Statement of Honorable Minister Hadrammeh Sidibeh, Delivered by Mr. Hassan Jallow, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sports The Gambia at Official Opening Ceremony of West Africa Youth Leaders Forum on Population and Development at Metzy Residence Hotel, 23rd October 2019

Master of Ceremony,
Her Excellency Vice President,
ECOWAS Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Gambia,
Honorable Minister of Health,
Resident Representative, UNFPA The Gambia
Director General, WAHO
Chairman, The Gambia National Youth Council
Executive Chairperson, African Youth Commission,
Youth Leaders and Representatives from West African States and the Sahel
Partner Representatives,
Colleagues from the Media,
All Protocols duly and respectively observed.

I bring you warm greetings from my Ministry, Youth and Sports. It is always a pleasure for me to address such a unique gathering of young exceptional leaders.

Since I assumed this role as Minister of Youth last year, I have interacted with young people, I sit together with them, I listened to their ideas, their challenges as well as their innovative solutions to our various societal problems. My young people here in The Gambia would agree me that I always say that “youth should not be perceived as trouble makers but rather as solution providers to our problems”.

The passion, the energy and contributions of young people to the realization of our various national, sub-regional, continental and global development agendas has inspired me greatly and I am always encouraged to answer to their calls whenever they need my personal support or that of my Ministry.

Mr Chairman, Distinguish guests, ladies and gentlemen,

This first ever West Africa Youth Leaders Forum on Population and Development is timely and quite important for the Ministry of Youth and Sports The Gambia.

As you are all aware, this year 2019 marks the 25th anniversary of the ground breaking “International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)”, which took place in Cairo in 1994. At that conference, 179 governments adopted a Programme of Action, recognizing that reproductive health, women's empowerment and gender equality are the pathway to sustainable development.

At the ICPD in Cairo, what began as a discussion about population targets shifted and put the needs and aspirations of human beings at the centre of sustainable development. With this paradigm shift, 179 governments adopted the visionary Programme of Action and agreed that putting people first, empowering women, and
enabling people to freely decide the timing and spacing of their pregnancies would clear
the way to sustainable development.

The gains made since then are remarkable:

- In 1994, only about 15 per cent of married women in the least developed
countries used a modern contraceptive. Today, 37 per cent do.
- Twenty-five years ago in the least-developed countries, nearly eight in 1,000
women died during pregnancy or childbirth. Today, that rate has been cut in half.
- A woman in a least-developed country 25 years ago had nearly six children. Today she has fewer than four.

Despite this success, we still have a long way to go before we can claim to have lived
up to the commitments pledged in Cairo.

It is against this background that, the Governments of Kenya and Denmark, together
with UNFPA, have agreed to convene a high-level Summit in November to bring all
relevant stakeholders together to galvanize and mobilize the political and financial
commitments needed to urgently complete the unfinished business of the ICPD
Programme of Action.

This is why, under the auspices of my Ministry, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the
Republic of The Gambia is hosting this sub-regional youth gathering today to hear from
young people directly on how they are contributing to accelerating the delivery of the
Cairo 1994 Promise at national level.

Mr Chairman, Distinguish guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The Gambia has always been at the forefront in championing and promoting youth
development at all levels. The creation of The Gambia National Youth Council in year
2000 and the adoption of the African Youth Charter in Banjul in 2006 can are a
testament to this.

The Government of The Gambia under the able leadership of H.E President Adama
Barrow has recognized young people as critical actors in National Development. Since
the ushering of the New Gambia, the Government has supported a numerous youth
development programmes and initiatives in the fields of health, education, skills
development, sports, agriculture, economic empowerment (business and job creation)
among others.

In conclusion, I would like to offer you the full and continues support of my Ministry
(Youth and Sports), for the realization of your common purpose and aspirations for the
“Africa We Want”. Lets together Match for Rights and Choices for All.
Finally, my special appreciation goes to the Gambia National Youth Council and the African Youth Commission (AYC) for jointly organizing this important gathering, to West African Health Organization (WAHO) for funding, and all other partners who in one way or the other contributed to the successful organization of the forum. A big thank you to you all.

To all the participants, thank you for coming and have a productive session and stay in The Gambia (the Smiling Coast of Africa)

Thank you for your kind attention.