



**National Assembly, New Assembly Building,
Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul, The Gambia**
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
SECOND EXTRAORDINARY SESSION
FRIDAY 15TH MAY, 2020

SESSION – 2020



National Assembly, New Assembly Building,

Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul, The Gambia

P A R L I A M E N T A R Y D E B A T E S

[HANSARD]

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The Second Extraordinary Session of the Fifth Assembly
of the Second Republic of The Gambia in the 2020 Legislative Year

Proceedings of the Sitting of Friday 15th May, 2020

CONTENT:

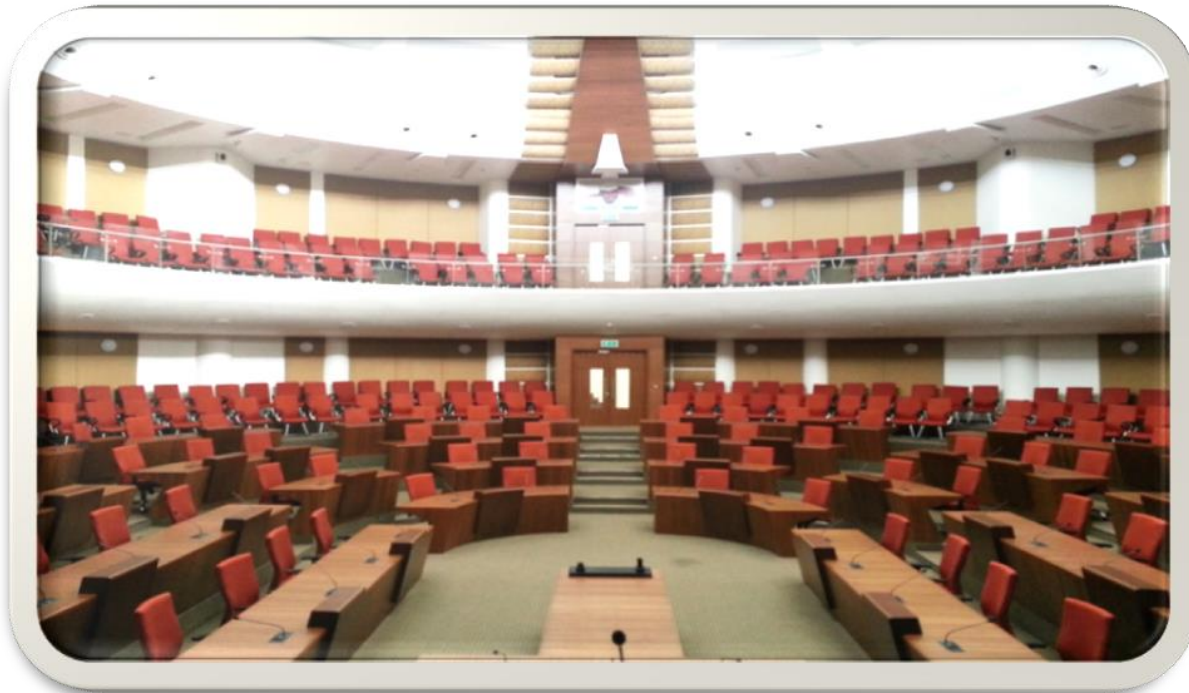
1. Prayers

2. Communications from the Chair

3. Correction and Approval of the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 6th April, 2020.

4. LAYING OF PAPERS AND REPORTS:

Report of the Special Select Committee of the National Assembly on the implementation of the State of Public Emergency [By: Hon. Alhagie Mbow, Chairperson of the Committee]



**THE CHAMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
GAMBIA
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
HOUSE**

**SECOND EXTRAORDINARY SESSION
OF THE FIFTH ASSEMBLY OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC
IN THE 2020 LEGISLATIVE YEAR**

FRIDAY 15TH MAY, 2020

1. PRAYERS:

[The Speaker, Hon. Mariam Jack Denton, Reads the Prayers].

[The House met at 10:00 a.m. in New Assembly Building, Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul].

[The Speaker, Hon. Mariam Jack Denton, in the Chair].

The House was called to Orde

2. Communication from the Chair

THE SPEAKER: Good morning Honourable Members, Honourable Ministers, members of the Press. Honourable Members, I welcome you all to the Second Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly in the 2020 Legislative Year. May I also welcome the Honourable Ministers who are here with us today: the Ministers of Justice, Fisheries, Agriculture, Finance and Trade.

Honourable Members, this sitting is summoned in pursuance to Section 98(1) (a)(i) of the 1997 Constitution, the President of the Republic signed a letter requesting the Office of the Speaker to summon a sitting of the National Assembly to consider important and urgent matters of State. The said letter has been circulated to you all for your records. Thus, the reason for the summoning of this extra session that would last for the period 15th May to 20th of May 2020.

Honourable Members, as we are all aware, the world is living in a very abnormal situation and unusual times caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic, and The Gambia is no exception. One of the reasons why this Extraordinary Session is summoned is to consider the further extension of the State of Public Emergency.

Finally, when the State of Public Emergency was extended on Friday, 3rd April 2020, the National Assembly also established a Special Select Committee to perform oversight and monitor the implementation of the State of Public Emergency. Among its mandate was to advise this Assembly whether there is a need to extend or revoke the said State of Public Emergency. Therefore, we will hear from the Special Select Committee first before we allow the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to table the Motion for the extension. Thank you all.

3. Correction and Approval of the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 6th April, 2020.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the record of votes and proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 6th April, 2020 is before us for correction and approval. Can any Honourable Member please move that the said Record of Votes and Proceedings be considered and approved?

HON. ALHAGIE DARBOE [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I rise to move that the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 6th April, 2020 be considered and approved.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, any seconder?

HON. OUSMAN TOURAY [SABACH SANJAL]: I rise to second the Motion.

[Question Proposed]

THE SPEAKER: Any issues or observations from Honourable Members? The records had earlier on been circulated. Can we take the corrections starting from page 1? Any observations or corrections on page 1? Are we all satisfied with page 1? Page 2? We move to page 3, then page 4.

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [TALLINDING KUNJANG]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. Page 4, number 53, instead of "Honourable

Foday Gassama" it is "Honourable Ya Kumba Jaiteh" because I think the last sitting, Foday was not around.

HON. ALHAGIE DARBOE [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you. Page 4, the last word "corrections" instead of "amendments."

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you. It is the same, the second or third paragraph, it is "amendments" that is put there instead of "corrections."

THE SPEAKER: Anymore on page 5? No, we move over to page 6 then.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: When you come immediately after the names, the first sentence we should look at it together. "Due to the fact indicated the motion" so, we just say "Due to the fact that the nominee..." instead of "indicated the Motion". Due to the fact indicated in the Motion.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Anymore on page 6? Page 7?

HON. ALHAGIE DARBOE [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: The last line before question put and agreed to, the Honourable Member for Brikama South seconded and spoke on the "Motion" instead of "Report", page 7.

THE SPEAKER: Page 8, No? Okay, Page 9, Page 10, Page 11.

HON. ALHAGIE DARBOE [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Motion to withdraw a Bill, Number 5, where you have Attorney General and Minister for Justice intends to "withdraw 2 Bills" instead of "withdraw."

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: It is the 5, Motion to withdraw, the second line of that paragraph it should be "that the" the definite article is not there, "the Bill entitled..." rather than just... The last paragraph also, the second line we need to put "the".

THE SPEAKER: Anymore on Page 11? We are all together on Page 11, Page 12?

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]:Page 12, under the Motion, the first paragraph, the last line at the end, "to stand adjourn" it should have an "ed" there and then the third paragraph also, the second line, Assembly to adjourn you should not put "ed" there. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Please can we all confirm the attendance?

HON. ALHAGIE DARBOE [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Number 6, the last paragraph is one line, the Honourable Member for Brikama North seconded the Motion.

THE SPEAKER: Can we all have a look at Page 3, going onto 4, the attendance to ensure that everybody's name is captured? It is okay, Thank you.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 6th April, 2020 be approved with amendments].

4. LAYING OF PAPERS AND REPORTS:

Report of the Special Select Committee of the National Assembly on the implementation of the State of Public Emergency

[By: Hon. Alhagie Mbow Chairperson of the Committee]

HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker, I rise to lay the Final Report of the Special Select Committee of the National Assembly on the Implementation of the State of Public Emergency.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 95 (5), the establishment of a Special Select Committee by the National Assembly was premised on the objective of holding the Executive to account as it delivers on its commitment to the people during the 45-day period of the State of Public Emergency that was approved by the National Assembly of The Gambia.

The mandates of the committee are to, among other things, critically securitize the regulations, monitor the effectiveness of their implementation and engage the relevant stakeholders. The committee is to ensure that the prerequisite platform is provided that would facilitate the implementation of the regulations and demand periodic updates from the Ministries, Departments and Agencies that the committee considers appropriate and integral regarding the situation and implementation of the State of Public Emergency and advise the plenary accordingly.

In the week following its establishment, the committee designed a work plan which guided its activities. Ministries, Departments, Agencies and non-stakeholders have been invited to present their activities in relation to Covid-19. Furthermore, the committee visited 38 places across the country which include ferry terminals, health facilities, markets, border posts, fish landing sites, fishmeal factories and security sectors where it gathered firsthand information on the level of implementation of the emergency powers regulations and assessed the preparedness level of the implementation or enforcement agencies in handling and controlling the spread of Covid-19 in The Gambia.

The Objectives:

The report seeks to:

1. Update the National Assembly Members on the extent to which the committee has delivered on its mandate.
2. Inform the National Assembly about the state of implementation of the regulations and their effect on the lives and livelihoods of the people and institutions in the country.

THE SPEAKER: I am being informed that Member for Banjul South raised her tag.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I am appealing to this august Assembly to just read the background, introduction and recommendations to save us time because we all have the privilege to have read the report beforehand. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, I thought of that. That was why I was consulting to have a summarized version but some other Honourable Members might feel otherwise because it is important they may want to go through it. I do not know whether everybody had an opportunity, the softcopies were sent yesterday because we could not print the whole document. They were sent to your emails and the hardcopies deposited in your pigeonholes this morning. Can we take it as read and then go straight to the recommendations or we allow him to summarize. I think it is relevant that he summarizes it before going to the conclusions, please if you can.

HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. That is exactly what my plan was, to read the summary but there are certain things that I really need to read out for people to hear. That exactly is my plan. I wanted to give the background so that we understand really how we handled the situation and what the committee actually did in terms of getting down to this document. I am not going to read everything, just the relevant areas. Thank you.

The methodology we used basically was internal committee meetings and consultations with the Ministries, Departments and Agencies. We also had consultations with the Local Government Authorities and non-stakeholders. We also made site visits. That is exactly how we did it.

During our first meetings, Madam Speaker, we put down on paper how we really wanted to handle the situation in terms of the oversight. The first thing we did was to select the Vice Chairperson of the committee, which was not done prior to

that. The committee unanimously agreed to make Honourable Dawda Kawsu Jawara the Vice Chairperson of the committee.

During the consultations with the Ministries, we met with the Ministries of Finance and Economic Affairs, Interior, Justice, Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment. The first time we met all of them, the objective basically was to make exhaustive consultations with relevant stakeholders so that by the time the committee rolls out to the field, it would be in a position to make assessment and deduce conclusions from the submissions made on the extent of implementation or other issues relating to the emergencies.

Our findings during the first meeting; the committee's findings were wide and varied and could be summarized according to each Ministry or Department. I am not going to go into details since it is part of the document. In general, what we realized was that there was lack of proper coordination and communication among the Ministries, Agencies and Departments. While we meet with the Ministries, some of them were really expecting that the Minister of Justice should give them the regulations that were affirmed. Upon further consultations, it was realized that this was gazetted and it is the responsibility of every stakeholder to ensure that you get your own copy so that you can do what you really needed to do. That was the first thing we realized.

During the consultations, we realized a few areas e.g. specifically on the state owned enterprises. We realized that state owned enterprises, particularly GIA and Gambia Civil Aviation Authority, depend a lot on these international airlines and we detected that they have the potential to lose up to D1 billion if the situation continues. They depend a lot on Hajj operations and the tourism sector for their revenue. Those two agencies really have the potential to lose up to D1 billion, according to what we gathered from the meeting with them.

Security Services: The Security Services, Madam Speaker, the Inspector General of Police as well as the Immigration really made it very clear. They are

up for the job; they want to do the job but they are also sceptical in the sense that their men do not have the proper personal protective equipment at the time of reporting. They do not have but we were made to understand that some have already been given to them. I think one can easily see why the regulations were not enforced 100% because they do not have any facemask or glove to be able to do those things.

We also met with the religious leaders: Gambia Christian Council as well as Gambia Supreme Islamic Council on how they are living and coping with these regulations. They made it very clear that they advised their congregations not to really gather together in one particular place. They are supporting the government in those areas but they thought before those regulations were in place, consultations with them would have been better so that they can give more ideas to the government in terms of the regulations that affect the opening of mosques and churches.

Madam Speaker, we also had consultations with the National Public Health Emergency Committee. The objective of establishing the National Public Health Emergency Committee is to coordinate a robust resource mobilization campaign for health emergency. We met with them and they gave us a good grasp of what they are trying to do. One area that needs to be very clear here is this: they are telling us is that if the situation continues like this in terms of social distancing, if that is not fixed right now, the country has the potential to be infected with 181,000 cases and that was very clear. They used a particular model from WHO to come up with those numbers. With those serious infections, 20% of those figures are expected to require medical attention and 5% may die. Essentially, they are telling us in terms of social distancing, the regulations or advice from the WHO, we really need to take it very seriously.

Madam Speaker, Local Government Authorities (LGA) indicated that the enforcement of the Emergency Powers Regulations would continue to pose huge challenges as the Councils that are part of the key implementing authorities have

neither been consulted nor served copy of regulations to comprehend their contents. As I said earlier, the expectation was for the Ministry of Justice to provide them with copies but because these were gazette, they were expected to get their own copies or through their line Ministry. There was consensus among the Local Government Authorities that rural Councils like Kuntaur and Basse Area Councils would be most affected because they depend a lot on LUMOs to generate revenue.

Observations: The committee observed that the government has recently announced some amendments to the emergency power regulations. Some of these include those amendments that were made and adopted at the National Assembly plenary as well as new insertions. The Minister of Justice noted and assured the committee that it would have to seek the affirmation of the National Assembly on the revised ones.

Madam Speaker, from there we went on a countrywide tour. The committee visited and inspected 2 Ferry Terminals (Banjul and Barra), 12 health facilities including the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, Serekunda General Hospital, Serekunda Clinic, Bwiam Hospital, Farafenni, Kaur, Basse and Bansang to name a few. During the course of our interventions, we also visited 2 police stations i.e. Barra and Old Yundum Police Stations to see how they are managing the enforcement of the regulations that are within their mandate.

Madam Speaker, we also visited border posts across the country. One of the key things we realized on the health area, in terms of the clinics and the hospitals, it is generally seen that to enter into the hospital you really need to do the basic things which is to wash your hands. They also have a team in each of those places except for Serekunda Clinic where you are actually seen first, in terms of washing your hands, checking your temperature and separating you from the rest of the visitors, in case your temperature is very high. We have seen that at most of the hospitals and clinics we have visited.

In fact, we have also seen that they formed special committees in all of these clinics that would handle Covid-19. We were particularly impressed by the one in Bwiam, that had Team A and Team B. Those 2 teams are separated completely, to serve or in case one team is infected, the other team can come and continue the work. We thought this was really commendable. Bwiam and Bansang have those 2 teams. Madam Speaker, what we also noticed in the hospitals and clinics that we visited is the lack of personal protective equipment. They lack those at the time of our visit. They did not have enough. Some of them have some but it was not enough and that is one of the complaints that we actually received.

Madam Speaker, talking about the hospitals and clinics that we visited in the country, most of them have holding centres. The borders as well have holding centres and these are the ones that were built during the time of Ebola and they are using them but we realized that not all of them are well equipped in terms of water and electricity. Those things really need to be looked at properly. We continued and also visited some fish landing sites and Gambia Ports Authority as well, which we are going to highlight in the report.

To look at the finances, during our consultations with the Ministers of Health and Finance, we have realized that a good amount of money (D500 million) was put aside for the fight of this Covid-19. It is important to note, Madam Speaker, that almost D720 million will actually be spent in terms of medical equipment, personal protective equipment and other things relating to health. Remember, the President of the Republic put aside D500 million towards the fight of Covid-19 and the Minister of Finance was also able to put together another \$10 million from the World Bank. D500 million direct from the World Bank and the other D500 million came from another project from the World Bank making it \$10. The Government of The Gambia added another D100 million which is equal to \$2 million. Essentially, \$12 million has been spent.

We requested for the breakdown on each item but we were clearly told that the World Bank fund was towards the procurement of ambulances and other medical

equipment from Turkey. The total bill of the Ministry of Health for that purpose was \$12 million and that \$12 million was already done. \$10 million which is equivalent to almost D1 billion and an additional D100 million came from the government of The Gambia. Essentially, you can say that more than 85% of the monies that we received from the World Bank and government of The Gambia have been spent on medical and personal protective equipment, including ambulances. I wanted this figure to be very clear.

Findings and Recommendations: Right now, I will just go straight to our findings and recommendations because I think by now you have a gist of what we were doing. I want to highlight one particular area which is under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. The Minister for Tourism indicated that the fate of the country's tourism sector depends on what obtains in source or Western countries where tourists would come from after the pandemic. If you look at the Appendix, I have given you some other additional documents on the Appendix, especially the one called Covid-19 in The Gambia - A Rapid Assessment of the Impact of the Covid-19 on the tourism and related sectors done by the Gambia Bureau of Statistic (GBoS). If you look at the impact, according to the study by GBoS, the closure of business operations will invariably have various forms of impact on the establishment, mostly economic losses. It was in the interest of data collection to have a forecast of financial losses that the establishment envisages to incur during the month of April to June. An overall amount of D6.7 billion was reported by all establishments as forecast of losses during the period under review. This is about the tourism sector.

The reason why I am bringing this up, Madam Speaker, is the fact that 30% of our GDP comes from the tourism industry. If they do not do well, it means nationally our revenue will really be affected. With this D6.7 billion on the tourism sector, D6.4 billion is the amount that is related to hotels. Then you have the lodges, the eco-lodges as well as the restaurants. They have about D33.8

million losses. Beach bars, tour operators, etc. In total, the estimated losses from the tourism sector is about D6.4 billion.

Madam Speaker, The Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Allied Sector also indicated the same figures here. In terms of asking for assistance from the government, their contribution to the revenue base of the government is very clear in term of corporate tax, PAYE, VAT and Municipal Rate. They contribute a total of D1.4 billion. The contribution of the tourism sector is D1.4 billion in terms of revenue to the coffers of the government of The Gambia. In totality, according to these two stories we have, they have the potential to lose almost D6.7 billion and then they clearly need some assistance from the government of The Gambia.

Procurement: The Gambia Public Procurement Authority (GPPA), in our engagement with them, indicated that the Act that they have does not make provision for a clear-cut procedure as regards procurement during emergencies. It said the law only caters for direct or single sources which it said has implications and could lead to over-pricing of invoices.

The Authorities noted that since the Act is not explicit, there is bound to be discretionary actions which could be counterproductive. The GPPA acknowledged that the response to Covid-19 has to compromise certain key principles of procurement which under normal circumstances must have to be adhered to at all times. These include: value for money, shared opportunity, transparency, accountability and following the due process. When such compromises are being made, the Authority was concerned that it could as well lead to unreported procurement.

The authority reported that it is currently working with the World Bank to digitalize its operation procedures, developing an E-procurement system through which all the procurement processes would be done.

Madam Speaker, before I come to the conclusion, due to time, we were unable to complete certain areas. We really wanted to meet with the Ministry of Basic

and Secondary Education (MoBSE). We wanted to also meet with the Ministry of Higher Education, NAQAA and the Minister of Trade for the third time, if I may say. However, due to time, we could not meet with them to give you more information about the education part of it.

Conclusions: It has been observed that social/physical distancing, as directed by the regulations, is generally not observed at markets, beaches and other public places across the country. This can either be attributed to a general disregard by members of the public and weak or non-enforcement by the enforcement authorities i.e. the Councils and the security sector. It was also observed that the borders are porous and in some instances like Panchang, they are open. It was also observed that the borders are porous and as such, people continue to illegally enter the country without notice and being quarantined.

Recommendations:

In the recommendations, Madam Speaker, we separated them based on Ministry but you are going to see that sometimes two Ministries may actually have the same issue.

Ministry Of Justice: The committee here presents the following recommendations by sector:

1. A regulation to be in place to make it an offence for anyone, transport driver or compound owner, who assists any unauthorized traveller to enter the country or harbors any visitor or guest from abroad in his/her compound without notifying the health authority. We want to have such a regulation for that.
2. A regulation making it an offence for anybody who enters the country and refused to quarantine or refuses to report to appropriate health authorities for mandatory quarantine. All such illegal entrants shall bear the costs associated with their quarantine.

Security: The closure of all borders must be fully enforced with the deployment of the armed and security forces. The army should be used to reinforce the regional taskforces in the implementation of the regulations. The Ministry of Interior in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to ensure that the quarantine and isolation centres are off-bound to visitors 24/7.

The Ministry of Interior should be equipped with more vehicles and communication equipment to allow them to go to any part of the country to enforce these regulations. They need to deploy the Navy to sea immediately, to curb illegal entry to the country and to ensure that foreign fishermen do not dock on Gambian shores without being subjected to mandatory health checks and quarantine. We are suggesting that the Navy should endeavor to stay at sea 24/7 with periodic shifts to ensure their own personal wellbeing.

Ministry of Finance: The Ministry of Finance may need to revise the 2020 Budget to give more support to the operation and activities of the Minister of Health in the fight against Covid-19. The Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the Central Bank to facilitate the acquisition of foreign exchange for importers to continue importation of goods into the country. The government should engage state owned enterprises, Local Government Authorities as well as the private sector, especially tourism, to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on their businesses. This will allow continuity of the essential services provided by these institutions.

There is the need to holistically review the Public Finance Act, 2014 to ensure that laws that contravene the Constitution are corrected and at the same time formulate other laws within the Act that would be in line with best practices in Public Finance Management.

The committee strongly recommends the creation of a Contingency Fund through an Act of Parliament that will appropriate certain amounts of money to be used with very clear guidelines during emergencies like natural disasters, epidemics and pandemics.

Ministry of Local Government: The Ministry of Land, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, in collaboration with LGAs should come up with a financial strategy that would keep the Councils in operation. There is a need for the Local Government Authorities and Market Committees throughout the country to find ways to decongest the markets so that social/physical distancing can be observed. To do this, we recommend that all those without canteens or tables inside the market as well as vendors in the streets be moved to designated areas that will be clearly demarcated for each vendor to sell during the opening hours. For The Regulation on Open Market and Shopping Areas Emergency Power, we recommend the following:

To decongest the markets through the recommendations mentioned earlier and then increase the opening time as follow;

1. All markets to be open from 6:00am to 4:00pm daily. We are making this recommendation based on 100% enforcement of the regulations.
2. The local Government Authority to fumigate the markets on a daily basis from 5:00pm to 6:00pm and mandatory facemask to be worn by everyone selling or entering the markets.

Ministry of Health: All health facilities and points of entry be equipped with infrared thermometers for temperature checks. Incinerators should be provided in all facilities to ensure proper management and disposal of medical waste.

The health and enforcement authorities to design a consistent and standardized format that would be used to collect detailed personal information of individuals entering the country and in all facilities across the country, for the purpose of easy contact tracing. Makeshift tents to be provided at all border entry points, which was also recommended by the Health Committee earlier, as first point of contact for all incoming people and shall supervise all hands washing, temperature checks and screening before new entrants interact with any security officers.

The fact that epidemics and pandemics are on the rise globally, we recommend the building of well-equipped and well-resourced permanent treatment centres in all regions as well as isolation centres at all border posts to better prepare for the future.

The Minister of Health, in collaboration with the Gambia Standards Bureau, to initiate the production of standardized reusable local facemasks for nationwide distribution and for the regulations to make it mandatory to wear them in public. The Ministry of Health and stakeholders to engage in regular disinfection of markets and other public places across the country.

The Minister of Health should come up with a training plan for all doctors and nurses and expedite trainings to ensure that there is enough manpower to handle any potential surge in infected people.

Ministry of Trade: The Ministry of Trade must be in constant touch with the importers to ascertain that essential foods are in stock. There must be a weekly confirmation with verifiable data.

The Ministry of Trade, in collaboration with Ministries of Agriculture and Finance, should come up with mechanisms on how to handle the perishable goods that are being produced by the women gardeners across the country.

Ministry of Fisheries: The Ministry of Fisheries, in collaboration with the Taskforce Committee at the landing sites should ensure that all foreign boats that dock on the shores of the country are impounded and persons onboard be subjected to the necessary health checks and mandatory quarantine. Places should be identified and designated fish landing sites, different from the seaside, for fish vendors to sell their fish. This is to create enough space where social distancing can be observed. Additionally, we strongly recommend that all sellers use facemasks during the entire time they are in those places.

Madam Speaker, still on fisheries, although the fishmeal factories claimed to have scaled down production thereby reducing crowds and public interactions, the evidence on the ground shows total disregard for social distancing and high risk of spreading the virus. We therefore strongly recommend that the fishmeal factories be temporarily closed during this pandemic to avoid large crowds gathering to pick fish from the boats to supply the factories.

Resolutions: Cognisant of the fact that Covid-19 cases continue to rise in neighbouring Senegal that has 2189 cases with 23 deaths;

Having considered the steady increase in the number of infected cases in The Gambia, most of whom are either from or traced to our immediate neighbour, 23 confirmed cases as we speak;

Noting the apparent under-resourced medical facilities across the country as well as inadequate supply of personal protective equipment to frontline health workers to enforce the regulations;

Aware of the fact that the Ministry of Health is yet to be in receipt of the medical equipment that were procured for the fight against Covid-19;

Aware of the ill-equipped and under-resourced state of holding/isolation centres as well as the lack of treatment centres across the country;

Considering the fact that a lot of people in The Gambia continue to live in denial of the existence of Covid-19 and as such grossly disregard social distancing or any measure at public places and the markets;

The committee hereby resolves that the State of Public Emergency be extended to a further 21 days subject to strict adherence to the implementation of all state of public emergency regulations.

The committee further resolves that this august Assembly recognizes the relentless services of the health workers of the country, the contribution and support of the Medical Research Council – The Gambia (MRC), the invaluable

support of the World Health Organization during this period, the contribution of the private sector, particularly the GCCI and its entire membership, TAF Housing and Global, the Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly and that of the Speaker who continue to check on us periodically to find out if we are safe. We want to also extend our sincere thanks to the government of The Gambia for what they provided so far to fight this pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank each and every one and to also remind you that there are 5 additional Appendices that that have good information that you can make reference to during your interventions. On that note, I want to thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Also in addition to the last few sentences that you have added to your report, make sure that it is recorded. Thank you very much. Any seconder?

HON. MOMODOU CAMARA [FONI BINTANG]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I rise to second the Motion and I would like to buttress on the report of the Special Select Committee. Madam Speaker, let me first thank the Special Select Committee for coming up with a very good report within this limited time. I think the main focus or objective of the state of emergency is to curb or contain the Covid-19. I think the first 45 days we approved here, the main reason why we approved it was for the government to come up with a relief package and other things.

Madam Speaker, I think you have seen in the report that there is no coordination between the Ministries and Agencies. If that happens, I do not think we will have the result we need. I think there should be proper coordination between the Ministries and the Agencies. That will help us a lot to control this Covid-19.

Madam Speaker, in their report also, they said that Health Ministry said that if social distancing is not observed, we may have around 181,000 people infected. Madam Speaker, that is a very serious thing and I think it is said 5% of that will

die. I think this is a very serious thing and we need to see what best we can do to ensure that the Covid-19 pandemic is curbed in The Gambia.

Madam Speaker, I think the enforcement is the main issue that is lacking here. Government needs to make sure that the enforcement is done properly. I think the enforcement is only on one side i.e. the mosques, churches and schools but you have seen the markets. The transport itself, commercial transport, even the private and government vehicles, sometimes you have seen they are not adhering to this social distancing. The government needs to make sure that the enforcement is adhered to.

Madam Speaker, he talked about the porous borders. In my constituency also, I have my entire Constituency bordered with Senegal. Madam Speaker, really the borders are very porous. Every day, they are in The Gambia and we know the infection in Senegal. Some of the people here who are infected with corona virus are from Senegal. If the borders are not well secured, I think we will have more corona virus cases in The Gambia than even in Senegal. I think the government should look at this properly.

Madam Speaker, I think the committee had done a very good job and given us some of the recommendations especially they said the state of public emergency to be extended to 21 days. Madam Speaker, when I came in the morning, my intention was not to even add a single day to it. Honestly, but with this report, I am convinced. I now support the 21 days of the committee. Honestly, my people told me that they would rather die of Covid-19 than hunger. This report is a very good report and as far as we assigned them to do a job for us and they have done a good job, I really support the 21 days. They said it very clearly, 21 days subject to strict adherence so the government should also consider this very well.

And you know that these regulations, Madam Speaker, have restricted people's movement so people are not earning up to what they expected. Madam Speaker,

we should consider one thing also, electricity and water is one of the most important things in human life. In this Covid-19, they said we should wash our hands but now sometimes you go up to a day without water and this is very important. NAWEC and the government should look at this. If they can help the citizenry, it is necessary because our earnings now are very low. To look at how they can subsidise NAWEC, to help people pay their NAWEC bills.

Madam Speaker, rent also. Every tenant is complaining that they cannot pay their rent. Some of the landlords also depend on this rent to feed their families. It is a problem and I think the Ministry or the government has to look at this very well. Madam Speaker, on that note I support the 21 days by the Special Select Committee and I thank them very well for coming up with this important and straightforward report. Thank you very much.

[Question Proposed]

THE SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the this Honourable Assembly do consider the report of the Special Select Committee of the National Assembly on the implementation of the state of public emergency.

Those in favour please say "Aye". Those not in favour please say "No". The "Ayes" have it, thank you.

Now any Honourable Member who wishes to take part in the debate may do so. The Constituency Tags have already been raised and I will go by my list that has been provided by the Table Office.

HON. MUHAMMED MAHANERA [SANDU]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. First of all, I want to register my sincere gratitude to the Special Select Committee on Covid-19 for the wonderful job that they have done and also to recognize the compliance of the Ministries who are direct stakeholders in this. Madam Speaker, as alluded to by other Honourable

Members who took the floor, I just want to look into the recommendations that were made by the committee.

Madam Speaker, I will start with the Local Government Authorities. In the recommendations, the Member stated "All markets to open from 6:00am to 4:00pm daily". Madam Speaker, the implementation of the state of emergency regulations to all those who are from the rural areas, we have registered lot of disparities as to what is happening here in the urban areas compared to what is happening in the rural areas.

Madam Speaker, some markets were allowed to open in the urban areas while the local markets that we have in our areas are all closed. If the committee is coming with a recommendation where social and physical distancing will be observed, I believe they can also extend the same regulations of physical and social distancing in some parts of rural Gambia where they have their local LUMOs. If you look at it Madam Speaker, the government has tried to provide food for these people but before it comes, it is a little bit late. Most of these people are farmers. They depend on their produce and livestock. The only place where they can sell this livestock is the LUMOs. If you want to transport, let us say, a sheep or goat from Sandu up to Abuko, Madam Speaker, what you will spend on the way coming, if you come and sell you will not even have a profit. I am urging the government to please consider the Local Government Authorities, to see what they can do for those people. They can also see whether what is implementable in the Kombos here can also be implemented in that area.

Madam Speaker, still on Local Government Authorities together with agriculture, the mover of the motion stated that there are a lot of goods like onion, potatoes that our farmer are engaged in which are perishable. The last time I engaged some women in Sandu, some of them ever since they said Covid-19, they stopped going to their gardens. Right now, what they would depend on? It is the produce from their gardens that they will go and sell. Those produce also, you can never sell them anywhere because they are not in large quantities that you

can export. You can only take them in a bowl, go to the LUMOs, sell them and come back to feed your family. If those places are closed, they do not have any means. Government has tried to give them rice, sugar and oil but you cannot eat the rice alone, there must be something. They can only get those ones when they sell their produce to get some cash and they will be able to feed their families.

The enforcement of the regulations, Madam Speaker, there was a scenario in my area. The woman that you share the same bed with is sick. There we do not have taxis, means of transportation is very difficult. You cannot carry the same woman on a motorcycle to take her to the hospital. The saddest thing is, if you are seen, the police officers will chase you. Two police officers will be sharing one motorcycle and you and your wife cannot share the same motorcycle. It is funny because it happened; two police officers were on a motorcycle riding chasing somebody who is carrying his wife to a hospital. The regulations say one person to a motorcycle but two police officers to a motorcycle is not fair. Definitely, this is a challenge in that area.

For example, somebody is sick in Sandu where we do not have a Major Health Centre. The only Major Health Centre we have is in Basse. How will you leave your wife or child on a sick bed, you cannot carry the person? You do not have a motor vehicle and there is no taxi. Most of the routes are one-way. Early morning, when the vehicles leave Diabugu, they go to Basse. They would not come until 6:00pm. You have somebody on a sick bed, how would you transport that person to Basse or to the nearest health centre when the police are everywhere monitoring? Two people should not be on one motorcycle but two police officers can be on one motorcycle? Madam Speaker, this is a concern. Definitely, I do not know whether the Ministry of Health, together with Interior, will go into these and look at it thoroughly to help our people so that there is at least equity in the implementation of these regulations.

In Kombo here, we are seeing the markets. People are going on their daily business. Even right now, people have started with this "*Wanterr*" but when you go to the provinces, you will not see any market open. All the markets are closed. The only market you have is Basse and Honourable Magassy can bear witness that even in Basse, the space there is not enough for the people of Basse talk less of people who are coming from Wuli and Sandu to come and spread their mats to sell their goods. This is definitely a concern/constraint for our people.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Trade definitely is our Ministry. They are trying a lot in terms of promoting business in this country. There is one thing that come up in the regulations. There was a moratorium on importation of onion and potatoes. Madam Speaker, to my surprise, I do not know how it came about but government has given an order to someone who is importing while MA Kharafi has a lot of food in stock.

If you are encouraging or promoting local trade, I think we should give them that opportunity to push whatever they have in stock into the market and even go further to engage our local farmers in the provinces who are producing onions and potatoes, to encourage them so that government will buy from them. They will also have something for their families.

With that Madam Speaker, we all know that if the Covid-19 cases are 100%, we can say 98% are imported. That being the case, I think we need to look at our borders, how we can control the movement of people from one region to another or from one country to the other. Definitely, we know that the Covid-19 pandemic is worldwide. Madam Speaker, it is something that we do not need to joke with. If you look at our health system, we do not have that much technology in our health system that will able to contain this virus. What we can only do is to help and educate our people that the virus is real and let them have the belief.

Some people will just say government is looking for funds. Let government look for funds. The funds are still coming into this country but the health of our people is our major concern. If they do not understand and we understood that it kills and when it spreads to stop it is not going to be easy, then the best thing is to go back again and sensitize our people. Let them have the belief that this virus is real. If not, you will be working toward somebody's health and the person is considering you or your effort as useless.

Definitely Madam Speaker, with that I am in support of the 21 days because it falls in our next session i.e. June. The 21 days will go up to that. Maybe if we do not see what we expect, we can revoke the extension. We all know that this is the second extra ordinary session. After that, we can never meet again until maybe next session but since the 21 days fall into that, I think it is a good recommendation from the committee. I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, may I just appeal that we have about 30 Honourable Members who want to intervene. The way Table Office recorded it, if I am to go by the list like this, we just concentrate on the sides. Everybody raises his or her tag at the same time so I would be juxtaposing from here to there so that everybody will have an opportunity at least from both sides. Let us just be straight to the point and precise and know that we are debating the report. If you can link the interventions to the report, I think it will help to expedite the proceedings.

HON. SAINÉY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the floor. I will also join my colleagues to thank the Special Select Committee of the National Assembly on the Implementation of the State of Public Emergency.

Madam Speaker, you will agree with me that this committee has done a tremendously good job, taking into account the issues surrounding Covid-19. They have taken a risk Madam Speaker, in convening meetings basically to

address issues bordering on the pandemic and I want to thank them for a job well-done.

Madam Speaker, the essence of easing regulations/restrictions is geared towards alleviating the suffering of our masses and I think the Special Select Committee have done that. Madam Speaker, that notwithstanding, the restrictions have their own side effects as well. They have their ups and downs. Madam Speaker, a vast number of constituents are affected as a result of these emergency measures. I think we must all put on our thinking caps to ensure how to alleviate their suffering. The essence of our being here is to wipe their tears. That is the long and short of our being here as people who are representing their constituents.

Madam Speaker, I have some problems with some of the regulations that were enforced. There is a problem in the mode of enforcement. If you say social distancing or physical distancing, Madam Speaker, it is not observed in certain places. For example, if you go to our markets, there is hardly an element of social or physical distancing being practised. Madam Speaker, if you go to our ferry terminals, people are crammed into the ferry I am cognisant of the fact that the authorities have reduced the number to half but if you look at the passengers on board the ferry, you tend to wonder whether the regulations are given any regard.

Madam Speaker, these restrictions have a lot of casualties. One of them has to do with our religion. Coming to a month now, the mosques and churches have been deserted basically, during the restrictions. I would urge the Special Select Committee or this august body to please have a look at some of these restrictions. If some of them can be eased, I think it is high time for us to ease them especially when you come to the issue of religion. Madam Speaker, it goes without saying that religion is the opium of the society. It is very key to our existence.

If markets and ferry terminals are allowed to be congested either by design or by default, I want to suggest, humbly, that we consider our religious places like the mosques and churches. Doing that, Madam Speaker, will serve as a very good measure. I believe fervently when we go to our churches or mosques and pray before the Almighty God that is another way of lessening the pandemic. That is my desired opinion.

Madam Speaker, the suffering of our people must be considered beyond all reasonable doubts. The amount of money that people who are here and are commuters travelling to the provinces are charged to pay, Madam Speaker, is quite exorbitant. Some are forced to pay double fares. I have confirmed this because I took it upon myself and went to one of the garages just to know what obtains there. Believe me, some of the passengers that were bound for my constituency were not happy. I think there is the need for us to look into this very closely because it is not fair. The regulations/restrictions, Madam Speaker, are meant to lessen the suffering of our people and they are also here to help in assuaging the suffering of our people. That is the alpha and omega of our being here. If that is defeated, Madam Speaker, then there is a problem.

The regulations were even violated by people who are highly placed. I can tell you that people who are highly placed violated the regulations and that is not sending a good signal. They say charity begins at home, we expect those who are highly placed to observe and respect, in total, the regulations that we have passed here in this august Assembly. Madam Speaker, you do not expect a lawmaker to be a law breaker. That is quite unfathomable. We must make sure that we respect the regulations in total.

What is very important, Madam Speaker, is the plight of our people. What is very key is how these regulations/restrictions are being felt by our people. If you look at the wider picture you will know that, some of our people are not happy with some of these regulations in place because some of them live from hand to mouth. Some of them are menial labourers. If they go to the market, they sell

their wares; that is what they use to feed their family. That is what they use to eat out a living. If the restrictions are there to serve as a barrier for them to get their livelihood, I think we should give it a second thought. That is very key.

Madam Speaker, having said that, the 21 days is very good but do we have what it takes to enforce these regulations to the letter? That is the million-dollar question. Do we have what it takes in terms of human and material resources? If laws are printed in letters of gold and they are not enforced, Madam Speaker, they are...no existence. If laws are printed in letters of gold and they are not enforced to the letter, they are as futile as they are nonexistent. I think we have to think about that also because that is very key. The essence of these emergency powers is to save our people from contracting this deadly corona virus but from the look of things most people are not in the habit of respecting the regulations. Madam Speaker, I think we should be very cognisant of that.

Madam Speaker, I think the 21 days is on the high side. What I would suggest, if at all we can prevail on our people to embark on mass sensitization and advise them to stick to WHO standards i.e. by regularly washing their hands and maintaining social distance. Also to know how to sneeze, when to sneeze and where to sneeze. I think that will help a lot, some they do not know when and how to sneeze....*[laughter]*.

I think that will help a lot, Madam Speaker. That being the case, Madam Speaker, I think we should not go in for the 21 days because it is going to multiply the suffering of our people. Honestly speaking, the long and short of our being here is only to transform the fantasies of our people into realities. If they are feeling the pinch, we should be there to assist them, to assuage the suffering that they are going through. Believe me, if you go to my constituency (Jarra East), there are some households that are living in abject poverty and that is across the entire Gambia, in the provinces. They find it very difficult to put food on the table because of the restrictions. I have gone there and seen it with my naked eyes. This an eyewitness account, it is not hearsay, and I was on the

ground. I sympathize with some of them and equally empathise with them but there is little I could do. I think their plight must be put into consideration.

As head of a household, you wake up in the morning thinking that you will go to the market to sell your produce but you cannot do it because of the regulations in place and there is no one that will come to your aid. I am not oblivious of the food that the government had rolled out or is about to roll out and I know it is better late than never. I must commend the government for having the initiative or foresight to assuage the plight of Gambians. I must commend them for a job well done even though it is better late than never. I think there is a need for us to put in place mechanisms as to how to distribute these food items.

Madam Speaker, the trickle-down effect must always be felt. If that is not felt, the beneficiaries will find themselves at the receiving end of suffering and may God forbid, if that happens, the whole palliative measure is going to be defeated. No one is praying for the multiplication of this Covid-19. We are all united in dedication, diversity, solidarity but also in adversity. It is the nation is in crisis, it is the nation that is wearing the same thinking cap although our thinking might defer. That does not mean that Mr X or Mr Y does not wish well for the country. We can have divergent opinions but no matter the divergent opinions, the health of our people is very paramount, Madam Speaker. If you observe WHO standards: hand washing regularly and thoroughly, fumigating our environment, observing social and physical distancing and decongesting private places, Madam Speaker, this Covid-19 will be given a heavy blow. Unless we do that, it will be very difficult for it to be kept at bay. The only panacea to keep this thing at bay is to observe WHO guidelines thoroughly and also observe social or physical distancing. With that, Madam Speaker, there is the tendency for this disease to be defeated.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, I would urge all Gambians to remain committed, to be united in solidarity, dedication and commitment. That is the only way Covid-19 could be kept at bay. We must all focus on the same thing and make sure

that the powers that be are also not found wanting in terms of violating these said restrictions that are in place.

Madam Speaker if a man in the street violates a regulation; that would not make much attention but if a highly placed individual violates it will amount to an egregious violation because you have the enlightenment and awareness but still you violate. That is quite egregious. We should not allow that; we must be examples, we must be pacesetters so that you will serve as role models for all those progress aspirants. With these remarks, Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Special Select Committee. You are indeed special because you served in a special moment. Thank you.

HON. MAHTARR M. JENG [LOWER NIUMI]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. I want to make observations on the works of the taskforce to highlight some of the constraints that would not be possible unless and until they are addressed by the body that is responsible for the operations of the implementation.

If you go to the recommendations, Page 34,Securities: "There is need to deploy the Navy to sea immediately to curb illegal entry into the country and to ensure foreign fishermen do not dock without being subjected to mandatory health checks and quarantine". For the Navy to stay at sea for 24 hours is not possible because the Navy is not well equipped. They do not have the resources to do that. We are witnesses by virtue of our settlements to these constraints that the Navy is facing and unless and until this area is addressed, we should rule out the possibility that the navy would be able to stay at sea 24/7. They do not have the boats, even if they have the boats, they do not have the fuel. A good number of the...***broken recording...***

Thank you very much Madam Speaker, once again. As I was saying, the Navy is not that equipped to go on that surveillance or to go on that patrol for that period because of the constraints of not having enough fuel to enable them to do

that. A good number of the smuggling taking place is by boats that will load in Banjul as if they are heading to Barra and would head straight to Senegal. In most cases it is the Senegalese that do apprehend such boats.

The other aspect I want to observe in the report is social distancing. Old habits die hard and it is our culture that we get close to each other by virtue of the fact that, that is how we have been brought up. To bring us a regulation to tell us it is because of this that we would ask you to stay away because of the possibility...

Madam Speaker I am not ready, the mic went off. As I was saying, it is going to be very hard. It would need a lot of sensitization for our people to appreciate, understand and accept that social distancing is fundamental in this case but that is lacking. Where we have the security forces that are implementing most of these measures, instead of talking to people, they use brute force. You will be surprised to know that our security forces are still using brute force. You found people sitting, as this happened in Jokadu, alight from the vehicle, go and tell them this is not allowed. You should sit aside at a distance or so. Instead, you just alight from the vehicle and start lynching them. That is too much. You know people would not even appreciate it, then the blame goes to the government. This is how the government is handling this when actually it is not the wish of the government to do it that way. As the implementing body, it would be better if the Ministry of Interior is out to tell its personnel to approach people with civility rather being very brutal to them.

Madam Speaker the extension, as proposed by the taskforce, is adding salt to injury. Our people are suffering and their sufferance is going to be impounded by any additional one day on top of these 45 days that we had passed. For the past 45 days, nothing had come to the people. The rice that is said to be distributed, we still have it in stock for the past 45 days. Some have gone to the extent of using the seeds that they intend to plant for the raining reason and we are requesting for extension. Our people do not and would not appreciate that. They

could take it without any alternative but they would not. I am sure when we go out our people will tell us what you have done is not fair, is not right. Thank you very much Madam Speaker.

HON. NDEY YASSIN SECKA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I will start by applauding the committee for this job because this is what we are expecting from them. Maybe the other thing you did not put on your recommendations is the sensitization to the public which is very essential. Some people do not still believe that this deadly disease is prevailing and we really have to make sure that we talk about it. If you go to the radios now, every radio station you go to, you hear lessons. I think those lessons for schools is the same thing that should happen to train people to know or sensitize them to know. We need to train some people on how to sensitize people because if you go outside and talk about it, some will even say no, this disease is not true.

The other thing is that Gambians have been suffering since time immemorial, when you knew that there was no corona virus up to this time. What about if we happen to be struggling since time immemorial up to this crying situation, what do you think? It will continue and this is what is happening. I think, as National Assembly, we should come on board to let our people know that this is what is happening. We should work together as one for the betterment of our nation, this is a deadly disease.

I am asking, is it that if we forget about this state of emergency, are we creating more deaths? It is either this way or that way and this is the situation. We have to be as reasonable as possible. We have to come together and put all hands on deck to tell everybody what to do, including ourselves as National Assembly Members. We should really make sure that we enforce this, at least these 21 days. The last 45 days, whatever you say they will tell you, you are at your National Assembly and you do not know the situation. I know the situation, I know what is happening since time immemorial.

Since in the 60s up to now, Gambians are struggling. There is nothing that can make Gambians happy, much more in this situation. We are in a different situation. Rather than saying that, it is true Gambians are really struggling. Even the National Assembly Members are struggling. What of if we have our salaries and everybody comes and we are supposed to give them what we have. How are we going to manage?

These are things that we really have to put onboard. We have to sensitize our people, we have to let them know that this is a deadly disease and it is ready to kill us. Who knows when we will die? Do we know if we are going to be infected with this disease? I think we should be realistic to ourselves and tell our people that this is deadly and we come up with a very robust sensitization. Let our people know and let government put their hands on deck to make sure that people have what they are supposed to get. Let this state of emergency be enforced, thank you.

HON. OUSMAN TOURAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the committee for a job well done. However, I have some observations on the report, especially on the recommendations. I want to believe that some of the recommendations were part of the Ministry of Health's Strategic Plan and they are coming up with those as another recommendation. I do not know whether it is implemented or not. That is what I observed first.

Secondly, I was also expecting to see that if they see a gap in the implementation of the regulations, they should come up with a recommendation to manage that problem but that is not forthcoming in the report as well. Looking at the report, if you look at the health officers, the frontline workers, nothing is being said about them and we all know that they are really at a very risky position. I was expecting that they will talk something about them so that people will know their situation and how they are handling this problem. That is

not featured in the recommendations. I want to remind them that that is also important.

The social distancing issue, in fact, I will just say the regulations in general; Madam Speaker, let us call a spade a spade. Gambians are human beings like any other human being in the world. If you look at the entire world, this problem affects everywhere and people put regulations to manage the pandemic. The behaviour and attitude of Gambians toward these regulations was very bad. That is the hard fact, Madam Speaker.

If you look at our markets, some regulations were made just to make sure that people are not infected but people are not even adhering to that. Nobody is observing this, the closing and opening times of the market were not enforced so we have a problem and that is enforcement. I want to believe that government or the Parliament did not do this to make people suffer. This is made to protect people from a deadly or a very serious pandemic which is going round the world. If people understand that, I think they should really comply with the regulations that go along with the emergency but this is not happening, Madam Speaker. I am hearing people saying extending it for another day will cause another problem.

What difference does it make with the activities of the people? Looking at what was happening, what difference does it make? The regulations were there but nobody adhere to them so you cannot tell me that it is because of the regulations that people do not have what to eat. People were going to the markets doing their daily activities as usual. It seems as if we are in a normal situation. Let us be factual, that is the fact in this country. If you go to any market, this is how people behave so we cannot hide behind these regulations and say that people are suffering because of the emergency. I am not a party to that. What I want to say Madam Speaker, is just short because most of what I wanted to say have been said by many people. If we remain complacent about this disease, we do not know what will happen because WHO reports indicate

that the peak period for The Gambia is June. We do not know what will happen before June; we do not know what will happen in June. If we think we are okay and we feel complacent and do not put any mechanism to control this, when it comes, Gambia could not handle this. In the first place, we do not have the places to harbour all these people. We do not have the materials, we do not have the human power. It is better that we prevent before we go to that level. That is my take on that.

Madam Speaker, if you look at the recommendations or resolution, I see no point in closing the mosques. The mosques are closed and the markets are left open like that. People spend more time in the markets than in the mosques. The people meet in the mosque periodically, five times a day and at a very short period for each meeting. You could not allow the markets to be operating like that and enforcing the regulations on the mosques. That one is really a problem for me and I will like to seize this opportunity to implore this Parliament to look into the issues of the mosques. If it is to be enforced or continue to be closed, the markets should also be closed like the mosques.

Closing the markets does not mean that the markets will be closed entirely but people must observe social distancing. People must also know that this is not a place to sit. You just come and transact your business and go. People are not doing that. If you apply the same thing at the mosques: provide the hand washing materials and sanitizers, people can pray. This is the problem. I would rather attach myself to their recommendations for the 21-days extension or even more. Even when we make it more, if the need is not there, Parliament can just revoke that or the President can revoke that through a Gazette. I think that is not a problem.

My problem is the regulations, not the period of the emergency. The regulations, how the country is to be governed in that period, is the most important thing for me. Madam Speaker, until we come to the next item, I beg to take my seat.

HON. MUSA AMUL NYASSI [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I just want to say that it is important that the Special Select Committee have done their job and presented the report before plenary which we are looking at and the recommendations equally have been very clear. The Honourable Member for Sandu has made my interventions easy because he touched on the local government and agriculture. I will not belabour talking about those two areas.

I am happy that the Chairman of the Special Select Committee is back. In his report, he made mention that the committee did not have the opportunity to meet with MoBSE. It would have been very important for the committee to meet MoBSE. We are all aware that there is a kind of education system taking place in the country with the use of radio and television. This is supposed to serve the entire Gambian students. As opposed to what obtains, this is not the reality on the ground. It would have been important for MoBSE to be engaged for them to further explain how they came up with the conclusion of using television and radio to conduct lessons for students.

If you look at it, it is not the least fair that you have a certain sector of students in this country enjoying the privilege and the other sector not even knowing what is happening. I do not know whether plenary would create room for the Special Select Committee to have a day or two with MoBSE to get the feedback from them as to how they reached this conclusion. It is very important.

Honourable Speaker, I want to look at these two scenarios which for me are also very important. The Special Select Committee, in their report, made mention of the discussions they had with Gambia Christian Council and Gambia Supreme Islamic Council.

Their observations were raised but in the recommendations, I did not see it captured. What the Special Select Committee would have recommended as per these two religious bodies. It is just like the Member for Sabach Sanjal and other

interventions earlier stated. Let us say for instance if it is the Friday prayers, scholars are saying there is a possibility that people can converge in mosques to observe Friday prayers in not more than 30 minutes. In fact, in some cases, some are saying in 20 minutes it can be observed. If the committee is recommending for the extension of the opening hours of markets with the physical and social distancing, it is laudable, provided the enforcement will be taken in to consideration. What stops us from ensuring that these two religious denominations, Christians and Muslims, also have time for Fridays and Sundays to worship?

I saw in the report, where it is stated that Gambia Standards Bureau can come up with a recommended standardized facemask that could be used for worshipers. We can avail them the opportunity of ensuring that they have hand washing facilities at the entrances of those places of worship and hand sanitizers as well. If that is something to be considered, I would not hesitate to throw my weight on the recommended 21 days after the resolution of the Special Select Committee. Where that does not happen, I would not mind being the only person to object for the increment of the state of public emergency even for a single day because it is very important.

Honourable Speaker, I will commend the efforts of the Special Select Committee because if you crisscross this South Bank road, you see a fleet of foreign vehicles coming into The Gambia day in day out in their numbers so you begin wonder how secure our borders are. These people are not using where we call porous borders, but they are using borders where we have our security men and women. What is happening, what kind of goods are they bringing in and out of the country on daily basis? This is something that also needs to be considered. We want to call upon the Ministry of Interior and Defense to partner and ensure that when we say borders are closed, we mean borders are closed or we mean closure of borders but you cannot just say borders are closed and the next moment we see vehicles plying in and out of the country. It is like when I listen

to the Health Minister talking about the most recent cases that were from Senegal. Through which entry point did they come into the country?

We have a host of Gambians stranded in Senegal, I remember the last time I made mention of it here. What can we do, looking at our relationship? Some of them, as we speak, are completely stranded. They are out of pocket, they do not have money. They want to come home but they cannot come home. Again, I want to re-echo, what can the government do using our relationship with Senegal in ensuring that they facilitate the homecoming of Gambians that are stranded in Senegal. It is very pathetic when you talk to some of them.

Honourable Speaker, I would not belabour on the relief package because yesterday we had the opportunity to engage with the NDMA and Gambia Red Cross Society. They have given us, the Health Select Committee, enough information and evidence as to why the relief package is delayed. That is why I will shelf that one. All I want to say is that as per our engagement with the NDMA, as an individual, I will say that listening to the presentation by the NDMA, the manner in which the food package is to be disbursed is completely transparent, very transparent. I am convinced beyond reasonable doubt that there will be no foul play. I took time to make clarifications, to ask questions as much as I can. Based on the explanations and methodology which they are going to apply in the disbursement, the whole process is transparent.

Honourable Speaker, the youth. If you go to our football pitches in the evening, you begin to wonder what is happening. All football pitches are engaged. Youths are playing football just like anything, forgetting that it is not only affecting churches, mosques and markets. In fact, there is more physical contacts on football pitches so what are we doing to that effect?

There is one culture that the Honourable Chairperson of Health can attest to, and some of the colleagues I interact with, I tell them there is this culture that I hope and pray that after Covid-19, The Gambia will adopt it as a culture and that

is regular and constant hand washing. It improves our personal hygiene. That is one beauty that I appreciate as an individual as far as all the WHO recommended standards are concerned. I take the example from my own home. When my kids and other kids that come to the house wash their hands, after a few minutes I go and look at the bucket. You see the nature of the water, had this practice not been done, it means all this was going to go into our system. That is why I say it is a culture that I hope and pray that Gambians will adopt for the rest of eternity. It is very important to our way of life.

Honourable Speaker, I came to the Parliament like the only odd person here but very comfortable. Comfortable in the sense that we had a discussion with the Red Cross and our Chairperson reliably informed us that the entire parliament was fumigated so I feel I am safe. I am not at risk and as a result I am very comfortable to be in the manner in which I am. I can see how other colleagues are struggling. Even the Honourable Minister here pulls it down and takes it up because it is a strange culture. Over time, we will get used to it.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Health Minister is here. Yesterday, I challenged the NDMA but they had their reservations. I said why we cannot introduce the temperature testing during the disbursement of the food relief. I believe it is an avenue where the frontline can also use that opportunity to be testing people's temperatures. They had their reservations but I am still maintaining my stance that it is important for us to do that.

The 21 days by the Special Select Committee, like I said earlier Honourable Speaker, I will re-echo on consideration that these places of public worship are also given the opportunity even if not on five daily prayers, but at least every Friday and Sunday. If that is something to go by, I will throw my weight on the 21 days. If not, I will totally (I repeat totally) oppose the increment or extension of the state of public emergency even for a single day. On that note, Honourable Speaker, thank you.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA KANTORA: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I equally join my colleagues to thank the entire membership of the Special Select Committee on this Covid-19. Equally, at this juncture, allow me to recognize the presence of Cabinet Ministers herein present.

Coming to the discussion proper, I do have some observations, very brief and short. When I went through the report, certain significant border posts have indeed been left out. I believe the URR does not only have the free border posts but if you go to Kantora Constituency where I hail from, there is a border post called Nyamanari. It is a place where human transactions/communication, goods and services of vehicles normally pass through. It is very key and I was surprised that that place was not visited.

I will also be more than willing to really engage the committee, take them through to see the beautiful job that is being done on the ground by the personnel and volunteers i.e. Red Cross members. These are youths in Kantora who took up the initiative to volunteer to be part of the Red Cross. They have their motorbikes and normally patrol around to see the illegal trafficking of persons from Senegal. At this juncture, I would like to applaud their efforts and thank them so much for the statesmanship. It is a right move in the right direction as well. Probably during the response of the mover, he could give a reason why that place was omitted.

I will also look at the issue of worship. Of course, we do recognize that The Gambia is a religious state comprising Muslims and Christians. There is this outcry about how the regulations can be reshaped to give a way for people to really worship. I would have loved for the committee to engage the Gambia Supreme Islamic Council to know if it is allowed in Islam to have a spacing during worship. When that question is asked, they will have a definite response and that will help to arrive at a certain conclusion. It will be recommended that it is accepted in Islam when praying on the same line you can create distance among yourselves since the primary focus is to avoid human contact. When that

is actually done, I think the committee will be in the best position to advocate for the reopening of the mosques. The timeframe, as alluded to by the Member for Foni Kansala, that it is very operational. You can conduct Friday prayers and give a sermon within 20 minutes. Sunday churches normally consume time and so many people attend and it becomes so crowded. We are trying to change the entire narrative i.e. to allow you operate within a timeframe of 20 minutes and disperse, provided that sanitizers and hand washing things are provided in the mosques or churches.

According to political philosophers like St Thomas Aquinas, Church Supremacy should supersede the State i.e. the human beings should work towards the eternal enjoyment of the hereafter. That is only attained in the mosques and churches. Therefore, I believe that the State should be subordinate to the religious places. However, is just a political thought but we can actually consider that particular initiative whereby they could be leaving a little bit of space between two or three people in a line to allow that distancing to be observed. If that is advisable by the Health Minister as something to go by, which can also serve as a deterrent to possibly transmitting the Covid-19 to other people, then the measure could be adopted.

I just stand to applaud the committee membership for the statesmanship and also give my blessing to the report and the 21 days extension period recommended by them. Thank you very much for the job well done.

HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity. I also want to join my colleagues to thank the Special Select Committee for a job well done during these trying times of the country. Madam Speaker, I will be try to be very brief, just to talk about their report because we have other documents that we are going to discuss i.e. the extension of the State of Emergency.

Madam Speaker, at beginning of their report, the meeting they had with the Minister of Justice, I want to express my disappointment there a little bit. I believe in this time of Covid-19, there needs to be a very strong collaboration between all sectors of the government. The Ministry of Justice came here for state of emergency and we have given the approval for 45 days and we have regulations that we agreed on. We believe there should be proper coordination between the Ministry of Justice and all other stakeholders that have the responsibility to implement.

All this talking that we are doing here, many are making reference to disregard to social distancing. As part of the regulations, social distancing is being mentioned there. If you go to the Ministry of Interior who should be responsible for the enforcement of these regulations, they say they were not being properly involved, trained and provided with the equipment. These are issues that we need to be very serious about, especially in this time. There should not be any blame game but everybody should do your responsibility, inform and collaborate with every stakeholder that is relevant. As it is now, securities are needed in our country to be able to implement.

We need to know as Gambians that this is an emergency, a pandemic that is affecting the whole world. The Gambia is not an exception to that. What we are hearing and seeing in other countries, we shall never pray for it to come to The Gambia. As it is now, we have 23 cases. When we were giving the 45 days here, we were less than 23 cases. We have given 45 days now and we are having 23 cases. That means it is going up. What is the problem? The problem is non-enforcement of the regulations. And who is responsible? It is the bodies that are responsible.

If the committee asked and the Ministry of Justice manifested and agreed then there was no collaboration. We should blame them for that. We expect the Ministry of Justice to get these regulations and serve it to all relevant organizations and agencies that are responsible to implement this.

The Ministry of Health should provide materials that are necessary for the securities to be able to do their job. If the Ministry of Interior are not provided with materials, they will not be able to dispatch men to the streets because they could be infected. This is something that we need to look in to it.

Madam Speaker, when you generally look at the extension or non-extension, I want to wait for expert advice on the level of Covid-19 in the country. From the regulations, the information given to us by the committee, obviously there is need for us to extend but how long will depend on the advice I will get from the experts.

Madam Speaker if you look at the 23 cases we have in the country, a greater percentage is imported and our airspace is closed because we have only one international airport, Banjul International Airport, which is closed. It means all these other cases that are coming up, are coming through the borders. We all agree that no matter what we do, we cannot secure our borders 100%. That one is obvious because of the geographical relationship we have with Senegal. It will be very difficult for us to close our borders 100%. The borders are porous, there are other ways out. How best can we minimize it, Madam Speaker, I raised it here the other time. Securities are key, especially border securities. Why will we not look at them again, the fund that we are getting for this Covid-19, and consider the security?

The last time I went to the Army Headquarters, the PRO of the Army said, they have also declared Covid-19 as an enemy to the country so they are ready to fight it. What they need to have is the correct information about Covid-19 and they also need to be provided with the materials. They need to be given personal protective gears/equipment that they need. The soldiers at the borders also need to be provided with mobility. If you look at our borders, all identified borders where you have the security checkpoints are closed. Nobody is passing there but every day we are hearing that people are entering the country. What is lacking

now is constant patrol and those patrols cannot be done if securities are not given mobility.

I am suggesting to the government, as from today, let them revise. They are buying mobility, pickups. Those at the border, even if they can have motorcycles and personal protective materials, soldiers and other security forces can be constantly patrolling the borders. They can engage the border villages that let no one hide anybody. If anyone knows a person that has newly entered into the country, you report the person to the police. The security at the borders needs to be strengthened very well and in that we need to effectively use the services of the security.

Madam Speaker, the committee said they have met with the religious leaders. If people had listened to me and understood very well, I wanted the mosques to be opened. There was a proclamation by the President that all worship places should be closed. I believe in this time of Covid-19, everybody needs to be involved. I said the President might be at the State House but if he has somebody who is representing him in the mosque. If there was proper consultation, some might say let the mosques be open. Some are praying and some are not praying. Imams are being arrested here are there. Let us consult and collaborate with our religious leaders and tell them about this pandemic and get their suggestions. I have done consultations and I am still doing consultation. I know many of the Members here will have this confrontation from their people, that our places of worship should be opened. I am going to give a suggestion, let there be special regulation on places of worship like mosques and churches but that regulation needs to involve the stakeholders, if not all imams but the Gambia Supreme Islamic Council.

Somebody asked whether it is possible to have social distancing of one or two metres from each other when praying in our mosques. I know it is possible because we are seeing pictures from other places. Is it possible for us to wash our hands before entering into the mosque, whether it is going to nullify our

ablution or not? It is possible and when that is done, there could be responsibility given to the mosque owners. When I say mosque owners, I mean the imams and the church heads. Tell them in your church or mosque there is the need for social distancing and there needs to be constant fumigation of the mosques. Who is going to take the responsibility? You give it to the mosque committees, they will. This is a cry that many are saying. They want to appeal to the government to allow the mosques to open especially in this month of Ramadan and more especially in this last ten days of Ramadan. Madam Speaker, that one is very important.

Somebody mentioned schools here. It is just very funny in the country as it is now. The information I have about this virus and the fear I have for it, if I reach others, what they tell me is just very funny. I want to recommend to the committee, it would have been better if they can include sensitization in their processes. Sensitization is lacking in this country. Madam Speaker, whether people are deliberately denying or they lack the knowledge of this Covid-19, there are greater numbers of people who are in denial of the existence of this Covid-19 especially in the country. Some will say it is political, it has never come to The Gambia but the government is just trying to get money.

The government is losing, we all cry that we do not want any foreign aid from outside. Government needs to depend here but government is losing so much local tax. I think we need to sensitize our people for them to understand that anything the government is doing is because of the fear of this Covid-19 so that what is happening in other countries will not happen in The Gambia.

Madam Speaker, that is the point I wanted to talk about, and the education sector. Somebody mentioned the education sector. I am part of the Education Committee and we had some meetings with them. Definitely, it is pathetic. They are spending a lot of money and risking their own lives to go out. They are trying to give lessons through radios and television. Madam Speaker, if you go down to the grassroots/ communities, it is infective. Consultations and analyses are going

on. If you look at the infection rate of corona virus, it affects the elderly more than the young ones. If you look at it percentage-wise, more elderly people are affected than the young ones. We need to go with analyses and expert advice.

In the education sector, the students are losing a lot. Bad students will want to stay at home, but if you look at the impact it is going to have on the country in years to come, it is going to be very serious and that is going to affect the transition. Education is just like one leaving a step and others follow. For example, come September, there has to be new intakes from home to Grade 1. There must be space in Grade 1 for them to be enlisted into schools. Grade 9s need to go to Grade 10, so that there could be space for Grade 8s. Grade 12s need to graduate to university so that there could be space for Grade 11s that are coming. If we do not have this transition, it is going to really affect our education system.

I am suggesting, if it is possible and I believe with consultation and expert ideas it could be possible, if we cannot open all schools, let us target the examination and transitional classes. By examinations classes I mean the Grades 9 and 12, more especially the Grade 9s. Grade 12s can be given examinations anytime because they can all sit to private examinations but for Grade 9s, they need to transit to create space for the other ones that are coming. If that is not done, it is going to delay. I am suggesting for the Ministry and government to look into that, to come up with regulations to open schools, if not for all but for the Grade 9s to come to school. When you say Grade 9, schools have 4 or 3 classes of Grade 9. At bigger schools, it might not be more than 500 or 600. You can put half of a class roll in one classroom. Then you call teachers to come and then you observe strict regulations of the WHO. You can have two months of lessons after which you give them examinations so that they can transit. Otherwise, Madam Speaker, it is going to give them a very big problem.

Madam Speaker, I emphasize, let us use the securities. Let us strengthen the borders and in doing that, we cannot only say we need the securities at the

boarders. We need to provide for them the personal protective equipment and mobility. If they cannot have motorcars, they can have motorcycles, even bicycle sometimes, for them to be patrolling and helping us to avoid people entering into the country.

On that note Madam Speaker, I beg to sit until the next paper. Thank you.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Thank you Madam Speaker. Allow me to make some short preliminary remarks. The world is at war with an invisible enemy. That is what must be understood. We are on a battle field with an enemy that we cannot see but it sees us it is attacking us but we are incapable of attacking it because we do not have the weapon to attack it.

The beauty of being a human being is that there is nothing that comes into this world as a difficulty or problem that we as human beings cannot overcome. That is in our nature; that is in our intelligence; that is in our capacity but you cannot win a war with sentiments. Wars are not fought with sentiments. Wars are fought with ideas, skills, objectivity and the required weapons to fight. The beauty in our being human being is this; even though this enemy is invisible, our intelligence has told us that there is a way that you can prevent yourself from it even though you cannot see it.

That is what we must be thinking about. That is where the intelligence lies. You cannot see an enemy but you can prevent yourself from it. That is very intelligent. How do you prevent yourself? If you do this and that, it cannot attack you. That is the issue and here sentiments have no place, it is tactic. In fact, everything that we are doing is tactical. What enables us to fight the enemy that we cannot see is that we must strengthen ourselves. We must reinforce ourselves against an enemy that we cannot see. That is the tactic that we have been developing. That is the strategy that we have been developing, a strategy to overcome the enemy that you cannot see. Sentiments do not have a place here.

I have said it over and over and I will repeat it; this National Assembly is the heart and soul of the nation. The nation depends fundamentally on this Assembly and we cannot afford to use sentiments to fight a war. We must use the required weapons if we want to win this war. We know there are deep-seated cultural practices, everybody knows what they are in our society but we cannot use those to fight this war. This war is much more powerful than those and we must help our people to grow to empower themselves against this enemy. We cannot do anything to weaken them against the enemy. If we do that, we are failing our responsibility in this National Assembly. Our job is to empower our people, to empower them in such a way that even though they cannot see this enemy, they can fight and win it.

We cannot use sentiments to help our people to become big and powerful against such an enemy. Let us not diminish ourselves, let us not mitigate ourselves. We need all the forces that we need today to become stronger against this invisible enemy which is devastating the world. That is the issue here. As far as I know, since my life up to this day, I have never heard of any virus in the world like this. Ebola came - Africa; SARS came - Europe; this one - the whole world and that is why the world is united against an enemy that they cannot see. Let us not weaken ourselves with sentiments. They are not helpful.

Madam Speaker, I think we need to applaud the committee for the work that they have done within so short a time; 38 places from here to Basse, Basse to Barra within so short a time with limited resources. They have done well and that is what we require as a consensus, commitment to what we are to do to fight this enemy.

Everybody must be committed to that. Please let us help each other to grow. Let us help each other to understand the need for us to have the means necessary to fight this common enemy that we cannot see. We should not do or say anything to weaken anybody against this enemy, this devastating enemy which we do not know how long it is going to last. Do you know that there are new

cases in China? New cases have emerged in two different places in China and that is where they say it was going away. Now it has emerged in two different places in China. We must be really prepared to fight this war and we are very well ill-armed. We have all been saying it here, ill-armed and we should not allow that "ill-armedness" to continue by discouraging people, by putting sentiments into people to accept what is going to kill them. That is not our role, we are failing our people. You must help them to understand what they do not understand. It is our responsibility to help ourselves to become aware, to understand fully the nature of this enemy so that we can help others to arm themselves better. Let us lose sentiments here. Sentiments are not helpful in any situation, particularly in this situation.

I am not against extending the period because it is emerging, it is increasing. Do not underrate the numbers. That is how it started everywhere. In Ghana, it started with 18, one died. Now tell me, how many have died in Ghana. How many are infected in Ghana? Thousands! So it is growing. Why do we want to be complacent in the face of an enemy which is waging an onslaught on the world? We cannot afford that.

I am comfortable praying to Allah in my house. Allah does not say that I should not do that. Allah in fact says, in those circumstances, that is precisely what I should do. Preventing yourself is better than to cure. That is in the Qur'an, prevention is better than cure. All that people have been talking about here, will not help. If you open the mosques now and say okay social/physical distance, who are you going to tell not to go into the mosque? The mosques will be so crowded that there will be no space to distance anybody. Who are you going to tell to go in and who are you going to tell not to go in? Think about things objectively.

I have been to a burial recently, it was overcrowded. They were talking about social distance but it was overcrowded. I refused to shake hands but people were forcing me to shake hands, they forced me to hold their hands. That is

what they know but that is not right in that circumstance. It is a culture we all know, we embrace it, but sometimes you have to put culture aside to survive. To worship is to survive, if you die, you cannot worship. Save yourself to keep your life in order to worship. Do not hate yourself to die in order not to worship. Look at things more objectively, please. These are terrible times in the world and this is the time we should grow bigger as human beings. Difficulty should make us even acquire more knowledge against the enemies of our existence. Let us leave all these petty talks aside. Let us engage ourselves into understanding the enemy that we are to fight. That is what we must do.

I do not need to be a doctor, I do not need to be a scientist; to save myself, to help myself to have the equipment necessary to save my life from perishing. That is why this is a collective enterprise. Those who know are pulling together those who do not understand/know and they are helping them to know in order for them to become strong against that enemy which is invisible. They are doing well but we still have to do more.

My dear colleagues, we all know what the nature of our society is. If you look at the sociology of our society, sometimes when you talk about this I laugh. Go to some homes there is only one house for father, mother, daughter and sons. One single room; bed time, what type of social distancing are you talking about in such circumstances? We have to understand the nature of the structure of our society to be able to do this things/measures, to design and implement them. Unless we understand the nature of the society in which we are living in, all that we are saying will be meaningless.

If you talk about social distancing in such a family, you are insulting them. That is what they have. What about a place where everybody eats from same bowl, which is also a culture which is practised everywhere? What are we saying about that? A wife and a husband, they are two on the bed but they are lying down. They can lie on top of each other. Where is social distancing in there? You are

laughing but these are facts. You sleep with your wives, when you are sleeping you roll on each other and you do not even know what you are doing.

Honourable Speaker, somebody has said it. Yesterday I talked about it and Honourable Nyassi has mentioned it. Almost all the sectors are affected by this Covid-19 but the sector which is going to be terribly affected is education. Why? Schools are closed but lessons are being administered over radio and television. When I was coming, in my vehicle, the radio was on. A woman was complaining bitterly on the radio that these online radio lessons are not helpful at all; that not many people are accessing them. That is what she was saying and I can attest to that because I am from Wuli.

There is a student that I am even sponsoring at Methodist Academy. She spent the whole of her day yesterday trying to access it through her mobile but it was impossible. I said something must be wrong with your mobile. If your friends are accessing it and you cannot, then change you mobile. Does she have money to by an android mobile? No, she does not have and there are many like that. So, the whole syllabi for education is going to be distorted. They are seemingly administering lessons on the radio and television. When schools open, let us say tomorrow, they will pretend that what they have already been giving on the radio and television should not be gone over. Some have not, maybe three-quarter of the students have not accessed it. That is distorting this and it is creating a big disparity, as I said yesterday, among students themselves. The same class, some are going up and some are still at the same place because they have not been having any lesson since the closure of schools.

That is why it is important that this committee must try and meet the relevant authorities. In fact it is both higher and lower education, whatever they call it, they should assess so far the achievements and challenges that they are meeting in using this media for administrating their lessons.

Madam Speaker, there is so much to say but I think I will stop here. I want to stop by saying please, please, please, it is not impossible for us to overcome this but we cannot overcome it disunited; we cannot overcome it with sentiments, I emphasize the word sentiments. We must leave them behind, they cannot help us in these circumstances. We need something much more than that. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULIEAST]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I also rise to lend my support to this report. I think we were all monitoring the situation across the country in our various constituencies. Honourable Speaker, the report mentioned an expert opinion which reveals that over 181,000 people could be infected with Covid-19 if the country fails to strictly adhere to the rules of social distancing. As an avid listener to the media, especially external media, I can confirm this information. If you go down in the same paragraph, if we have taken some care, we may end up with 53,000. Even 53,000 for a small country like this is too much. We should not even anticipate that, especially with 1,000 deaths. This is the information that we must use to make decisions in this place.

We know what Covid-19 has done to countries that have played down the pandemic. We know what is happening in Brazil. We know what is happening in the US, thousands and thousands of people are dying and they are not even counting those who are dying in their homes because they are not even in touch with those people. Some of them even get to the health facilities but they are not treated because they do not have any opportunity for treatment. So, this is a serious matter and I think we must accept that it is a serious matter that is more important than anything else. I will thank the Special Select Committee for the report. I think they have done justice to their mandate.

Honourable Speaker, my concern is in the area of enforcement. I think there are a lot of challenges to ensure that the regulations are enforced. Many people have said some of the things that I have already accepted or agreed. For example, at

the border areas, if the security does not have patrol vehicles, they cannot get to the borders on a continuous basis. If they cannot get to the borders on a continuous basis that means there is no border closure. In my constituency, I have not seen any border closure. I was sitting in one compound and somebody came from Senegal with a stick. He said he was selling animals but he was following people who came with some of his animals and he was following them to see them so he came to the compound without any contact with any security at the border and told the Alkali: "I want to sleep here for the night because I am following my people who have gone with my cattle, we are selling cattle." That person just crossed. If there is no patrol vehicle, I do not see how we can control the borders and somebody is recommending taking soldiers to the borders. My other concern is, is the army properly trained to deal with this situation, to take care of the human rights concerns that we have expressed, to take care of the democratic concerns that are reasonably justifiable in a democratic society? Are they properly trained to do that or within this short period can we train them to take care of those concerns? That is something that I have.

Honourable Speaker, the other concern is the issue of transport fares. I took it upon myself and joined a vehicle from Farato all the way to here. What is taking place and what is in the regulations are completely different. The issue of progressive review of the fares was discussed here and the suggestion was to review it progressively to make it better (win-win). If they reduce the fares because it is anticipated that the fuel will be reduced, we have seen that the fuel has reduced drastically but the fares went up. They went beyond the normal.

At that time, from Farato to Westfield was D18. Now, when you join a vehicle from Farato, they will tell you Yundum is D10. When you get to Yundum, because they are taking for example only 7 passengers, to get 7 passengers that are leaving Yundum to go to Lamin is very easy so they will charge D10 to Lamin. From Lamin, they will say D10 to Tabokoto and from Tabokoto to

Latrikunda D10. Latrikunda to Churchill's Town D10; Churchill's Town to Westfield D10; by the time you get here, you are paying D60 to D70. That has completely defeated the intention of the regulations. All the police are concerned with is the number of people in the vehicle. I see them stopping vehicles for that but, I have not seen any officer interested in knowing how much fares are being used on the people. That needs to be looked at.

My other concern Honourable Speaker, I visited the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital. That day (it was an earlier period) nurses were running away from people because they were not protected. They did not have any protective gears so when people come to them they do not know who is who, they want to run away from you. If you want to ask them, they want to run away from you. We are told that they have stopped other cases, they will address only emergency issues. How many other cases apart from Covid-19 concerns do we have? We have many patients living at home waiting so that when this period pass, they will be able to come because they said they are only dealing with emergency cases. I did not see an issue in that in the report. Also, Honorable Speaker, we can see our cases are very small but how is the testing done? Are we testing, how many places do we have testing? How many people have been tested? I did not see them in the report. Maybe they did not have that report. If you are not testing people, you hardly have cases and people may be dying but you will not know why they are dying. Maybe they are suffering from Covid-19, you never know. So testing must be done but if we wait for people to come and say I am sick, how many people will come and say I am sick, I want to be tested? We know Gambians, it will not be easily done.

Honourable Speaker, the other concern is the private schools. You know government will take care of their teachers in terms of salary but private schools are considering laying off their teachers because they could not bear the situation. They have closed. Some of them were giving D1000 to their graduate teachers for the month. Now they are tired of that, what do we do? If they lay

off these teachers, at the end of the day, even if the schools open again before they get all these teachers are back the students will still suffer. I have not seen in the report anything relating to education. I have read the report, maybe you can correct me if it is there but I have not seen anything relating to that. What are we doing about that? We need to really take care of those teachers. If the schools are giving them, for example D1000, maybe the government can consider giving them another D1000 to help them to keep up with these difficulties. If we just leave them like that, they may disappear and go into other areas which will create more problems for us in the future.

Honourable Speaker, I expect the special committee to meet with the foreign affairs as well because Gambians are also suffering in some other places. What has come out of that? We had the opportunity to meet the foreign affairs so I expect them to also have some information on that which they could feed the rest of the plenary. I have not seen anything there, maybe they could help us.

Honourable Speaker, there was a very good initiative which I see in some places. My concern is that in the semi-urban areas like Farato and Nema Kunku (which I always clamour here), they do not have water even though pipes are all over around them. They do not have water and NAWEC was putting tanks in some places. These two places were highlighted but up to now there is no tank in those areas and those people are suffering. I followed them until I got tired and they said they will do it. If you are in this situation and it takes you 45 days before you can get a tank, I do not see how that will help the situation. I thought that there would have been a proactive method to really look into those deprived areas and give them some of these remedies that would have helped.

On that note, I thank you for the time.

HON. MOMODOU S. CEESAY [JANJANBUREH]: Thank you Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. I also want to join my colleagues in thanking the

committee for a job well done. Within a short period, they were able to produce two reports and today we are here looking at their last report.

However, Madam Speaker, I said it here before that by the end of this 45 days, the Ministry of Health should be able to give us a comprehensive report of our state of affairs from when this virus was discovered in this country to date. This should be able to make us think whether there should be an extension or not. Two or three days ago, I was listening to a radio station and the staff at Basse Health Center were saying that the training they had was only for one or two days which was not enough for them. It was even not a training per say, it was like a demonstration to them. I do not know whether when the team went to Basse they were informed about this.

On the report, I have not seen what PPE is particularly available or not. Predictions are that in Africa by June, July we will reach our peak. This is the prediction by scientist and, God forbid, if for example our cases increase, are we able to manage them? Do we have the staff, do we have PPEs? I have not seen that too in the report. The question of the mosques opening, I do not want to dilate on this more because it has already been talked about by previous speakers. However, I want us to be very cautious. You can only pray when you are healthy. We can only pray when you can go to the mosque. If you are lying at Wenchong, you can never be able to pray. I am not saying that we should not open the mosques, I am not really saying that. Let us be very careful and let us look at the issue properly. If we want to listen to what people are saying, probably those people are looking at their interests. I have a feeling that if praying at home is not allowed by the Qur'an, it will not have been practised in any of the Muslim countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

As the Member for Wuli West said, let us not be sentimental. Covid-19 is real and it is existing and it has come and has shown that the entire world was not ready for it. Even the most powerful countries were not ready for it. America being the world power, what and how they have suffered and their state of

unpreparedness for this disease, let us not take it as a joke. I think we owe it to the people, the people who voted us in here, we need to tell them exactly what this can cause.

When we were debating this the first time, I think we had only a few cases, less than 10. Today we are talking of 24 and Heaven knows what is going to happen. Nobody prays that it continues but you have to be on the state of preparedness to ensure that if the worse comes to the worst, you can be able to prevent it. For the mosques and churches, I have a feeling probably that by the end of these 21 days probably we would have been able to know exactly whether we need to extend or not. By that time, we can be able to open.

I just want to appeal to National Assembly Members to understand that it is not easy nowadays, particularly when the Social Media is everywhere. Whatever you say, sometimes they misinterpret it. That does not mean that you should not take your rightful position. Any issue that comes on the table, you give it your right and honest opinion. Whatever people may say, they can say it. As far as I am concerned, I think the opening of the mosques would be too soon because I do not even think this social distancing is allowed in the mosque. I stand to be corrected but I do not think it is allowed. If it cannot be allowed there and you cannot assure people coming into the mosque with masks and hand washing, please let us try and inform our people to be careful. Let us wait, I am sure God would understand us. Thank you.

HON. KAJALI FOFANA [JARRA WEST]: Thank you Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. I also join my colleagues to thank the members of the Special Select Committee for the hard work they have been doing *...incomplete recording...*

THE HOUSE RESUMES:

DEPUTY SPEAKER [IN THE CHAIR]:

HON. BAKARY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: Thank you very much Mr Speaker, for giving me the floor. I would like to join my colleagues to thank the committee for the efforts they did, to complete the task we gave them during this Ramadan. From the report we could see that the committee did a lot to go to almost all parts of the country from Banjul to Essau, Farafenni, Pacharr rice fields, Basse and down to Gunjur and Kartong.

Honourable Chairperson or Chairman of the Special Committee, on page 2, I think "Karting Fish Landing Site" should be Kartong, please take note of that. Also, I was expecting to see some of the porous borders which are major concerns to every Gambian due to our proximity to our neighbouring country which is Senegal. Honourable Speaker, looking at the objective of the Special Committee, if I may read the second one that is to "To inform NAMs about state of implementation of the regulations and their effects on the lives and livelihoods of the Gambian people and institutions in the country".

Honourable Speaker, this is exactly what we are expecting from this committee, that they should inform. Looking at their report, you could see that the committee went around to observe but we are expecting a little bit more than that. We would also want to know the effect the implementation of these regulations have on people. We do not expect the committee to meet only organized bodies or institutions but we also expect them to also meet non-formal

organizations and the poor or vulnerable people who are more affected than anybody. Therefore Honourable Speaker, what I expect from the committee is to come up with recommendations on what we can or should do from now on.

Honourable Speaker, we gave the Executive 45 days and these 45 days are coming to an end. We want to know the effect it has because our people are suffering, Honourable Speaker. If you look at the nature of the virus, it seems like the virus is not going anywhere soon. If the virus is not going anywhere soon, what is expected of us is what other countries are doing, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, other countries are opening up strategically. If the virus is here to stay we should also be thinking of how to open up strategically. We cannot continue to close down. If we know the plight of our people then we should think about it because there are so many things to this, Honourable Speaker. During these 45 days, a lot of things have happened and are still happening. Somebody made mention of it, people are not even going to our hospitals to get medical treatment. We expect the committee to find out from these hospitals. Why are people who are sick staying in their homes and not going to the hospitals to get treatment?

Honourable Speaker, I was privileged to be very close to the hospital in Bundung. Not long ago, a diabetic man who was sitting at home for more than a month without coming to the hospital for a treatment, came there. When he came, it was too little too late for the medical personnel to help him because his leg was in fact smelling very badly. He did not come to the hospital for any treatment. He was just sitting at home because he thinks that it is not safe to go to the hospital. You could see that this Covid-19 is not killing people but instead, because of its effects, people are dying silently in their homes without getting proper treatment.

The health facilities and almost everybody in the country is now jumping up Corona Virus. I am even afraid, if we are not "corona virus-nised". Honourable Speaker, as at now, we do not need any more extension of this State of Public Emergency. There should be a reason why we need to extend the public emergency and the reason should be clear. This should be based on evidence, data and statistics. We expect the committee to come up with some of this data that will warrant an extension of this public emergency.

I did not want to make mention of the opening of mosques since it has been mentioned but Honourable Speaker I have a letter with me here from the Mosque Committees in Bundung who came to me specifically to discuss about why mosques are still closed. Honourable Speaker, there is an Imams Committee of all the mosques in Bundung. They have an association called Bundung Imams Association, where the Imams of all the mosques are in that committee. Due to the nature of things, we organised a meeting and sat down with them. They equally have their concerns. I think what we need is to be very frank and open to our people and tell them the truth.

The situation in Bundung is very critical and I think, Honourable Members, all of us here should understand that. Honourable Speaker, the first death of this corona virus we were told is from Bundung. After that, all the people who had contact with the victim who died were quarantined but after 14 days all tested negative. This means none of them got it and my community finds it very difficult to understand whether actually it is the virus that killed that man.

He was living with people in the same house and they worship in the same mosque. None of those people got corona virus and the nurses also who attended to him, none of them got corona virus. The family started wondering if in fact it is corona virus that killed the man. It will be very important if the

Ministry of Health tries to update citizen. No matter what, tell us actually what has happened. If there is any decision or later on confirmation that it is not in fact corona that killed the man, I think they should be able to go back to the people and tell them the reality. If we do not talk to people, they will have their own perceptions about things. We have nothing to do to change those perceptions unless we communicate to them well, no matter how the situation is. That being the case, I think many, even National Assembly Members, should revisit the perception they have. Mr Speaker, it is not that Gambians do not believe that the virus exists. The problem they have is whether is it in The Gambia?

HON. SAIKOU MARONG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Point of observation Mr Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: What is your point of observation, please? Honourable Member for Bundungka Kunda are you allowing him?

HON. BAKARY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: I am not, I am sorry. I know why he wants to raise the point. Honourable Speaker, I know you have limited time, time was not on your side but there are other committees that you could use to help you in your work because there was so much expected from you. The whole Gambia was expecting you to come with a report that will highlight most of the things that are not explained or what is going on that they do not know about.

You mentioned that due to time constraint, you could not reach the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE). Although the committee took it open itself to call the Ministry, the Ministry has their own story, completely different from what ordinary Gambians are thinking about the whole issue. For example,

the D35 million given to the Ministry of Education, they declared that they did not receive any dime. They also only heard it like that and so many more.

In your report you mentioned the Fish Meal Factories that totally disregard the regulations. In fact, I was expecting to see the total close down of those Fish Meal Factories in your recommendations. Honourable Speaker, as at now, fish is a problem in this country. We are facing difficult times. Last week I visited Tanji. There is no simple social distancing or any of these regulations that is adhered to. If we gave 45 days of public emergency for those regulations to help us curb Covid-19 and none of it was adhered to, why do we need any more days? All these regulations have directly impacted the Gambian people who are suffering silently in their homes and there is nothing that is coming to address those situations. Do we just want to give another 45 days or another 21 days like that? NO! we should not do that, why should we do that? Honourable Speaker, I think we should do everything possible that will minimize the effects of this Public Emergency on the people.

If not, we are running from our people dying but another side of the coin is that we are making our people to die silently. I am very sure of that Honourable Speaker, I have seen people who are dying silently in their homes. Just the day before yesterday, I was called that one of our elderly community leaders in Bundung passed away just like that. We were told that even at the funeral, these things are not adhered to. The regulations are not adhered to and they are making our people to just suffer and die. Covid-19 is not killing them but the consequences of those laws are killing them, why can we not look at that?

The whole world now knows that this virus is not going anywhere. They are now strategizing to open up. Today, we should be thinking about how to open up strategically. The public emergency was meant to stop or cut the spread of the disease. That is the reason, it was meant to stop the spread of the disease

through those regulations. If those regulations are not adhered to, that means it would not serve its purpose. What we should be thinking of is to strategically see how best we will use our mosques, hospitals and markets so that we will be safe in both ways. We will stop the virus and the other side that makes people suffer, killing them silently in their homes.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. ALAGIE JAWARA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Content of Speech, Standing Order 29 (1) says "Every member shall restrict his or her observation to the subject under discussion" and here we are talking about the report of the Special Select Committee but what the Member is saying is not directly affecting what is in the report.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member please restrict yourself to the report and keep up the time please, thank you.

HON. BAKARY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, I do not think you will allow Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu to waste our time when we are talking about things that are serious.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. ALAGIE JAWARA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Point of Order Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I am not accepting your Point of Order Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu. Allow the Member to go ahead with his intervention, please.

HON. BAKARY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I do not think my conscience will allow me to support any further extension of this public emergency because as at now ...

POINT OF ORDER

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Thank you very much. Standing Order 29 (5), "No Member shall impute improper motive to any other Member". The language he used against the Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu is improper.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Upper Niumi, please. You can go ahead Honourable Member for Bundungka Kunda but please try to wind up.

HON. BAKARY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: I think the Honourable Members ...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member do not respond to any other Member. Please proceed with your debate.

HON. BAKARY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, their actions are deliberate. When you are making your point, they want to distract you. I think they need to be cautioned. As I was saying, I do not think I will support any extension of this Covid-19 public emergency. What Gambia needs now, as the rest of the world are doing, is to think of how to open up strategically.

It seems we are always behind time. When countries started to lockdown, we were just sitting down here without making any efforts to lockdown. When we wanted to lockdown, there was no proper plan for the public emergency. When

we approved the public emergency, the regulation was not adhered to as it was supposed to be so that it can serve its purpose. These regulations were not observed as they should be. If at all the expectations of the health experts are correct then by now everybody in this country would have the corona virus. That being the case, when the 45 days have gone without properly implementing the corona virus adherence, we still do not have a local transfer of the disease. The cases that we have are imported cases...

...INTERRUPTION...

THE SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for Bundungka Kunda, please continue.

HON. BAKARY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: That being the case, I am in for zero extension of the public emergency. With that, I would like to stop here. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, Standing Order No. 32 (1) says "No Member, except the Speaker, shall interrupt a Member when he is doing his or her deliberations". Please let us respect that and move ahead. Thank you.

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank the committee for the effort they have put across to come out with this report. Though it is going to be difficult for them to get all the expectations of the people in the report; that notwithstanding, I commend you for the commitment you have taken to come out with this report.

This is a situation where it is very critical. I think everybody here is aware of the emergence of this global pandemic (Covid-19) which is affecting every living soul

in this world and it has an adverse effect on our lives. We have to look at it in our own context. How do we implement the containment strategy as during the approval of the first extension of these 45 days?

Definitely, Honourable Speaker, it is very difficult to change the perception of the people in the country because the number one expectation i.e. the food relief aspect of it, for people to stay put to avoid overcrowding in order to observe the physical and social distancing. This can only be done if there is this relief package. Until now, people are yet to adequately get what they want and that is a problem.

I just have a few observations in the report of the committee regarding a few areas. First of all, I just want to look at the committee observations on Brikama market where you have three bullet points. The last point was that the market was congested at the time of the visit, no social distancing was observed. As I am speaking right now, it is getting worst as the Koriteh or Eidul Fitr is approaching. The usual habit of reducing prices that we call "Wanterr" is going on. You find it very difficult to cross that area so I know enforcement is still a problem. As you rightly said, it is increasing.

Last week there was a fire incident in Brikama. Actually, if you go to the market you will be surprised with the number of the people there. We cannot effectively observe physical and social distancing without providing certain food relief for people to be indoors. Although it is in progress, when will it be completely done? Here is a situation where we are demanding for an expansion.

Can we fully guaranteed that by even tomorrow, enforcing these things is going to be observed? That this is our problem. If you go to Darsilami Border Post, after the committee observation, there was an interview with the ground personnel which reads: "The Immigration Officers reported posting their men

along some of the illegal entry routes into the Gambian territory. There was no official mobility at the post so personal motorbikes of individuals are used to deploy officers. Incoming Gambians are kept for quarantine but Senegalese nationals are sent back. A holding center was available but too small and not ideal to hold any suspect. Three Public Health Officers work at the post seven days a week but there is usually no officer during the night. No allowance has been paid to any of the personnel". This is where my argument is based because I frequently visited these areas.

These are areas people are using on a daily basis to access The Gambia even when we have these people there and even at night. If you look at the border, it is so connected that people can use it especially the way they understand it. There are certain known escape routes they also use on a daily basis because they heavily depend on Brikama and the surroundings for their daily survival so this is a problem. Out of the 23 cases, one is dead. Almost 90% percent of these cases are imported from outside and Senegal is number one that surround us almost in three areas so we have these porous borders without enough security. You find it very difficult for us to make sure that we control these areas to avoid imported infection into the country.

If you go to the Local Government Area where you have Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, Honourable Speaker, I just want us to put at the back of our minds that it is not only the market area that matters most. You have other areas that also need to be looked at critically. I want to believe that the committee made certain recommendations with regards to decongesting the market through the recommendations mentioned earlier and then increase the opening times as follows: all markets to be opened from 6am to 4pm on a daily basis. This is something that is important. I want to believe that they do not just jump and come out with this thing. I think with regards to the market, there were enough consultations to come up with the opening and

the closing times of the market even though the social and physical distancing is not observed. In the same way, there should be enough consultation with the religious leaders also to come out with criteria that are going to be strategic to make sure that we have limited numbers in the mosques or we have timing probably for every period of prayer. This also could be done. If we want to forget about spirituality of the people, you are creating another problem. We need to look at that also. It is very important, even in the containment aspect of it because the mind-set of the people needs to be there. That is why the sensitization aspect is key.

If you look at it, as highlighted by others, you have people who are sick but find it very difficult to go to the health facilities as a result of the stigmatisation attached to the Covid. People are sick but they will not go because they say anytime you go and there is any death case, they will relate it to this thing so people are afraid. That is something that the national television should work on seriously to make sure that you sensitize people enough to understand the presence of Covid in our country since we are part of the global village.

If you go back to our communities, we have families that live in extended family setups. At such family setups, they are up to 50 or more and you have limited houses and limited mattresses. How do we make sure that there is this physical and social distancing? Sometimes you go to a household, especially these boys quarters, you have more than 5, 6 people living in the same house, one single room. These are the issues and again if you want to combat this thing, we have to look at everything. I am sure if there is a number of testing done in the country, we may even register new cases and this cannot be done without the support in every aspect. These are areas that we also need to look at.

Honourable Speaker, it is very interesting that we have some Gambians that are on government scholarship, on studies in one of the most affected countries

where there is serious complete lockdown. How do we ascertain the lives of those people especially if something is not reaching to them in terms of survival? All these are issues that are very difficult. The report explains a lot of gaps that we need to bridge. How are we going to be guaranteed that even if we extend this by tomorrow there will be enough security forces on the ground to make sure that this is implemented to the letter?

You have a lot of communities that are still without these food items. The relief package is also very key for people's compliance. The reason why you are not forcing everybody to go and stay in their homes is because the relief package has not reached them and we have to understand the majority of the population of this country are living in abject poverty. Most of them are petty traders so their survival depends on their daily activities. If you ask those people to be sitting in their homes for completely one month, you are creating another problem.

That is why the relief package, in the soonest possible time, should reach every household, especially the most vulnerable families. If that is guaranteed, there is a need for extension. The 21 days you are mentioning is good, depending on this relief packages being provided in the soonest possible time. If not, it is going to be difficult for us to do these things. As highlighted by others, if you go to the football parks in the evening, there are trainings all over. This cannot be effective when we are not serious with the relief package. It is one of the most fundamental things. We are urging them to revisit, even if there is going to be extension, there should be consultation with the religious stakeholders so that they can come out with a well-crafted criteria on how we are going to use our religious facilities. They are very important. On that note honourable Speaker, I beg to take my seat.

HON. YAYA GASSAMA [KIANG EAST]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, for giving me the opportunity. Being among the last persons to speak, most of the points that I wanted to raise have already been dealt with. However, I will still want to say one or two things regarding the report and Covid-19.

Honourable Speaker, many speakers before me spoke about the fact that people do not regard this Covid-19 seriously. I think the whole issue started at the beginning when money issues were being involved. People actually know that Covid is existing in other countries but for The Gambia the issues started when that D500 million was mentioned. When the President mentioned that he appropriated D500 million to fight Covid-19, a lot of attention was focused on the money instead of the disease. Many people were not happy with the way the government manages or handles the money. They say that government is using this as a venture to make money, that the longer this Covid-19 argument lingers around, the more opportunity it is for people to make money. This is one of the reasons why many people do not actually subscribe to this idea of Covid-19 and they did not respect the regulations that follow the first state of emergency that was discussed here in the National Assembly.

When the first state of emergency issue was tabled in the Assembly here, many people approved 45 days. Then, it was nobody's desire that we will come back here again to discuss the same issue because we thought that by the expiry of the first 45 days this thing would have been done and over. Unfortunately, what we are seeing is a gradual increase in the number of cases that we are registering in the country. That is very worrisome. We have a disease that is taking a very serious toll in other parts of the world and this is the disease that is looming over us as a country and the country is very poor: the people are poor and the government is poor. When we are facing this kind of situation, at this moment what people need to understand is the seriousness of this disease. Therefore, all hands must be on deck, everybody must support in the fight

against this disease. When you go round the country, people definitely know that this is existing. It is existing, it is a reality but they do not want to accept the fact that it is in The Gambia because they saw it as a venture for the government to make more money, which is very unfortunate.

Regarding the regulations, I have made my personal observations. Some of the regulations are not adhered to, for example, the Open Market Regulations. On the first day of Ramadan, I was at Brikama Market and I was scared of what I saw. There was no social distancing at all and given the nature of our society in The Gambia, may God forbid, if this disease spreads in The Gambia it is going to be a total disaster. In our homes we know we sleep in threes and fours in the bed. We share practically everything from food to utensils, everything we share. If this disease happens to spread in The Gambia, the consequences are going to be too much for this country to bear. With the Open Market Regulations, I think we buy some time along the line. What happened was that food vendors were required to be in the market selling from six o'clock to one o'clock. Thereafter, other set of sellers can come and take over the market. The effect of that was that people were given just limited time to do the shopping. Everybody rushes to the market to do their shopping between six o'clock and one o'clock. That resulted into a very serious congestion in the market at that time. I think if we have to extend this time, some of those regulations need to be looked at.

There was also the issue of our places of worship. Somebody mentioned here that we are carrier of messages from our constituencies. We relay their issues in the National Assembly here. We have been receiving a lot of calls from Imams, religious people and everybody that you have closed down the mosques. People are not going to the mosques to pray but there is no social distancing observed in the markets. What is the sense in that? We need to properly look at that area also, if we have to extend it. Maybe if it is possible, we can allow mosques to operate and social distancing will be required in the mosque. We can work with

the mosque committees to limit the number of people that can go into the mosques, depending on their sizes, and frequent fumigation of the mosques just to allow people to do their worship in the mosques and churches.

There was also the issue of the borders. The report mentioned somewhere that there was no proper coordination between the Ministry of Justice and the law enforcement agencies/services. To put these regulations into effect and make sure that they are effectively monitored and implemented, there should be coordination between all the stakeholders and institutions that matter. What I observed is that in The Gambia our borders are very porous. There are certain key areas, certain key border crossing area that can be protected. There are some settlements in The Gambia parts of which are in Senegal. How do we monitor the other part in Senegal? How do we ensure that people do not cross from these places in Senegal into The Gambia? This is a very big challenge. Our borders are such that you can just walk across The Gambia into Senegal at any time of the day, even at night. How do we monitor those things? This will require the deployment of security services but again there are challenges and the challenges that are mentioned in the report relate to the issue of transportation or mobility. The security forces are there but they are not mobile to be able to monitor these border crossings effectively. One Honourable Member mentioned, and I agree entirely with him, now that the workforce in government is reduced, many of the government officers are staying at home. Some are working from their homes but the government vehicles are there. It will be a great idea and it will add a lot of value to our fight against Covid-19 if those government vehicles can be impounded and given to the security forces to monitor and control the borders.

Most of the cases that we have registered so far are imported cases. Of course, we do have some local transmission but since the disease is spreading in Senegal, I think they have registered far more cases than The Gambia. Since it is difficult to control the borders, I think the security forces need to be further

supported. They need to be further strengthened to be able to patrol the borders and control the inflow of people into the county from Senegal.

On that note, Honourable speaker, I want to reserve the rest of my opinion until the Motion is tabled by the Honourable Minister of Justice. That is the time I will be able to see whether to support this one or not. Thank you Honourable Speaker.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH SEREKUNDA: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. Covid-19 is a pandemic. As we sit here, we are told that over 80,000 people in the United States are dead because of this virus, more than those who died in the Vietnam War. As the slogan used to go, during the HIV/AIDS, we are either infected or affected. It is significant that we undertook to hold this session by virtue of the demands of our times and circumstances.

Honourable Speaker, we were informed by the State that a state of public emergency exists and it is a health emergency. Under Section 35, the State is empowered to rely on an Act (and the Act exists), to be able to make regulations, implement the regulations in order to address the pandemic. We were approached by the State to extend the state of public emergency on the 26th of March, for 90 days but we gave them 45 days. In those 45 days, the State has the power to make the regulations but we are informed that the regulations must be affirmed by this National Assembly.

We are empowered to extend and the State under Section 34 (3) has authority to revoke what it has proclaimed and this National Assembly also has power to revoke any resolution we pass. Here you have the separation of powers. The House has the responsibility to guard the interest of the people; we are discussing about how to safeguard the Gambian people and their interest. That is the focus, that is why the State came with regulations. Four (4) of them when

we sat in April and an additional one after our sitting. When we gave the 45 days, we also passed the Motion to set up a committee, a special select committee that will have some of the following functions:

- To ensure the implementation by the Executive of the states of public emergency within the remit of the law;
- To ensure that government provides the necessary mechanism for the implementation of the regulations.

Of course, maybe we exceeded the bounds of what is reasonable under those circumstances because that is what we cannot ensure. Maybe we would have chosen other phrases to be able to describe what we could do but essentially what we intended to do is to create a committee that will serve as oversight and be able to follow up the process of implementation and report back to us after receiving the facts. In essence, we created a fact-finding mission that will be able to advise the National Assembly if there is need for the revocation or further extension of the state of emergency. Essentially, we are given a report by the committee. We are told that the regulations were designed to combat the illness and defeat it. To do so we need tools and three (3) fundamental tools are required: we need instruments, those are the regulations; we need institutions, we will see what the committee says about those; and we need practices that will lead to the change of mind-set so that we are able to serve the people by guiding them collectively towards what is essentially our common destiny being safeguarded.

Honourable Speaker, if we look at the regulations, I will start with that. The committee was assigned the responsibility to accompany the Executive in ensuring that these regulations are implemented. These regulations are required by the Constitution to be reasonable and justifiable. That is one assessment that would have to be done to gauge whether these regulations are fit for propose.

The Essential Commodities Regulation Powers was designed to carry out or to ensure that we preserve essential commodities being available: rice, maize, millet, flower, sugar, milk, bread, chicken, and on and on. All these are supposed to be available to ensure that they are here. They are essential, we need them, they should be available. And to ensure that they are available at reasonable prices, it also creates an element of price control and to prevent price control being abused, it bars hoarding of the goods. It ensures that even rationing could be implemented to prevent one person buying in bulk and making others to lose. The regulations prohibit exports so that the goods will be available. To create an institution that will ensure implementation, it creates the Essential Commodities Control Committee and that committee is supposed to supervise the enforcement of the regulations. The Solicitor General, Director General of State Intelligence Service, Inspector General of Police, Commissioner General of Gambia Revenue Authority, Chief Executive Officer of Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Executive Secretary of Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and President of Consumer Protection Consortium of The Gambia are part of that committee. Essentially, these are people who should monitor these regulations on a day-to-day basis so that it will be implemented as stipulated. One would expect then that our committee will be able to meet this particular committee to find out what the challenges were and how they sought to address them. I have not seen that in the report.

Honourable Speaker, I have also with me an Essential Commodities Emergency Powers Amendment Regulations 2020, and it was designed to amend what is already available. Somehow, Page 1, we have seen it mention the open market and also the drivers of commercial vehicles because we heard that people were exporting. Now they are required to report their whereabouts when they carry these goods from the Greater Banjul Area and they must not depart after 3pm, etc. They must report to the police indicating their destination, etc. In short, the objective is to prevent the exportation of these goods.

The Attorney General in his reply may have to observe Page 2 where it says that made this day of 2020, no date. And there I must emphasise again, Honourable Speaker, that we are supplied these documents but we should really start getting these documents directly from the government printers because they are the printers. As an interested person, we have tried getting these regulations before Parliament was convened and we had to pay D230 for each copy and this is just about four pages or something. That is clearly, I will not use the language that will not be parliamentary but four pages for D230 is exorbitant?

The Attorney General must begin to monitor what happens at the printers, whether they are in fact available. The confusion may not be between the two institutions that we are talking about as we see but sometimes at the source. We have been privileged to seek the document at the source. At a material time, we were not able to get it. Therefore, we must ensure that this Gazettes, at proper sources, must be available and we will ultimately recommend that all government institutions become subscribers to the Gazette so that they get direct copies once we are printing. That is the way to solve this problem because some of our institutions are actually working towards that direction.

Honourable Speaker, when you say we should not export, there are impacts to that. Gambia has always been benefitting from re-exportation for its economy. That is why the impact assessment is important. This committee that is established is not only securing that essential commodities are available but what is the impact of not exporting in the economy when we rely basically on re-export trade for importation of quite a lot of goods and therefore for access to revenue.

Honourable Speaker, number 2, there is the Closure and Restriction of Non-Essential Public Places Emergency Power Regulations. These regulations seek to close bars, gymnasiums, museums, nightclubs etc. etc. etc. It also goes to

restrict '*Vous*' to 5 people and to maintain social distancing. It restricts public gathering in restaurants so that at the restaurants you buy take-away and maintain social distancing. It restricts public gathering in supermarkets so that there will be social distancing. Salons and Barber Shops and essentially that is the objective. We must look at this as a crime, if you violate these laws. Therefore, it is the police that will be responsible as law enforcement officers. Specifically, no guidance is given and what should the police do if they are not trained on the regulations? How will they enforce it? Is it a special squad that will be created to actually deal with the regulations? If enforcement is a problem, then there is some element that we need to inject i.e. the institutions that we can rely on to be able to handle the problem.

There is a third one, Restriction on Public Transportation Emergency Power Regulation. This was designed to ensure that social distancing (what I call safe spacing) is maintained in the transports and they should not carry more than half of what they are licensed to carry and ensure that if it is a vehicle with four (4) passengers it will carry only three (3). It goes on, motor bicycles you only go alone or unless emergency medical issues you can carry a second person. It goes further, the freezing of commercial vehicle fares so that they will not increase again. It creates a machinery that the public garages and stations and transport offices, that the local government authorities of every region shall ensure that the public garages i.e. car parks are cleansed and disinfected at least twice a day and have had hand washing facilities available in those areas. We are beginning to see responsibilities as the ferries and canoes travel between 6am and 7pm with the maximum of half. Also, protective gears being available. They must ensure that they disinfect before every trip.

These are all responsibilities to be tasked and the Councils are given responsibilities to ensure disinfecting those garages. Air transport, similarly, that where they come into the country, they must have permit before arrival. If it is a medical cargo, there must be quarantine before departure. Airport and health

authorities must be provided with hand sanitizers, hand washing and protective materials. They must check their temperature, etc. etc. People who arrive similarly must be checked and eventually quarantined if necessary. Well, these are all responsibilities to be carried out. There is an amendment to these regulations but the amendment basically is on the fares, increasing it. Maybe they will explain to us whether that is where the freezing is, that maybe they reduced it before. What has really happened here is an increment. That is what amendment is really all about.

Honourable Speaker, the next one is the Restriction on Open Markets and Shopping Areas Emergency Powers Regulations. Initially, this was meant for markets to open between 6am and 2pm and the after opening, they must maintain social distancing, public hygiene and that it will be the responsibility of the Councils to disinfect the market after closure. They were meant for those who will sell food and others were excluded. People cannot sell within the 100 meters but outside of that radius they would be able to sell by maintaining social distancing. Now it says that local government authorities and the state security services shall designate their officers and Inspectors to enforce these regulations. Here too, there is an element of amendment, where now one group 6am to 1pm and those who are selling non-food items will be there 2pm to 6pm. Now the issue is when do you disinfect and sanitize? All those issues are left untreated. What is the objective is what we should look at and I will come to that very soon.

The last one, Honourable Speaker, came after our last session i.e. Closure of Educational Institutions and Places of Worships Emergency Powers Regulation 2020. That did not exist before that is why we said there was no regulation closing mosques but now they brought one. Looking at it, there is no paging and no date and maybe the Attorney General will help us later to understand what is really happening in this respect. What is before is closure of educational

institutions and places of worship. What is interesting, Honourable Speaker, is that it says that "Notwithstanding regulation 2 which closes, an educational institution may be opened for official use by its administrative staff. A mosque or a church maybe open for the sole purpose of the call to prayer or a religious announcement of any other form". Does this make sense? Why say you are closing something when in reality you are saying for particular purpose it will be open. What is the use of using the word closure except to create confusion and misunderstanding? You do not close such institutions, you can regulate. These are easy matters to handle if we do so in good faith. Clear explanation of the illness, in fact the religious leaders were the first to jump in explaining why preserving life is so fundamental to religion. Simply meeting them and discussing that maybe the mosque committee, taking into consideration the importance of social distancing, when it is call for prayer they will go there and call for prayers and they (mosque committee) can pray so that you will not say the mosque or church is closed. The key, the clergy can handle that responsibility. They become the custodian of their mosques and churches and explain to their own people why this pandemic needs to be fought.

We raised this when we had this session; be imaginative, be creative because the objective is to get the people to take ownership. If they do not take ownership you will not succeed. They do not want to die but there is so much confusion that they have no direction. Therefore, what we put as law must not be something that is so disgusting to a person that the person will say when you said I have closed the mosque what does that mean to the person? He will say this is a draconian legislation. What is important, Honourable Speaker, this must go. Nothing about closure was mentioned when it comes to such institutions. It should be regulations, some restrictions that is reasonable and to explain what form of restrictions. As has been said, you discuss with those who are the custodians so that you reach an understanding as to why that is being done.

Honourable Speaker, the regulation constitutes the instruments that our committee should have really focused on to monitor how they are being implemented. The challenges of their implementation: if there are institutional gaps, the institution that should be created to do so; if there are financial gaps, the finances that were required; if there are materials gaps, because you need human resources, financial resources and material resources to be able to deal with any pandemic.

Honourable Speaker, the committee has done its best and our duty is to add value to the work we have started. The work we have started is to realise that it is not only the Executive that has the responsibility of saving lives but this National Assembly has the obligation to save lives and we are competing with each other and we should show that we are firmer, in fact, in our principles and objectives in ensuring that the lives of our people are not compromised. That was the purpose of setting up such a committee to monitor the implementation of the regulations.

Honourable Speaker, the committee has done the work of meeting Ministries and some organisations like the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the hotel association, visiting markets and garages, border points with the objective of collecting facts. If we look at the facts, we will see that it informs us of what the gaps are and I would want to deal with those gaps so that we will go to the recommendations.

The key institution in fighting Covid-19 is the Ministry of Health. At page 9, the committee explains the core institutions that has been established to lead the fight and that is the National Public Health Emergence Committee. The committee has identified that it has earmarked certain responsibilities to be carried out. To do so, it emphasises that they have created a Special Project Account and that is opened at the Central Bank. How much is in that account?

What money is in that account? Our committee needs to provide us so that we understand what this account is out to do and whether it has the financial wherewithal to be able to carry it out. What they have identified as a source of finance is D500 million earmarked by the government and this is supposed to go to the Ministry of Health but they also emphasised that it will not only cover health issues. It also may cover certain other matters. They have indicated that the GCCI has provided D20 million and they are supposed to build 600-bed hospital in Sukuta but the project does not come from funds raised by the Ministry. It means that this D20 million is just from GCCI. When is this project going to be completed? When will the beds be available? That is really the question because we are dealing with emergency and from them the statistics are already quoted, I do not need to go back into that.

We know that we are faced by a crisis situation. Can you imagine 181,000 people being infected and they all live in a family setting, who will be left in the Gambia? All of us will be infected. I believe that people have heard that one worker infected 500 people in Ghana by working in a particular company. It means that one person can infect 500 people. This can spread like wild fire. Therefore, it is important that we take that into consideration and they have highlighted the dangers. If we ignore it, we do so at our own peril, the dangers are clearly highlighted by those who are specialists. They are our medical practitioners, if you are ill you go to them. What authority do you have to question their judgement? We have no moral or legal authority to question their judgement. We can only assess their actions based on results.

Honourable Speaker, they told us the institution that is important in that sense and one would wonder, at page 31, they continue to highlight the health dimension in the fight against Covid-19. Speaking to the Ministry of Health, they have seen the issues of equipment that are necessary. According to them, they have all the thermometers (500); they have others that have been ordered. In a

way they are justifying that they have the equipment that is necessary. It is for them to indicate what they need and when we looked at the results, the impact assessment, we will see whether the equipment that they have are serving the purpose for which they are intended.

The issue of their staff not being properly remunerated is clearly addressed at page 32. They are saying they give them D500, others D300 and others D200 (and this is a day). Are they satisfied with that? What queries do they have, we need to know? We need to deal with the staff to be able to gather the information that is necessary.

In the area of health, we have seen a missionary created, an institution but is that institution adequate? I hope they will come and educate us. They are the ones who told us, Honourable Speaker, that the illness by being exogenous, had to be controlled from the borders and that the first stage is screening. They told us that it is these thermometers they had at the borders and the airport to be able to screen. What did our committee discover? Are there two meters everywhere? That is the fight; that is the gun. You go to war without gun, you are dead. The frontline fighters are the health workers, each of them should have this in their pockets. Wherever they may be so that they will be able to continue the screening. The screening does not mean you have it or you do not have it. It is a means of first port of call to deal with the illness? It means that not only the health workers, they must train the security personnel who will be incorporated in this fight to also be able to have this and use it. Can we really say that all health workers or security personnel, 10 or 20 percent of them have these major instruments to fight this war? We want to know that. A database must be created for it so that we know this is what is available, then we know our limitation and how to augment to be able to fight our limitation. Otherwise, how can we fight? We must have facts, we fight with facts.

Honourable Speaker, it is important to again gather from that. They tell us that some people are asymptomatic and they do not reflect all that screening. How efficiently are we controlling the borders so that whoever comes in at least you will move to the odd dimension of being controlled for a period and even being tested? They need to come up and tell us their policy. Do you move from just screening to testing and what does that entail? We need to know that. Do they have the capacity to do that mass testing? That is important.

Honourable Speaker, they are the ones who also told us that once they discover certain symptoms you must be quarantined. You must be taken to a place and kept there. We have seen the amount of money that is now being paid, in Addendum, to the hotels. I do not need to go into that, we all have the document. You can see that they are being quarantined in hotels and millions are being paid to maintain that. Catering has to be done and millions are being paid for catering, is that sustainable? Do you not see the need that we must work or move towards the preventive dimension because if we move further and further into quarantining, the more expenditure and at the end of the day that is not sustainable. It is important therefore to look at that. Their own line of thinking is that you move from screening and actual observatory to take you to quarantine so that they can observe you and if they discover then they treat you. Now the treatment centres, we have seen MRC telling us that they have 42 beds so that we can speed up the process. Keneba, I believe that they said they have 10. It is like MRC is preparing itself for those numbers of beds. What do we have? Sukuta and which other treatment centre? I do not want to mention it. These are the things that we need to have: the places where people are being treated, their locations. I do not want to get into that substance, I am sure we should be able to get into that. What facility have we provided from the Ministry of Health to be able to do the treatment, the actual curing of the person? That is very significant.

To conclude the Health sector, Honourable Speaker, we had talked about an Inter-Ministerial Taskforce because you are talking about finance, environment, the border etc. All these must function not only at the level of a taskforce of officers under a WHO and a Minister but inter-ministerial. Maybe it exists, we need to get that information so that they will be able to sit down and look at these issues before regulations. They will be able to consult then one institution will not come and say I do not even know about the regulations. Who consulted who? How can they be that without that proper consultation at that high level? That is fundamental in our recommendations, if it does not exist, it should exist because the right hand must know what the left hand is doing otherwise you cannot have complementarities in action.

Honourable Speaker, they have looked at institutions like Trade. The committee wanted to know whether essential goods would not fall short of our needs. We have seen the Ministry talking about 37,000 tonnes eventually dropping to 23,000 tonnes. I am quoting statistics off head because I do not want to go and continue looking. If I have any error in that, you can rectify it. Essentially that huge drop and they can only attribute that to some exportation taking place. It is important then to look at who the importers are because you control the stock and how will your stock miss. It is essential to be able to have a regulation in being able to deal with those stocks to ensure that that exportation does not take place in the first place.

Honourable Speaker, it has also indicated the need to look at what is available locally. Have they actually examined whether there are stocks of rice/food in this country that people have produced, that there is need for internal assessment of what is available locally and if need be purchase those ones in the localities before we start either importing and say we are distributing? Some people may have stock of this food at the local level which we can purchase. It is important then that an impact assessment is done at that particular level also.

Honourable Speaker, there is the Ministry of Tourism indicating the drop anticipated in the tourist industry and the losses that are anticipated, D6.7 billion, is not an ordinary sum. It is going to affect the hotels, restaurants, lodges and every sector of the tourism industry. They are talking about 100,000 young people being laid off work so this is not an ordinary problem.

Honourable Speaker, when we look at the issue of works and communication, we see the incoming flights that all these public enterprises, GIA, etc. will be closely affected by the current situation. The Hajj flights will be suspended, they are talking about D200 million. Essentially, we are talking about an impact assessment of millions that are going to be lost. Honourable Speaker, I would beg to ask the committee Chairperson to tell me why he would take out state owned enterprises in that whole bag of providing funds of relief for the state. It seems like quite a number of them are going to suffer tremendous losses because of the current situation. We would want, ultimately in their recommendations, to activate certain committees to look/zero into this so that proper impact assessment can be done. The threats properly seen for the government to proper itself. You have seen the Minister of Finance indicating that the D35 million that has been given in terms of dealing with the state owned enterprises at least is being converted in some way to be able to deal with Covid-19. These are issues that we need to look at concretely in terms of the short, medium and long term impact on the economy and on those institutions and their survival.

Honourable Speaker, we have looked at their findings at the borders and markets etc. What I have not seen is talking to the market committees and unions. I have seen the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I do not want to accuse the committee of being business bias and not worker focused but I have seen absence in that. That really the unions, motor drivers, consumer

societies, etc. should have been contacted to be able to understand the impact on all sectors of society.

Honourable Speaker, the key institutions that can facilitate the success of the fight is the Ministry of Finance. Page 6 of the report tells us what the Ministry has actually been doing. At page 6, the Minister of Finance reveal that D500 million pledged to the Ministry of Health, D172 million has already been paid; that D100 million out of the D172 million was added to the grant approved by the World Bank towards the procurement of ambulances and so on and so forth. All equivalent to D12 billion. It is important to see exactly the resource base of Covid-19 and we hope that ultimately, we will put all the resources together.

First and foremost, we have heard from the Health Committee indicating the special fund that is created. We need to look at this issue of special funds. We have also have seen your report, especially the Addendum, and it is very clear. For me that was my major concern and we thank the committee that that element is now very clear. We are only told that there is virement but how did they get D500 million and what is clear from the Memo the Committee received from the Ministry is that the Office of the President had a virement of D20 million on travel, PMO training D70 million, National Audit Office travel D60 million, Ministry of Health D50 million on consultancy, Centralised Services D150 million, Ministry of Environment OMVG D100 million, OVP D2 million, PMO D1 million, National Assembly travel D4 million, Judiciary D2 million, PSC D1 million, Tourism D1 million, Justices D1 million, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs D22 million, Ministry of Agriculture D2 million, Ministry of Trade D1 million, Ministry of Health D2 million, Ministry of Environment D1 million, MoBSE D500 000, Ministry of Fisheries D1.5 million, MOHERST D1 million, Ministry of Works D500 000, Ministry of Health D70 million so in essence that is D500 million. We are being told that is where the virement actually comes. Let us look at Section 29 of the

Public Finance Act in terms of virement, whether what has happened is actually the right thing that should happen and what lessons could we draw from it.

Section 29 provides three pillars for virement. Subsection [4] states that there can be virement among expenditure items of a budgetary agency, which means you have a budgetary agency. A Ministry, National Assembly are all budgetary agencies. You can have a virement of items of budget within a budgetary agency, so it goes from one to the other, or among budgetary agencies under the same supervising department. You have three departments under a ministry, well it is the same budgetary agency so you can have virement between the funds of those departments among budgetary agencies by the approval of the Minister in consultation with the vote controller of budget agency. So what has actually happened here is virement across budgetary agency and if the Minister had consulted with the vote controllers it is perfectly in order but if the Minister have not done that then the Minister should accept that there has been oversight and this Assembly should be assured that as long as the Public Finance Act exists, that will be respected henceforth.

Essentially, we must look at what has also been said by the Ministry of Finance. They have indicated that in terms of the funds that they have received from the World Bank, that is actually given to the Central Bank. When it is given to the Central Bank then in reality the Central Bank will actually lend to the Ministry and in that sense, they have no authority to control what the Central Bank does. That is how it is put here. I would like the Minister eventually to really explain the rapid credit facility. There must have been some form of agreement between the IMF and the government. Whether it was 20th Century, 19th Century, or 18th Century, there must have been an agreement. It is only the existence of that parent agreement that should be able to ensure such development in terms of funds going into an account and being utilised without coming to the National Assembly. So we would request for the Minister to search for that parent

agreement so that we ultimately know from which provision that this particular practice is emerging. Without that then we have to sit down and really look at the practice and then make sure that the practice is fit for the purpose. That is the purpose of the exercise that we are here to look at Covid-19 from the perspective of the national interest.

As it stands, our committee has made recommendations and I would propose that we take this report not as the final report if the committee Chairperson and members agree but as a preliminary report which should be beefed up by the briefing of all the elements that are here so that a seasoned and robust recommendation could be made in the form of a resolution that the National Assembly would adopt. This is important that we now have the fact what is important now is to rely on the fact to ensure that we build the mechanism that would be able to fight the fight so that we can be victorious at the end. And I hope the Ministry of Health will see the vacuum in building up that institutional framework for the fight. I have not seen any layer of bringing experts in the country and mobilizing them so that we build up an observatory for disease control on a permanent basis. There should be an objective of having a permanent observatory for disease control which will definitely be guided and directed by a team of experts who will facilitate the building of the institution itself and then train the Gambians who will be able to run the institution. That is really important at this stage.

I have also not seen the whole plan of ensuring that testing throughout the country is being done immediacy. There are plans but we want something concrete and time bound so that we see that this is exactly what is going to happen in two weeks three weeks or a month. Do not come to us this time and ask for extension of state of emergency without concretely saying this is what we can achieve and this what we want to achieve concretely and this is what is going to be visible. So in that sense we will be able to move forward. If they

have that then we should be able to give them whatever number of days but if they do not have that, you may end up having 25 or 45 days because we still need to check whether you are fit for purpose, whether you are ready to fight this fight and lead us to fight it. We must be convinced. The regulations must now be built up on the basis of consultation so that we do not offend sensibility. It is said that the regulations must be reasonable and justifiable in a democratic society.

Lastly, Honourable Speaker, there is an extension mandate of other elements that should be taken into consideration. If you look at Section 36 of the Constitution, it is also goes to protect those people who may be arrested and detained under the state of public emergency and make it a requirement to report to the National Assembly on those who are detained during a state of public emergency. So we hope that the Minister will go into the whole issue of protection of fundamental rights and checking whether there is need for those tribunals to be established because it demands tribunals to be established to look at certain cases which deals with emergency powers. Emergency powers are not ordinary powers, they are dealing with other issues so do you need to create that special tribunal. So it is important that we look at this with greater insight and hopefully we would be able to create the machinery to be able to advance the course of fighting Covid-19 and exterminate it before it exterminates us.

HON. AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. If the most experienced people speak before you, sometimes you just tend to withdraw. Nonetheless, I just also contribute my quota on the debate but I am going to be very brief because I will not repeat anything that somebody has said before me.

Honourable Speaker what we are debating here is the report of the Special Select Committee that was established to monitor the implementation of the

state of public emergency. I just want to thank the committee for the job they have done on behalf of the National Assembly. Definitely, they have done wonders because they have visited almost 38 places, conducted series of meeting and so on. They have to be thanked because they have sacrificed a lot. I call them frontline workers and I hope they were taking all the precautionary measures that are necessary, the physical distancing during their visits to the various parts of the country, not only the face mask is enough but you have to observe the physical distancing. Honourable Speaker, Covid-19 is affecting the world globally and is not something new. We have been hearing and seeing until it has reached us so what we need to do as a country is to respond and in responding we definitely need the efforts of all to make sure that we are all protected. As you know, and as the saying goes, prevention is better than cure. Definitely, looking at the health system, if you want to compare it with the countries that are most affected today, you will tend to lose hope but still there are opportunities. Let us observe the regulations and guidelines given by the WHO and Ministry of Health for us to be safe and protect ourselves, our families and the entire nation.

Honourable Speaker, the only point that I want to emphasise is the health workers (frontline workers). They definitely deserve commendation. I definitely concur with the recommendation that they make with regards to the Ministry of Health, that the Special Select Committee has made, and I think it is like a carbon copy of the previous recommendations the Health Committee made before this plenary. Looking at the health system, there are challenges in various ways and means.

Honourable Speaker, one thing that we need to emphasise here as Parliamentarians is for the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance and also the Parliamentarians to make sure that those who are sacrificing their lives when we are sleeping, staying at home or doing whatever to make sure that we are safe

definitely need to be protected to the maximum level. They also need to be motivated because it is not easy to risk your life for something and at the end of the day you are not well motivated. I think it is a matter that should be taken by the Special Select Committee and also the National Assembly Select Committee on Health in particular, to be engaging the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance to see how best the frontline workers can be motivated especially, the health workers.

Honourable Speaker, as I said earlier, I do not need to repeat what has been said here because all the points that I have had been dealt with by the previous speakers. I just wish to stop here and once again thank the Special Select Committee and also the frontline workers. Thank you very much.

HON. FODAY NM DRAMMEH [TUMANA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. It is a long day and I would equally join my colleagues in thanking the special committee for the job well done. Indeed we are in a very trying moment as a country but then we have to sacrifice. This is the only thing that we have under the surface of the sun. Honourable Speaker, we were here last month to pass a regulation but again looking at the reality on the ground, I realize that we try to solve a problem but in doing so the regulations that we passed here created another problem. The timeframe that was in the regulations for essential commodity sellers in a market to operate from 6am to 2pm. Had it been the time was like from 6am to 5pm or 6pm, that would at least give chance to a lot of people to go to the market at their own convenient time. When that did not happen, everybody has to rush within that timeframe from 6am to 2pm. This is why there was a problem that we cannot even address. You cannot ask people to stay at home without feeding their families and they cannot feed their families without going to the market. I think this recommendation from the select committee that the market has to be open from 6am to 4pm is a point that I really like. I would also want to advocate and convince others to support it. If

need be, we can extend it to 5 or 6 o'clock so that those that are working in the public sectors or in the private sectors, when they come back home they can also use the few hours to go to the market to do their shopping so that they can feed their families.

Honourable Speaker, laws refer to the system of rules and regulations that a member of the society has to apply in both private and public lives in the interest of peace, good governance and the recognition of individual interests. No system of government can operate effectively when there is no law or when people are not paying attention to those laws. These are shown beyond reasonable doubts, going through the report, what the regulation is saying and the realities on the ground. In our markets and football fields, in fact, we say no to public gatherings but you still have some people going to the football fields playing football, the markets are overcrowded, the ferries are overcrowded.

The week before last, I travelled to Niumi. I do not know whether Upper Niumi or Lower Niumi, a village called Kerr Mamma but plying through Banjul to the ferry terminal. When I was at the ferry terminal, I was looking at the entire situation there. I asked myself the question: what is the essence of coming up with regulations when those regulations are not being adhered to and as Members of Parliament, we have responsibility. The primary responsibility of this Parliament is to make laws but again we are in a partnership with the Executive to make sure that all the laws that are made in this Parliament need to be enforced. Our responsibility is to make laws but the responsibility of the Executive is to make sure that the laws that are made by the Parliament are being implemented. If those laws are not being implemented, I see no reason why we should be coming up with other laws. Let us make sure, as Parliament, we follow the Executive. Let us play our part and follow the Executive to make sure that they play their part so that the purpose of coming up with some of these laws will not be defeated. Let us interact, let us know if they are

constrained in terms of human resources, capacity, or money. Let us make sure that we support them because this is a trying moment for the world, most particularly this country – The Gambia. All hands has to be on deck, regardless of our political affiliations, religion, gender and whatsoever. This is a trying moment, our responsibility is to make sure that we protect each and every Gambian. It is a primary responsibility on us to make sure that we support one another in these trying moments. There are lots of people suffering out there.

Honourable Speaker, going through the report, we go to page 6, the Ministry of Interior, with your permission, “The Ministry of Interior reported that those who are to enforce the regulations i.e. the security services, have no prior training on any on the regulations”. This is a cause for concern. When we met here last month, this is what I was trying to raise. Those who are supposed to implement these regulations should know the regulations to their fingertips. In as much as we want to protect our citizens, we should also not violate their rights. They have rights, you cannot just come and find people sitting at a place and you just jump on them trying to violate their rights. I am not very far from Latrikunda market, most of the vendors are coming to me lodging complaints that the police sometimes come and seize their second-hand clothing or some of the materials that they have, asking them to pay a certain amount of money. I would ask them, do you have any evidences that this is what they ask you to pay? They would say no. If the people that are supposed to protect the people and their properties are the ones violating their rights, that is really very bad. This is not a surprise, I watched the committee having an engagement with the Ministry of Interior saying that they do not even lay their hands on the regulations. I think this is going a long way in trying to jeopardize the efforts that this Parliament is making. We should not let this happen. Let us make sure that the people that are supposed to implement these regulations know these regulations to their fingertips so that they would try as much as they can to protect the people from catching this virus. It would also go a long way in trying to prevent them from violating their rights.

Honourable Speaker, I think we also have to look at the prices of some of these essential commodities. When we were here last month, a bag of rice in the Upper River Region is costing like D1,250 but now that the price of fuel has gone down drastically in the world market and even in The Gambia, this should have an impact on the price at the moment. The price of fuel per litre was D100 for example. Now that it has dropped to D50, I really want the committee to look into that to make sure that they engage the right authorities to make sure that it is also reflected on the price of those commodities because most of the time what the businessmen will complain is that we normally transport these commodities from the urban areas to the rural areas. I think that has to be looked at because most of the people in the provinces are the ones feeling what is happening in this country. That has to be looked at.

Going through the report again, page 8 where you had an engagement with the religious leaders. Honourable Speaker, the way we are going as a nation it will indeed kill religious commitment in the heart, mind and soul of our young people or the population. We will be very relaxed and lackadaisical in our worship and that has a lot of impact on the life and livelihood of the people of this country. The impact will be that it will raise the crime rate in this country. Most of the people in this country, especially the young people, are not involved in crimes because of their religious perspectives. The moment people are staying at home without going to the Masjid to observe their compulsory prayers and even Jumah prayers, Honourable Speaker, it is making people relaxed and that is not good for the country.

In fact, I see no reason why we should even close down the Masjids now because in this country especially in the rural Gambia you see a family of 40 or 45, 20, 15 or 10 of them would be living in a single room. Again, most of those people, like 10 of them, would be eating from the same basin. When you go deep into the interior of the country where you have these big marabouts with

their Talibes, some of those marabouts have more than 300 Talibes in their compounds and they are all living in single rooms. If these are some of things that are happening on the ground, I see no reason why we should close down the Masjids and churches.

Going by the relief packages, I think this is not only to the government but to every stakeholder in this country, be it an individual, philanthropist or government itself, let us try by all means and help the marabouts on the ground because most of them have 600, 500 or 300 children that are living with them in their compound. To my surprise, week before last when I was going to my constituency, I met series of children under the age of 12 and 14. They are Talibes that are begging in the street. If we cannot provide food for the Marabouts, obviously the children in the households of those Marabouts would go out and look for food because they have to survive. They are Gambians and they are human. Please, be it political parties, philanthropic individuals or government, let us make sure that we help these people so that they would not be vulnerable to the virus that we are talking about.

Going through the report again, page 10, the Local Government Authority (LGA) indicated that the enforcement of emergency powers regulations would continue to pose huge challenges as the Councils that are part of the key implementing authorities have neither been consulted nor served copies of the regulations to comprehend their content. In think this is also another important thing. We should all be stakeholders in this. We are all gearing towards protecting the life of each and every Gambian or even a non-Gambian residing in this country. We should try by all means and do whatever we are doing in the interest of our nation. Any stakeholder that is involved in the fight against this Covid-19, let us make sure that we engage each other so that the purpose of our fight would not be defeated. Like it was alluded to by the Member of Wuli West, we are fighting an enemy that we are not even seeing, an invisible enemy. If other stakeholders

are left behind, it will be very difficult to meet our target. Therefore, I want everyone to be part of this fight so that we can defeat this invisible enemy.

Going through it again, where you have the oversight monitoring tour, the objective (page 12), there is a question that I want to ask if the Chairperson can just shed light on that. Although he is not here, the committee members are here. Where you said the essential commodities shops were still open at 1 pm. I just want to know whether you engaged those people to know why they are still operating at that point in time so that you can at least let us know what we need to do so that we address that issue.

The Barra Ferry Terminal, the waiting shed was clear of passengers but the corridor from the vehicle entrance leading to the ramp was crowded with waiting passengers. It is like we are clearing here and dumping them at the other side. I think this is something that we have to look at because in as much as we are trying to fight this Covid-19, it is going to be very difficult. It is like you are solving the problem here and creating another one there. That has to be looked at.

The same thing goes on at the Farafenni Hospital, the list goes on. I wanted to ask, where you have the page 18, number 13, Sabi Border Post. Some frontline staff have been paid their allowances but there were others who reported that they were not paid. They reported that some were paid who were not entitled to. I do not know whether the committee made any findings in this because this is unacceptable. Someone who did not deserve to be paid is paid. Someone who sacrifices his life, time, energy and resource for the nation to make sure that the people of this country are protected, you ignore that person and give money to someone who does not deserve the money. This is tantamount to corruption. I do not know whether the committee made any findings in that because no

matter how we try, we cannot pay the frontline workers. They are sacrificing a lot.

For me, by 10pm I go to bed until 6am. These people are the ones in the fight. We do not need soldiers, atomic bombs, RPGs or machine guns. These are the people that we need to do the fight, the necessary fight. If they are frustrated in the entire process, honestly this is unacceptable. You cannot be at the forefront for 2, 3, 4, or 5 days, 1 week without being paid and at the end of the day you are following the right authorities to make sure that you lodge this complaint. If National Assembly went there, this should have been asked. Who are those that received this money and they should not be entitled to it and who are those who are not paid and they are supposed to be paid, to do justice to those people.

Where you have Banjul Albert Market Committee's observations, most of the shops that were not supposed to open at the time of the visit were closed. This is Banjul Albert Market but this is not applicable to other markets in the country. We need to know some of the reasons that led to this because maybe the people of Banjul are aware or cognizant of this Covid-19. Likewise, maybe the people of Basse are not so what is the gap? What do we need to bridge those gaps? This is something that the committee has to look at to do justice to those people in the Upper River Region.

The other thing is that the Lumos represent markets in our various communities, regions or districts. If time can be given to people to go to the market here to look for their livelihood, I think the committee also has to look in that dimensions to make sure that people also access Lumos because I have a lot of people in my constituency who produce a lot of onions. I bought a lot of onion from them but up to now they still have a lot of their onions with them. They still cannot sell them. They used to take them to the Lumos on Lumo days but right now Lumos are closed and they cannot go to the Lumos. The Basse market that we rely on

has been burnt into ashes. It means we already have what we can eat so the excess is what we used to sell to feed our families and to take care of our other necessities. If the Lumos are not open, it is going to be very difficult for the people to feed their families, especially in the Upper River Region, most particularly Tumana Constituency.

No allowance has been paid to any of the personnel so this is a complaint that is coming from all angles. Let us try and do justice to these people. It is going to be very difficult at this trying moment. You cannot leave your family at your compound, you are there for like 1 week or 2 weeks without being given the entitlement that you are entitled to. It is going to be very difficult. You cannot leave your family there whilst they are hungry. We have to look into this.

Most of these fishing sites too, we have to look into. This is one of the areas where our neighbours are getting into our country without our notice. Gambia does not have any problem internally. In fact, we can let life resume again. Let us go back to our normal business if we can guarantee that we are going to protect our borders. The only problem that we have in this country is our borders with our neighbours and we cannot control those borders 100%. What we need to do is to go down to their level i.e. the level of the local authorities in our various constituencies and regions. For instance, you go to Basse and engage the Regional Governor, all the Chiefs in the districts, all the VDCs and all Alkalis to make them be their own police or their own securities. However, this cannot be done without sensitizing them. They need to know about the reality of Covid-19. Let us keep trying, eventually the door will let us in. Let us keep trying, you cannot just convince everybody at a go. Let us keep trying because this is a matter of life and death and we cannot choose death over life. These are the people that we need to protect. Most of them do not even have access to some of this information that many are having in the urban areas. In my constituency, only 2, 3 or 5 communities have electricity. Some would not even bother

themselves to listen to radios. We have to make this the priority, to make sure that we sensitize our people.

For sensitization, there is one point that the Majority Leader made mention of i.e. the use of traditional communicators. These are the people that have a lot of influence on the lives of the people in our various regions, let us use them. In fact, some of those traditional communicators have groups, they are already registered. Let us make best use of them. Many people listen to them so the moment we use them, they are going to disseminate some of the information that cannot reach the last village in Kantora Constituency or the last village in Wuli East Constituency. With the help of these traditional communicators, that would pave the way whereby everybody will have access to some of this information. Honourable Speaker, with these few remarks, I want to conclude.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, thank you but it is not a few remarks. It has taken a long time although I have no control over you on that.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I want to move a Motion for us to adjourn until Monday at 10 o'clock because many people are observing this fasting period, thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry Honourable Member, we will still move ahead to work according to the program. Your Motion cannot be accepted.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Honourable Speaker there is a Motion on the floor. The procedure is...

THE SPEAKER: May I now call the Honourable Member for Sami please.

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [BADDIBU CENTRAL]: Honourable Speaker there is a Motion on the floor. There could be a counter Motion but there is a Motion on the floor.

THE SPEAKER: Please can you move your Motion proper and quote a relevant Standing Order section, Honourable Member for Kantora?

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Honourable Speaker I am rising under Standing Order 53 (Motion without notice) for us to adjourn by 6 o'clock. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Kantora, I have agreed to your Motion but I am appealing that instead of adjourning the session until Monday, can we not meet on Saturday, tomorrow, because the state of the public emergency is expiring on Monday? Can you please amend your Motion to Saturday, tomorrow?

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I am amending the first Motion i.e. I rise under Standing Order 53 [c] to raise the Motion that we suspend the debate until tomorrow Saturday at 10am prompt.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member, any seconder?

HON. BAKARY CAMARA [KIANG CENTRAL]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I rise to second the motion.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agree to]

[To adjourn till tomorrow, Saturday 16th May, 2020 at 10am prompt]