Statement by His Excellency Prof. Muhammadou M. O. Kah, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of The Gambia, at the Sixty-Eight session of the Trade and Development Board

Agenda item 2 (b): LDCs Priorities for the Road to LDC5 -Monday, 21 June 2021 (afternoon session)

President of the Trade and Development Board H.E. Ambassador Maimuna Tarishi of Tanzania, Acting Secretary-General of UNCTAD Madame Isabelle Durant, Distinguished Panellists

Thank you, President, for giving me the floor. At the onset, my delegation would like to align with the statement delivered by H.E Ambassador Robert Salama of Malawi on behalf of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). I would also like to congratulate our outgoing President of the Trade and Development Board, H.E. Ambassador Federico Villegas (Argentina) for his brilliant leadership during his tenure.

Equally, my delegation Congratulates my sister, H.E Ambassador Maimuna Tarishi of Tanzania on her assumption of the role of President of the Trade and Development Board and wish her and other Members of the TDB team a successful tenure. Be assured of our support and collaboration. My Delegation also congratulate and welcome the appointment of our newest Secretary General Designate- H.E Rebeca Grynspan of Costa Rica. We are all looking forward to her Leadership.

Madame President, my delegation appreciates the very insightful opening remarks of our Acting Secretary General, H.E Ms. Isabelle Durant and the Keynote Address by our Deputy Secretary General of the UN, H.E Ms. Amina Mohammed.

My delegation wishes to commend UNCTAD and the TDB for conveying the High-level segment on the road to UNCTAD 15 and LDC5 and more importantly on mapping out the LDCs priorities to the upcoming 5th LDC Conference.

Madam President,

My delegation recognises the efforts being undertaken by UNCTAD and other LDC partners in the work towards the advancement of trade and development needs of the LDCs. Cognisant of the existing weak and vulnerable economic situation LDCs face, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, we believe both UNCTAD 15 and LDC 5 Conferences would continue to indicate that the road to recovery in trade and economic development for the LDCs will be long and steep. Covid-19 has rolled back some of the gains made by LDC’s in our trade and development aspirations and there is need for urgent and innovative interventions.

We note that efforts to increase the trade volumes of the LDC countries cannot be achieved without partnering with UNCTAD and other key partners to address the acute macro and structural vulnerabilities that our economies continue to face. Low levels of job creation, endemic poverty, productive capacity gaps and declining investment flows and lack of resilience, to name a few referenced in various reports were battles we were fighting prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Today these challenges are heightened in the wake of the economic fall-out from the pandemic over the past year, significantly impacting LDC country economies as we await equitable and comprehensive access to life-saving vaccines and seek to get our economies in full recovery mode. The support of UNCTAD and other partners is critical to ensure LDC’s harness trade opportunities and are integrated fully into the multilateral trade system through fair, equitable and balanced trade
rules. At the same time, the multilateral trade system needs now, more than ever, to step up support for the on-going recovery and accelerated growth efforts of LDC’s to ensure effective and resilient post-pandemic economic resurgence and sustainability of our economies.

Therefore, adding economic value to goods and services of LDC’s, in which we enjoy a competitive advantage, should be seen as a key priority to strengthen and diversify our trade, technological and economic base and to build economic resilience, sustainability and be better equipped to deal with future economic shocks to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**Madam President**

In paving the way forward, the support for LDC’s digital transformation is not a luxury, but rather a necessity as the importance of functioning telecommunications and communications networks has become evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure consistent, comprehensive connectivity in our economies. Bridging the digital divide and addressing the hard and soft infrastructural challenges we face is therefore critical to ensure that we can develop competitive Digital Trade Eco-Systems and Ecommerce infrastructure, to enable our future participation in the Digital Trade and the Digital Platform Economy, thereby ensuring job creation in both formal and informal sectors, to lift our populations out of poverty. This will require closer collaboration between UNCTAD and ITU to support LDC’s infrastructure requirements and needs.

Equally important Madame President is the strengthening of collaboration between UNCTAD and WIPO to facilitate the building of the Creative Economy with Innovation Platforms and Systems and a functional value creating IP Ecosystem that will be situated at the core of Development and to mainstream IP, Innovations into an augmented LDC’s “Smart Trade Ecosystem” supporting SME’s and MSME’s.

Considering the aforementioned challenges faced by LDCs, economic diversification is vital and necessary for all and especially for the LDCs in the African region seeking support guided by the ACFTA framework, to enhance LDC participation in intra-regional value chains to facilitate job creation and build our competitive export base in the region. Equally important, is how do we remove all bottlenecks to ensure our youth and women play a pivotal role in trade and development. Reinvigorating and strengthening the rural economy and rural development is at the heart of resolving some of our challenges.

Therefore, strengthening an E-enabling supply chains to connect more efficiently on national, regional, and global value chain; a better alignment of the trade ecosystem with other sectoral ecosystems guided by smart policy regimes, agility and efficient transactions and distribution networks are urgent for LDC’s. UNCTAD’s support to build an efficient digital infrastructure connected to more efficient traditional infrastructure with smart process and competencies to drive them; support for the building blocks to build manufacturing capability, including vaccine manufacturing capabilities through effective collaborations and partnerships are urgent, to facilitate a much more sustainable balance in our imports and exports and reinvigorating the resilience and value creation for thriving Trade is equally important.

Kindly allow me to conclude by reiterating that it is necessary to adopt effective evidence base policy options to enable us to maximise the benefits from value addition – either via global or regional value chains, which would include reassessing and identifying strategic economic priorities and reallocating necessary resources; embarking on pathways towards digital transformation (ensuring connectivity, affordability, and reliability), investing in capacity and skills development in key strategic industries, supporting and strengthening SME development, and upgrading infrastructure and regulatory frameworks.

Madam President, Thank you