The Gambia faces strong development challenges, with a per capita income of $330, a population density twice that of Senegal or Kenya, rapid loss of natural resources, and a population growth rate in excess of 4.1%. The country is a small riverine state in West Africa, bordered by Senegal on three sides, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. It has a
population of approximately 989,000 and a surface area of 4,127 Square miles. Its major natural feature is the Gambia River, which runs east/west the length of the country, or approximately 300 km.

The Republic of Gambia functions with a common law system established by the British Government in the 19th Century, which was imposed on an already extensively imbedded system of customary law. While the Gambia is not an Islamic Republic, local law is based on a Muslim tradition and still reigns supreme in many important areas of environmental law, particularly with respect to land tenure.

The Gambia was colonized by the British, who instigated a common law tradition at the national level, but came independent in 1966. Today the Gambia has a parliamentary system, containing a unicameral legislature and headed by a president. It retains the constitution it adopted on April 24, 1970 after independence.

The Gambia is in the early stage of controlling the future of its natural resources by the use of environmental laws and regulations, as well as through the use of non-regulatory incentives. The debate between regulatory and economic methods rages on in the United States, and because of the availability of U.S. funding, the debate has now been extended to the Gambia. One can only guess that a mixture of regulations and economic incentives will enhance the chances for success in a country that now appears to be strongly committed to environmental

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3 Environmental laws in the Gambia have evolved in the Anglo-American tradition. As a new nation, the Gambia does not have some of the problems of re-codification and coordination. It can also take advantage of some new trends beyond command and control, the major one being the cooperation between law and economics through programs of economic incentives written into the laws.

4 Depp, supra note 1, at 1.

5 Since the military coup in July, 22, 1994, the USAID has been forced under U.S. legislation to terminate its program of direct support for development until the country can be re-certified as meeting democratic principles due to the provisions of Section 508 of the FY 1994 Appropriations Act. However, under section 508, U.S. national interest justifies U.S. assistance through non-governmental organization (NGO) programs that address U.S. interest in the Gambia. USAID has been able to continue a limited grant to build democratic institutions and has included a small component ($32,956 of $2,088,000) for environmental activities. Id.