

KEYNOTE SPEECH BY THE VICE  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE  
GAMBIA, HER EXCELLENCY AJARATOU  
DR. ISATOU NJIE-SAIDY ON THE OPENING  
OF THE FOURTH ECOWAS REGIONAL  
ELECTRICITY REGULATORY AUTHORITY  
(ERERA)

FORUM IN THE GAMBIA  
KAIRABA BEACH HOTEL  
20<sup>TH</sup> – 21<sup>ST</sup> November 2013

The Vice President of The ECOWAS Commission

The Commissioner of Infrastructure of ECOWAS – Mr. Ebrima Njie

The Minister of Energy (Senegal) - Hon. Maimouna Ndoye - Seck

The Minister of Energy (Sierra Leone) - Hon. Robin-Coker

The Minister of Energy of The Gambia

Hon. Ministers here present

The Chairman of ERERA, Mr. Ibrahima Thiam

Members of the Diplomatic and consular Corps

Council members of ERERA

The Chairman and Members of the Board of Directors of PURA  
Director General of PURA

The Managing Director of NAWEC

Managing Directors and CEO's

Private Sector and Development Partner Organisations here  
represented

Senior Government Officials

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour for me to part of this important sub-regional forum and to deliver the opening statement. As The Gambia plays host to our brothers and sisters from the sub-region, I would like to firstly seize this opportunity to welcome you all to the Gambia, the smiling coast of Africa; I would similarly extend a warm welcome to participants from sister agencies, development partner organisations and private sector operators in the energy sector. I wish you all a pleasant stay in The Gambia and do hope that you would seize the opportunity of being here to sample some of the cultural, entertainment, tourism attractions, shopping and also investment opportunities that attract many visitors to the Gambia.

Mr. Chairman, as you may be aware, The Gambia is a founding member of ECOWAS and several of its institutions. As a

Country we have always believed in the benefits of regional integration as the best way of efficiently and sustainably exploiting and managing our resources for the common good of all our citizens.

It goes without saying that there can be no meaningful and sustainable development without adequate, reliable and sustainable energy. West Africa is blessed with some of the richest energy resources including oil, gas, coal, large hydro and abundant sources of renewable energy. However, over the last four decades we have been pursuing our individual national energy policies without exploring the benefits of economies of scale. Availability and access to modern energy services is not only vital to reducing poverty in the region but also towards maintaining peace and security.

We are beginning to see a paradigm shift in the sub-region with the establishment of critical institutions such as ERERA, the West African Power Pool (WAPP) and the ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE). We have also witnessed the implementation of several projects such as the OMVS-Manantali, the WAPP coastal transmission backbone and the CLSG. I would like to seize this opportunity to encourage the ECOWAS Commission to continue on the

development and implementation of these types of regional projects.

In our own neighbourhood, The Gambia has been pursuing the realisation of the OMVG project together with Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry and Senegal. The project includes the exploitation of the river Gambia and its basin for agriculture, energy and transport purposes. The energy component of the project is at an advanced stage and when realised would not only improve electricity supply but would greatly enhance the socioeconomic development and integration of our citizenry.

Mr. Chairman, it is worth noting that despite our unique geography and proximity The Gambia and Senegal are still not interconnected. It is my fervent hope that this forum today would discuss some of the challenges of encouraging such partnerships and how we can overcome these drawing lessons from the pioneering interconnection of Ivory Coast and Ghana or from the Manantali hydro-power project. We should also look at how we can build in new renewable energy technologies in such projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, the task at hand remains the same but the environment is different. It is now more difficult to raise the capital required to finance such large trans-boundary projects. Thus it is only through forums like this that government representatives, our regional

institutions, development partners and civil society can meet to find new solutions to some of these challenges.

Mr. Chairman, it is indeed for these reasons that The Gambia government is proud to host such an important forum. This forum is important not only in the opportunity it provides for discussing topical issues and bottlenecks hindering regional integration through electricity interconnection, but also finding solutions to these bottlenecks.

I am aware that since its inception, ERETA has worked tirelessly in providing a platform for regulators and operators to discuss how best to form a common market. Whilst regulation may be new in several countries in the region including ours, I can assure you that we in The Gambia have seen the benefits of utility regulation. Today the public is not only fully engaged in all decision-making processes guaranteeing transparency in the electricity business, but more importantly we have seen a gradual approach towards cost reflective tariffs and price stability. Competition through licensed operators has also brought about a lot of benefits and new investment.

Mr. Chairman, under the dynamic leadership of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A J J Jammeh, more than 50% of the Gambian population enjoys access to modern electricity services compared to less than 20% two decades ago. In fact all urban

areas including the provincial towns have access to good electricity services with access in the Greater Banjul Area exceeding 80%.

We are beginning to see a paradigm shift and with the establishment of critical institutions such as ERERA, the West African Power Pool (WAPP) and the ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE). We have also witnessed the implementation of several projects such as the OMVS-Manantali, WAPP coastal transmission backbone and the CLSG. I would encourage the ECOWAS Commission to further push for these types of regional projects.

In our own neighbourhood here, The Gambia has been pursuing the realisation of the OMVG project together with Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry and Senegal. The project includes the exploitation of the river Gambia and its basin for agriculture, energy and transport purposes. The energy component of the project is at an advanced stage and when realised would not only improve electricity supply but would help greatly in bringing our respective people together.

I would also seize this opportunity to encourage ERERA to build capacity amongst member states. The fact remains that not all countries are at the same level but each country has built up some competence in one field or the other. Thus we should be able to share data and exchange national experts so

as to train each other in a cost effective manner as we aim to achieve the common regional market.

Finally, I wish to re-assure the ECOWAS Commission of The Gambia's continued support and commitment to the work of ERERA and that we would always be willing and ready to assist in any form necessary to promote our collective regional interests.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now my honour and pleasure to declare this 4<sup>th</sup> Forum of ERERA, officially opened and wish you all fruitful deliberations.