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**COMMUNICATION**

by

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on

**“Bridging the Gap: Digital Innovation and Citizen Engagement in the National  
Assembly of The Gambia”**

**Istanbul Session**  
**April 2026**

- Mr. President,
- Distinguished Colleagues,
- Secretaries-General present,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a profound honour to address this distinguished body in the historic city of Istanbul, a city that for centuries has served as a bridge between continents, cultures, and civilizations.

In many ways, the role of Secretaries-General mirrors that same function. We serve as institutional bridges, linking the complex procedural machinery of legislation with the lived realities and aspirations of the citizens our parliaments represent.

It is therefore with deep appreciation that I share with you the recent experience of the National Assembly of The Gambia, perhaps one of the smallest parliaments represented in this forum, yet one that is undertaking significant institutional reforms aimed at strengthening parliamentary openness, innovation, and citizen engagement.

Following The Gambia's democratic transition in 2017, the National Assembly Service embarked on a deliberate process of institutional renewal. This renewal required moving beyond traditional methods of conducting parliamentary business and embracing innovation as a tool for strengthening efficiency, transparency, and public participation.

Our objective has been twofold: to modernise parliamentary administration and to bring Parliament closer to the citizens it serves. Innovation, in our context, has therefore not been pursued for technological prestige, but as a practical instrument for democratic deepening.

Today, the National Assembly has reached an advanced stage in its comprehensive digitalisation programme, a strategic initiative designed to maximise institutional performance and legislative output. This transition towards a more sophisticated, technology-driven environment represents a decisive departure from legacy manual systems, replacing antiquated administrative procedures with a modern digital ecosystem.

This modernisation is fundamentally enhancing the Assembly's operational capacity. By integrating advanced workflow management tools and transitioning toward a paperless architecture, the Assembly Service is increasingly equipped to manage a demanding and complex legislative agenda with greater speed, accuracy, and institutional efficiency.

One of the earliest and most impactful reforms involved the modernisation of the Hansard reporting system. Historically, the production of the official parliamentary record represented a major administrative bottleneck. The preparation and printing of transcripts often took several months, meaning that by the time the public record became available, parliamentary debates had already faded from the national discourse.

In 2025, the National Assembly introduced an AI-assisted transcription system to modernise this workflow. Under this new system, uncorrected transcripts are produced within 24 to 48 hours of a sitting. Journalists, researchers, and the public now have rapid access to accurate quotations and parliamentary proceedings, allowing debates to be reported with greater accuracy and contextual integrity.

This reform has significantly strengthened the credibility of parliamentary reporting. When the National Assembly appears in the news today, the narrative is increasingly anchored in the official digital record. More importantly, by digitising our parliamentary archives, we have moved legislative history from physical archives to searchable digital platforms, making it accessible to citizens across the country and within the Gambian diaspora.

While plenary debates often attract public attention, the committee stage remains the most substantive component of the legislative process. To enhance legislative inclusivity, particularly during committee oversight work, concerted efforts are currently underway to fully institutionalise a Digital Stakeholder Submission Portal.

Traditionally, stakeholder engagement relied primarily on physical consultations, which often limited participation due to travel costs and logistical constraints. The proposed digital portal will allow stakeholders to submit memoranda electronically through an online submission platform, verified institutional email channels, and moderated digital engagement platforms.

This innovation will effectively transform the legislative process from a largely top-down consultation model into a more participatory and inclusive bottom-up engagement framework.

As I briefly indicated in my previous address to this forum, a notable institutional innovation emerged during the establishment of the Special Select Committee in May 2025, mandated to investigate the sale and disposal of assets linked to the former President Yahya Jammeh following the findings of a Commission of Inquiry.

In addressing this complex matter, the National Assembly adopted a novel approach by integrating professional legal practitioners as Lead Counsel to assist the Committee during its public hearings. Traditionally, parliamentary questioning in The Gambia had been conducted exclusively by Members of the National Assembly. While Members embody the democratic mandate of the people, complex financial and legal investigations often require specialised legal and forensic expertise.

By adopting a structure similar to that used in judicial commissions of inquiry, the Assembly significantly strengthened the technical rigour of witness examinations. This innovation effectively bridged the gap between political oversight and professional investigative scrutiny, thereby enhancing the credibility, depth, and effectiveness of parliamentary inquiries.

I am pleased to report that the Committee successfully completed its mandate and subsequently tabled its report before the Assembly. Both the proceedings of the Committee and its final report were widely acclaimed as unprecedented in both substance and form. Indeed, for the first time in the history of our Parliament, an

inquiry of this nature was conducted with such depth, transparency, and procedural sophistication, successfully facilitated by the National Assembly Service.

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Dear colleagues, citizen engagement today is increasingly mediated through digital platforms. In The Gambia, internet penetration has reached a significant proportion of the population, with most users accessing the internet through mobile devices. Recognising this trend, the National Assembly has prioritised live streaming of plenary sittings and key committee hearings.

In effect, every smartphone has become a front-row seat in the Public Gallery of Parliament. This development has significantly increased public visibility of parliamentary oversight activities. When committees such as the Finance and Public Accounts Committee question government agencies regarding public expenditure or asset management, citizens can now observe these proceedings in real time.

Such visibility strengthens transparency and serves as a powerful deterrent against administrative complacency and potential misuse of public resources.

Innovation has also strengthened internal accountability mechanisms. As part of our ongoing efforts to leverage modern technology, plans are underway to implement a Digital Ministerial Response Tracker, a tool designed to enhance executive accountability.

Linked to the requirements of Order 100 of our Standing Orders which mandates that Ministers provide formal responses to committee recommendations within specific timelines, this system will utilise a centralised dashboard managed by the Office of the Clerk. Once fully operational, the tracker will automatically flag delays and provide real-time monitoring of response data to ensure consistent follow-up.

This technological innovation seeks to entrench a culture of accountability, ensuring that parliamentary oversight moves beyond debate and results in measurable executive action.

While digital reforms offer enormous opportunities, they also raise the risk of digital exclusion, particularly in rural communities. To address this challenge, the National Assembly has adopted a hybrid communication strategy.

Digital engagement is complemented by National Assembly radio programmes, through which parliamentary proceedings and legislative developments are translated into local languages for wider public understanding. Innovation must therefore remain inclusive. Technology should expand democratic participation rather than inadvertently narrowing it.

Distinguished colleagues, as Secretaries-General we are the custodians of our parliaments' institutional memory and administrative evolution. The experience of The Gambia demonstrates that innovation in parliamentary administration does not necessarily require vast financial resources. What it requires is vision, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to transparency.

Our e-Parliament Roadmap and Legislative Reform Agenda represent our determination to build a modern, responsive, and citizen-centred Parliament.

As we reflect here in Istanbul, a city defined by its bridges, we are reminded that the greatest bridge a parliament can build is the bridge of trust between institutions and the people they serve.

Ultimately, the most transformative innovation any parliament can adopt is the innovation of openness. When we open our records, our procedures, and our deliberations to the citizens we serve, we do more than remain in the news, we remain relevant in the democratic life of our nations.

I thank you for your kind attention.