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**DRAFT STATEMENT FOR H.E MR SEYAKA SONKO, MINISTER OF
INTERIOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**

AT THE

**74 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EXCOM) MEETING OF THE UNITED
NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES**

9-13 OCTOBER 2023

PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

SALUTATIONS

Distinguished Chairperson,

Excellencies,

High Commissioner Mr. Filippo Grandi,

Esteemed representatives of the UN Agencies, and esteemed delegates,

I bring you fraternal greetings from the Government and people of the Republic of The Gambia! My delegation congratulates High Commissioner Mr. Filippo Grandi and the Secretariat for the successfully convening of the 74th EXCOM Meeting. We pay tribute to the entire UNHCR community and affiliated UN bodies for tirelessly extending a helping hand to displaced communities, individuals, and refugees worldwide.

The Government of The Gambia in its quest to fulfil its GRF pledges, is committed to reforming the provisions of the 1997 Constitution concerning refugees and aliens. A point of focus is the necessity to ensure that the Refugee Identity Card is recognized as valid proof of residence during the naturalization process. We aim to eradicate statelessness in The Gambia. In this regard, we have completed a comprehensive study on statelessness and we solicit the continued support of our partners in the realization of this mission.

Furthermore, in cognizance of the importance of a robust civil registration mechanism, The government of The Gambia has taken monumental strides toward digitizing birth registration. The fruition of this initiative was evident in the mass electronic birth registration and National Health Insurance Scheme Enrolment Campaign between August 2022 and February 2023. As a result, all public health centers across The Gambia are now fully equipped to undertake registrations seamlessly.

Chairperson

The Gambia remains host to refugees and persons of concern from the ECOWAS sub-region. Out of a total of 4,178, 3,751 are refugees and 427 asylum seekers. A majority of this group is domiciled in our rural communities, blending harmoniously with local communities and playing a pivotal role in developmental activities. The influx of an estimated 1117 displaced persons from the southern Casamance region of Senegal in January 2022 underscores the dynamic nature of displacement patterns and reinforces our plea for enhanced support from the international community.

In the spirit of our rich tradition of humanitarianism and hospitality, The Gambia is committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of refugees and other persons of concern. Under the auspices of the National Refugee Commission, we have put in place strategies and programs in the domains of health and education, to uphold the wellbeing and rights of refugees, and guarantee their protection against abuse or exploitation.

Chairperson

In our bid to improve our integration systems, we continue to learn and implement best practices in refugee integration in our region. This was the impetus for our study tour to Guinea Bissau in 20...?, with a view to understand and replicate their commendable integration of former Senegalese refugees.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies & Gentlemen,

In conclusion, it is pivotal to underscore the heightened vulnerabilities experienced by specific demographic cohorts, such as women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, during episodes of forced displacement. In this regard, The Gambia calls for increased support and technical assistance from the UNHCR and its partners for Member States with limited resources, who continue to host these vulnerable groups.

Thank you.