st century. These challenges have also complicated the way we process early warning information and disseminate it in the most feasible form due to climate change denial, traditional beliefs and practices, ignorance and a general lack of technology in most parts of our country. We must not shy from these challenges for when we do so, it will be hard to initiate recommendations such as a massive and intensive capacity building to strengthen
the national coordination mechanism for disaster management, supporting both academic and professional growth in disaster management by focusing on science and technology, smart climate agriculture, and universal health care programming to improve our public health coverage.

3. Commitments in achieving the Target E of the Sendai Framework

I am glad to inform this gathering that through the public sector reform agenda that will promote economic growth within a realistic context of environmental sustainability for disaster risk reduction for sustainable development and political stability, the National Disaster Management Policy and Strategy are both approved for review to match them with the Sendai Framework and other continental/regional programs. In addition to this commitment, I must also inform this gathering that the Gambia is improving on its overall risk governance and management structures through the preparation of a national emergency operations plan with a combined standard operations procedures that does not focus on disaster response and recovery as it used to be. Reducing
risks and vulnerabilities, making new development programing as risk informed as possible and the use of insurance products such as the African Risk Capacity/View for disaster preparation and resilience. In all these processes, the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change and other national multi-sectorial teams assist the NDMA to promote its paradigm of disaster preparedness and mitigation than response through clear cut government programs and social protection policies. On a final note, I implore on our esteemed partners to support our human development agenda through respect for human rights and democratic values, transparency in disaster management through digital data collection processes, improvement of technology for early warning and a trained manpower that efficiently promotes and executes disaster preparations, response and recovery from a sustainability and equality perspective.

Thank you.