

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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### **Positioning women's voices and aspirations in development priorities: African Women Leaders Network's Solidarity Mission to The Gambia**



*AWLN delegation led by H.E Mme Bineta Diop, AU Special Envoy, Women, Peace and Security, AWLN Co-convener and H.E Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the AU to the UN, representing the AWLN GoFs in NY, pay a courtesy call to H.E. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia as part of AWLN Solidarity Mission to The Gambia.*

To support Gambia's efforts to centre women in economic empowerment initiatives and ensure that their voices and realities are included in programmes and policies, as well as in leadership and decision making, the African Women Leaders Network's (AWLN) Group of Friends, New York, embarked on a solidarity mission to the Republic of The Gambia on the theme: "Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment and Financial Inclusion for Enhanced Leadership." Led by the African Union (AU) Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security and AWLN Co-Convener, H.E. Mme. Bineta Diop, the solidarity mission was aimed at mobilising commitments from the Government of Gambia and development actors, to invest in the economic advancement and financial inclusion of women and bring visibility to the significant roles of women in driving change and advancing the country's development aspirations.

Addressing the delegation during their courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of The Gambia, H.E. Adama Barrow, recognised the immense contributions of women leaders in advancing Gambia's development endeavours. President Barrow reiterated his government's commitment to positioning women's voices and aspirations in national development priorities. "We remain committed to supporting efforts to advance women's economic empowerment and leadership by strengthening our support to the Women Enterprise Fund. My government and I are prepared to support the newly established AWLN Gambia Chapter, in the realisation of its strategic objectives" he highlighted. During the courtesy visit, the President was presented with the AWLN Champion's Award, making him part of the circle of champions, joining other Heads of State and Government.

As part of the engagements of the mission, the AWLN Gambia Chapter was launched on 16 May 2023, marking the 33rd national chapter on the continent. The launch ceremony was graced by H.E. the First Lady of The Gambia, Dr. Fatoumatta Bah-Barrow, ministers, heads of government institutions, and representatives of development organisations and civil society.

The AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, H.E. Mme Bineta Diop speaking at the AWLN Gambia Chapter launch, congratulated the Government of Gambia on the establishment of a Gender Ministry, a demonstration of the Government's commitment to lead the charge for women's inclusion and participation in leadership. "Research has demonstrated that where women are represented in government, there is more investment in social protection. Peace agreements are also more impactful and last longer where women are represented, while women's leadership in the private sector, leads to better business performance" she highlighted.

The launch ceremony was also addressed by H.E. Qwabe Bongiwe, Ambassador of South Africa to the Republic of The Gambia and Senegal and H.E. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Representative of the AU to the United Nations (UN), both representing the AWLN Group of Friends in NY; Honourable Dr. Fatou Diané Gueye, Minister of Women's Affairs, Family and Child Protection of the Republic of Senegal; and Mrs. Elena Ruiz Abril, representative of the UN Women Regional Office for West and Central Africa.

The mission also engaged the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad, Dr. Mamadou Tangara. Minister Tangara was commended for his crucial role in facilitating the launch of the AWLN Gambia Chapter. He was also recognised for his continued work through his office, to uplift and create opportunities for women to thrive.



*AWLN delegation with women at the grassroots in Bwiam Foni Kansala, West Coast Region, The Gambia*

In line with AWLN's strategic pillar on economic empowerment and financial inclusion, the mission conducted a field visit to the Foni Berefet and Foni Kansala Districts in the West Coast Region of Gambia. The first engagement was at the Nobo Bantang Women's Garden in Foni Berefet, where the delegation was pleased to note the multi-faceted approach utilised by the community to create a source of livelihoods for themselves, while also involving teachers and students to create an avenue to complement the government-provided School Improvement Grant (SIG), thus contributing towards school fees for students and the implementation of the school feeding programme. The systems put in place at the Nobo Bantang Women's Garden demonstrates the innovative, community-driven and solutions-oriented spirit of women, when given the opportunity to access and control resources in their communities. The Nobo Bantang Women's Garden is a current beneficiary of the Women Enterprise Fund facilitated by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare of Gambia.

The remarkable work of the women of Foni Kansala was also showcased at a community engagement in Bwiam, to officially wrap up the solidarity mission to The Gambia. At this gathering, the delegation was pleased to learn of various initiatives led by women in the district, to promote economic empowerment, inclusive participation in leadership and peace and security. One of such innovative initiatives is the creation of a joint community garden by the women of Dasilami and Touba Trankil, two border communities that have previously had longstanding land-related disputes. The garden is now a tool for fostering peace and social cohesion between

the two communities. A key takeaway from the community engagements is that, the women of Foni have transformed community challenges to opportunities to advance their political and socio-economic status and contribute to processes to strengthen peace and social cohesion in The Gambia.

The solidarity mission ended on a high note with the delegation reminded of the Government of Gambia's commitment to prioritise women's economic empowerment, inclusion in leadership and peace and security processes.

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