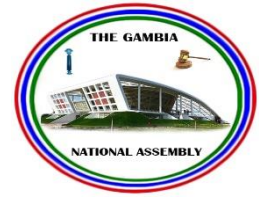




REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

National Assembly, New Assembly Building, Reginald Pye Lane
Banjul, The Gambia



COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

HON. SPEAKER

MADAM MARIAM JACK-DENTON

FAREWELL STATEMENT

TO

THE FIFTH LEGISLATURE

MONDAY 28TH FEBRUARY, 2022

Honourable Members, I welcome you all to today's sitting of Monday 28th February, 2022. Today is the beginning of the final sitting of the last Ordinary Session of this Fifth Legislature. In light of this, I wish to sincerely acknowledge and thank all Honourable Members of the Fifth Legislature for building consensus around critical issues that have been tabled before the Assembly during the last five years.

Honourable Members, you will agree with me that this Assembly has witnessed the transition from virtually the dominance of one-political party to a more pluralised Assembly with multi party representation. As the mandate of the Fifth Legislature draws to a close, it is therefore appropriate to bid farewell to Honourable Members, staff and the nation at large. While doing this, I will equally attempt to review some of the progresses made so far, as well as the challenges faced by the Fifth Legislature. It has been a very busy and eventful five-year parliamentary term for all of us, particularly for the new members who have had much to learn and adapt to.

First of all, on a personal note, I wish to thank His Excellency, the President of the Republic, Mr. Adama Barrow, for nominating me as a Member of the National Assembly under the powers vested in him by the 1997 Constitution. I will always be grateful to him for the privilege given to me to serve my country in this capacity and in this noble Institution. Equally, I wish to register my profound gratitude to the entire Members of the Assembly for electing me as Speaker of the Fifth Legislature. This was so huge for me and my family for two reasons: first, being Speaker of Parliament as a woman in a new democratic dispensation when Parliament and the country was at the international timeline, was indeed challenging as well as rewarding. Secondly, for my family and I, it is historic and delightful that my father was once a Speaker of Parliament for two terms during the First Republic. My family and I are forever grateful!

Honourable Members, it is important to highlight progress made by the Fifth Legislature on certain critical issues as well as the challenges faced. Honourable Members will agree with me that the most important procedural document which sets out parliamentary structures, procedure and processes is the Standing Orders of the National Assembly. Significantly, the Fifth Legislature with support from the Office of the Clerk and the CPA-UK, undertook a major review of its Standing Orders from August 2018 to September 2019 when the new Standing Orders were adopted. Some of the key changes in the Standing Orders includes: the legislative process, for example, a minimum nine-day period was imposed before a Bill could be passed at all its stages, where previously bills would usually be considered and voted on by the Assembly within a day. This was a huge achievement for our parliamentary democracy since the dawn of the democratic dispensation in 2016. In fact, I understand it is the first comprehensive review of the Standing Orders since 2001. We are proud, as a National Assembly, of the high degree of satisfaction with the Standing Orders which were revised in 2019 following a thorough review exercise to bring the Assembly's procedure in line with international parliamentary standards and practice.

Under the stewardship of the various Chairpersons and the invaluable support of the Office of the Clerk, the performance of our legislative oversight and accountability functions as enshrined in the 1997 Constitution and the Standing Orders of the National Assembly were exceptional and encouraging in a fledgling democracy.

Honourable Members, during the course of proceedings of this Fifth Legislature, Parliament was able to consider, scrutinise and pass numerous legislation that touch on the lives and livelihoods of the people and the nation in general. According to our records, about fifty-three (53) Bills were enacted from 2017 to February, 2022, including the annual Appropriation Acts. Prominent among these legislations are:

1. **The National Human Rights Commission Act, 2017;**
2. **The Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission Act, 2017;**
3. **The Constitutional Review Commission Act, 2017;**
4. **The Forest Act, 2018;**
5. **The Maritime Zones Act, 2019;**
6. **The Women Enterprises Fund Act, 2020;**
7. **The Petroleum Commission Act, 2021;**
8. **The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2021;**
9. **The National Assembly Service Act, 2021;**
10. **The National Health Insurance Act, 2021; and most recently**
11. **The Public Service Pensions Act, 2022, among others.**

On another note, Parliament during the Fifth Legislature witnessed the tabling of the Constitution (Promulgation) Bill, 2020 (in other words the CRC Draft Constitution) by the Hon. Attorney General and Minister for Justice in 2020. However, the document stalled in Parliament at the Second Reading Stage. Notwithstanding the setback, the Government may decide to come back to Parliament to continue the process of promulgating a new Constitution for our Republic.

The Legislature also witnessed the tabling of three (3) Member's Bills and enacted two of them whilst the other one tabled failed to pass through the second reading stage. This is unprecedented in the history of the National Assembly as only one Member's Bill was ever introduced and passed in the National Assembly.

Honourable Members, Parliament has also facilitated and confirmed appointments to the National Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the Judicial Service Commission. We wish them all success in their endeavours within their respective institutions. At this

juncture, I wish to also make special acknowledgement of Hon. Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and head of Departments and Agencies whose efforts and collaboration have helped us accomplished this much.

We have also successfully concluded some important businesses of Parliament for example, the State of the Nation Addresses, and consistently considered and approved the annual National Budget over the years.

We have also considered and deliberated on several motions, personal explanations, matters of the day, ministerial statements and other parliamentary matters. This is testimony to the fact that Parliament is a national forum for public consideration of issues of concerned to our people.

On a significant note, and a pride for this Fifth Legislature, is the proliferation of Parliamentary Questions to Hon. Ministers for Oral Answers. Our records have revealed that not less 150 Questions were processed for each Ordinary Session compared to not more than ten (10) Questions in the entire period of the fourth Legislature. This is again unprecedented in the history of our parliamentary democracy as a legislative tool of holding government to account. This was highly symbolic designed to demonstrate the mandate of the Legislature as people's representatives - the people's Parliament!

As a Parliament and Office of the Speaker, I have hosted several international parliamentary and other delegations from strategic partners in the international community, including, among others, high-level delegations from the People's Republic of China, the Republic of France, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Republic of Senegal, the Republic of Kenya, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, (UK Branch and the Africa Region), the International Republican Institute, and the International IDEA. These and other delegations have interacted with

Parliamentarians and staff as a component of parliamentary diplomacy in pursuit of our strategic objectives in bilateral and multilateral fora.

Honourable Members, I wish to enumerate some of the main strengths of our Parliament as a handing over legacy to the next Legislature - the Sixth Legislature:

- **During our term, Executive-Legislative relations have improved since the last elections in April 2017. This is illustrated by a constructive and cordial working relationship between the Majority and Minority Leaders of the National Assembly.**
- **The National Assembly enjoys substantial support from development partners including CPA and CPA-UK, WFD, all UN systems in The Gambia, the International Republican Institute (IRI), Article 19, International IDEA, TIKA and many others. The National Assembly is equally active in other inter-parliamentary meetings such as ECOWAS, ACP-EU and PAP. Several international exchanges, for example to Ghana, Sierra Leone and the UK, have exposed Honourable Members and staff to contemporary parliamentary good practices.**
- **The 2017 election saw a very high turnover of new Members, but a successful induction programme was carried out with the assistance of international partners on the operations, practices and procedures of the Assembly. Given that elections traditionally result in a high turnover of Members, a similar induction programme is necessary for the Sixth Legislature.**
- **Honourable Members, our friends from the media will agree with me that the sittings of the National Assembly (including voting) and the proceedings of Committees were open to the public. The media was granted unrestricted access to all proceedings. Despite limited ICT infrastructure, the audio-visual broadcasting infrastructure has**

been improved with live streaming of sittings of the National Assembly on all the Assembly's digital media platforms, providing digital quality live broadcasts, and a replay service that enables users to watch, link or to download videos of Assembly proceedings. The National Assembly is also developing and populating a new website (assembly.gm).

- Though challenges remain, there is evidence that Committees are becoming more assertive and effective when conducting oversight. Notably, the Standing Committee on Defense and Security provides oversight of the security sector and intelligence services, a sector which was a no-go area for preceding Legislatures. This equally demonstrates that the security service is accountable to civil rule and authority.
- Honourable Members, in accordance with the new Standing Orders, the procedures for budget and financial scrutiny have equally been strengthened. The Finance and Public Accounts Committee (FPAC) and the government must now agree to a protocol on the administrative arrangements for the scrutiny of the annual draft budget and other related budgetary matters.
- Furthermore, the ethical regime of the National Assembly has also been toughened. The new Standing Orders provide a mechanism to ensure transparency and responsibility for the conduct of parliamentary matters including adherence to codes of conduct and disclosure of interest. For example, Standing Order 135 establishes the register of interests of Members of the Assembly which will be made available for public inspection.

Honourable Members, the excitement of our successes or achievements cannot distract us from our challenges. Parliament's role in scrutinising the reports of government and public institutions as well as the reporting of some Committees have been challenging due to the overwhelming and

competing workload of the Legislature. As the saying goes, the work of Parliament can never be exhausted, hence the reasons why legacy reports are prepared, and the next Legislature will need to look critically and carefully at the issues and the challenges being faced by government entities. Parliament has a role to appraise the performance of Government.

The following are some of our key challenges:

- The infrastructure of Parliament is inadequate. There is a lack of office accommodation for both Members and some professional staff. There are limited meeting rooms (4 meeting rooms for about 18 committees). There are a few technical challenges including no media room or conference centre. I hope the next Speaker and Parliament will engage our partners and of course Government (the Ministry of Finance) to invest in a new annex building to cater for this infrastructural deficiency. Unfortunately, although my Office tried to engage the assistance of the Turkish Agency for International Cooperation (TIKA) on this matter, it did not yield in any success. This is a project, as you all know, I dearly wish the next leadership of the National Assembly to take up.
- On institutional matters, the existing professional staff are non-partisan, and additional staff are being recruited to improve on the capacity. The Hansard unit is understaffed but considerable efforts is being made to clear the backlog in transcriptions.
- The FPAC has the mandate to examine the audited accounts of government and the Report of the Auditor General on those accounts. The Public Enterprises Committee (PEC) provides oversight on State Owned Enterprises. Both committees have inherited a backlog of unaudited accounts, but attempts have been made to ensure that government institutions and state-owned enterprises are up to date with their audited accounts in a more timely and effective manner.

- The National Assembly Service is responsible for providing public education about the functions of the Assembly and its Committees. Some initiatives have been undertaken, for example the recent Open Day forum organised by the Office of the Clerk together with WFD-Gambia serves as a public lecture for stakeholders on the working of Parliament. The Office of the Clerk has now institutionalised this as an annual event to better bring parliament closer to the people.

Honourable Members, we would be remiss if we failed to note with sadness the passing away of two Honourable Members and former Clerk of this Assembly during this legislative term:

- Hon. Demba Sowe, former NAM for Niamina West;
- Hon. Fakebba NL Colley, former NAM for Kiang West; and
- Mr. Dodou CM Kebbeh, former Clerk of the National Assembly.

We remember these fine individuals and their contributions with affection and profound sense of loss. We pray that their gentle souls will rest in perfect peace in Jannatul Firdaus.

Honourable Members, noting that this is the last plenary Ordinary Session of the National Assembly as campaign for elections to the Sixth Legislature begins next week, Hon. Members will be reconnecting with their constituencies and electorates for electioneering. Honourable Members, I urge you all to campaign peacefully and smoothly. I wish you all to return refreshed and ready to continue the sterling work started by this Fifth Legislature.

To have served as Speaker of Parliament has been a great honour afforded to very few in our country's history. I must admit that the job of a Speaker is not an easy one. In fact, I consider it the hardest job in the land – I can tell you this for free. The expectations of whoever holds the office are infinite compared to the resources available.

Honourable Members, Parliament as an Institution, through the help of the Authority and the Office of the Clerk, we have repositioned and upgraded the Parliamentary Service through institutional capacity buildings, recruitments, and relevant trainings. We are very proud that we are leaving Parliament today in good and safe hands as far as institutional memory and capacity are concerned. The employees of the parliamentary Service are very good people and partners we are all proud of!

For Parliament and Parliamentarians in general, the future of Gambian progressive politics lies within your hands. I therefore wish the new incoming Legislature and Members all the best in the great task that lies ahead. There are always long dark nights of the soul. But believe it or not, morning does come, often sooner than you think.

On this note, Honourable Members, I wish to thank the Honourable Deputy Speaker, Honourable Momodou LK Sanneh, the Hon. Majority and Minority Leaders, Honourable Kebba K. Barrow, Honourable Samba Jallow, and all veterans and doyens of this Assembly in the persons of Honourable Sidia Jatta, Honourable Halifa Sallah, Honourable Muhamed Magassy and Honourable Majanko Samusa for their support, guidance, and dedication to the Assembly. Equally, I wish to register my thanks and gratitude to the various Chairpersons for their contributions to the work of the Assembly. Honourable Members, I am equally indebted to you all for your cooperation and dedication to duty over the period.

My thanks also go to the Clerk of the National Assembly, Mr. Momodou A. Sise, his deputies Mr. Daniel Cardos, Mr. Buba ME Jatta and Mr. Kalipha MM Mbye, and indeed all staff of the Assembly Service, for their unflinching hard-work, commitment and dedication. Our best wishes to all of them in their pursuit to providing better services to the Sixth Legislature. Honourable Members, on a special note on Chamber

and Table Office support services, I wish to register my special thanks, gratitude and recognition to the Clerk, Mr. Momodou A. Sise and his Deputy for Legal and Procedural Matters, Mr. Kalipha MM Mbye and Table Office Team for their extraordinary service to me and the Assembly over the years. I am not being biased or discriminatory here, but the Clerk and Table Office staff have been my immediate assistants with a mountain of challenges which they have endured with professionalism. Equally, I wish to thank and recognise the services of my Personal Assistants, my Orderly, my Guards and my Drivers. I am indebted to them and all staff of the National Assembly Service.

It is a singular honour to serve in the high office of Speaker of the National Assembly. Of course, I had no interest in being here for the sake of being here, and that the only point of being here was to make a difference for the betterment of our country. In some instances, I succeeded. In others I did not. Such is the nature of life.

But when history is one day written, detached from the passions of our time, perhaps we will be remembered, as Fifth Legislature, that we performed well and did raise the bar high as far as representative democracy is concerned. I would like to quote Dr. Kwame Nkrumah when he said: ***“Those who would judge us merely by the heights we have achieved would do well to remember the depths from which we started.”***

To conclude, nothing has brought me greater joy in my tenure as Speaker and head of the Legislature than the smiles that I have seen on the faces of some of our staff as a result of securing financial and operational independence for Parliament. I am glad that together, as a Parliament, we were able to save the future of Parliament as an Institution by the passing the National Assembly Service Act, 2021.

I will also continue to support the great causes of nation building, as members of this Assembly also know very well, I am a passionate Gambian.

To the members of this parliament, both friends and chair-challengers [laugh], and I can confidently say they are spread equally across both sides of the chambers, I thank you for the privilege of working with you.

Whatever has been said, in very chaotic instances sometime, is now in the past, I bear no malice against anybody. Life is too short for that. This is parliament and is a great institution. To my family, thank you for your support and endurance despite all the challenges associated with the job, you mean a lot to me. In the days ahead, I will be spending sometime with my family, [jokingly] I would ask my good friends in the fourth estate (the Media) to give us privacy as I will cease to be a public figure.

And so, having said all that, on this final Ordinary Session in the National Assembly, and as is now recorded in the landmarks for occasions such as this adjournment debate, it has really been my honour and privilege to have served this Institution and my country. I thank you all!