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Revised

STATEMENT BY HON. OUSMAN SONKO, MINISTER OF INTERIOR OF THE GAMBIA, TO THE UNITED NATIONS INTER GOVERNMENTAL EVENT AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL OF MEMBER STATES ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1951 CONVENTION RELATING TO THE STATUS OF REFUGEES AND THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1961 CONVENTION ON THE REDUCTION OF STATELESSNESS IN GENEVA, 7-8 DECEMBER, 2011. AM

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Mr. Chairman  
The High Commissioner  
Colleague Ministers  
Excellencies Distinguished Ambassadors  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. Chairman,

Please allow me to first and foremost congratulate the High Commissioner on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1961 Convention On the reduction of statelessness.

At the outset, The Gambian delegation would like to align itself with the statement read by the distinguished Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs and public safety of Lesotho on behalf of the African Group.

**Mr. Chairman,** The Gambia hosts a population of 9,390 rural Senegalese refugees and 1,061 urban refugees and asylum seekers from Liberia, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Togo, Somalia, DRC, and Cameroon.

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**Mr. Chairman.** The Government of Gambia established the Gambia Refugee Commission serving to assess international protection needs for asylum seekers in the Gambia. The Government of Gambia is thankful to UNHCR for its commitment in providing capacity building and logistical support for the setting up of the commission and asks UNHCR to continue its efforts on capacity building activities for the staff members of the Commission on Refugee Law and International Protection to refugees and other persons of UNHCR's concern. At the same time, the Government recognizes that the appointment of its president / chair person and board members is yet to take place. **The government of Gambia therefore pledges to ensure its continuous commitment to expedite the full establishment of the Refugee Board which will serve as the basis for the establishment of a fair and efficient asylum system.**

**Mr. Chairman.** The Government of Gambia's ratification of the Kampala Convention for IDPs in 2011 through both sides of the Gambia National Assembly marks the importance placed by the Government on the issue of internally displaced persons. **The Government of Gambia pledges to continue lobbying in parliament for a similar adoption and ratification of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, to which it is not yet a party.**

**Mr. Chairman.** Liberian refugees (numbering 713 as of 30 Sept 2011) constitute the second largest refugee group following Senegalese refugees in the Gambia. In light of the upcoming cessation clause, the Government of Gambia together with UNHCR, continues to work towards finding durable solutions through the implementation of a comprehensive strategy for Liberian refugees. Following the Sierra Leone cessation and local integration process, the Government of Gambia is well conversant with the cessation process and is fully supportive of any plans UNHCR may have for facilitating Liberian refugees' local integration. **The Gambian government pledges to continue its efforts in securing legal status for refugees wishing to locally integrate by the provision of a residence and work permit that allow ceased Liberian refugees to legally reside in the Gambia and to gain employment.**

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I want to on behalf of the Government of the Gambia, thank the IOM for evacuating Gambian nationals from North Africa.

**Mr. Chairman.** Finally, I wish to re-affirm the Gambia Government commitment to working with the UNHCR and the International community in finding durable solutions to Refugees and in the reduction of statelessness.

**I THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION**