

Good morning everyone, my name is Caroline Schaap and I am the chairperson of the Foundation The Gambian Children First. Let me start by saying that I am very happy to see all of you here today. It is great to be back in The Gambia. Not only because the weather is nice here and the weather is awful in Holland, although to be honest, it does add to the joy a bit, but mainly it is great to be back because it is always a great pleasure to meet such wonderful people like all of you again.

On behalf of the board of the Gambian Children First I want to wish a very warm welcome to all who have made the effort to attend this Joint Ceremony today. This is the second time such a ceremony is taking place. I hope this one will be as successful as the first one. But looking at all of you I have full confidence that this will be the case.

I want to express a very warm welcome to the Hon. Yankuba Colley, Lord Mayor of the Kanifing Municipal Council,

Mrs Fanta Bai Secka, Executive Director of the Social Welfare Department,

Mr Wasiu Ade Bayo, Chairman of the board of directors of the National Vocational Skill Training Institutes,

And Mr
Foundation

Chief Executive Officer of the Jammeh

for joining us on this special event today. Your attendance means a lot to us.

Of course I would also like to express a most special welcome to our sponsored students. Without our students, The Gambian Children Foundation would not exist. I have had the privilege to meet several of you during last year's visit and I am happy to see you here again. For the students I did not meet in person yet, I hope to speak to you during the course of today.

Furthermore I would like to say welcome to all the parents of our sponsored students. I specifically mention the parents as it is of the utmost importance to a student to have their support. **Often parental support is key to obtain community engagement.** Without such community engagement the social pressure on a student may become difficult to handle. Students may potentially drop out early if they feel compelled to assist a member of their community in times of need. **Parental support and as a result of that community engagement is therefore mandatory for a student to increase chances of finishing their full course.**

Of course I also want to welcome **the teachers and the members of the board of our sponsored skill centers. Without them, the skill centers would not be able to operate the way they do now and the students would not get the quality education that they need.** Without quality education a diploma has only little value. Thanks to these teachers and school boards we are confident that our students get the best value possible.

And finally I want to welcome all the other people I have not mentioned before. Thank you all for joining us on this special ceremony.

I would like to take this opportunity to summarise a few of our accomplishments. **Our foundation has been able to successfully sponsor about 500 students at 6 skill centers since 2002. With an average of 2 years for each course these 500 students have received a total of 1000 years of education. During these 14 years we invested approximately 150.000 euro's in the education of eager students. As a comparison: 150.000 euro's equals approximately 7 million Dalasi's.** Our main focus is to sponsor teenage girls. According to the World Health Organisation the level of development of a country depends a great deal on the level of education. Moreover, their research has shown that **countries that have a certain level of education amongst women tend to develop much faster than countries where women have no education at all.** It is in that view that our foundation mainly focusses on sponsoring teenage girls at skill centers. Another important reason for us to focus on mainly girls is that **we strongly believe in female emancipation.** When a woman has an education, it gives her a certain level of choices and as such a certain level of freedom. **An educated woman is no longer necessarily dependent on a man.** Although I am a Nigerian by birth, I have had an European upbringing. I have received all the education I needed to be able to make my own choices in life. This has given me a certain level of independence. To me, this independence is a great gift. To all of our sponsored students I would like to say that I sincerely hope our sponsorships can attribute something, how little or how much it may be, but at least something to your independence too.

These past few years, it seems that many Gambian young men feel their options in their own country are becoming too limited. Many of those young men try to make their way to Europe hoping for a better life. Unfortunately, this often turns out to be a very expensive and dangerous endeavour. The boats that are used to cross the Sea are mostly of bad quality and many of those boats do not reach the European coasts. Many people die during their trip. This is even the case for people who are on boats that do reach the European coasts. During the crossing some people die of hunger or cold or sickness or as a result of a fight. The ones that do reach Europe are being send back by the European governments. Europe only takes refugees from war areas and The Gambia is not a war area. This makes that horrifying trip not only expensive and dangerous but in the end even pointless. Although our main focus will remain to be on the teenage girls, the board of our foundation has decided, in light of these unfortunate developments, to sponsor some extra talented teenage boys as well, starting from September 2016. We have decided this because **we strongly believe that when Gambian youth will have the opportunity to receive a vocational education, they will be able to build up their own small business, so their need to go to Europe will decrease dramatically.** We realise we are only a small foundation and we believe the best results can be booked when this also has governmental support. **We will try to raise this topic to the Dutch government when we return back home. Also, it would be good if the Gambian government could add to this as well.** Last year, the board has visited the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education. It has been a very fruitful meeting. One of the topics discussed was the need for financial governmental support for skill centers. During that discussion it became clear that the government values the skill centers a lot and that they do have intentions for the future to financially support such centers and that they had recently presented a law in which they put those values and intentions into effect. Over the

course of the coming 10 years the ambition of this law is to have put in place a financial support system for local skill centers. Considering **the impressive developments that we have noticed with the establishment of the NTA**, which was also a governmental initiative, we have full confidence that this new law will indeed bring many effective and efficient improvements for the skill centers in The Gambia. The NTA has even been so successful that they have now been transformed into a brand new governmentally supported organisation: the NAQAA. Taking this new organisational structure into account which focusses primarily on the quality and accreditation of skill centers and it's staff, in combination with the introduction of this new law, I am sure it will benefit this beautiful and highly potential country a lot. We as board members are looking forward with much anticipation to the near future developments.

Earlier this week we have been travelling to Basse and Kerewan and visited some of their skill centers. We were very impressed with what we saw and **we strongly support the establishments of quality skill centers in the rural areas**. Youth that have the opportunity to receive an quality education in their own rural areas, have less reason to migrate to the Kombo. **This will release the pressure in the Kombo and it will increase development of the rural areas**. Last year the government has expressed their ambition **to invest more in agriculture**. We were very happy to hear this, as we strongly agree that it would benefit this country enormously when it would be able to fulfil its own local needs. Now the rice is imported from Egypt and the onions are imported from Holland. For the rural skill centers this brings additional opportunities for their curriculum and for the potential students it brings opportunities to start up their small business in a new and potentially explosive grow market.

It would be lovely to come back one day and to find "made in The Gambia" on a bag of rice! And that one of the only few things that are still being imported would be the cars that drive in the various rallies. Those rallies don't only bring cars to this country, but they also bring money and goods for the benefit of various local projects. We are very lucky that our foundation is also selected as one of those projects. The coordination of these great events is being done by the **Jammeh Foundation for Peace**. They not only coordinate these events, they also contribute to their own selected local projects. We have worked with the Jammeh Foundation for years now and we are very happy with the fruitful cooperation we have with them. We are very grateful for the relationship we have created and we would like to extend this cooperation in the future.

I know there are a lot of very interesting people who would like to say a lot of interesting things as well, so I will not take up too much of our time today. But before I step down, I would really like to say a word of appreciation to some people who have been key to our success. First of all I want to thank **Mr Phoday Touray. He has been our Country representative for almost 10 years**. His work for the foundation is of great importance. He meets with the teachers, the school board members and the students on a regular basis. His findings as well as his ideas are valuable input to our board meetings and are carefully taken into account when determining the new strategy for each new school year. When teams from Antwerp-Banjul challenges arrive in Banjul, Phoday is always there to give them a warm

welcome, to take them to our skill centers and to show them around. Finally, in case of any ad hoc needs, Phoday is our man on the ground to foresee in those needs. Thank you Phoday, for all your valuable work.

Also, I would like to thank **Mrs Sidebe of Sobeya Skill center, Mr Jagne of Taku Laggaye Skill Center, Mr Krubally of Basse Insight Trainings Center, Mr Drammeh of President International Award and Mr Jobartheh of SIMMA Vocational Center** for their cooperation in achieving our ambition. We are looking forward to continue our fruitful cooperation with all of you.

Although they are not present here today, I want to thank all our donors and sponsors. Thanks to them, we have been able to put 500 students to school. Amongst the various donations, there have been a few specific project donations related to our skill centers as well, which have resulted in for instance the building of an extra classroom or the renovation of the sewage system.

And finally, thanks to all of you for joining us on this special day and I hope to see all of you again on the next ceremony. For those students amongst you who will be graduating this year I want to wish you all the best of luck with finding a nice and fulfilling job.

Thank you all!

www.gambianchildren.nl

info@gambianchildren.nl