

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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### **National Peace Campaign and Dialogue on Democratic Reforms and Youth Participation in Political Processes launched in The Gambia**

The African Union through the African Governance Architecture (AGA), in collaboration with Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the have successfully launched the National Peace Campaign and Dialogue on Democratic Reforms and Youth Participation in the Political Processes in the Gambia. The Campaign aims to create an open and collaborative space for the youth to be part of the political processes, ongoing reforms and peace processes in The Gambia. It is also part of preventive diplomacy activities in support of a peaceful elections by member states.

The Peace Campaign is particularly timely as the Gambia prepares for its first cycle of Presidential and Legislative elections in 2021 and 2022 respectively, under the new political dispensation. These elections offer an opportunity to consolidate peace, democracy and participatory governance in the country. It is also in recognition that the youth constitute an indispensable socio-political category of the citizenry that is key towards the democratization process of the country.

The campaign will be focused on among other strategic issues; to rally Increased awareness of the youth on the ongoing reforms and how to engage first-hand; to enhance understanding of the role of the youth in the democratic governance processes; to establish networking avenues for the youth, national and regional stakeholders; institutionalise the concept of ambassadors for peace among the Gambian youth; and rallying for a more inclusive, democratic and credible electoral process.

At the launch of the National Peace Campaign and Dialogue on Democratic Reforms and Youth Participation in the Political Processes, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr. Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, in a statement delivered on his behalf observed that “in the past, the Youth have been used as tools and being manipulated by conflict entrepreneurs to achieve their selfish goals. Today, it is gratifying to note that the youth are now engaged in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Remember that your destiny lies in your hands. So make good use of the opportunity. As ECOWAS, we share the conviction that now is the time to invest in the people, particularly the youth which is the peoples-centered investment for development, so that they can become agents of political and social stability.” He laudable the initiative as one as it is in consonance with the priorities of the country’s National Development Plan, the AU Agenda 2063, and the ECOWAS Vision 2050.

The Acting Head of the AGA-APSA Secretariat, Amb Salah Hammad, echoed similar sentiments stating, “as the Gambia goes through elections this year, this particular call for national dialogue and launch of a peace campaign is ideal. It is believed that this dialogue and campaign will bring this youthful nation to embrace its differences, become one and support this important national exercise as a testament of the growing democratic space.” He emphasised on the need for increased investment on youth and their meaningful engagement as leaders for peace and partners for change.

The campaign and dialogue is an outcome of the multi-stakeholder assessment mission that was led by AGA and held in partnership with ECOWAS, Democracy Elections Assistance Unit (DEAU) and African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), in August 2019. The mission's findings elaborated on the commendable efforts by the government, but also identified glaring gaps including the need to support the meaningful engagement of the youth in electoral and political processes.

These findings paved way for strategic engagement and support as reflected on the Joint Action of AGA –ECOWAS, DEAU with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. This action plan aims to identify resources, experiences and capacity that can potentially address impediments for youth to exercise their full potential. Recognizing The Gambia, a country in transition, and being cognizant of the fact that the country is preparing for its elections, channelling technical support to this youthful nation was deemed ideal. This support is directed to building capacity of young people to facilitating dialogue on peace but also building their knowledge-base to facilitate their meaningful engagement in the political processes.

Further, in line with a series of activities supporting the Government and people of The Gambia, the AGA rolled out a Training of Trainers (TOT) programme on Youth Participation in Electoral Processes in The Gambia from 25-30 August 2021. The AU's DEAU is also expected to deploy a training of trainers' program for youth on Citizens Election Observation from 1-5 November 2021.

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