Master of ceremony,  
Her Excellency Vice President,  
ECOWAS Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Gambia,  
Honorable Minister of Youth and Sports,  
Honorable Minister of Health,  
Representative of the Director General, WAHO  
Resident Representative, UNFPA The Gambia  
Chairman, The Gambia National Youth Council  
Youth Leaders and Representatives from West African States and the Sahel  
My fellow Commissioners and Secretariat team of the AYC,  
Staff of the Gambia National Youth Council and its Regional Youth Committees here present,  
Partner Representatives,  
Colleagues from the Media,  
All Protocols duly and respectively observed.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here this morning, to witness the official opening of this first-ever West Africa Youth Leaders Forum on Population and Development 2019.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of my dearest sister, Ms. Natalie Sonia Mukundane, Executive Chairperson of the AYC. She would have loved to be with us this morning to share our joy and celebrate this achievement together but unfortunately she could not make it due to unavoidable circumstances beyond her control. She however asked me to convey to warm greetings to all of you!

Master of ceremony, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen,

By way of introduction, the African Youth Commission, popularly known as AYC started way back in 2013 as African Union Youth Working Group to follow up on the implementation of African Union key decisions and recommendations on youth.

It was formally inaugurated on January 2017 in Addis Ababa, Federal Republic of Ethiopia. Over the years, the AYC has transformed and positions itself as a continental youth network with sole mission to unite and mobilize African youth in Action for the promotion of African Unity and Development.
The Commission subscribed to the Pan African Vision of “An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena.”

It’s core values are:

1. PAN AFRICANISM
2. INCLUSIVITY
3. INTEGRITY
4. ACCOUNTABILITY

Among its founding principles is to compliment the efforts of Government and development partners in their quest for youth empowerment and development.

Today, the AYC as a Pan African Youth Network has a membership of more 1000 youth led and youth serving organisations in 46 African countries including here in The Gambia.

AYC works through a Consortium of youth organisations at national level. The Gambia was among the first countries in whole of Africa to launch the AYC National Consortium. In its membership, the Gambia AYC National Consortium has 5 pioneered National Youth Organizations including the National Youth Council.

This country the Gambia is equally the host of the AYC Pan African Secretariat. Just in March this year, it hosted the 3rd AYC Pan African Youth Conference on African Unity and Development and the General Assembly Meeting which brought together over 400 participants.

The March Conference was also the beginning of youth pre- ICPD events as AYC and Gambia National Youth Council co-hosted Youth ICDP side event with UNFPA.

Today, in less than 8 months, we are convened in this beautiful city again for one of the important sub-regional youth leaders’ forum.

The main theme for the Forum is: “ICPD25, The Contributions of West African Youth to Accelerating the Promise.”

During this 2-day forum, we will have interactive discussions on issues of relevance to the youth as far as implementation of ICDP Programme of Action is concerned,

The following key issues will be discussed:
- The contribution of young people to the implementation of ICPD Cairo Promise;
- Sharing of young people’s specific experiences (progress and challenges) in delivering the “Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights”;
- Highlight how access to Reproductive Health quality services and efficient information sharing among youth could be improved to ensure rights and choices for all;
- Explore the role of youth leadership in delivering on the ‘unfinished business’ as well as the role of youth organizations in the implementation of the Africa Agenda 2063 for the Africa We Want;
- And finally, strategies on how West African youth can have their say in the ICPD discourse and drive the implementation of its Plan of Action beyond Nairobi Summit on ICPD25; and come up with West African youth position paper to the world leaders at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 on November 12-14.

I would like to encourage all participants to contribute actively in the discussion and bring out key issues affecting their development.

Finally, I thank all our partners particularly the West African Health Organization for their technical and financial support to the forum. Lets Match Together for All Rights and Choice!

With this few remarks, I thank you for your kind attention and look forward to a fruitful deliberations.