**REMARKS BY THE COMMISSIONER GENERAL AT THE 29TH WCO-WCA CONFERENCE OF THE DIRECTORS GENERAL HELD IN BANJUL, THE GAMBIA FROM 4TH- 5TH MAY 2023**

His Excellency, the President of the Republic, Mr. Adama Barrow,

The Secretary General, World Customs Organization,

The Honorable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs,

The Vice Chairperson, World Customs Organization for West and Central Africa (WCO-WCA) Region,

The Directors General of the Various Customs Administration here present,

The Chairperson and Board of Directors of Gambia Revenue Authority,

The Management and staff of GRA,

Distinguished delegates,

Invited Guests,

Members of the media,

Good morning to you all.

It is a great honor and privilege to welcome you all to The Gambia, **‘the Smiling Coast of Africa**’. We feel greatly honored to host the **29th WCO-WCA Directors General’s Conference** in The Gambia, for the first time. I wish to seize this opportunity to warmly welcome the distinguished delegates to this important conference. We are delighted to have you in our beautiful country as we gather to discuss and share insights on the latest developments and challenges in the Customs profession in our region. We hope that you will leave with a lasting impression about The Gambia. The Gambia is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and warm hospitality.

Your Excellency, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, to organize a conference of this nature is a huge undertaking, and we appreciate all the hard work and effort that has gone into making this event a success. On behalf of the Board and Management of the Gambia Revenue Authority, I wish to express our profound gratitude to the WCO-WCA leadership for entrusting us with the privilege of hosting this important conference.

I also wish to thank His Excellency, the President of the Republic, Mr. Adama Barrow for agreeing to grace this August gathering. This goes to show the high regard he has for the Customs profession and demonstrates his recognition of the important role that we play in facilitating trade, protecting borders and ensuring the safety and security of our societies.

Your Excellency, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in the spirit of the theme of this year’s conference: **‘Nurturing the Next Generation by Promoting a Culture of Knowledge Sharing and Professional Pride in Customs’**- I would urge you all to share your innovative insights and perspectives to strengthen cooperation and foster a culture of cooperation and collaboration between our various Customs administrations. As our economies continue to integrate at regional and continental level, it has become even more necessary for us to cooperate and support one another.

At this conference, we will focus on exploring innovative ways to strengthen cooperation and collaboration among our various Customs administrations. Through collaboration, we can find innovative solutions to common problems, improve our operational efficiency, and promote greater transparency and trust between Customs and the business community.

Over the next two days, we have a packed agenda that includes presentations on a wide range of policy issues and reports of various committees, and we hope that these sessions will provide a platform for fruitful discussions, valuable networking opportunities, and new ideas and strategies that can enhance the Customs profession in our region and beyond. We hope that this conference will serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue, building lasting relationships, and advancing the Customs profession as a whole.

Over the past few years, we witnessed unprecedented challenges to the global economy caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the supply chain crisis and rising inflation. Most of our economies are yet to make a full recovery from these challenges. It is therefore essential that countries work together to find common solutions to these challenges and ensure that international trade can continue to drive economic growth and development across our region and the continent as a whole. I am confident that by working together and sharing our experiences and best practices, we can overcome these challenges and emerge stronger than ever.

Furthermore, as we advocate for more collaboration and knowledge sharing among our various Customs administration, we must also focus on nurturing the next generation of Customs officials. As we usually say, **the young are the future leaders of tomorrow**. Our young Customs officials will play a critical role in shaping the future of Customs administration in our region and Africa as a whole. We must provide them with the necessary tools and resources to succeed, including access to training and development programs, mentorship opportunities, and exposure to international best practices. By investing in the education and training of our young Customs officials, we can ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the challenges of tomorrow’s global trade environment.

Your Excellency, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me to use this platform to thank the Organizing Committee and our various stakeholders such as the Gambia Police Force, the Gambia Armed Forces, the Gambia Immigration Department, the Gambia Civil Aviation Authority, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and others for putting together the resources required to successfully host this Conference. This event would not have been possible without the collective efforts and contributions of each and every one of you. On behalf of the Board, Management and staff of The Gambia Revenue Authority, I wish to express our profound gratitude for the invaluable contributions and for going above and beyond the call of duty.

To the organizing Committee, I wish to say bravo for a brilliant job. Your tireless efforts behind the scenes, from planning and logistics to on-site support, have ensured that everything went smoothly and seamlessly. Your hard work, dedication and commitment have made this event a resounding success.

I would also like to commend the team of experts who spent long days deliberating on the WCO-WCA strategic plans and programs. We appreciate the efforts that you have put into this process. Your recommendations have been instrumental in guiding us towards more informed decision-making and have helped us to ensure that our policies and programs are aligned with our organizational goals. Your contributions will have a lasting impact in our region.

To my colleague Directors General from West and Central Africa, I want to thank you for availing yourselves for this Conference. Your presence is critical to the success of this event. I know that you all have busy schedules and that it can be challenging to take time away from your other responsibilities. Your willingness to invest your time and energy into this event is a testament to your commitment to advancing the Customs profession in our region. I believe that our collective efforts will lead to important advancement in the Customs profession, and we must heed to the theme of this Conference by nurturing the next generation to take over the baton from us. As we move into an ever-changing and fast-paced future, it is essential that we invest in the next generation and ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to tackle the challenges of tomorrow.

I thank you all for your kind attention.