



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

[OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT]

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PROCEEDINGS THE FIRST EXTRAORDINARY SESSION

[REVISED ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE, 2022]

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Proceedings of Thursday 28th July, 2022 Sitting of the 6th Legislature of the
Second Republic of The Gambia

SESSION 2022

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[By: Hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs]

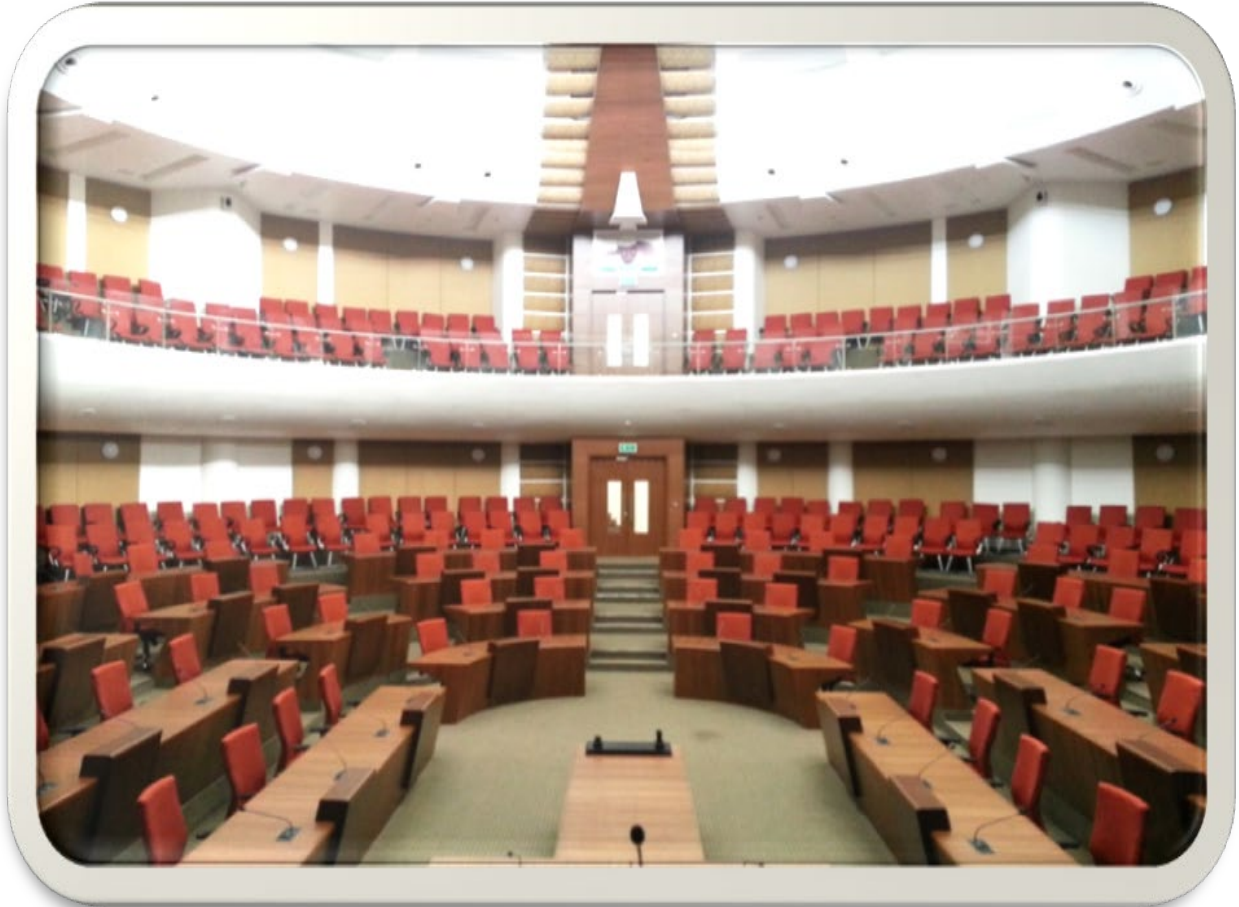
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THE CHAMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE GAMBIA

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

[OFFICIAL HANSARD]

THE FIRST EXTRAORDINARY SESSION

FOR 2022 LEGISLATIVE YEAR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

THURSDAY 28TH JULY, 2022

1. PRAYERS

[The Speaker, Hon. Fabakary Tombong Jatta, read the prayers.]

*[The Assembly met at 10:30 a.m. in the New National Assembly Building,
Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul.]*

[The Speaker, Hon. Fabakary Tombong Jatta, in the Chair]

The Assembly was called to Order.

2. Communication from the Chair

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, may I welcome you all to the First Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly in 2022 Legislative Year. Equally, may I, on your behalf, welcome the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, the person in charge of business before the Assembly. Let me also welcome His Excellency the Vice President, Cabinet Ministers, Senior Government Officials and those in the Gallery.

Honourable Members, as you may already be aware, this sitting is convened pursuant to Section 98(1a[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 Assembly to consider important and urgent matters of state. Thus, the reason for convening this Extraordinary Session of the Assembly.

Honourable Members, the President of the Republic has indicated the business of today in a Certificate of Urgency that requires the urgent

consideration of the Assembly. Accordingly, I wish to put a vote on the Certificate of Urgency without debate.

Be it resolved that this august Assembly do accept the Certificate of Urgency issued by the President dated 19th July 2022. Those in favour please say 'Aye', and those not in favour say no. The 'Ayes' have it.

3. Corrections and Approval of Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 25th April, 2022

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 25th April, 2022 is before us for corrections and approval. Can any Honourable Member move that the said Record of Votes and Proceedings be considered and approved, please?

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NUIMI]: I move that the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 25th April, 2022 be considered and approved.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder?

HON. ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]: I so second it, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER:

[Question Proposed]

Any issue or observation from Honourable Members? We can look at it, page by page. Any comment or observation starting from page 1?

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker page 4, first paragraph, second line reads; "question put that the august Assembly do consider the report of the Committee of Selection on the report of the Committee of Selection on the nomination of membership to committees". The use of 'on' is too much there, so I think after selection in the second line we could say "regarding the nomination of membership.

THE SPEAKER: Report of Committee of Selection on the nomination of membership to committees. What is your suggestion?

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: I said "regarding" the nomination, instead of 'on' again.

THE SPEAKER: I do not understand, but selection on the nomination of membership ...

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Member for Wuli East, I think if you look at it, it is in inverted commas. It is the title of the original report it was drafted on, so they are reflecting on it that is why it is in inverted commas. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Wuli East, is that ok? If so, we move to page 5.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you. The paragraph under the end of the debate, first line. It reads, "on the invitation of the Honourable Speaker, 'the' Honourable Billay G. Tunkara ...". The word "the" should be deleted. Going further, it says again 'Majority and Members'; it should be "Majority Leader" instead.

HON. SAINÉY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Yes, Honourable Speaker. I will refer us back to number 25 of page 4, the ensuing debate. Honourable Fatou Cham [‘Sanimenterent’], the spelling of her constituency on that page does not match with the one on her tag “Sanimentereng”.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, number 25 of page 4, second to last line, the name “Sanimentereng” is not spelt as ‘Sanimenterent’, so he wants it to be corrected. Table Office will take note. Any other on page 5? Then, we move on to page 6 which is the last.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Yes, it is just a typographical error. The word ‘sin de’ is wrongly spelt. It should have been “sine die”.

THE SPEAKER: It should be “die” instead of ‘de’. Any other?

HON. BIROM J.S. SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Honourable Speaker, I will refer the Assembly to today’s Order Paper. Instead of “6th”, it is written as ‘5th’ Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: It has been corrected, Honourable Member for Niamina West. Honourable Members any observations on page 6?

[Question proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 25th April 2022 be approved with amendments.]

4. Motion:

Be it **resolved** that this Assembly do consider and approve the:

- I. Laying of the revised Estimates of the Revenue and expenditure for the year 2022, and
- II. Committee of supply on the Revised Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2022. Both to be laid by the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Minister, you are invited to the podium.

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Good morning Honourable Speaker and the esteem august Assembly. I present before you the Revised Budget for the Financial Year 2022.

Honourable Speaker, I rise to submit before this august Assembly, a Revised Budget for 2022 as per the provision of Section 30(1) of the Public Finance Act, 2014 which stipulates that "The Minister may submit a revised budget to the National Assembly with any changes on the revenues and expenditures that may be required within the limit of total appropriated amount of expenditures in any particular financial year". The submission of this Revised Budget is premised on the following four factors:

1. The downward revision of total revenues amounting to D3.3 billion which is 11% of the 2022 originally approved budget. This came about due to revenue shocks, the detail of which will be read shortly;
2. The reduction of expenditure budget by D1.2 billion from the following categories; debt service and cuts from the Ministries, Directorates and Agencies which amounts to 3.4% of the Approved Budget;

3. The funding of the salary increment amounting to D575 million (five hundred and seventy-five million dalasi); and
4. The creation of two new ministries (the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, and the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative Reforms, Policy Coordination and Delivery).

This proposed budget is reflective of the current economic realities and consistent with a stable macroeconomic framework. As both the domestic and global economies began to recover from the effects of the pandemic in 2022, the Russia–Ukraine War brought about a dramatic shift in the global economic conditions characterised by heightened supply side constraints, higher food and energy prices, fuelling inflationary pressures across the globe. The resulting effect is the growing poor performance of the domestic resource mobilisation affecting oil related taxes as well as put increasing pressures on government spending needs. These effects together with the creation of additional two new ministries and the decision of the Government to increase the salaries of Civil Servants necessitated the revision of the 2022 Approved Budget to accommodate these changes.

▪ **RECENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS**

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members of the National Assembly

In 2022, initial growth forecast was estimated at 5.8% which is largely driven by stronger private remittances inflow to support construction and domestic demands as well as a more sustained recovery in the tourism section. However, the Ukraine War has dramatically shifted the outlook to the downside with overall economic growth revised downwards to 3.8% induced

by heightened inflationary pressures, increase food commodity prices, agriculture inputs, fertilizer prices and energy prices. In addition, the growing global supply chain bottlenecks and a reversal in general monetary policy direction further exacerbates the downside risk to growth.

As a result, the agricultural sector in 2022 is estimated to only grow marginally to 4.8% from 4.7% in 2021. Whilst the industrial and service sectors are projected to record a decline in growth of 6.3% and 1.1% in 2022 compared to 10% and 1.9% respectively.

However, the faster than anticipated recovery in tourism arrivals in early 2021 and record high remittance inflow spurred growth, but the recent global macroeconomic landscape has dramatically rendered the outlook more uncertain. As inflation continues a faster pace reducing the spending capacity of both the tourists and The Gambians abroad, the trajectory of good performance on tourism and remittances to drive domestic growth is becoming more a doubt.

On inflation, the global increase in energy and food prices is fuelling inflation reaching 11.6% in June of this year. And as supply constraints continues, amid a sustained increase in demand, inflationary pressures are expected to further strengthen. Thus, stifling the growth prospects, especially for lower-income-import-dependent countries. As a result, inflation is expected to remain above the medium target of 5% for the rest of 2022 and beyond.

In terms of outlook, growth is projected to moderately rebound to 3.8% in 2022 and strengthen further in the medium term at an average of 4.3%

per year thereafter. These projections are predicated upon recovery in tourism which appears slower than initially anticipated in view of the surge of the global inflation outlook and the on-going Ukraine War.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members of the Assembly

▪ **THE RATIONALE UNDER-PINNING THE REVISED BUDGET**

As you know, government has taken a decision to revise the Approved 2022 Budget due to the four factors mentioned above. The global economic shocks resulted in the non-realisation of more than 11% of the revenue budget is one case in point. To ameliorate that, the Government decided to reduce other charges and interest on domestic debts to contain the impact of the revenue reduction and to be able to accommodate the increase in the salary of the civil service as well as a revised remuneration package for the cabinet members. Overall, this has increased the personnel cost to D575.8 million. The increase is applicable to certain public institutions that use the civil service integrated pay scale.

To finance the salary increment, government has embarked on expenditure cuts across the board. These cuts affected other current charges by D761 million, capital expenditure by 116.3 million, and debt service by D415 million.

On revenue, there is general decline in revenues and grands. The continuous subsidy on petroleum products to the tune of nearly 1 billion for the first 6 months of the year affected the revenue performance for the oil-related products.

Budget support grants has been revised downwards due to the non-materialisation of budget support from the EU and the African Development Bank for a combined amount of \$30 million which transmitted to D1.5 billion, \$23 million and \$7million respectively.

For non-tax revenue, US \$30 million has been revised downwards following the non-realisation of this revenue from the petroleum sector receipts. The sum of these three revenue items resulted in the overall reduction of 3.3 billion in the revenue.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members of the Assembly

- **REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES**

Total Revenue and Grants for the revised 2022 fiscal year is projected to reach D26.6 billion which is about 11% decline compared to the Approved 2022 Budget. The decline in the Revised Budget is mostly on account of poor performance in tax and non-tax revenue items as well as the missing out on the budget support grants. The lower performance in non-tax revenue of D1.47 billion is mostly related to lower than programmed non-tax revenue from the petroleum sector for 2022. Project grants are projected to remain unchanged at D9.66 billion whilst programmed grants are expected to decline to 1.1 billion in the Revised Budget compared to D2.6 billion as per the Approved 2022 Budget. This downward revision is explained primarily by the D1.6 billion expected in budget support from the EU and African Development Bank. As a result, the 2022 Revised Budget only factors budget support of D1.1 billion from the World Bank which was duly received.

- **EXPENDITURE AND FINANCING**

Total Expenditure and Net Lending are revised from the approved estimate of D32.2 billion in 2022 to D31.1 billion for the Revised Budget of the 2022 fiscal year, representing a decline of 3.4%. Personnel Emolument Expenditures, on the other hand, are projected to increase from D5.1 billion to D5.7 billion, accounting for additional personnel cost of D575.8 million. The increase in personnel emolument is mainly because of the increase in the basic salary of civil servants.

Other Current (Other Charges) Expenditure is estimated to decline from 11.3 billion to D10.6 billion by the end of the fiscal year, representing a decline of 6.7% (in dalasi term D761.3 million). This is mainly as a result of the cuts in goods and services, and transfers on budget balances of MDAs. Similarly, the capital expenditure (GLF and externally financed) is also expected to fall from 12.1 billion to D12.0 billion, a 116.3 million (1%) decline compared to the 2022 Approved Budget.

Debt Interest Payments are also revised downwards to D3.04 billion, falling by D415.2 million in the Revised Budget compared to the 2022 Approved Budget amount of D3.5 billion. This is mostly due to the over projection of domestic debt interest payments by D450 million.

On financing, external financing remains broadly unchanged. However, domestic financing through domestic borrowing has increased to D4.2 billion in the Revised Budget from D2.5 billion in the approved budget. This represents an increase of D1.7 billion in domestic borrowing coming from the ECF on lending to support the revenue shocks from the Russian-Ukraine war. Capital revenue also is increased by D385 million in the Revised Budget,

reaching D1.4 billion (37.9% increase) from 1.0 billion in the 2022 Approved Budget. This is mostly on account of better-than-expected offer price for the sale of MEGA Bank.

Mr Speaker and Honourable Members of the Assembly

- **REVENUE POLICIES TO SUSTAIN THE BUDGET**

To restore oil revenues, domestic retail prices will need to be revised to reduce the subsidy element to generate a total revenue of D750 million by the end of the year. This measure is expected to generate 0.6% of the GDP in the next five months.

The Revised Budget will also include immediate revenue measures which will help address the increase in the Wage Bill resulting from the 30% salary increment. As a result, the 30% increment in salaries is estimated to generate a personal income tax of 222.5 million in the remaining six months of the year.

On MEGA Bank sale, government will ensure timely execution of the sale agreement so that the proceeds from the sale will be available for spending.

On pensions, 5% deduction will be applied on the gross earnings of all employees which is estimated to generated 106 million to finance the budget.

In the context of the improved domestic resource mobilisation, the Ministry has established recently Directorate of Tax and Revenue which will focus on enhanced compliance and monitoring of revenue performance. This will

cover critical areas such as domestic and international trade taxes as well as tax expenditures.

On the Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE), the directorate has already commenced work and has issued letters to all the State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) to submit records of their PAYE deductions, filing and payment to the GRA. This in effect is expected to ramp up compliance through enhanced monitoring. A similar letter will be issued in collaboration with the GRA to all registered tax payers for the Pay-as-You-Earn. Similar measures are being undertaken by the new directorate for all VAT registered entities in the country to remit VAT collected on behalf of the Government to the GRA on time. The current VAT compliance rate of 66% is expected to be increased to at least a minimum of 80% and with that we expect to generate additional revenue.

On Tax Exemptions and Special Investment Certificates (SICs), the Ministry has taken an aggressive approach to tackling excess losses associated to tax exemption under the SIC schemes. This action has started with the launching of an audit on all expiring SIC beneficiaries to establish the potential tax receipts from graduating companies. These exercises will be conducted periodically going forward.

On the telecommunication sector, the Ministry in consultation with the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy will introduce revenue measures that will help enhance non-tax revenue collection.

Land lease rental income is largely underperforming which is mostly due to low compliance and lack of enforcement. To this end, the Ministry has requested from the Ministry of Local Government & Lands a list of all leased

properties and the number of receipts associated to the leases. A comprehensive action plan will be drawn in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government & Lands to support the collection and administration of land-leased rental.

The implementation of the digital tax administration system through the Asycuda World has commenced. The Asycuda World was launched on the 20th June 2022 and the Intergraded Tax Administration System has also started. This is expected to improve compliance and reduce the cost of collection as well as improve data quality for economic policy planning and formulation.

Rental income on both domestic and commercial properties remain largely untaxed. As a result, GRA in collaboration with GBoS has recently conducted a survey on all rented properties in the Greater Banjul Area to establish a rental registry that can inform an enforcement plan and collection strategy.

On toll bridges, recent changes in the automation on ticketing of revenue collection at the Senegambia Bridge has proved to be highly efficient, registering a revenue growth of 100% compared to the manual ticketing system. In addition, the Accountant General's Department has now been deployed to take over revenue collection administration from The Gambia Ferries and National Road Authority. Giving this success, the Ministry in collaboration with relevant stakeholders is working on establishing a toll collection plaza at the Basse and Fatoto Bridges to further strengthen toll related revenues.

On the PPP concessions, the Ministry is embarking on a comprehensive review of all Government concession contracts, especially the ones close to expiration. The share of the concession fees on the current security port at the Banjul International Airport that goes to The Gambia Civil Aviation Authority will revert to the consolidated revenue fund.

Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members of the Assembly, the expenditure policies are hereby outlined.

▪ **EXPENDITURE POLICIES**

The 30% basic salary increment only covers the Civil Servants (i.e., ministries and departments as well as subverted hospitals under the Ministry of Health and subverted schools under the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education).

Furthermore, the general 30% increment on basic salaries excludes pensioners as their pensions were increased by 100% in 2018. This increment resulted to an income mismatch between the active employees and the pensioners, so their exclusion is meant to correct this anomaly.

Delinking of allowances from the basic salary will be carried out to further create an estimated fiscal space of D125 million in the next six months.

To further create fiscal space, the Ministry will freeze all committee allowances for internally held meetings within the ministries.

On the general expenditure revisions, a cut on the budget balances of ministries was done to provide needed fiscal space in order to accommodate the salary revision. In addition, the groundnut subsidy for 2022 has been

removed since groundnut prices are surging globally and therefore minimising the need for the subsidy on groundnut.

Domestically Financed Capital Expenditure has also been reduced. This affects mainly non-performing capital projects. However, additional funding for road construction has been provided, and this covers roads such as the Hakalang and North Bank roads, Lots 1 and 2, as well as the Kiang Sankandi.

Debt service: The Ministry has started engaging our external creditors for a debt reconciliation exercise. The objective of this exercise is to update our external debt database and improve policy-making process.

On the domestic front, the Ministry has started debt re-profiling initiative to reduce the cost of interest on domestic debt. For this reason, the Government has begun the issuance of long-term bonds to retire short-term treasury bill instruments.

In the same vein, the Ministry will continue to engage our creditors on debt relief initiatives to create the necessary fiscal space for domestically financed capital expenditures.

In conclusion, the overall fiscal position will remain sound under the presented framework. All revenue shocks have been adjusted and domestic revenue are expected to finance Government expenditure for the rest of the fiscal year. This will help provide greater predictability in the implementation of Government programmes. Furthermore, spending cuts more than offset the increase in salaries.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members of the Assembly, whilst we continue to count on your usual support, we look forward to this august Assembly to

approve the Revised 2022 Budget which is expected to improve the lives and livelihoods of the Civil Servants in particular and Gambians in general within a stable and sound macroeconomic environment. With that, I submit. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Minister. Any seconder? Yes, Honourable nominated member.

HON. MAIMUNA CEESAY [NOMINATED]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I seconded the Motion. I would like to ...
[interrupted]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Honourable member you will speak later since there is a proposed motion before the debate.

[Question proposed]

The floor is now opened for any Honourable Member who wishes to take part in the debate.

MOTION

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. We are to deal with three different items in this Extra-Ordinary Session, and we really need time to be able to complete them. On the bases of that and as far as our agreement at the ABC is concerned, I wish to move a motion according to Standing Order 61(2) and (3) that the Assembly limits time to be allocated for the intervention of each Member to 8 minutes.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder?

HON. KEBBA JALLOW [JARRA CENTRAL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I second the motion.

THE SPEAKER:

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Assembly limits time for each Member to debate on the Revised 2022 Budget for not more than 8 minutes].

Honourable Members, the 2022 Revised Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure is tabled by the Honourable Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs, and subsequently seconded. Therefore, we will now commence the debate on the said Revised Estimates. In view of that, may I now call on Honourable Members who wish to take part in the debate to do so by raising his or her constituency tag to be recorded for you to be given the floor. In the meantime, I would like to remind ourselves of the scope of the debate under Standing Order 30(1) which reads: "Debate upon any motion or amendment to a motion or upon any bill, part of a bill or amendment to a bill shall be relevant thereto, except in the case of a motion for debate on the adjournment of the Assembly". Also, Standing Order 86(7) which reads: "The debate on the motion shall be confined to the Estimates and the explanatory statement together with the reported findings and recommendations of the Assembly committees and the Finance and Public Accounts Committee's consolidated report of the Assembly Committees' consideration of the draft budget.". Therefore, I appeal to Honourable Members to respect and observe the said provisions of the Standing Orders

as well as observe the maximum 8 minutes allocated to each Member who may want to contribute.

HON. FATOUMATTA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: You just mentioned Order 86(7) that the debate on the motion shall be confined to the estimates and the explanatory statement, but we have not received the explanatory statement and according to our Standing Order, it should have been given to us at least 30 minutes prior to the statement being read. We are yet to receive the explanatory statement, Honourable Speaker. How can we confine our debate on a statement that we have not received? Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The purpose of the provision is to ensure that debate shall not exceed that scope. It can be short of it, but it cannot exceed it. Honourable Member, if you do not have a copy, it will be issued to you shortly. I now open the floor for debate. Honourable Members, can you raise your tags so that we get the list of those who want to contribute. Honourable Member for Kiang West, you may have the floor.

HON. LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members of this august Assembly, Honourable Ministers, and the media. I rise to make a submission and a few observations with respect to the proposal presented by the Honourable Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs.

First, I would to make an observation on the 30% salary increment of the civil servants rightly stated by the Honourable Minister. This increment segregates the pensioners and, it cuts across flat for all the civil servants, be they low-income earners or higher-income earners. When it comes to the

pay scale, there is a huge gap with respect to this increment. I have done a little mathematics here just to highlight some of these differences.

As per the 30% increment, civil servants with basic salaries of D2,500 are going to have only D750 monthly increment and those with D3,000 basic salaries would also earn only D900 which could not earn these low-income earners a bag of rice or one week plus fish money, but those with basic salaries of D10,000 would have D3,000 monthly increment which could earn them two bags of rice or more. As for those earning D20,000, they would have D6,000 increment which would enable them at least three bags of rice while those earning D3,000 cannot even secure a single bag of rice. Therefore, I fervently think it is necessary for the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs to properly look into this since we are almost more than half way of the fiscal year. In my view, it is more ideal for the Ministry to do a general salary scale review/restructuring rather than the 30% increment. When this is done, it would mean those earning low salaries be given more desirable percentages and those earning high salaries be given a certain percentage at the end of the month. Thus, I believe the 30% salary increment of the civil servants is not feasible hence it is coming at a time when the fiscal year is more than halfway, almost ended. General salary scale review will significantly help the citizens more so those that are earning very little at the end of the month.

Honourable Speaker, I would proceed to look at the proposal which contained one of the reasons why the budget of 2022 is been revised. I want to submit that the creation of the two-line ministries is a huge job and the funding of which cannot probably come from the cuts from various ministries

or the national contingency fund. If the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs is ready to cut the budgeted national contingency fund to help fund the services of these fully fledged ministries, our national contingency fund would be at stake hence we would not be able to respond to disasters and other miscellaneous expenses.

Honourable Speaker, the Revised Budget has allocated D134,663,000 (one hundred and thirty-four million, six hundred and sixty-three thousand dalasi) to the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative Reforms, Policy Coordination and Delivery. I believe we have gone half of the fiscal year, so, allocating such an amount to the new ministry is not feasible because our engagement with the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs on Wednesday made it crystal clear that these ministries are not going to be built from the broad base but they are to only provide operational leadership and advice. I believe the procedures and the salary of the Minister within 6 months should not take up to D134 million (one hundred and thirty-four million dalasi). I would suggest this proposal to be cut by D100 million (one hundred million dalasi) to service the national debt which has been cut by D450 (four hundred and fifty) million Gambian dalasi. The debt level of the country is very high, so I believe servicing of that should not be compromised with the allocations of these ministries.

Honourable Speaker, the domestic borrowing of the country has demonstrated that the financial situation of the country is definitely worrying. As rightly alluded to by the Honourable Minister, Russia-Ukraine war has been a serious issue as well as the nonrealization of commitments from the

development panthers. These are some of the things we need to factor out before any consideration. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member. We now have Honourable Maimuna Ceesay (Nominated Member). I must apology for it skips my mind that you wanted to take the floor. I should have given you the floor first before the Honourable Member for Kiang. My apologies, once again.

HON. MAINUNA CEESAY [NOMINATED]: Thank you so much and I accept the apology. Honourable Speaker, I would like to support the Revised Budget as you know our budget has 3 components which is the Revised Budget, deficit budget and the balanced budget.

Honourable Speaker, the reason to review the budget may include cutting down the expenses which is another significant thing to our current situation. It may also involve cutting the budget line of sectors to pay for some liabilities and provide some funding to finance projects in hand.

Honourable Speaker, when we talk about supplementary budget, it means that the revenue we have is higher than the expected expenditure. The balanced budget on the other hand, is the budget that we are expecting or the expected expenditure to match with the current revenue. Knowing all these, we must now ask ourselves to which category does our economy belong? The reason to review or revise the budget is necessary when the current atmosphere of the economy differs from the expected expenditures of the current plan budget or plan of action. So, in that case, to revise the

budget is necessary. That is why in financial terms, there is normal increase/decrease of finances in budgets.

So, in revising the budget, certain ministries must experience some cuttings to be added to others to perform some of their activities. On that note, I think it is a very commendable move from the Minister of Finance to see that the welfare of the Gambian people especially the civil servants is put into consideration.

We are in the global pandemic for almost two years now compounded by another unexpected war that affected the world which The Gambia is no exception. We find ourselves in that situation where we think it is a collective responsibility of this august Assembly to make sure that we stand in the interest of the country. We may have party affiliations but not at the detriment of the current situation of the country.

We are appealing to our Honourable Members to make objective reflection as each one of us here knows the situation around the world. So, before taking my seat, I want to appeal to this august Assembly to consider this important document and give their blessings. I beg to take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Nominated Member.

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I think the job before us is an enormous task, but I just want to remind everybody that we are tasked with the responsibility of dealing with this Revised Budget that is before us.

Honourable Speaker, I can vividly remember that the 2022 budget has been approved and implemented up to July. Thus, revising it is good, but it is very

important for us to get the implementation report of what has been approved from 1st January up to the end of June. The 2022 budget has approved 29.8 billion with a deficit of 2.2 billion which has been implemented up to 6 months but at the tail end of the 6 months, there is a serious cut of D3 billion dalasi. My problem is that the Ministry took time to make this revised budget and brought it to us for decision to be made within a day. If you look at the 2022 budget, it has entailed reports showing the sources of these revenue which we need to know. An example is the tax revenue and the non-tax revenue component of it. The revenue component for the approved budget is 17.5 billion whilst in the revised one is 15.8 billion but the tax component of it is 13 billion and the non-tax component is 3.6 billion. We also need to know how much has been obtained from this. Moreover, did the GRA collect the targeted revenue up to June? We need to be very much aware of that if we want to make a very good decision. Regarding the non-tax revenue, how much has also been attained and what is left? I think this will better prepare us to take a decision to deal with this document that is before us.

Honourable Minister, in the Revised Budget, we initially have a deficit of D4.4 billion in the 2022 Approved Budget but what has been submitted is knocked down to D2.2 billion. However, it is increasing again by looking at the debt burden of the country. If you also look at the financing aspect of the D4.4 billion, it mainly depends on the domestic borrowing which constitutes D4.1 billion which is a huge amount.

Coming to the aspect of domestic borrowing, it is really putting lot of pressure and that is why the commercial banks are enjoying because they will invest in The Gambia and only be buying the Treasury Bills and forget

about the public and the private sector. If you go as a private citizen to take a loan from these banks, they will be asking numerous collaterals which customers cannot meet. It is widely believed that commercial banks need to be public and private sector driven, instead of depending on the state resources. We need to do something about it.

Besides, I am also in support of the salary increment aspect of the budget because the source of income does not match with cost of living in the country. It is also clear that there is a huge disparity between the low- and high-income earners which needs to be bridged. So, the issue of salary increment is not a solution to our problem. We are expecting salary restructuring informed by a survey but salary increment at this level would only help the highest cadre to earn more at the detriment of those at the lowest cadre. I would recommend market survey to determine the cost of living of average Gambians regarding a bag of rice, daily fish money, tuition fee of children, electricity, and water Bills? I expect all these items to be factored and then the salary restructured accordingly.

Honourable Speaker, I still want to lay emphasis on the salary aspect. As I told you, I am not against the salary increment but I am a little bit worried about the level of discrimination regarding the increment within the civil service. I have realised that the two Ministries, Ministry of Health and MoBSE, are subvented institutions and are also captured, so what is wrong with other subvented institutions in other departments? I believe they are Gambians like us. We also have to consider the autonomous institutions for they should not be exempted. So, these are the things we need to look at. The percentage of the marginalized group can even be more than the one that

are considered for the increment and we are all going to the same market. We are all compliant when it comes to the issue of tax payment in The Gambia. So, when you come to the service, I think it should be cross cutting but not discriminatory. I do not think the National Assembly will subscribe to the issue of discrimination.

Honourable Speaker, I would also like to flag the summary sheets that have been given to us. If you look at it, there is a huge disparity with the figures that are tabulated. I do not know where they are coming from. For example, the Office of the President, what we have approved in the 2022 Budget and what is in these summary sheets are different. What we approved is 677 billion but here we only have 615 billion, and I can vividly remember that there was another summary sheet that is talking about a different figure which is 672,650 billion but in the actual approved one, we have 677 billion.

THE SPEAKER: Just take your seat, what I want Honourable Members to do is to be looking at the screen while speaking so that it will help you manage your speed. I give you 20 seconds Honourable Member to wrap up.

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you for your generosity, Honourable Speaker. I just want to flag some disparities with regards to what is entailed in the summary sheets starting from the Office of the President to the Independent Electoral Commission. If you go through the summary sheets, you realised that what has been captured and what is approved in the 2022 Budget is completely different. So, technically I am not too sure whether what has been cut is a true reflection of what is entailed here.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Brikama South. We now have the Honourable Member for Bakau.

HON. ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. The topic before us is so delicate that I would describe it as a time bomb. Honourable Minister, you talked about creating new ministries couple of months ago and we are made to understand that they have been receiving allowances and salaries which have not been budgeted, and there was no explanation to that effect I would need clarifications on that to have my support for the Revised Budget.

When it comes to salary increment, there is nobody in the country here that would go against increment of salaries for all civil servants. It is a welcoming news for all genuine Gambians, but then my question is whether it is sustainable or not? To this effect, I would propose salary increment for low-income earners and maintain the high-income earners as it is. I would propose 50% for low-income earners instead of 30% that is my opinion.

The Government is silent in creating jobs for our youths and it is coming up with a Revised Budget to seek our blessings. I would recommend the entire Government to do something about unemployment and the burning issues in the country of which I believe the Government gives a deaf ear to. Nurses have been on strike for couple of Months, the Government does not attempt meeting their demands. When it comes to the issue of fertilizer, it becomes a burning issue in the country because farmers are crying of high prices of fertilizer and to my understanding, Government is not willing to make any

subsidy to make sure that the prices of fertilizers are within the reach of the common farmer.

I am made to understand that there are some cuts in budget line items from some institutions as well as some ministries, and according to the document before us, no explanation has been given to that effect.

Honourable Speaker, I would want clarification on that before I give my blessing to the Revised Budget. With these few remarks, I would take my seat. I thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member for Bakau. Honourable Members, let me remind all of us that we must not go outside the scope of the debate. I do not want to put in order any Honourable Member, we all have our Standing Orders, we all know the guidelines as much as possible. Do not try to deviate. We may wait until the adjournment debate when we can come out with certain issues.

HON. ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: Honourable Speaker, with all due respect I ... [Interrupted]

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please sit down. Honourable Member for Foni Kansala the floor is yours.

HON. ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, the Minister of Finance, and all members in the Assembly. It is indeed a flag that we think could be raised to see a great effect in the changes with regards to the civil service earnings for their survival.

I am putting this to the Minister of Finance that an overall change of salary is desirable not the 30% increment. The salary should be structured for the common good of the civil servants at least to improve their living condition. PMO had done a great job regarding the approach it has taken to restructure the salary of the civil service, but the issue of increment had killed the spirit of what we are here for. It was published all over the Media that civil service salary has been restructured with a new pay scale and people have seen it. But what we are seeing today much to our surprise, is an increment of 30% which has dashed the aspirations of the entire civil servants. We have to be realistic in our approach in terms of our governance and governing system so as to change the narrative by bridging the gap between the low-income earners and the top brass of government.

Honourable Speaker, I believe clearly that this is the time when all civil servants irrespective of roles and functions should be accommodated through best practices that bridge the gap to make sure that the disparity between low and high-income earners is reduced. Looking at the approved budget and the Revised Budget, I am flattered and left dumb founded. Today, look at the Ministry of Tourism, it is a revenue-based Ministry that could yield dividend, change the narrative and bring revenue for the country but when compared with the National Human Right Commission, in terms of allocation in the Revised Budget, the National Human Right Commission is about D53,766,000 (fifty-three million, seven hundred and sixty-six thousand dalasi) and Tourism D41,145,000 (forty-one million, one hundred and forty-five thousand dalasi). What is human right going to bring us in terms of

revenue? So, it is a great concern and I think if we keep supporting the Ministry of Tourism, it could change the scope.

The other thing is, if you look at some of those institutions like National Audit Office, what has been cut from their budget lines is significant and these are institutions that served as a guiding tool for the National Assembly in terms of their operations. If they are not equipped, we end up having problems of backlog of cases or reports that are not attended. So, I think if they are regularized, we could chance dividend.

Regarding the Judiciary, we must be ready to bridge the gap as well. The Judiciary could bring revenue for the country if proper tools are put in place by the Minister of Finance and government institutions in terms of court cases and charges levied.

We should also be ready to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture to make sure it generates revenue for the benefit of the country.

Looking at some of the basic salaries of civil servants, the 30% increment is not helpful because it is taxable. As per my research, a sergeant in police received a rental allowance, house rent of D250 (two hundred and fifty dalasi). By going through the budget, the Office of the President had an allowance called cost of living for the top brass, and we are all bearing the same cost of living so I believe it should be for all and sundry. If D20,000 (twenty thousand dalasi) would be paid monthly for the cost of living for the top echelons while a Police Constable or Sergeant receives D250 (two hundred and fifty dalasi) as house rent where in The Gambia would you have that? We could work along to make sure that we bridge the gap by

restructuring the salary to make the lives and the livelihood of the people better.

Moreover, the basic salary for the drivers of the Ministry is D17,115 (seventeen thousand, one hundred and fifteen dalasi) per annum. How do you expect that driver to survive? How much would be his take home? We have to be realistic. Nobody is against an increment or an overall pay restructure to improve the live and the livelihood of people, but we want the Government to come out plainly and apologise to the population for not acting as per the circulated message that was going on regarding a total new pay scale instead of the 30% increment. I laid my submission whatever agreement or disagreement we may have with this budget the civil servants are still not paid. They are waiting for the approval of the new pay scale which turns out to be a total disappointment and segregation.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, your time is up. Thank you, Honourable Member for Foni Kansala. We now have the Honourable Member for Niamina Dankunku.

HON. SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. Let me thank the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs for coming up with this Revised Budget. My distinguished colleagues, the Minister has informed us about the four reasons why he had come with the Revised Budget. The first one is the failure to release the D3.3 billion that we approved in the 2022 budget which alone could have warranted a revised budget much more if other issues are added.

Normally, budgeting is planning but at the end of the day when you realized that what you have planned is not achieved, the only option is to revise. I think this is the decision of the Ministry of Finance.

Honourable Speaker, the other issue is the creation of two ministries which as you all know is not only the salary of the ministers and staff but also the operating cost.

Regarding the salary increment, we are all concerned about the salary package of the country. I believe both the high and low-income earners are all having problems. We are all National Assembly Members and when we received our salary, we hardly spend it without buying three or four bags of rice for others outside our families. The idea of increasing salaries, left to government alone, everybody will have enough to take home. I would like to thank the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. However, we were anticipating a supplementary approbation bill that will be tabled here. The Ministry brought the Revised Budget instead due to the nature of the economic situation in the world. That is why some budget line items were cut from the approved to get the amount needed to accommodate the 30% salary increment. Initially, the idea was not 30%, it was to restructure the salary so that the low and high-income earners will at the end of the day go home with something. Let me tell you it is very important to restructure the salary but there is no way that we can receive equal salary. We just have to be realistic. Even when salary is restructured, we cannot earn the same figure. Our wish for every Gambian is to be paid salaries that can adequately take care of their families.

Honourable Speaker, salary is very important during active service and when you are retired. As representatives of the people, we wish every Gambian to have enough at the end of the month, but we have to understand that Gambia is not an island. We have certain things that we normally look at when it comes to salary increment. I think the Ministry of Finance have made a lot of efforts to make sure at least no matter how small it is, we get 50%. However, the issue of sustainability has to be considered. There is no point increasing 50% but after two, three months it ceases to continue. That is why they decided to look at a reasonable percentage increment until in the near future when the economy can sustain it. I think we should understand that Government did not pronounce 100% and then decline to do it. I am convinced that if the financial muscles were there, they will just do it.

Honourable Speaker, what we have here is not actually complicated. This is a budget that we approved in 2022 but the Minister of Finance is saying that he is not changing the whole budget, neither is he presenting a new budget. He is presenting a revised budget where they feel that certain budget lines need to be cut based on priorities.

My colleagues, Honourable Members, I would like to implore you to approve this Revised Budget that the Ministry of Finance has presented before us, then in due course we will see what exactly can be done for the low-income earners. As I mentioned earlier on, it is not a wish of government to pay them low, but it is based on what the Government can sustain. We all acknowledged that the civil service of this country is the poorest in the sub region which is not the wish of government. It depends on our economic basket. In fact, at the beginning, I was thinking that the Ministry of Finance

would say no to the issue of salary increment because of the economic situation.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Niamina Dankunku. I now invite the Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal.

[Point of Observation]

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Honourable Speaker, observation! I think your watch is having a problem. Can you regulate it?

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, can I hear from you?

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: I am saying your time has a problem. It is not working.

THE SPEAKER: I think your watch has a problem.

HON. ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. Good morning to everyone here present. First of all, I would like to thank all the Honourable Ministers here present and all the Members of the Assembly for participating in this important debate which is the budget review.

I would deviate from what my Honourable colleagues have been concentrating on which is the issue of salary increment. We have to put that into consideration, but I think there are other issues which also resulted to the review of this budget as stated by the Honourable Minister before this august Assembly.

One of which is the downward revision of total revenue amounting to 3.3 billion indicating 11% reduction in the Approved 2022 Budget. I think this is

very important for us to look at. It is important to note that The Gambia also depends on international funding some of which are loans with conditions. As a country, we cannot do without some of these important donors who come with their recommendations and conditions. Yes, it is equally important to note that the reduction of the expenditure by 1.2 billion from the domestic debt service and cuts from MDAs has also resulted to the review of the Approved 2022 Budget. Among these is the component of the salaries. What will you tell your fellow Gambian who posted in the remote areas of this country, for instance somebody at Kunjeta, if this Assembly or we cannot approve this Revised Budget because it includes salary increment which The Gambia cannot sustain? After all, the Ministry has already put up some measures to tackle some of these difficulties the country is facing as far as financing this budget is concerned. One of such is the establishment of a tax directorate which will go a long way in fighting corruption. If we do not want people to continue being corrupt, they should be paid well for rendering services. Through this, we will go a long way in eradicating corruption in this country.

The other thing is the D750 million which is expected to be generated within a period of five months to finance this budget. When it comes to sustainability, I think this is enough to sustain the budget.

Besides, I want to commend the hard work that was done to launch the Asycuda World which will also help the GRA, an important revenue collector in this country. Also, somebody raise concern on how would this Government make sure that the Approved 2022 Budget is put into a good use or how do we scrutinize its implementation. Obviously, we perform oversight functions

on Government institutions through our committees. So, if a budget is approved, it is the responsibility of the Assembly through its committees to perform oversight functions making sure that it is put into good use. We will blame ourselves if we fail to perform our responsibility as an Assembly.

Also, somebody mentioned that PMO has every right to come up with recommendations but that does not mean any recommendation from PMO is approved. They have publicised their recommendations on newspapers and social media but that does not mean the recommendations were tabled before the Assembly for approval. So, we are coming up with this 30% increment because it is sustainable as rightly stated by the Honourable Minister and that is what is important. Therefore, if the 30% increment under review is approved, experts in the Ministry will definitely ensure its sustainability, so I do not see any reason why we would keep debating on this issue. We need to look at ways of increasing strategies or instruments to be put in place to help increase the economic growth of this country. During the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine War, we seen other countries strategized themselves to increase the economic levels of their countries. For example, Germany reduced train tickets in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine as one way of helping its people. They have not increased salaries of their civil servants, but they have at least reduced train tickets which will help them to move easily in that country. Our method of helping civil servants have better living is to increase their salaries by 30%. Salaries can never be equal because we have different responsibilities. Therefore, in the interest of our own humble civil servants who have been doing

tremendous jobs in this country, I move that we consider the Revised Budget approved for the benefit of our Nation as a whole. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable member. We have eaten into your time by a minute. We can still allocate you one minute if you so desire.

HON. ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you. I humbly donate the one minute to my colleague, Honourable Omar Ceesay (Independent Member).

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Kombo East the floor is yours.

HON. ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]: Assalamu Alaikum, my colleague Members of the National Assembly. I thank the Minister for the deliberations on the Revised Budget.

As my colleague, Member for Brikama South, had just highlighted about the instruments given to the Members on the Revised Budget, I want observe that the figures are very misleading because there are mismatches. Because of the limited time, we should be banking our studies on the summary sheets but the figures do not match at all. Going forward, I would urge the Ministry to thoroughly review documents before presenting them to the Assembly.

Furthermore, the revised pay scale is in respect to the inflation trend we are enduring upon. Thus, I would suggest this increment to be on allowances instead of basic salaries as basic salaries are subjected to taxation which reduces the expected take home earnings. We know civil servants are anxiously waiting for salaries to be paid so I would suggest for the Ministry going forward to make due diligence in trying not to rush it up in this dying

minute to present such an important revision of a whole budget, almost half way in trying to make the Parliamentarian to take decision this way. I thank you very much.

HON. ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, Honourable Minister and all the Honourable Members here present.

Honourable Speaker, we should know that increasing somebody's salary is not an easy thing and nobody will go against it. However, we must look at how it will be increased because it has been circulated for a very long time that the Government is going to increase civil servants' salaries. In fact, there was a new integrated pay scale spreading virally in the social media. So, why could the Minister of Finance wait until the eleventh hour when he knew very well that the Government made a promised to review salaries? Now, people are sitting down without salaries. I think salaries should be released then later drawbacks can be paid. What is 30% increment, Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members? It is very minimal, and other speakers have said it here. We want general salary restructuring but what is happening is survival of the fittest. Yes! Anytime there is increment of 50%, it is across the board. We fail to consider the low-income earners. So, if we do not have enough, we should cut our coat according to our cloth.

Honourable Speaker, let us factor in the low-income earners by increasing their salaries and those earning more to wait for another time. It should be done like that. When salaries are increased, the basic commodities are also increased, yet the pensioners are left out only because they were giving 100% increment previously when some of the pensioners cannot in fact buy

a bag of rice and they are doing nothing to earn a living. They are only relying on their pensions. At least, the pensioners should also be taking into account and leave out the higher-income earners. Every one of us here is entitled to his or her opinion, so this is my own opinion.

Honourable Speaker, this year is a bad year for the farmers. We are talking about salary increment but farmers are out there without fertilizers because they cannot afford them. Farmers should benefit from the increment since they cannot afford a bag of fertilizer this year but we are not thinking about them. Last year, a bag of fertilizer was D700 and now it is D2,000. How many of our people can buy 2 to 3 bags of fertilizer at such a price when they are thinking of how to survive?

Honourable Speaker, this is why I always ask why always budget cuts? Honourable Minister you made cuts in all the various Ministries, but did you consult those line Ministries? Within this short period, you are doing more harm than good. I do not know; how can you just cut approved budgets? I know when there are budget issues, we discuss with the Ministries before passing them in the Assembly. Honourable Minister, you cut the budget in this short period, but do you know what will happen after cutting? You might cut an important thing there which may affect the whole Ministry. I do not know!

Honourable Members, please let us not rush on this. As I said, let them pay salaries now and pay drawbacks later. I believe that is the right thing to be done. We cannot be sitting down here up to night when people are outside there without salaries because of this. We should not accept that instead we

should look at this critically. Last but not least, drop the high-income earners and only consider the low-income earners and the pensioners regarding the increment, please. Thank you very much.

HON. KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I rise to raise my concern and observations on the Revised Budget. First of all, all of us are Gambians, and we are here based on our mandate and political affiliations but what we have in common is the interest of this country. Are we ready as a nation to move this country? I would say no because we have leadership crisis in this country. My colleagues who spoke before me have already raise issues here. No one is against the Revised Budget because it is well designed to serve the interest of the country, but we only have a concern on the implementation of the loans we are taking.

The low-income earners, women, farmers and the school children are definitely suffering in this country. I am a part time lecturer and I was one-time director and served the rural people in Community Forestry Management. So, I know what it means to be a rural person. I made my investigations and the results as follows. Considering the population of this country, some would say we are already 2 million while others would say 1.8 million, but whatever the case maybe we are about 2 million. Concerning our debts as it stands, it is 89 billion as of today. Comparing the past to the present, some said the debt after Jammeh's 22 years and that of Jawara's 30 years is 38 billion. However, within this short period (6 years to be precise), we are at 89 billion almost doubling the 52 years' debt. This is the investigation I have made. Somebody wrote it and that is why I said some

said 38 billion. We are here to discuss in the interest of this country and not personal interest. I am talking on behalf of my people. Whether we accept it or not, we swore to defend the interest of this country and not a political party. Looking at what is happening here, we all know that everybody is suffering, especially the low-income earners. So, the 30% increment is nothing because someone earning D3,000 will just have an increment of D900 and a deduction of like 5% plus other things. As we speak, the civil servants are yet to receive their salaries and they have already taken loans. So, before we approve this revised budget, pay their salaries tomorrow so as to pay their debts even though nothing is left with them. Are we helping them?

I mentioned leadership crisis although someone may not like it, but that is the reality. This includes all of us here as I was one time a leader. So, as leaders, we need to listen and learn in order to engage people to achieve development, but is that happening? Let us just park our private cars and board taxis to hear the people's comments. You will not hear positive things about what is happening in this country? Everything is lacking behind.

We are not against the Revised Budget, but the problem lies in the implementation of the funds. We take loans which ends up into individual pockets. It does not impact the lives of the people, so that is the concern.

As others have said, we need to bridge the gap between the high-income earners and the low-income earners through restructuring of salaries instead of the 30% salary increment. Today, 50% increment across the board means the person receiving D40,000 will have a take home of D60,000 while the

one paid D4,000 will only receive D6,000 as salary. You can imagine the gap! Also, the culture in this country is when salaries are increased on Monday, basic commodities will be increased on Friday. Thus, a bag of rice, oil, fares etc will go up. We expect our security personnel to protect us when their house rent is D250. Even in my constituency, Foni Jarrol, you cannot have a rent at such an amount much more in the urban area. I was a director at the livestock in Abuko, where they lack mobility. Sometimes, I lend them vehicle or they hire a taxi to do their work, and we still expect them to provide us proper services. This is why I said we are not helping them by approving this 30% increment.

We should stop defending political parties. Politics is over the day we are voted in. We are here to protect and fight for the interest of the same people who voted for us. We should not be overprotective because it favours where you belong. No! We are not serving foreigners but our own people who elected us to be here. I am not here to serve the interest of anybody other than the Gambian people. We have leadership crisis that is putting people in positions who do not know their responsibilities thereby subjecting their subordinates to suffer. This is what is happening in this country but some people are still defending it. We will agree on the Revised Budget but our debts will certainly increase. Looking at our economic challenges, corruption is another pandemic here because for the past years we only hear monies disappearing in offices but no one is held accountable. In this country, the only person held accountable is the one who steal D5 or a driver who gave D50 to a policeman. Such would be on social media and people would

criticise that person for collecting the D50, but people who take millions in offices are being promoted or even made ambassador.

We should look into this properly if we want to move as a country. The Gambia is going backward whether people accept it or not since almost all institutions are dying.

We are revising the approved budget just to increase salaries by 30% which will also lead to the increment of everything. Businesses are closing here and we are losing most of them to the neighbouring countries. The Gambia is a tax based country, so what are we doing to protect our businesses? The institutions we collect revenue are closing and we continue to take loans and beg for grants which put great burden on us.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol, can you take your seat? There is a Point of Order on floor.

HON. KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: OK.

[Point of Order]

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Honourable Speaker, I withdraw the Point of Order because Honourable Member's time is already finished. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol, can you continue? I will give you extra 20 seconds.

[Point of Order]

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity. I am rising on a Point of Order.

Order 18, "Any Member deviating from these Standing Orders may be immediately called to order by the Speaker or any other Member rising on a point of order." The Member is deviating because he is saying that the Government is failing. I think our interventions should be specifically on the Revised Budget. Thank you.

HON. KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: No, that is not a deviation. It is in line.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, when an Order is put, you should sit down until I ask you to rise again. I have heard the Member's Point of Order and I, myself, realised at a point when he was deviating but we will allow him to continue. So, Honourable Member, take note and continue, please.

HON. KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you. You may call it a deviation, but in my view, it is not because the Revised Budget is getting into the lives of the people whom we represent, and what I said is clear.

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Honourable Speaker, the 20 seconds has expired.

HON. KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: This is our problem because we do not want to hear the reality on the ground. I am speaking on behalf of my people.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, when people interrupt, you sit down until I call you back. Do not argue with Members. You will always be given a chance to speak. Now, just sum up in 8 seconds.

HON. KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Let me just stop here because people do not want to hear the facts. *[Laughter]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol.

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity. I will begin my intervention with the loan component. Honourable Speaker, we should commend the Government and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology for putting huge loans into our educational system. *[Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Nominated Member, can you continue?

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. They want to distract me, but it will not work.

[Point of Observation]

HON. ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you. I think you are lost. We are discussing the Revised Budget and not the loan aspect, please.

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much. It is contained in the Revised Budget but it is okay. I will still continue with the Revised Budget. Honourable Speaker, we need to commend the Government that increased the salaries of the Civil Servants by 50% and for the pensioners 100% in the mid of the Pandemic. I have a reason for supporting this Revised Budget and commending the Government.

The Government has achieved tremendous achievements and, today, we are witnessing another significant milestone. That is 30% increment to the entire

Civil Service. I think that is a laudable achievement, we all need to commend the Government for. Considering the take home of average Gambians before the coming of this Government, I think we all need to be realistic. Honourable Members, I think we should stop playing to the gallery and be realistic as we all know our current take home as Members of the Assembly and that of the Honourable Ministers. We are called Honourable Members not that we just deserve the title but we hold positions. So, it does not mean we are better than those who are not Honourable Members. However, we cannot be equal with them considering the different responsibilities we hold. I am not the same Fatou K. Jawara who was not paying anybody a salary likewise my colleagues. Holding an Honourable position goes with responsibilities because people rely on you. We cannot earn the same amount with low-income earners. We need to be realistic.

Honourable Speaker, I believe Honourable Member for Wuli East has a Point of Order.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, Points of observation you are making can only be allowed by the Member on the floor, but when a Point of Order is raised, we have to listen. Please, what is your Point of Order, Member for Wuli East?

[Point of Order]

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, as per our Standing Order 29(5), "No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member.". We are expressing our opinions so people should not impute any motive. That is my Point of Order. The Honourable Member is saying

that we should not play to the gallery, but no one is playing to the gallery. We are just expressing our opinions. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Nominated Member, wait until the Point of Order is clear. Honourable Members, let us not misunderstand the two things. 'To impute meaning to somebody's speak' and 'to express an opinion on an issue' are two different things. Many a time, parliamentarians make statements that show the other side or seemingly behave otherwise. So, if you want take all those things as imputing something on to somebody's statements, it will make the Assembly work very difficult. To that end, I am ruling it out as Point of Order to this particular issue. Can the Honourable Nominated Member continue, please?

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker and Honourable Member for Wuli East. I must apologise because I respected this institution and I want everybody to respect this institution. So, my apologies.

Honourable Speaker, Members raise concerns about the high cost of fertilizers, but we all have budgets in our houses. Should we just say there is no food on the table so we will not send our children to school? Though the price of fertilizers is high, but we know what the Minister just read and what he explained during caucus. So, I believe that should not be a cause for concern.

Concerning the 30% increment, we should understand that we are not financially strong to increase it to 50% or more. Therefore, I am calling on all Honourable Members to be sincere to our electorates by supporting the

Revised Budget, and I wish to remind us about the oath we took here. If we are saying that high-income earners should be exempted from the increment, we should forgo half of our salaries to help the low-income earners have better living hence we are game changers. Thank you.

HON. YAYA GASSAMA [KIANG EAST]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity. The Revised Budget before us is very important because it deals with the second most important document in the country apart from the constitution.

Honourable Speaker, I think the whole idea of revising this budget is triggered by salary increment. In other words, increasing the salaries of the Civil Service is the main driver behind this budget review, but in as much as we want to increase the salaries of Civil Servants, we must also raise our concerns.

The Honourable Minister did say that the proposed budget is reflective of the current economic realities and is consistent with a stable macroeconomic framework, so I want to ask him whether indeed he believes that this will not have any negative implication on our microeconomic? Personally, I am not sure whether this budget review is going to be helpful because it failed to address the problems of ordinary Gambians. We are going through very difficult times since people are poor, hungry, and farmers do not have fertilizers because they cannot afford the cost. Also, we are half way into the rain season without fertilizers so we can expect low productivity in the next harvest season. Of course, we know the consequences of that, acute food

shortage. So, if the Revised Budget fails to add anything or fails to subsidise fertilizer for farmers, I think it will be a very serious issue.

We also have problems in our health sector. There are drug shortages everywhere, yet nothing is added to the Ministry of Health to buy enough drugs for the people instead 6.6% of its budget is cut.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology's budget is cut by 8.1% amounting to twenty-three million, one hundred and ninety-six thousand dalasi (D23,196,000). We have similar budget cut in agriculture and the National Audit Office is also reduced by 6.5%. Of course, those of us in the National Assembly who engaged all these Ministries, Departments and Agencies during consideration of their audited financial accounts, the persistent problem we have been having with many institutions is that their audit reports were not ready. Why are their audit reports always pending? I think it is as a result of insufficient manpower in the National Audit Office to do the exercise. So, I would suggest this sum to be maintained in their budget to be able to train more manpower to do the work effectively so that we can ...

Honourable Speaker, let me quickly move to the salary increment of the Civil service. I will be brief as nobody is against the increment of salaries, but 30% is way too small. 30% for a civil servant earning three-thousand-dalasi salary is only nine hundred dalasi to be added to his salary while those receiving fifteen thousand will four thousand five-hundred-dalasi increment that does not make sense to me. This thing should have been properly

looked into so that the low-income earners receive more increment than high-income earners as a way of bridging the gap.

Last night, I spoke with one security officer who asked me about the salary increment. When I told her that the increment is 30%, she felt utterly disappointed. I know that the same feeling is right across the board. In fact, it was widely spread that salaries are going to be completely reviewed which would have made more sense because that would capture all disparities. Since that is not done, justice is not done to the whole salary issue. If it is not too late, I would personally encourage Ministry of Finance to take this thing back for a proper revise. They could pay this month's salaries then after everything is sorted out, the outstanding balances can be paid. People are very poor or earning very low salaries which is not good for the country. I think the minimum salary should be able to cover the basic living expenses of families because nobody should be paid salary that cannot even buy a bag of rice. People earning low salaries also have to pay rent, buy food for their families as well as pay school fees, medical bills for the family and pay transport to office, so all their salaries are exhausted beforehand at the end of the day. Why? They end up taking loans and by the time the next salaries are paid, loans consume their entire salaries, so it is like working for nothing. This in itself is not good for the country. Honourable Speaker, with that submission, I beg to take my seat.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, I thank the Minister for Finance for the effort that he and his ministry has put into this salary revision. I believe that the Government wants a non-recurring budget revision, not a recurring one and that is just during

this temporary period you adjust certain things so that they will be able to move out.

Honourable Speaker, I earlier told the former Minister that the 2022 budget was not realistic and the fact that the budget could not be implemented halfway shows you that the previous one was not realistic. So, when we are making budget, we should make it realistic. What is the meaning of putting 20 something billion when you know that you have capacity to only collect 15 billion? Thereby, all the departments, ministries and Agencies will be clamouring to get something from the Ministry then they will be handed over half what they demanded. Why don't you (the Ministry) become realistic? If you are not realistic, we will continue to do this revision continuously and I believe that the minister may come back again for another revision don't be surprised.

Honourable Speaker, the Minister told us in clear terms without mentioning the right words that we are in a bankrupt economy. Our economy is bankrupt because all what he said indicates a recession. So, we cannot continue the way we are. What they are trying to bring here is austerity which means that we should tie our belts because we are increasing expenditure. That is what I cannot understand. If the expenditure is increased, the hardship of the ordinary people is increased too.

Honourable Speaker, in the Minister's introduction, he said the resulting effect is the growing poor performance of domestic resource mobilization affecting all related taxes as well as putting increased pressures on

government spending needs. They are not collecting what should collect and we are increasing our expenditure, so that is abnormal.

Honourable Speaker, the Minister also said that the initial growth forecast in 2022 was estimated at 5.8% slightly driven by a stronger private remittances flow to support construction and domestic demand and not that is also not the case now. Under Agriculture, the Minister said that it is not growing, but the economy is going backward Also, according to the Minister tourism is not improving and inflation is getting higher and higher. Before he came to this position, inflation was like nine point something percent and now it is eleven point something percent which is going up. If we look at the overall outlook of the economy, it is going from bad to worse, and according to him this 30% salary increment needs to happen. We require D575.8 million (five hundred and seventy-five point eight million) to do just the 30% increment.

When it comes to debits, there must be something innovative. What have they done to cut the debit service by 415 (four hundred and fifteen)? Maybe, they agreed with the IMF to do. But, how do you do that? That will be interesting to know.

On revenues, there is a general declined in revenues and grants. The continuous subsidy on petroleum products to nearly 1.0 billion dalasi for the first six months of the year affected the revenue performance for oil-related products. Which means that the revenue we are getting from oil (fuel) is going down. Therefore, if we give 30% increment to the workers, the pump price of fuel will also be increased and then the transport fares will be increased too. It is like giving money by the left and taking it with the right,

so it is not an increment. It is so minimal that it will hardly make any positive effect on the ordinary person.

Honourable Speaker, the revenue items results to an overall reduction of 3.277 billion which we are missing in revenue side. Every effort must be done to collect revenue and I keep on saying that this country is a tax-based economy. This developing country is not like the United States of America which has conglomerates, industries all over the place paying taxes to government. We are dealing with ordinary people with small businesses, small-scale farmers etc. Therefore, we need to be thinking about investing in the productive base of the country in addition to the collection of taxes.

Honourable Speaker, people always mention Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic as major problems, but our economy itself is not growing in irrespective of whether there is war in Ukraine or Yemen. Nothing is growing. So, we must make effort to ensure that our economy grows. The Minister said that industry, construction and tourism are also going down. So, nothing is going up. Meaning, even if there is no Ukraine war, we will continue to have this problem. What will make our economy to grow?

Honourable Speaker, what the Ministry is planning is to borrow more money and to pay taxes. The external borrowing has increased, but that will not affect us much presently compared to the domestic borrowing. I am going to accuse this Government because the policy of its from 2017 to date is to reduce domestic borrowing with a view to allow the commercial banks save money to be able to provide investment into the productive base of the

economy for economic growth. That is not what they are doing now instead they are deviating.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Wuli East your time is up. Honourable Member for Lower Saloum the floor is yours.

HON. SAINY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor and the Honourable Minister for bringing the estimates. Honourable Speaker, we are Honourable Members, so we do not want any Member to mislead this august Assembly. The last regime and this regime cannot be compared because private jets were bought for 4.5 ...

[Point of Order]

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: He is deviating seriously.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, when the Speaker is speaking, you do not talk. My brother, please! Who is calling for Point of Order?

HON. BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: I am calling for Point of Order. Order 18 clearly states that any Member deviating from the Standing Orders may be immediately called to order by the Speaker or any other Member rising on a point of order. So, he is deviating.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are out of order, yourself. Can you continue, Honourable Member for Lower Saloum?

HON. SAINY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Honourable Speaker, one of my Honourable colleagues spoke on the debt services of the last regime

and this regime as well. This is why I was trying to lay my foundation. Let us talk about what brought us here and leave party affiliation at the gate.

Honourable Speaker, we are to discuss the salary increment and other things. My observation is that the low-income earners should be well treated. Honourable Speaker, I do not know whether the Honourable Minister has made a thorough investigation on the market prices, house rents etc. Today, the rent for certain houses goes up D5,000 and the civil servants from grades 1 to 6 earn less than 7 thousand dalasi. Imagine they have to pay rent, school fees, as well as provide food for their families and other things from the meagre salaries. This is why the many workers would steal or beg, sorry to say.

Honourable Speaker, I propose that the low-income earners (i.e., from grades 1 to 11) have 50% increment and 30% for the others because a bag of rice is D1,600. I do not see the importance of this salary increment. All sentiments should be put aside since we are here for our people who are the nurses, teachers and other civil servants. Honourable Speaker, before I will be misquoted, I am 100% in support of the salary increment. I am just trying to lay my foundation because we have political diversity. If one is very frank, he/she might be categorised on the other side while that is not the case.

Honourable Minister, we need to revisit the Rent Act we have passed here because our people are suffering. Now, house rents are increased frequently without notifying the tenants who had to sometimes pay six months or one-year advance payment. In fact, there are landlords who ask tenants to pay in dollars.

Honourable Speaker, how many farmers can afford a bag of fertilizer at D2,000? Instead of talking about Ukraine and Russia, we should focus more on improving our agricultural and tourism sectors. If we invest in agriculture, we will be able to produce enough flours and other food stuffs to better the lives of our people.

Also, there are leakages of funds in various institutions. Let us be frank to one another here, a person employed in GRA or Customs within 2 to 3 months would start building storey buildings and driving expensive cars while an officer who stands on his/her feet from 7 AM to midnight is paid only D3,500 that should not be. I met an officer, a sergeant, in Trust Bank with a payslip of D3,700. This is unacceptable, Honourable Speaker. The reason why we sleep comfortably is because of the security officers so their earnings should be augmented to better their lives. The same thing is prevailing in our health facilities and schools. Let us improve on our people's survival. Thank you.

HON. AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I will be very brief because the facts, as presented by the Honourable Minister, are very clear. Realising that the 2022 Approved Budget is not very realistic, the Honourable Minister and his team revised and brought it to us for approval. Definitely, I want to thank them for that.

The facts are very clear and definitely the 4 highlighted factors suffice for us not to even debate much on this. The Minister mentioned that the downward revision of total revenue amounts to 3.3 billion. In 2022, we approved 29

billion revenues which is revised to 26 billion because they said it is unrealistic. What else do we want? Where are we going to get this money? He said they cannot get this money anymore. The question we should be asking is, why are these revenues not realised?

The other thing is the deduction of expenditure on debt servicing. As a government and country, we must pay the debts whether this year or in the next 10 years. So, what is the justification behind cutting the expenditure on debts because we must pay these monies? They know better, and I know the Minister will explain.

On the issue of salary increment, I just want to remind the Honourable Members that I do not think the Honourable Minister would table the Revised Budget before us had it been it was only for this 575 million. When Covid-19 hit this country, 500 million was given to the Ministry of Health, where did they get that money from? Through the Public Finance Act virement here and there makes it available for the ministry which is accepted by law. That could have been done, but based on other factors, it is brought for us to approve. So, I do not want Honourable Members to just make their observations on the headline, salary increment. There is more valid justification with regards to the economic situation of the country, so let us be realistic and face the facts as presented to us.

[Point of Observation]

HON. LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Honourable Speaker, Point of Observation.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, Point of Observation can only be given by the speaker, so immediately it is made if the speaker sits down, then you can raise your observation.

HON. LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Honourable Speaker, I rise to observe that we really know the reasons for the revision are not only based on the salary increment that is why we made our submissions on different areas namely debts servicing, budget cuttings as well as steps made from various ministries. We specifically laid emphasis on the salary increment because both the certificate of urgency and today's agenda indicate; "one of it is the 2022 Revised Budget for consideration of the National Assembly to accommodate salary increment". So, we might consider other factors secondary hence they are not captured. Meaning, the salary increment is the primary focus and that is why we laid emphasis on it.

THE SPEAKER: The Minister has given various reasons and people are just expressing their opinions on how they see those things. Please, can you continue, Honourable Member?

HON. AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Kiang West. Definitely, you have even enriched my submission more because the essence here, as the Honourable Minister put it, is very clear unless we want to debate on one issue and forget about others.

On the creation of new ministries, this is something which we definitely do not even need to talk about. The Executive has the authority to create any ministry as and when the need arises, that is not our mandate. If the created ministries employ people, such people are employees of the Government

who are by law entitled to salaries and allowances like any other government employee. Definitely, it makes no difference when speaking about one issue and then bring up another because all these issues are related. What is the justification for us not realising D29 billion revenue and grants as far as the 2022 Approved Budget is concern, and why are we cutting debt servicing? On that note, I thank you all.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, let me remind you that the timing is tight to your microphones. If you are interrupted and you put off your microphone and start again, it starts afresh. So, we will take note of your 2 minutes.

HON. MUSA BADJIE [TALLINDING KUNJANG]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I believe we are all here for the interest of our people and I for one, I am not against the Government. I am in for what positively impacts the people of this country.

If anything is brought forward here, that will go a long way to addressing the needs and concerns of our people. I, Honourable Musa Badjie, will support it. If it goes otherwise, I will raise my concerns and objections. Having listened to Honourable Minister's submission, I beg to defer with reasons advanced as per this budget revision.

I would like to begin with inflation. It has been in existence for a while, yet we cannot curb it while we think of increasing salaries. Personally, I have high hope on the Honourable Minister in view of his background. I was expecting the Finance Ministry to come up with robust policies designed to address or curb the impact of inflation because everybody is bearing the

brunt of it, and not just the civil service sector. If you bring a salary scale that would help the civil servants address the price hikes of commodities. What are you doing to The Gambians who are in the private and informal sectors, the people in Bulibanna, Basse, Koina etc who are not Civil servants? What is the economic policy in place to address the concerns and difficulties of those people so that they too would not continue to feel the pinch of the inflation? I was expecting the Ministry to come up with something like that because for me, it is not feasible to just increase the salaries yet you do not expect the inflation to go below 5% for the rest of the year. What happens if we increase and later inflation goes up to more than 10%? Should we revise again and just be adding salaries to curb inflation? I think we should have policies geared towards addressing inflation so that the larger population will enjoy because we are all Gambians. We all go to the same markets to buy bags of rice and onions.

So, it is important generally as many people have alluded to some differences like widening the income margin between the high- and low-income earners which the 30% is doing just that. I was expecting that the Finance Ministry to come with allowances like cost of living as somebody said the take home income for police officers, teachers and other workers is very low. So, to address those things for a better living, it should be a matter of urgency. We should look at allowances which are not taxable. Ministers are having cost of living allowances, why not the civil servants as well. We should look at the Market to know what is affordable and can help civil servants to have a decent living. I do not think that adding D900 to somebody's salary would address the situation at all. It is not that we do not appreciate it but

our people must be remunerated well. We all know that Gambia compared to other West African countries, pay less across all spheres of our workforce from the Ministers down the ladder.

That is more the reason why Ministers should be included in this category when talking about Civil Servants. Ministers are not civil servants. I quite agree that our Ministers are paid less compared to their counterparts in other countries but that is not peculiar to Ministers alone, it cuts across the three organs of Government. Even the President's salary is not compared to President Macky Sall. Our speaker's salary is not compared to the Speakers in other countries and our judges as well. So, I think addressing those things should be holistic but not selective. That is the approach I was expecting from the Ministry. We must address the issue of salary if we want to attract talents.

The other thing I want to comment on is the cuts effected on the Revised Budget. You said you know what informed the decisions that led you to arrive at certain percentages, but I have seen a vital Ministry whose budget is very small and they are being cut more than even some Ministries that are having significant amount of money in their budgets. Like for instance the National Audit Office with 193 million and you remove 23% from their budget. whilst the Ministry of Finance which has 1.3 billion, you just remove 14%. I want to know what must have informed that move? We have Local Government Ministry and I want to note here that successive Governments during the colonial period do not take this Ministry seriously. I am in that portfolio Committee, and we know the difficulties that the Ministry is facing. So, I do

not know what must have informed this decision to cut its meagre budget of 281 million by 31%.

I am also worried about those vital services that are cut from those Ministries. What negative impact is it going to have in the general operations of those Ministries? I was happy that the budget of the Ministry of Health was not cut which is a good thing to do because I do not expect anyone in the country at this moment to cut the budget lines of the Ministry of Health. So, I want the Minister of Finance to inform this gathering about the reasons for their decision to cut Ministries that have lower budgets with higher percentage than even Ministries that have higher budget. Thank you very much Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Tallinding. I now invite the Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji.

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I also want to welcome the Honourable Ministers and their technical staff present as well as the media.

Honourable Minister, you will agree with me that the economy is not doing well and there are clear and available signs that it can crash without serious austerity measures. Personally, I was thinking when you come to the National Assembly, you will be telling us more of austerity measures than going into issues that we do not understand.

The reason why I said we do not understand is that some National Assembly Members did not pick their documents from their pigeonholes for two days. They have collected it this morning and some did not even read to know the

content of it. I do not know how they are going to contribute to this debate. You are given a document you do not read to understand it and you want to contribute during the debate. It is very unfortunate.

Honourable Minister, you inherited and presided over the mess and in my opinion, you want this Parliament to make it messier so that we would be the scape goat. That is why I will urge this Parliament to tell the Honourable Minister to submit a comprehensive physical reform before we can bless this appropriation. We are not doing this for anybody but for the country. I know you inherited the system that is why yesterday I tried to speak to the former Minister Mamburay Njie on the phone, but all his lines could not be reached until a friend told me he is outside the country. I wanted to get more information from him before you but unfortunately, I was not able to speak to him.

I will blame you a little but will put more blame on the National Assembly Members who were here before for approving a budget that they know was not realistic.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, please stop murmuring. If you have a point of order or something, please use your mike to make it clear.

[Point of Order]

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NUIMI]: Standing Order 86(7) says: "The debate on the Motion shall be confined to the estimates and the explanatory statement together with the reported findings and the recommendations of the Assembly Committees and the Finance and Public Accounts Committee's

consolidated report of the Assembly Committees' consideration of the draft budget". The Honourable Member is deviating from the business before us.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji, can you please take your seat and put off your mike? Yes, Honourable Member.

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NUIMI]: Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Member is deviating from the business before this Honourable Assembly. The business before us today is about the Revised Budget not where he is deliberating on. He is beating around the bush.

THE SPEAKER: Where specifically do you believe the Honourable Member has gone wrong? Listen Honourable Member. What issues has he raised that is not in order?

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Honourable Speaker, we had the Honourable Member vividly trying to blame the former National Assembly Members for approving a budget that is not sustainable which is not true.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member. You know that one is specific and do not apportion blame. You were not a Member of the National Assembly. You cannot just come and then make that blatant statement against all of them when you do not have the facts.

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Honourable Speaker, I have the facts before me that is why I am speaking like this because they were the National Assembly Members at the time who approved a budget that was unrealistic and false. I am just trying to give you in general terms what I was trying to say.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are not here to apportion blame on former National Assembly Members. Please when I am talking, you sit down. Honourable Member, we are not here to argue and no more of those types of statements please. We do not impute something to somebody. You are expected to do your best and respect the opinions of others and then you can take the floor.

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. As I said before, I expect the Minister to be talking more on austerity measures to save lot of money for the Government and to decrease the cost of governance. This austerity measures in my opinion should include the allocation of only one vehicle to Ministers which will ensure the immediate implementation of the vehicle policy.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: May I hear the Point of Order?

HON. ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you. The Honourable Member is reading from his device which is contrary to the Rules of Procedure, Order 17(e) [Behaviour of Members]: "All Members shall not use mobile phones or any other electronic devices in the Chamber or at Committee meetings". I beg to submit thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, Point of Order sustained. Honourable Member when I am talking, you should sit down. I have told you to put off your microphone. Honourable Member you must not read from documents unless you want to make reference and moreover you do not have to use mobile devices. Please you can go ahead.

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Honourable Speaker, that is exactly what I was doing. I have my talking points that I was making reference to and I think those who spoke before were all using their devices.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, do not argue with people. You should not use your mobile device or any other device please. Honourable Member, what I am trying to make clear is that you can use your notebook or any other to put your jottings but do not use technical devices.

[Point of Order]

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Honourable Speaker, Order 17(d) explained by the Honourable Member of Sabach Sanjal has been missed. "Members shall not read newspapers, books, letters, or other documents except when making reference to such parts therein as may be directly connected with the business of the Assembly and with the permission of the Speaker." I believe the Honourable Member was making a reference.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are making two different points. The Member said he was using a device and you are talking about making reference to newspapers or documents. Please Honourable Member, it is you who is out of order. The Member is raising a Point of Order that the Honourable Member is using a device. If you are quoting from newspapers or looking at your notebook, it is fine but do not use a device. Please can you continue?

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I want to urge the Honourable Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs to go back and resubmit a clear budget that is going to be

understandable by the National Assembly Members before we can bless it. Note, I am not saying that I am against the salary increment, I am not implying that, but I want a salary increment that has been pronounced by the Executive previously. There was a time when salary increment was pronounced by the Executive, but they failed to do that. So, the Minister wants to make us a scape goat if we do not approve it by saying that it is the National Assembly Members who did not want your salary increment which is not the case. We want salary increment, but we want it to affect or impact the lives of all the citizens of this country.

The Government in my opinion lacks economic wisdom and physical prudence to generate growth in the economy. Now, your concentration should be on the high inflation especially with regards to food prices. A bag of rice in the country now cost 1800 dalasi which should be your area of concentration. You should also concentrate on high youth unemployment prevalent in the country. How do we save our economy? We must generate employment for our youths. The collapsing Agricultural Sector as other Honourable Members have said here before should be fixed. The price of fertilizer is unacceptable, and the Agriculture Committee has discussed this on several occasions. These are some of the issues that this Government should concentrate on not any other thing. The issue of salary increment probably might not even be sustainable because what I realized is that the economy was based on false and unrealistic projection. The Honourable Minister inherited a false and unrealistic projection, and this can lead to crash of our economy. So, this is something that I urge the Honourable Minister of Finance to put into consideration very seriously.

If you go into the budget of the National Audit Office, it faces serious efficiency and operational challenges with the serious cuts in their revenue. For instance, you look at training budget cut by one billion, five hundred and fifty million dalasi will adversely affect the capacity of the National Audit Office in performing its statutory functions. I think ministries should be cut but these critical Ministries should not be cut because we all know the functions of audit to make our economy grow well. So, if we are cutting the operational budget of the National Audit Office, it does not make sense at all.

The budget of the External Audit Services being reduced to twenty billion, five hundred & twenty-five million dalasi will leave many Government projects and institutions unaudited as the National Audit Office does not have the capacity to carry out the audit of all government institutions and this is the implication. If you cut the budget of the National Audit Office, they will not have the capacity to perform their audit functions. So, I would want the Honourable Minister to put that into consideration please and come back to the National Assembly with a revised one.

When you also look at the budget of the civil service reform, it has been reduced from fifteen million to zero clearly showing the Government's lack of commitment to carry out necessary reforms. The Government is instead making salary revision without reforms as a tool to satisfy government workers to make a meaningful...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, sit down and leave your microphone on, please. You have one minute. When you make jottings, they are not notes to be read.

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Honourable Speaker, I think you are also interrupting my session.

THE SPEAKER: Please, put off your microphone until I ask you to take the floor. I was observing following the point of order raised that you are reading notes not jottings which is out of order in the Assembly. I give you one extra minute to continue please.

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. What I was trying to say is that the Minister came here to make us a scape goat. When the Executive made statement to increase the salaries of civil servants in January, they could not do this in January, and it was then extended to July. It is at the end of July that they now come to the National Assembly to make that realized which is unacceptable. Next time, let it be passed to us a month before so that we can go over the documents and understand it very well. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji. I now invite the Honourable Member for Banjul South.

HON. FATOUMATTA NJAI [BANJUL SOUH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker and the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic affairs for bringing this document to us. I would have appreciated this move if it had been accompanied by a serious civil service reform. We all expect

our civil servants to be paid well not only as an incentive but also to curb corruption which is very rampant in the country.

I would have also loved to see the bottom-up approach being applied because we all know that obviously the disparity is wide, the salary of the lower graders and what the grade 12 earners received has a very wide difference, and it would have been lovely to see that lower graders have 100% increment at least. We have all seen the salary increment last year but that might not be enough considering the current global crises. It is not only peculiar to The Gambia, but also worldwide. So, no one would say no to salary increment of civil servants but at whose expenses. We have all seen in November, December when we discussed the last budget, I personally did not even contribute to that debate because I regarded it as unrealistic and a form of window dressing. I saw it as a campaign strategy to tell people that government was reducing their expenses. It was a lie I would say. It was misleading The Gambian people to win election but what I am here to say is that it is a good move by the Government, but we expected it to come with civil service reforms. It was a campaign promise which was done before the 2022 budget was approved. So, my expectation was that since it was deferred to July it was going to be factored but it was not. I was also assuming that they would come with a true and realistic figure of the civil service because we all know that there are too many ghost workers, as was claimed by the Government. So, the fact that this increment was due in July, I gave them the benefit of the doubt hoping that with due diligence they would come out with a proper government civil service figure. I think that would have been better and like I said, no genuine person would say no to

it but yes at what expenses? Yes, are we going to fund a civil service that is bloated with fake figures. Are we going to service and increase salaries of ghost workers or are we going to increase salaries of genuine Gambians that deserved it? In that case, I would recommend that right from the ministers to grade 12 to be increased by 30% and the rest at least by 60%, in that way they would feel the benefit of the salary increment because if one would go home with even 4,000 dalasi, a 30% salary increment would do nothing but again, I would applaud the Government for coming up with this thought because the fact that they are thinking of the betterment of the citizens is a good move. The question is whether it is genuine or not?

I always ask myself as to whether it was a campaign promise or not because we have all heard His Excellency on TV saying that when we campaign, you can say anything but was it with good intention that such promise was made or was it only a cynical ploy to win election? It is a cause for concern, and it is for The Gambians to see the truth through His Excellency. Again, I would look forward to Government coming up with ways of increasing the revenue of the country because the predicted income is not feasible as the total expenditure and net lending is revised from 32.2 billion to 31 billion in the Revised Budget which is good because we are trying to cut our coat according to our cloth. Again, we do not only need to look at the expenditure, but also our income as to how much difference it is with the income at hand. Moreover, the thinking of coming up with 2 new ministries does not make sense like somebody said if we are to tie our belts, we need to tie it according to our size. In fact, is there a need for that? If we are saying that there is world crisis, I think we should be more judicious with the little resources that

we have. Pay everybody well but do not bloat the pay list because adding new ministries may not be necessary. Is it necessary I ask myself? If it is, then why not but if it is not, then there is no need. Once again, I would applaud it and try to look at ways and means of how to increase our revenue.

We have all heard the GRA making mentioned of what they have received. I cannot remember the exact figure but is that sustainable given the increase in the expenditure that this salary increment would incur. Thank you Honourable Speaker and Honourable Minister. I want to congratulate you on this move.

HON. GIBBI MBALLOW [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I thank the Minister of Finance and the technical team for the job they have done for The Gambia. First and foremost, I want to tell you that the Member for Lower Fulladu West would wish to see 100% increment on the salaries of civil servants because we are really concerned in the sense that we are asked more questions about the salary. So, if you make efforts at least to bring in 30%, we are grateful. I am telling you at my own level that it has been endorsed. I am concerned that from 1997 to 2017 the salary has increased by only 5%. So, I thank the Government of the day for effecting increment in 2018 by 50% and 30% in 2022 respectively. This move indicates that this is a serious government that is interested in the welfare of their people. The Minister of Finance told us that the issue of sustainability made it very difficult for the increment of salaries to be done because we all know salary is one-way traffic once you increase salary it can never go back. So, increasing this 30% I believe the Minister has rightly told us that it can be sustained.

One thing I would also like to applaud them for is that there is a sharp increase in the budget of the Ministry of Health. We all know the issues that are happening. So, they judiciously look at the Revised Budget and then did justice to it. Although I have a little concern about agriculture which is the food basket of the country. Currently, the people of Lower Fulladu are using the hard way like using the barrel to separate the straw and the rice grains. During their first harvest, the loss is very high. So, that is what concern me but apart from that I feel this is a serious government and Members of the Assembly will not have any reservation about the 30% increment. I am telling the Minister that this is already endorsed because the civil servants are all listening and looking at us. We are representing them and I thought that there would be a salary restructure because if you look at the social media there is a grading system that was circulated on the media which really raised the hope of the people. We know that any serious government would want to satisfy its workforce which is the civil service. So, this is a route towards satisfying that. We need to thank this government for the wonderful gesture. We know very well that the civil service is underpaid as compared to other countries. We know that there is serious economic crisis in the world and The Gambia is no exception. I know the President would have loved to see that everybody is paid 100% but would that be feasible? The Minister of Finance is here before us to tell us that this is not possible so, as Member of the Assembly, we want the salary of civil servants to increase but we are also cognizant of the fact that we want something that is sustainable.

Going back to the issue of loans, I think that the Ministry of Finance should be commended for putting measures as according to his deliberation, they have instituted a directorate which shall be responsible for our revenue. We understand there are lot of loopholes which caused revenue leakage, but they are technically working very hard to ensure that these loopholes are going to be addressed. A scenario was made looking at the Bamba Tenda Yeli Tenda Bridge. In June 2021, D20 Million was received and now in June 2022, they are telling us D43 Million. I think the Ministry of Finance and his team need to be commended for the good job that they are doing. So, on that note I want to thank all of you.

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. It is a pleasure to stand before my colleagues today to look at the Revised Budget. We have been vindicated because we told the former Minister that the budget was not citizen friendly and was not directed in a way that it will earn revenue for the country. We stood here and told them, but he tried to defend it and the budget was passed.

Honourable Speaker, by looking at the statement made by the Minister, it tells us that they do not have a smart program and policy to rescue this economy.

Honourable Speaker, there is increase in the debt GDP ratio and the physical space. The Minister presented the budget which raised hope, so 6 months have gone, and I expected the Minister to tell us the expenditure and the revenue within the past 6 months but that is not given to us.

Honourable Speaker, looking at the micro economy, the way the budget is presented to us I see it as a form of misdirection as far as The Gambian economy is concerned. The Minister is telling us that the other avenues where the country should earn are in serious trouble. Covid-19 has not gone and moreover the Ukraine-Russia war. I know that Baddibunkas and Kiangkas will blame Ukraine and Russia when they do not have food. There are lands where they can farm and get at least something to eat but the problem is agricultural inputs. Honourable Speaker, I wonder why we are not trying to downsize some of the Ministries that are existing but instead we are increasing them by coming up with new Ministries. I know the personnel maybe from Ministry of Finance or other Ministries but when you look at the operation cost it is going to affect the income of the country.

Honourable Speaker, bringing the Revised Budget to the Assembly, we all expected it to be only on the civil servants. We do not expect Ministers to be part of it. There is no bridge between us, and the Ministers and we want your progress, but the country is suffering economically, we are all complaining including the civil service. The Ministers also want a package in this. I think Honourable Members of this Assembly, Ministers and other sectors should give chance to others. In fact, we can go into our budget and your budget to try to see if we can really help the civil servants. We need to look into the budget to see whether we can still cut somewhere. I told you but you said your economy God father IMF told you that it is not possible, but it is possible. If you really mean to save the country, we need to build up. We can all do it from the President to the last man. We need to sacrifice something, but we do not mean it. We always cry about the low earners,

farmers, and the poor people but we all know our take home so let us pledge right from the President. I pledge 20,000 every month. Let all of us pledge to bail our people out if we really mean it. If we mean it, we have to look at this situation Honourable Minister.

Honourable Minister, our country is entirely depending on tax which is not sustainable. We expect us to also export goods outside the country so that our foreign exchange can go up but that is not happening. Countries are going forward but The Gambia is going backward. If we want to restructure the salary, there must be enough money in hand.

[Point of Observation]

HON. SAINY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Honourable Speaker, this is why I said we are Honourable Members. He pledged D20,000 (twenty thousand dalasi) every month, take note Honourable Minister.

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: I was asked but I preferred you hold on. This is very simple, and we are responsible people. This is a country we want to develop. What I am saying is, if we want to develop as a nation, let us all come out with something.

Honourable Speaker, what I really want to tell the Minister is, I am not convinced that the increase is sustainable. The simple reason is that the Minister did not inform the Assembly about the source of funding. I see it as Robinhood system of taking from one end and giving it to the other end or from left to right. This is how I see it.

Honourable Speaker, with reference to page 5, in the context of improved domestic resource mobilization, the Ministry has established a new

directorates of tax and revenue which will focus on enhancing compliance and monitoring of revenue performance. This will cover typical areas such as domestic and internationally paid taxes as well as tax expenditure. Honourable Speaker, GRA had been doing excellent tax revenue collection in the country but creating a new directorate is not the solution Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, regarding the Pay-as-You-Earn (PAYE) Policy, the Ministry has issued a letter to all SOEs to submit the records of PAYE deduction filling and payment to The Gambia Revenue Authority. So, it means there is a system already in place. What are they creating again? Similar measures are being undertaken by the new directorate to all VAT registered entities in the country. Are they telling us that those VATs that we have been hearing three years ago were not realized?

Honourable Speaker, coming to tax exemption and the income we paid, it is stated that when we paid this money from our income, it will be taken out and saved to pay for this increase. How can that be possible? You paid me salary, I pay income tax out of that, you take out that income tax and save it for what. I am not clear about that Honourable Speaker. You give me from the right, take it from me and give it to the left.

Honourable Speaker, we must be well informed. We all know that our people are suffering and there is need for salary restructuring, and this was my expectation. I thought the task that was given to PMO will continue but if the Minister now is coming at this crucial moment of the year to say that we have to adjust this salary hook or hack, it means that there is a force from

somewhere. Who is forcing us? I think we must take our time and look at these issues holistically. Once it is done, it benefits all of us and the target is fulfilled.

Honourable Speaker, coming to the expenditure policies ...

THE SPEAKER: You have seconds left. I will make it 30 seconds for you.

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: No, I do not want to finish my time. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Central Baddibu. I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai,

HON. BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you so very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the platform. I greet all the Honourable Members present here and the Honourable Ministers.

It is obvious and clear that the Minister of Finance has come at a wrong time simply because we were informed in July about salary increment which attracted the hope and aspirations of The Gambian civil servants that salaries are expected to be paid, and we are seeing a Revised Budget of 30% salary increment at the 11th hour which is too late. Civil servants all over the country are waiting. They are not paid and are from Tobaski break financially exhausted and the Government is putting more pressure on them again.

Initially, we were promised of a salary restructure, but they are now saying 30% increment coming from the Finance Ministry. What we want is not 30% increment, we are calling for a restructure. We want the salary to be restructured. If that is not possible then we want 100% because the

teachers, the securities and all the workers working for the nation are suffering. We also realized that you are giving us two confusing papers. We have 77 (seventy-seven) million added to the Office of the President. The first paper you gave us was D89 (eighty-nine) million, the changes are confusing, and you are coming again with this document. Under normal circumstance, leadership should be by example so the Office of the President should lead by example that if there should be any cut, it should be from the Office of the President first and then to the various ministries.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Can we hear the Point of Order, please?

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. Order 6, [under content of speeches], the name of the President of the Republic of The Gambia shall not be used to influence the Assembly and the Member is using it. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, the name has not been used. It is the title that has been used.

HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Then, I beg to withdraw.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member. You can continue.

HON. BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for standing up for justice.

I do not know what the creation of additional ministries would imply. You told us that the economy is bankrupt and that is why you cut from various ministries to subvent the 30% salary increment. Now you went on creating

other ministries and before the creation of those ministries, you are aware of the salary increment and the living condition of the civil servants. You went forward to create new ministries. How are you going to pay those ministries? Under normal circumstance you should not have created those ministries if you cannot satisfy the needs of the civil servants.

I have the belief that Government should learn how to create and generate income for its people rather than depending on loans and cutting from approved budgets. You cannot cut from approved budget for the purpose of subventing salary increase which is not sustainable. So, the Government should learn to generate income for its civil servants and to sponsor other projects. We cannot be bent on blaming Russia and Ukraine for our national problems. I am truly convinced that if not the Russia and Ukraine war, you are going to blame it on Covid-19. What I am saying in essence is that there are many people who contested for presidency, but he happens to be the President of the Republic of The Gambia. If he cannot function, if he cannot generate income, let him resign for the betterment of the country. It will be better at least. I thank you.

HON. PA DEMBO SANNEH [FONI BONDALI]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Mine will be questions to the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs. What are the plans in case Russia-Ukraine war failed to end anytime soon? And the second question is, how can Government sustain the salary increment without incurring any other cost in the future? Thank you.

HON. KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I would start my deliberation by commending the

Ministry of Finance for the foresight. Before going any further, I would like to do is to make some clarifications as to the points raised by the Honourable Member from Kombo South, and also the Honourable Member from Kombo East. These were valid observations and I believe it is in the interest of all the Members of the National Assembly to know that the initial presentation by the Ministry of Finance do have discrepancies which are visible if you refer to the 2022 Approved Budget and the Revised Budget on pages 18 and 19. If you follow the affected ministries which might be (11) of them, you realized that in their initial submissions of the net effect was (0), and the reason for that is the total additions in the budget was D58,995,000 (fifty-eight million, nine hundred and ninety-five thousand dalasi). That value as well happened to be the total deductions in the budget. So, what he is saying initially was a transfer from one-line ministry to the other and eventually did not have any negative impact either coming in as an increment or a reduction in the total value that was supported. That is why if you look at both sets, the final figure will be D23,692,000 (twenty-three million, six hundred and ninety-two thousand, two hundred and twenty-seven dalasi) which was the submission on the excel sheet given by the Ministry, and it is the same figure in the Revised Budget. So, Honourable Speaker, it is my submission to the Honourable Members that the submission is indeed correct.

[Point of Observation]

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: I want to make an observation.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Central Baddibu, the Member has sat down so you can observe. Observation is not allowed only when the Member does not sit down. So, if you want to observe and the Member sits down, you can immediately make your observation.

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Honourable Nominated Member, if I heard your explanation very well, there were unauthorized expenditures in the budget.

HON. KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: I think I will add flesh to bone regarding what I was saying. If you would permit me Honourable Speaker, I will refer the Members of the Assembly to the Approved Budget in correlation with the Revised Budget on page 18. We only concentrated our deliberation on one budget line item as an example. Let us take the Office of the President for example, I am doing this to clarify the points raised by the Members for Kombo East and Kombo South. If you look at the initial submission of the Ministry of Finance, the approved budget on the excel spreadsheet was D672, 650,000 (six hundred and seventy-two million, six hundred and fifty thousand dalasi).

If you look at the 2022 Approved Budget, there is D677,650,000 (six hundred and seventy-seven million, six hundred and fifty thousand dalasi). This is the discrepancy they were reporting. So, I am telling you that there were no unauthorized expenditures in the budget. What they should have done was to do a comprehensive and thorough reconciliation of the budget. This I did and realized that 11 ministries are concerned, and the net effect is zero. If you also look at the figures in isolation and leave the rest, the initial result

you will have might be misleading. That is why he made no mistake. The Honourable Member for Kombo East made no mistake to say the Minister of Finance did give us misleading figures but indeed what happened was he did not do a thorough reconciliation.

So, what I want to submit to this august Assembly is that the net effect is zero. The figures stand and again just to clarify that point, they did not send us the correct version, once you have the correct version, you can proceed.

Honourable Speaker, at this point, I would like to comment the Minister of Finance for being prudent in the sense that if you look at what is currently happening you realised that our biggest problem in this country is the revenue because the Ministry of Finance was able to make budget cuts and saved up to D1.3 billion and this D1.3 billion should have been sufficient to take care of the salary increment of D575,000,000. But what we are seeing at the end of the day is an increment on the budget deficit from 2.2% to 4.4% and why? The reason being that there was a reduction in revenue up to 3.3%. So, now the question is, if at all, the salary increment is 30% and we have an increment in the deposit from the approved budget of 2022 to the Revised Budget of 2022, rationality would fix that. If we should go for the 100%, what is going to happen? The deficit will go in triples which is not sustainable. Of course, we are Gambians, it is sustainable in the sense that studies were conducted, and this Honourable Assembly knows it and the initial proposal was brought down to ensure that at the end of the day whatever approval effected and agreed on as increment will become sustainable.

The other area I would like to buttress on is the fact that the Ministry had the foresight to take out almost D3.3 billion from the revenue because they realized that it cannot be attained. I am saying this because there is a sound financial policy based on the principle of prudence. This is a serious government. If it were other governments, they would say part of the 3.3 billion is the 3.0 billion from litigations which may still be ongoing, and the trend might change to recover the money. At this crucial moment, the Government realises that the likelihood of getting the money is very slim. I believe the Minister of Finance needs to be commended again for being prudent. If we all agree that the main concern/problem of this country is on revenue, I think it is only prudent and rational that the Ministry establishes the Directorate of Tax and Revenue.

Honourable Speaker, I am one of the people who fervently believe that if this country manages its tax collection well, we might not even go for loans, and will not even have a budget deficit. There are so many leakages in the system, I want to make this humble submission that would urge the Minister to strengthen that department to ensure that the necessary tools are provided together with a strategic operational plan to maximize our revenue collection capacity.

The main reason why we cannot give the civil servants 100% increment is that we do not have the money, and our tax collection to GDP is 11.7%.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, your time is up but I give you 30 seconds to round up.

HON. KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: On that note, I will urge the Honourable House to consider and approve this budget. Thank you.

HON. AMIE COLLEY [FONI BREFET]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. Honourable Minister, I have a question that I would like you to clarify regarding the salary increment.

We heard earlier that the salary increment will be more than 30% as representatives of our people, we always listen to them. We heard that the salary increment will be more than 30%. In December 2021, the Government made a pronouncement that salary increment will be 100% which was probably a campaign strategy for people to vote them into office. Now, you are talking of 30% salary increment Honourable Minister, will this be sustainable?

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. We now have the Honourable Member for Jeshwang Constituency.

HON. SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: Thank you very much Honourable Deputy Speaker and Honourable Minister. It is a bit difficult to say that it is too good for you to be a 'Jarranka', you should have been a 'Nuiminka'.

I would start my intervention by giving advice. Let us stop the blame game because this is a process we have started, and it is continuing. Yes, the Fifth Legislature was here, and they did their quota and now we must take it from there and rectify those errors. We are here to rectify the mistakes that were done. We are also here to correct the wrongs that were done and then the Minister should do the same thing.

This is a race with a baton that we need to pass to each other. If you are given the baton, you either redouble your speed or maintain the same speed to be at the end part. So, we have to double our speed to make sure that we are doing the right thing.

Here we are talking about the Russia-Ukraine war and Covid-19, but then let us look for a solution. It is good to come with argument that it is not happening and why?

We suggest that we should come together as a team not only as a government per se but also National Assembly Members. Somebody stood here to say that he can give out three thousand dalasi from his salary. I know he was just cracking jokes when saying it. However, I would try to give a suggestion here. We, the National Assembly Members, always talk about Ukraine. Why Ukraine and Russia all the time? The reason is that most of the things that are coming to The Gambia are from there especially the flour and other things. Why not we change from bread and other things and go back to the early morning "cherreh" and the evening "porridge." This will cut the cost for us and will ensure that we are making a good living.

Honourable Minister, the Salary issue is a concern to all of us. Let me stand to say I am 100% in support because I know some of the 'Jolas' and 'fulas' are standing there waiting to see whether it is approved or not. I will support it but I want to make a suggestion and I do not know if it is going to be possible. Can we look at the grading system from grade 1 to 5? Can we now start the grading system from 5 above so that there will be justice to the other grades Imagine if you are in grade 1, it takes 5 to 7 years to move

from a point to another point. How many years will it then take you to move to grade 2? Let us say 5 to 6 years from grade 2 and the same thing continues. So, at the time of pension, you are only at grade 3 or 4 which will affect your gratuity. Therefore, we should change the grading system and start from grade 5 and above so that the increment can match.

I heard my other colleagues saying that whenever there is increment, those on top are always enjoying. If you go to Section 33 of the Constitution with regards to discrimination, when there is increment, it should always be across the board whether 100% or 200%. It should be across the board and should continue but if they change the grades, that will definitely suit our needs so that even the driver employed today can start from there. That will really uplift the grading system, and everybody will enjoy. So, it is very important that we start it and then move ahead.

Coming to the issue of the IMF, how can we change this? It is about the revenue. We have to change our system and attitudes. If we do, everything is possible. I am not always in support of people blaming Government Officials as being corrupt. We are all corrupt because we made those officials corrupt. Let me quote an example today. If I want to acquire a driving license, it is going to be hard to go by the long queue because I am an Honourable Member, failure to join the queue as an ordinary person is form of corruption.

So, Honourable Minister you have a big role to play. You have to work on the revenue collection of the country if we want to be self-sufficient. We should not be blaming Ukraine-Russia war or to allow IMF to be controlling

us. Let us look at the revenue aspect of our country. Let us all be prepared to make sure that we tighten our belt to make sure that the revenue of this country remains in The Gambia. Honourable Minister, I do not know if you are aware that there is currently a port being built in Funjung, and if we do not control our revenue collection here in The Gambia and try to bring our tax a little bit low to match satisfaction of customers, if that port is completed, The Gambia is nowhere to be seen because it is easier to go to Funjung, drop your vehicle or materials there and then access Gambia very easily. So please work with the GRA, and other responsible institutions to see how best we can have our revenue down and collect the best. This revised budget is only for six months per se, and we only have six months to prepare ourselves for the next budget. It is better we look at the allowances for the low earners, especially the teachers and the security forces. It is very disheartening to see what they are earning. When I am earning D10,000 dalasi for my transport allowance, they are earning D300 dalasi and are the ones doing everything. It is not fair.

[Point of Observation]

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Member is alluding to the fact that all of us are corrupt. I think he should speak for himself. If you are speaking, you speak for yourself but not all the Members. You cannot say we are all corrupt because I am not corrupt.

HON. SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: No, I am not saying we are all corrupt. I say it should start from us to try to see how best we can work against corruption. If I said so, then I have withdrawn my statement.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you must be careful of making general statements that may put other people in bad positions.

HON. SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: I think he has taken part of my minutes by observing me, but he is not corrupt, my boss is not corrupt. That is all I wanted to say, let me rest my case. Thank you

THE SPEAKER: Are you up Honourable Member? It is ok. I thank you very much Honourable Member for Jeshwang. I now invite the Honourable Member for Busumbala Constituency.

HON. MUHAMMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. Thank you very much Honourable Minister for making that wonderful presentation regarding the Revised Budget that we are having as a subject matter today.

Honourable Minister, you made four main salient points which you said were the main reasons the Government is coming up with the Revised Budget. One among those is:

1. The downward revision of total revenue amounting to 3.3 billion, representing 11% reduction from the approved budget of 2022
2. The reduction of expenditure of 1.2 billion from the domestic debt service cut from the MDAs,
3. The third one is the funding of salary increment amounting to 575,000,000 dalasi.

4. The fourth one is the creation of new ministries such as the Ministry of Communication, Digital Economy and Ministry of Administrative Reform and Policy Coordination.

Honourable Minister, I think coming up with the salary increment is timely and every genuine Gambian will welcome this increment. As we know, the civil servants of this country are really under paid compared to other civil servants in the subregion.

Honourable Minister, we will advocate coming up with a budget for 100% or 50% increment but like other colleagues have alluded to, these are things that need to be look at in a proper perspective. When you look at the salary increment, you take cognizant of those that have the lowest earnings compared with those earning fat salaries. We would have at least preferred a proper salary restructuring that will cater and feel that financial gap between the low earners and the ones having the fat salaries.

So, I welcome the idea of salary increment by 100% but with the creation of these new ministries Honourable Minister, we understand there are constitutional provisions that sanction the Executive to create offices within the public service that is in Section 80 of the Constitution. But then at this point in time, when we are facing some economic instability or economic crisis, I do not think it prudent or reasonable enough for the President or the Executive to create other ministries that are going to attract income. You are telling us that there are some economic constraints yet you are creating ministries which are to be headed by Ministers whose salaries are beyond grade 9.

Prior to the creation of these two ministries, in the country there were ministries operating and were doing the function of this newly created ministries. For example, the issue of policy coordination, we have PMO who were doing it. So, I am not seeing any sense of creating other ministries when we are having economic crisis. We should curtail our expenditures but not to increase it. I know creating them has a legal basis but then whether it is justifiable and prudent at this point in time is the question. It is not only these ministries that were created in the country but also several offices that are not doing anything absolutely. A good example is the several Presidential advisory offices that have been created. So, Honourable Minister, if only we want to look at the betterment of the Gambian people, and be honest to ourselves, let us look at the methods and measures that are going to improve the economy of the country but not to honour the promises that were given by the President or by any other political figure during the campaign just to protect their offices.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Busumbala. I now invite the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum.

HON. ALHAGIE MBOW (UPPER SALOUM): Thank you very much Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members. I would also like to take this opportunity to make a sensible comment with regards to the proposed revised budget.

Firstly, we need to confirm that this Revised Budget is in line with the laws of the country, and the Public Finance Act is actually in line with what we want to do. I know lot of people out there are confusing two things that is

the Revised Budget and a supplementary appropriation which are two different things. If you go to the Constitution of The Gambia, it talks about supplementary appropriation which means that in any given year if what the National Assembly approved for the Government to operate is less than what they intend to do, the Minister of Finance can prepare a supplementary appropriation with the sourcing of financing to come to the parliament for approval. But we are here today to look at something quite different which is revising a budget meaning the Ministry of Finance has looked at the economic situation of the country looking at various economic indicators in terms of the revenue that the Government would be generating, and the expenditure and realizes that there is something that needs to change. It is not only about the new ministries that are created neither is it about the salary increment. It is far from that.

When you look at the revenue itself in 2022 approved in this Assembly, I tend to differ when somebody says the Assembly actually just approved the 2022 budget without having done a thorough scrutiny. I think that is false. We have done our best under the circumstances knowing fully well that a budget is not cash in hand, but a forecast and the Minister has come back here today to tell us that the forecast they made few months ago especially on the revenue side would not be realized. So, it is better for us to revise the budget downwards and I think that is very commendable. You know it takes willpower for any Minister of Finance anywhere in the world to come back to Assembly and say you approved this budget for me, but I do not think I will be able to get this. Therefore, reduce it. It is only somebody with determination that can do that and I want to thank the Honourable Minister

for having the daring to come to the Assembly indicating clearly that the revenue that we forecast for 2022 is not achievable.

Now Honourable Speaker, if you look at the forecast last year, it was about 29.8 million that is the tax and non-tax revenue cumulatively. But when you look at the analysis from the Minister, he is telling us that with regards to the non-tax revenue, there will be a drastic decrease on the non-tax revenue. So, in totality, the grants that he also expected, and the budget support would not be achieved. So, the two together that is the tax and non-tax revenue is about 1.7 billion and the grants and budget support is about 1.5 billion giving a total of 3.2 billion. He is telling us that he may not be able to get this to be exact. Fundamentally, that is what he is telling us. The responsibility to manage the economy of the country does not rest in our hands but on the Executive, and that is why they are coming back here to tell us that there is a difference of 3.2 billion on the revenue side that they will not be able to get. So, austerity measures will tell us that then you must look at your expenditure and reduce it so that the gap that you actually had in terms of the budget deficit will be managed better.

Now, let us remember this is not the first time we are having a revised budget. In 2017, we did a revised budget here in this Assembly when the Minister of Finance at the time also thought about the same situation and said what is in the budget then was not going to be achieved in 2017 and that was Honourable Sanneh. He came back with a budget of almost 14 billion dalasi, but he said we need to reduce it. The deficit was then reduced from almost 2 billion to 9 hundred less than one billion in 2017.

So, today we are here for the same thing, another Minister of Finance is also coming saying that what we have approved in 2021 is going to change because the economic indicators are showing very clearly that this cannot be attained.

However, it is a coincident that the two new Ministries are created but remember one thing, PMO was under the Ministry of Finance, the National Record Services was also under them, and you already approved a budget for them. So, it is not like the new Ministry is having a whole new budget, no! There was already some that was approved in the previous one that would be extracted from the Ministry of Finance to be given to the new Ministers. So, it is not like whatever you see there is something new, it is not new and if you do the mapping, you will really understand this. That is why when the Honourable Member said that we approved a budget that we did not understand, I said that is not correct. I understand from page one to page hundreds of the budget. Now when you look at the other Ministries also, which is the Ministries of digital economy ...

[Point of Observation]

HON. FATOUMATTA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: The Ministry is new. I think the Honourable Member should accept that it is a new creation.

HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I think what I said is very clear. The budget that was approved for PMO, has actually been moved from the Ministry of Finance to the new Ministry and that is correct. You can go back and make reference, it is there. When you look at the other new Ministry of Digital Economy which I love so

much, it is also the same situation because there was a Minister of Information and Communication Infrastructure, they differ but there is a component from the previous Ministry that would be maintained in the new Ministry. So, the same thing will apply also. The expenditure of the previous Ministry allocated for them in the previous budget, part of it is also going to move to the new Ministry. So, we need to understand this budget clearly.

So, Honourable Speaker, we look at two things here regarding the reduction in the expenditure.

[Point of Order]

HON. OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: My point of order is on rule 17 [d]which states that: "A member shall not read a newspaper, book or another device when making a submission", and it seems that is what exactly the Honourable Member is doing using his laptop.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are saying that the Member is making reference to a newspaper.

HON. OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: No, he has a laptop before him where he is reading.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, devices are not allowed to be used.

HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would close everything but just to tell you that this is not something that somebody should tell me what to say in this Parliament. When you look at the overall expenditure, there are two things we need to look at:

1. The debt repayment we have to make.
2. The personnel cost.

The two of them together in the approved budget currently accounts for almost 60% of our Government funds. What that is telling us is, 60% of our current expenditure is going towards salaries and debit repayment which is very risky. But when you look at the new budget proposal from the Ministry of Finance, it has decreased from 60% to 55% which is a way to go because we need to have a breathing space where the funds that are generated by the Government of The Gambia can be used for other development objectives instead of taking loans or grants that is what I am trying to point out.

Honourable Speaker, the area I really want to mention is that you know we have been hearing lots of things about the civil service reforms but let us not forget that the reform is scheduled from 2018 to 2027. It is not today or yesterday, it is a process and we must understand that it is a timeframe that the Government of The Gambia has actually given itself to do. So, salary increment or whatever, it is a program that cannot be done in one year or two years. So, I thank you Honourable Speaker.

HON. SEEDY S.K. NJIE [DEPUTY SPEAKER]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I also want to join my colleagues to commend the Honourable Minister for Finance and Economy Affairs for coming up with this timely revised budget.

Honourable Speaker, Governments are elected by the people to take charge of their destiny and of course their welfare, and in so doing, it is the

responsibility of every government to be responsive to the needs of her people. And it is against this that the Government, having realized the current economic situation in the world, in addition to the havoc caused by Covid-19 that the President and his government decided to look at the budget with the current economic realities on the ground to increase the salaries of civil servants.

The Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs has told us even without increment of this 30% that he would come to the National Assembly to revise the budget because there are issues in that budget that are not realistic. This shows an honest government that wants to operate with financial prudence and discipline. It also shows that Government is committed to the welfare of the people.

We were told by Government that it was part of its commitment to revise the whole salary structure of the country in order to better the lives of each and every citizen, but their hands are tight and the Honourable Minister told us clearly in his submissions that because of the current situation that government wants to come up with 30% salary increment to better the take home of majority of Gambians and civil servants across the board.

We agree that no government can do it alone and the Government of The Gambia wishes to see that no salary take home should be less than 5000 dalasi or six thousand dalasi but again, is that sustainable? Can Government maintain that? We are increasing salaries today and we cannot come tomorrow and say let us decrease it. The very people who are advocating for 100% increment would stand to criticize and castigate government for

being so irresponsible. We want to commend the Minister and the Government for being very responsible and responsive to the people. When you look at the issues, some members talked about more increment under the Office of the President. Let us not lose sight of the fact that when you talk about the Office of the President, it is not the President only, you have the Office of the Vice President and other satellite institutions including the National Disaster Management Agency, the National Population Affairs and other institutions. So, the increment on staff emolument under the Office of the President, naturally, we increase more where you have for example 50 people in the Office of the President than a Ministry or department where you have 10 staff. It is based on those spaces that the Minister and his technicians came up with that conclusion to get us 30% increment of the civil servants' salaries.

I think it is quite agreeable that the discrepancy is very high between grade 1, grade 7 and grade 12 but when this is approved by this august Assembly, every Gambian will realise that there is addition regardless of the grade you may be.

It is the commitment of Government to continue on the civil service reform, study the grading system and overhaul everything. It is the top most priority of the President and his government because the Honourable Minister is telling us that the Government wants an effective and efficient civil service that is why it is taking the civil service sector reform very seriously as a way to addressing the welfare of The Gambians.

Honourable Speaker, it is a fallacy and weak argument to indicate that once salary is increased to 30%, the following day Gambians will increase prices of commodities, that is wrong and that is why the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs have to work with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Regional Integration to ensure that people do not take Gambians for granted. The increment of salary is meant to address the growing high prices, inflation, and other economic hardship that people are undergoing because of other factors including the Ukraine-Russia war because most of the things that are used by Africa and other parts of the world come from Ukraine and Russia. Moreover, Russia is one of the biggest energy suppliers to not only Europe but also Africa. So, the market force is being dictated by Ukraine -Russian war which has a negative impact on the global market in general including Central Baddibu and Nianija.

Honourable Speaker, some people also talked about farmers and fertilizers. Anyway, this government is committed to the welfare of all Gambian Farmers. Although, there was an outcry against the D2500 price for a bag of fertilizer, but government is subsidizing millions of dalasi only to ensure that farmers can access fertilizers for D2000 per bag. It is a common knowledge that, every household farmer or compound you go to in this country, have civil servants. Government has partly taken care of that to ensure everybody is catered for whether middle-income earners or breadwinners of their families.

Honourable Speaker, it behoves on all of us to support this revised budget for prudent macroeconomic policy and for the welfare of the Gambian people under whose mandate we are here. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Nominated Member, Seedy S.K. Njie. I now call on the Honourable Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader.

HON. ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]:

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. The conclusion of the Honourable Minister regarding the submission for the Revised Budget call on members to approve the budget with the expectation that it will improve the lives and livelihood of the civil servants and Gambians in general is a very strong statement.

In the context of the people that we represent Honourable Speaker, I want to submit if you would allow me since this is the maiden debate after my election to thank my electorates of Brikama North for the trust and confidence they bestowed on me.

Having noted the points that were advanced regarding the reasons for the revision of the budget such as the non-realization of the budget support, the impact of the Russian/Ukraine war, the new ministries created and the increase in the salaries of the civil servants, the subvented hospitals and schools as well as the revised remuneration for the Cabinet Ministers were the factors that were advanced regarding the Revised Budget.

We may not be responsible for the Russian-Ukraine war, but I want to believe that the Ministry has its austerity measures to handle the situation economically. Regarding the non-realization of the budget support, I would quickly like to ask the Minister to inform us as to what were the factors that caused the Finance Ministry not to meet the requirements for the budget

support? On the creation of the new ministries, I believe that this has been a forecast by the Government that when it comes into power after the December 4th Election, those ministries will be created. It would have been better or proper if that was at the back of their minds that these ministries supposed to come in order to meet the desire of this new government including all other ministries to avoid the current predicament that we find ourselves midway in the execution of the budget. The revision of the total budget is for the President to appoint the cabinet to get staff rather than to have a caretaker cabinet. It was not a caretaker President on the 19th of January, the first week after the swearing in, we do not expect to get a caretaker cabinet. When we do so, the shortcomings that were observed by your ministries would have been earlier observed and the remedial measures can get started immediately. However, now that we are halfway in the execution of the budget, I believe late appointment of the cabinet is one contributing factor to this dilemma which any government should avoid in future. So, as soon as one is elected and sworn in as President, appoint your cabinet and let your ministers be tasked and they start their work effectively. Seriously, there should be no caretaker President or caretaker cabinet.

Regarding salary increment, if you look at the rationale that was advanced is to improve the lives and the livelihood of the civil servants and Gambians in general. I do not think that 30% commensurate with the statement that you have given. 30% increment for a low scale earner will merely get D750 or D900 and what would such increment do for them? Let us be realistic. What will commensurate the statement that you have given, in my opinion is not 30% for a low scale earner. It should be at least 50% if not 100%.

One would say there was increment in 2018 for the salaries and pensions by 50% and 100% respectively. Honourable Minister, I think right now we need to take the holistic approach by looking at the salaries holistically. So, what we need now is not a piecemeal increment all the time but total salary restructuring, and I want to believe that this is what PMO has been working on. I do not know whether it was actually the submission of the Government for PMO to go with that or not, but I think that was a good move for the salaries to be restructured. It has to be understood that this piecemeal increment of the salary especially by 30% is nothing. It does not make any significant change as far as the lives and the livelihood of ordinary Gambians especially the low scale earners are concerned.

Honourable Minister, I observed that there were independent institutions that were cut. Legally, what has the Ministry of Finance has to cut those institutions, especially National Audit Office, National Assembly and Independent Electoral Commission. These are the institutions that were affected. I believe the Ministry should not touch those independent institutions. On that note Honourable Minister, I want to seize this opportunity to thank you and your team for realizing that the approved budget 2022 is not realistic and we are ready to do the remedial measures to make the budget a realistic one.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader. I now have the Member for Kantora and Majority Leader.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. Your Excellency, the Vice President and Honourable Ministers of the Cabinet, the media and invited guests, I welcome you all.

I think we have to make some serious clarifications that Government is not in any way increasing expenditure or increasing the budget line. Government has the belief that the 2022 Approved Estimates could not be implemented as planned. Of course, all of us know that budget is a planned document, and the Public Finance Act does give him rights to come and revise to save the country. The revision has revealed that they have saved this country up to one billion. I thank the Honourable Minister for being so transparent to Assembly, and I thank him so much for coming up to our caucus and do the needful before this august Assembly. Honourable Minister thank you for being so transparent.

As I said, we are here to look at the approved envelope, but this time around is a downward revision and reprioritizing several budget lines so that the much talked about 30% is materialized at the end of the day. Cognizant of the inflation, living conditions and external shocks that the country has really experienced over the years, to mitigate such, they will have to come with this approach. Unless we forget, I do not see it as 30%, I see it as 80% because in 2018, the same Civil Servants have been given 50% and in addition to 30% that has been added to the very Civil Servants by this same Government.

However, we agree that in the long-term review, there has to be a policy to address what I called a minimum wage that will really commensurate with the living standards of our country. Therefore, we thank His Excellency's Government within 4 years, they are able to come with a policy that affects the lives and livelihoods of Gambians.

That takes me to the newly created Ministries, when we understand the importance of these two Ministries, we will advocate for a supplementary appropriation to fund them to yield dividend for the country.

Going to the Ministry of Public Service Administration and Reform, we are of the conviction that, we have a saturated Civil Service which calls for the need to establish a Ministry to holistically study the entire Civil Service System to come up with a comprehensive and manageable Civil Service by downsizing it so that their salaries will be attractive to commensurate with the job they are running for this country. In so doing, this newly created ministries would serve not only the Government but the entire taxpayers.

Coming to the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, this thing is long overdue given that the World now is being driven by technology and Gambia cannot afford to be an exemption. These ministries being established will not only create the E-Government but also go a long way in eradicating corruption, addressing revenue leakages and in a bigger picture generate revenue. If you understand what an E-Government means or if you understand what digital Economy means, the importance of these ministries will be recognised. The digital economy will create the much talked about job opportunity. It also gives the Government the lenses to look around to

spot or tap resources. Therefore, I commend the Government for coming up with this initiative to create Ministry of Digital Economy. The World is advancing, look at Rwanda for example, they do not have Mineral Resources, but they embraced ICT to boost up revenue. Nothing should stop this country from embracing the ICT Sector to promote E Government. So, I thank the Government for coming up with the initiative.

If you also look at the 11.6% inflation, there is indication that this will continue. 5% is expected to remain in the sector. So, there is every reason for this revised budget as alluded to by the Minister. Even without 30% increment, we must come back and revise. I served in the previous Assembly where our first engagement in 2017 was the Revised Budget when the economic outlook was not favourable. It was deemed fit at that moment to revise the budget so that it can sustain the operations of Government.

This time around, it is only prudent to come up with this revised budget to save the country and our taxpayers. People talked about the level of Treasury Bills, we have to commend the Government because in 2017 Treasury Bills were at 24% interest rate, and banks were at comfort Zones to invest in Treasury Bills and then get the money. Now as we speak, because of the strict financial and physical policies, we can boast of having less than 5% interest rate. These are on records. Therefore, it is commendable for the Government to take stringent measures to make sure we reach where we are. Without making much ado, I also want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for creating a Directorate of Tax Collection to increase our revenue base in this country. I will call on the right Honourable Member to urge the other side of the Assembly to come and join

hands to make sure we do justice to this document before us and pass it at the soonest possible time. On that note, I thank you for your indulgence.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Kantora and Majority Leader. Honourable Members now that we have exhausted the list, I will now call on the Honourable Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs, mover of the motion, to respond to issues and concerns raised during the debate and conclude it.

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Good afternoon and thank you, Honourable Speaker. Before I take the floor to respond, I would like to put on record my sincere appreciation to the contributions of all the Members of this Assembly. This shows the commitment of this august Assembly to the cause of The Gambian people. All comments have been noted and observed and will enrich our experience and form the basis for improving our work. Very many useful comments and observations have been raised, and I took time to make notes and I think I will try to do justice by attempting to answer every question asked by Members who took the floor.

I want to begin with the Member for Kiang West who enquired about the 30% increment across the board and regarded it as leaving the lower wage earners even worse off. But I must stipulate that there is no system in the world where everybody is paid the same and to be precise, this salary review is not a salary restructuring, and to try as a Ministry of Finance to input the necessary justice as is expected would mean outstepping our boundary. There is an ongoing civil service reform and to that end, a new Ministry has

been created that will constitute the core administration of the civil service and they have already started work on revamping the Public Service. So, these cannot be addressed by just a simple salary increment of 30% across-the-board rather, it should be a holistic change and before we get to this, there were lot of issues as a Ministry. We knew that the civil service reform is pending not yet finalize and the question we had in mind was do we proceed and raise the salary for everybody or wait until the reform is done? However, we can no longer wait because the pain and suffering of The Gambian people has been very acute. Cognisant of that, we took this step in line with the Executive directives and was duly approved by Cabinet.

That being the case, this is not the only augmentation of the civil service that this government will embark on. Once the civil service reforms are implemented and the economy stabilised, for sure this Government will ensure that every civil servant is paid a living wage and I am not saying this for politics. His Excellency the President himself and the Cabinet have always been discussing this and it is not corridor talk. We are living in a very challenging world, and we cannot just do what we want ourselves. We had to do what we call a sustainable review of the remuneration.

On the establishment of the two new ministries, this is necessitated by the national contingency. If we look at what these two ministries will do, they will pay for themselves in the long run. The new Digital Economy Ministry is going to introduce an E-Government which will close all tax loopholes and corruptions that we have been talking about. For your information, when we go digital, government revenue will be collected properly and there will be no discretion and we will not be accusing any government civil servants of

having unfettered access to public resources. So, I think that is a worthy cause and it is long overdue.

For the Ministry of Public Service, it is not just the core civil service. If you look at government investment in the parastatal, it is more than three billion dalasi today until very recently has government ever started receiving dividends from this. Even if we get a return on assets of just 1% that should have gone on to supplement the core civil service expenditure. So, we believe it is the wisdom of His Excellency to introduce a new Ministry that will look on revamping the entire public service and ensure efficient service delivery.

When we come to service delivery, I can inform this august Assembly that as we speak, we currently have more than six hundred and thirty-million-dollar worth of funding from the World Bank in the different sectors both regional and national but what is happening with the disbursement rate which is only 30%? We believe if the delivery component is implemented by elevating those disbursements and implementation rate by another 30%, we will see a lot. This is why we cut sectors like Agriculture and electricity because these are awash with funds more than two hundred million dollars for implementation, and do not forget that it is not only the Government budget that is operated in the economy. These projects are government projects just that we have development partners who are funding this. So, if we have projects in ministries, government does not need to carry out investment into the said ministries where we have development partners supporting us instead. That is why we have a very narrow and focused approach to that.

Regarding the revised allocation to Ministers, of course, we will be transparent with you because government has three arms that is the Legislature, the Judiciary, and the Executive. As we stand today, of these three institutions, the Executive is the worst paid because the average Minister's salary is less than half of the salary of the other two arms of government and that is not sustainable neither fair. So, it is within that spirit that we try to correct the anomaly by reviewing the compensation of the Ministers which we have taken on board.

Member for Brikama South asked about the implementation of the budget for the first six months, yes this was taken on board and that is where we came up with the projection. We believe it will load the National Assembly with lot of information that is why if you look at the projection, it is for the implementation of the first six months of the budget and adjustment or outlook for the next which we collate as the Revised Budget. But to do justice to this august Assembly, we shall be coming here quarterly to update the National Assembly on the implementation of the budget. It was mentioned that the National Assembly be furnished with sources of revenue and targeted revenue to date.

When it comes to salary restructuring, there was a full salary restructuring exercise done. Cabinet sat and discussed it, and a resolution was adopted, but the impact of that resolution was an increase in the wage bill by 50%. When we look at this 50%, we knew it was not sustainable, we assess it, and managing an economic system means honesty. We cannot just do things because you said it. When those approvals were done, there were no Ukraine and Russia war. So, we manage our economy with the latest information

affecting the macroeconomic fundamentals, and if those fundamentals changed, we have no choice but to change. Economic management is experimental, and we cannot keep our pride, we change as the fundamental dictates. It is because of that government in line with our development partners felt that it was not sustainable. We wanted to pay even 150% more to the civil service if we had the resources. This country does not have a problem of expenditure, it has two fundamental problems: one is revenue mobilization and the second is debt service. The current level of debt to GDP is 85% which is very alarming. Regarding the revenue mobilization, I am pleased that Honourable Fofana alluded to a statistic that was published recently indicating that, in the whole of Africa revenue to GDP is 16.7% but, in The Gambia, it is only 11% that means we are falling below the weight of the African continent in terms of mobilized resources by 42%. Assuming we add that 42% to our GDP, we will not be talking about the issues we are currently facing. That is why at the Ministry, the first course of action we have taken is to look at this very seriously and immediately institute a new directorate to look at mobilizing and strengthening revenue and tax collection and, we have started with some basic proofs as somebody alluded to Senegambia bridge that revenue was collected in a haphazard manner. When we went there in the month of May, we insisted that it will start in June 2022 compared to June 2021 which register an increase of 100%. It moves from twenty million to forty-three million more than 100%, and imagine we do that in all other sectors, we should not be resting on our Laurels. It is a challenge, and these are trying times. The Ministry is very cognisant of that and in so doing, we hereby call on all Honourable Members

of this august Assembly to support the Government. Let us all be walking-the-talk wherever we see revenue leakage, let us call it out and support the Executive to mobilize resources needed for development.

The Honourable Member for Bakau said that it is a time bomb. Of course, any economic system is a time bomb because you are dealing with what you do not know. When this budget was approved last year, nobody foresaw Russia -Ukraine war or the waves of this Covid-19. Nobody expected the inflation. I would inform this august Assembly that inflation is not only caused by domestic factors, but also have import -driven factors, and again this goes round even to our own exchange rates. We are in an economic system whereby whatever happens outside, it comes to us. US and UK are dealing with inflation at the highest level in the last 40 years. So, if their inflation is at the highest level in 40 years, we do not expect ours to be any worse or better. And for your information, we did a regional review in the sub region apart from the CFA zone, where the inflation is subdued because the CFA currency is linked to the Euro. In our own part of West Africa, The Gambia has the lowest inflation. We are aware of that and the budget we have proposed is not inflationary. Effectively, we have cut the total expenditure by one (1) billion that is disinflationary, and we are aware of that.

I doubled as the Minister for Trade, and we will not allow this 30% increase to pass through to the consumers or the market operators as a form of price hike. We are aware of the factors that drive this and have been closely studied and the good thing is that the global prices for some of the essential commodities are coming down like flour. We are already at an advanced

discussion with some of the flour manufactures to bring down their prices reflective of the international prices. So, when it comes to the issue of sustainability, we are not alone and will ensure that what we are doing will always make sure that the best is done for this country.

The issue of nurses on strike and fertilizer prizes, just walk across the border, fertilizer prices are not the same as market prices. We are still subsidizing fertilizer by more than 500 million as we speak given at their price of 200, but just walk across the border, we can know what the price for bag of fertilizer is in Senegal and we all know that fertilizer is not manufactured in The Gambia. We all take it from international sources, when international prices move, we are going to be affected and that is the reason why government has taken cognisance to subsidize the price of petrol to the tune of 1 billion and it is not because we are not interested in the revenue, but we knew the impact petroleum prices would have on the population. That is why we have subsidized petrol to that extent. So, it is not that we are insensitive to the plight of the farmers, we all came from farming communities, we know what it means but we must face the reality.

Restructuring of the pay scale has been much talked about but then I am sure my answer to that is still the same. The new Ministry will take care of that and will ensure the civil service restructuring looks at the pay scale in a more holistic fashion in due course if the economic factors permit it.

We are also aware of the revenue collection maximization effort. We are not just looking at GRA, we are looking across the board from concession fees to land rentals and licenses, court fees and even as basic as birth certificate

cost. Do we know that a birth certificate now cost only twelve dalasi? Basically, when you go and get a birth certificate you end up giving it to some more than it cost.

When we say revenue mobilization, we are not going to look at sectors that will have overall tax body. We are sensitive and will make sure that the proposed efficiency gains we want to introduce would be in line with the law and without any undue tax plodding, even if you look at the current compliance rate of VAT, every actor who is to register VAT is only collecting on behalf of the Government. Why are you not surrendering that money? If that percentage is only 66% that means 34% of what is legally collected for government revenue is being suppressed. So, that is what we are going to do, and we are aware of the plight of the low earners, but this cannot be addressed at this stage. It will be addressed in the subsequent civil service reform.

The Member for Foni Jarrol spoke about the level of indebtedness of the country and we are aware of that. We have a three -point approach to that. We are going to restructure and re-profile the debt and also do justice to the debt to GDP ratio statistics. The base here for debt to GDP in 2013 is an inflationary environment and that is too old. We want to rebase the GDP to as recent as possible, in that way, the debt to GDP would really reduce.

Corruption has also been mentioned and of course, all the digitalization efforts that we are putting together will go towards addressing that but of course government cannot fight it alone, every citizen has a stake in this enterprise.

Member for Kiang East mentioned salary increase as the main driver behind. No, I think this is one point I wanted to identify. The salary review is not the main point of this budget review. The salary review is only 17% of the total adjustment, it is the revenue where the issue is. We have 3.3 billion shortages, and I would be transparent to this august Assembly to say that budget is a projection or a forecast. When you are doing a budget, you have a certain outlook and if we can have that crystal bowl to predict the future perfectly, I do not think we would be here. Notwithstanding, when we realized the 3.3 billion revenue shortfall which came from three essential elements.

1. We had elements of thirty (30) million dollars which should not have been in the budget because it was overestimated, and it is a case going through the courts and until you have judgment it should not have been there.
2. We have hope for budget support that was included which should not have been there.
3. we have a third budget support for which we missed the targets because the targets were not just the Executive. Some of them linked to even the Legislative calendar like the procurement bill and all other things. So, those are some of the things that gave rise to some of the budgets not being realized in addition to the fertilizer subsidy as well as the subsidy for the price of the petrol.

In fact, just for the information of this august Assembly, if petroleum product was not subsidized, a litre of petrol would have cost ninety-two (92) dalasi. This is one-way government is taking the bites and the challenges.

The level of debt, which was pronounced by Member for Lower Saloum, I think when we look at our debt level and calibrate it in dalasi, we should be very mindful of the base effects and the external exchange rate. Most of these loans are calibrated in US dollar and as the dollar appreciates against domestic currency, these debts tend to be heightened or magnified accordingly. So, that is one element. It is not just that government had gone in a borrowing spree, we should all be mindful of course the quantum in the dollar term has been increasing but not as much as people have been alluding to.

The other aspects are why the bill is not realized. The revenue budget I have alluded to and the economy not doing well. Of course, no economy is doing well in the world now. It is not unique to Gambia and what we are doing is what a responsible government should do. When you know things are not right, you do not sit over it. You put it out on the table for everybody to know and you come up with measures to ameliorate the impact of that.

The physical reform that is being talked about are all included in our proposed revised budget because physical reform does not just mean increasing the tax rates. It means widening your tax base and already most of these taxes are already legislated. What we have as a problem is the efficiency in the collection, and when we come to collection, it is not only the responsibility of GRA, there are so many revenues collection that should have flooded into government but that is not happening and we mentioned the case of even basic income tax deduction, the pay as you earn. In the interest of time, when this directorate commenced work, the output of their survey to the SOEs in terms of assessing their pay as you earn deductions as well

as remitting of that to the state, we realized that a total amount of 1.5 billion arrears is outstanding. In the telecom sector, we have another 5 million dollars outstanding. So, those are the measures required at this stage. When you are in crises, everybody called for austerity, but austerity will only make you go for the downside. When you are in crises the Government policies are appropriate, you do infrastructure expansion you spend your way out of crises. This is what the west have done when they have exhausted both monetary and fiscal policies. They had nowhere to go but they turn to Quantitative Easing (QE). This is what you need in a crisis period. This is what China economy teaches us. So, we are aware that this revised budget is in no way going to be inflationary and is in no way sustainable and where it is not sustainable, we would never have recommended it.

Of course, there has been several discussions on the civil service reform, but the Ministry has taken care of that. We want everybody to be paid higher as alluded to by previous speakers but unfortunately the 30% is the swift spot that is within the fiscally available space that can be sustained.

The other element was the no smart policies. I do not think we are doing our best. Myself, my team and every member of the Executive will put in our best to do what is right for this country. We know the country is a tax-dependant country but there are different ways of addressing that:

1. Broaden the tax base,
2. To ensure what is due to you as a government you collect that.

The other element from Foni Bintang Karanai was for example the increasing of the budget for Office of the President. I will make one clear distinction

when we say Office of the President, it does not just mention the President. The Office of the President comprises the following, Vice President, State Intelligent Agencies, National Disaster Management, and the Cabinet Office. So, when we talk about the President Office, we are not in any way supporting the budget of the President, these are agencies that are all reporting to the Office of the President and their large agencies.

In the interest of some allusions of the lower cadre to be given a higher percentage than the existing senior members of the civil service. If we do that, we will be distorting the pay scale. You will see a situation where the lower cadre will earn more than the higher cadre and this cannot be done on ad hoc basis, rather it requires a comprehensive study as and when that study can be funded and ready, it will be done accordingly.

About the new ministries created, I explained about the new ministries, they will be more than pay for themselves in efficiency gains and the revenues to be mobilized. Why was the budget support not realized? I think I have mentioned that when responding to the Member for Brikama.

On that note, I thank you all for your contributions, if I missed out any question, I stand to be corrected. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister for your comprehensive address to concerns and issues raised. Honourable Members, Your Excellency, the Vice President, and Honourable Cabinet Ministers, at this juncture, I would want to suspend the sitting. It is now 15:22 until 16.00 hours to enable Members to go and have their lunch, pray and come back at 4 o'clock. The house now stands suspended until 4 o'clock.

Suspension

The House resumes

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, as the debate is concluded, the Revised 2022 estimates now stand referred to the Committee of the Whole Assembly in accordance with Standing Order 86(8) to consider it in detail.

On that note, the Assembly now stand Resolved into Committee of the Whole Assembly.

Committee stage

The House Resumes

THE SPEAKER: Clerk, can you read the subtitle of the Estimates again?

Revised Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2022

THE SPEAKER: I now call upon the Honourable Minister to report to the Assembly the outcome of the Committee of the whole Assembly.

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Honourable Speaker, I hereby report to this August Assembly that the revised Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2022 having gone through the Committee of the whole Assembly be approved with amendments.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Revised Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2022 having gone through the committee of the whole Assembly has been approved with amendments].

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I observed that most of you are concerned about seeing the actual figures, and now that we have gone through the Revised Estimates, the Honourable Minister and his technical team will give us actuals of the Revised Estimates. We will suspend the Assembly for 10 or 15 minutes to get those figures before we deal with the Appropriation Bill.

The Assembly is suspended for 15minutes

The Assembly Resumes

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Members. As we are aware, we are now going to deal with the Appropriation [Amendment] Bill. May I call on the Minister to hand a copy of the Appropriation [Amendment] Bill to the Clerk?

BILL:

*[First Reading of the **Appropriation [Amendment] Bill, 2022** by the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the First Reading of the Appropriation [Amendment] Bill 2022 is completed in accordance with Standing Order 65. Therefore, we will proceed to the Second Reading of the Bill forthwith in accordance with Standing Orders 66 and 67. Clerk, you may proceed.

[*Second Reading* of the **Appropriation [Amendment] Bill, 2022** by the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs]

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Orders 67 and 77, I will invite the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs to move a motion for the Second Reading of the Bill entitled "Appropriation [Amendment] Bill, 2022". If the motion is carried, the Clerk shall read aloud the short title of the Bill and shall declare it to have been read for the second time. Thereafter, Honourable Members, the Assembly will then debate on the general merits and principles of the Bill as per Standing Order 77(1) after which we will resolve into Committee of the Whole Assembly to give detail consideration to the Bill. On that note, I now invite the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs to move a motion for the Second Reading.

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Bill be read a second time. The objects and reasons of this Bill are to provide services for The Gambia during the period from 1st January to 31st December 2022.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, any seconder? Yes, Honourable Member for Kantora.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I so second the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member. In accordance with Standing Order 67(1), I will now open the floor for debate on the general merits and principles of the Bill. The floor is therefore opened, so any Honourable Member who wishes to partake in the debate may now do so. Honourable Minority Leader and Member for Brikama North the floor is all yours. Thank you.

HON. ALHAGIE S. DARBOE [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I only want to confirm the observations we made during the Committee of the Whole Assembly. We recommended that budgets of independent institutions be restored, but we could see the National Assembly budget amounting to 376,581,024 both the recurrent and the development. For Independent Electoral Commission, what is in the recurrent is 118,666,170, and the National Audit Office is 193,716,928, so is it that they do not have any development component of the budget to reflect changes in the recurrent budget? I want clarification on that, Honourable Minister.

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I confirm that those amendments have been restored. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER:

[Question proposed, put, and agreed to]

*[That the Bill entitled **Appropriation [Amendment] Bill, 2022** be read a second time.]*

THE SPEAKER: Can the Clerk read the short title of the Bill?

Appropriation [Amendment] Bill, 2022

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I will now resolve the Assembly into Committee of the Whole Assembly to consider the Bill in detail. On that note, the Assembly is now resolved into Committee of Supply.

The Committee of Supply Stage

The Assembly Resumes

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Assembly now resumes. May I call on the Honourable Minister to report to the whole Assembly what has transpired at the Committee of Supply?

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Honourable Speaker, I report that the Bill entitled Appropriation [Amendment] Bill 2022 haven gone through the Committee of Supply with amendments be considered and adopted.

THE SPEAKER:

[Question Proposed]

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Honourable Speaker, I moved that the Bill entitled Appropriation

[Amendment] Bill 2022 haven been considered with amendments be read a third time and passed.

THE SPEAKER:

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Bill entitled Appropriation [Amendment] Bill, 2022 has been considered, read a third time and passed with amendments.]

APPROPRIATION [AMENDMENT] BILL, 2022

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Clerk. The Bill is now passed. Can we move onto the next motion on the Order Paper?

Honourable Members, it has been proposed by the Honourable Minister that we take on the two loan agreements together but we will vote on each of them separately at the end. Those in favour of that proportion please say 'Aye' and those not in favour please say 'No'. The 'Ayes' have it. We can deal with the two together but when it comes to voting, we will vote on each of them separately.

MOTIONS:

"Be it Resolved" that this National Assembly do approve the Loan Agreement between the Republic of The Gambia and Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development concerning the Project of widening Bertil Harding Highway amounting to 6,000,000 (6 million) Kuwaiti Dinar as well as consider and ratify the Loan Agreement between the Republic of The Gambia and the Islamic Development Bank regarding the development of the University of

The Gambia Phase II Project amounting to US \$7,000,000 (seven million dollars) both by the Honourable Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Minister, you can move the motions.

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Good evening Honourable Speaker. I rise before this august Assembly to propose the deliberation on the Loan Agreement or for the ratification of the agreement in respect of Bertil Harding Highway Widening Project between the Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Republic of The Gambia.

This project, widening the Bertil Harding Highway, would contribute to greater economic development and it is the last phase of financing clause and the salient point features of the facilities are that the loan amounts to 6,000,000 million Kuwaiti Dinar which translates to \$19,698,965 (in dalasi term 1 billion 47 million) and covers a period of 28 years with 3-year grace period. The agreement was to charge an annual interest of 1% on the principal of the loan on withdrawn, and additional half percentage point per annum for administrative expenses and implementation fees. The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2024.

The second agreement before us is the ratification of the Loan Agreements for the Development of the University of The Gambia Phase II Project between the Islamic Development Bank and the Republic of The Gambia. The salient features of the Loan are to complete the ongoing construction of Faraba Bantang Campus for the students of the University of The Gambia

and it amounts to 4,950,000 Islamic Dinar (equivalent to US \$7,000,000 which translates to D372,099,000).

The development of the University of The Gambia Project aims at improving the delivery and quality of higher education services in The Gambia by providing a more conducive environment for research learning through the establishment of centralized campus and well development curriculum.

The Phase II of the University Project will be executed over the period of 18 months from the first disbursement date to the last which is 30th November 2023. The facility is for a period of 25 years with an administrative fee projected at 134,993 Islamic Dinar. The estimation of the service fee is based on the project implementation period and the final amount will be calculated at the end of the project implementation and paid within and until the end of the project.

Mr. Speaker, these are the 2 loan agreements presented to this august Assembly for your consideration and approval. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Minister. Any seconder, Honourable members?

HON. BIROM J.S. SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to second the motions.

THE SPEAKER:

[Question Proposed]

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I will first speak on the Loan Agreement between the

Republic of The Gambia and the Islamic Development Bank relating to the UTG Phase II Project which is \$22 million.

Honourable Speaker, the Loan Agreement has a service fee of 104, 993 with a grace period and a maximum period of 25 years. My question is, is this amount being indicated the total?

Also, if you look at the Article 4(6) of the Agreement it is just an explanation that is required there. If any payment payable by the recipient to Islamic Development Bank is not paid on its due date, in addition to paying the unpaid sum the recipient undertook to make payment to charity. So, this charity thing that you put there needs to be clarified. What charity is that? Is that charity account in the donor country or is it in The Gambia? What is the charity account all about because we continue to see this thing in the agreements? It needs to be clear who is paying what to the charity account.

In Article 6(2), achieving the deadline is also a concern because the effective date of this Agreement is 180 days after the day of signing this Agreement as stated at the beginning of the Agreement.

The signature date is when you signed the Agreement and then the ratification date would be today if it is done. We are interested in this, so the National Assembly committee responsible for monitoring projects should be proactive in monitoring these projects regularly to ensure their success because a lot of money is going into them besides many of such projects have failed.

Also, Honourable Speaker, the disbursement should be done diligently bearing in mind the charity they talked about. Maybe, the Minister could

explain what will happen to whatever is not disbursed? Is that supposed to go to charity?

Honourable Speaker, the Bertil Harding Highway Project has been ratified and already captured in the appropriation budget. We were expecting series of loans to be able to meet the maximum amount required to complete the project, so we are not surprise to see this one. We cannot reject these things because once they are rejected, these big projects which have already started will stop and we would not want that to happen. So, I believe we should all give blessings to these two motions in order not to delay the work and to ensure that the projects succeed. On that note, I thank you for the time.

HON. ALHAGIE S. DARBOE [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. One of the two motions before us is the Loan Agreement between the Republic of The Gambia and Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development for the widening of Bertil Harding Highway from Sting Corner to Airport Junction. I want to believe that ongoing road construction is the one that the President visited and expressed his disappointment regarding the progress of the work. If we approve this loan for the continuation of the project, then the National Assembly Select Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Government Projects has a great task to do this time around. Honourable Speaker, I would advise that if we are to appoint Subject Matter Specialists especially to the Project Monitoring Committee, we need to appoint engineers who can actually guide the Committee when doing oversight to properly monitor these projects. It is important to equip the Committee with

facilities to assess the quality of the road. I think we should now go beyond approving loans to construct roads which will only last for a decade.

Many a times, when roads are constructed in this country, most of them go without proper drainage system so I do not know whether that is by coincidence or the nature of their design. Honourable Speaker, roads are constructed to serve us but not to cause havoc to the residents around them. One will assume that engineers do not factor the topography of the area that should have a proper drainage. I believe a dual-purpose road of this nature would not cause havoc to the residences along it. We look forward to the completion of the road as the President was concerned with the slow progress of the work. Equally if we are to approve the loan, we expect serious work and the time stipulated for the contract should be honoured by the contractor.

The second loan agreement is Phase II of University of The Gambia Project for the completion of Faraba Bantang Campus. Honourable Speaker, higher education in any country is an investment meant to provide development. No nation can develop without its people acquiring higher education, so the completion of Faraba Bantang Campus will improve the acquisition of university education in this country. I think the pace of that project is very slow as that of the road construction. I want whoever would be the contractor to take it seriously because the National Assembly is very much concern with any loan that we approve. I must emphasise that this time around our Project Monitoring Committee should not take any of these projects lightly. Please, the committee members should make sure they have

details of all the contract agreements and they are fully guided and supported in their oversight function. On that note, I thank you.

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. The two motions before us are long overdue. You all know that the construction of Faraba Bantang Campus of the University of The Gambia has taking a long time. I believe our ratification of the Loan Agreement will ensure the timely completion of the work. So, what is important here is that this is a way of getting funds so that we can complete constructing Schools of Education, Agriculture, Engineering and the like. The purchasing of materials like furniture is well articulated in the Agreement. Therefore, I do not think there will be any Member here who will not give his/her blessing to this important motion.

On the Bertil Harding Highway construction, we do not expect road construction to be done overnight. It cannot be as quick as we expect because we want quality at the end of the day. Sometimes, road construction would be ongoing and people would be walking or driving on at the same time. A case in point is the road from Airport to Brusubi Junction. So, how can we get quality road? So, at the end of the day, we move nowhere. I think this culture needs to be really looked into. In as much as we want to reach our destinations fast, we need to also allow the contractors to do their job as expected.

Honourable Speaker, I want to urge all my colleagues to give their blessings to it. As the Minority Leader said, monitoring will follow shortly but the Monitoring Committee of the National Assembly is handicapped as we do not

have the necessary tools and technical support to do our work. So, our work is based on what we see on the ground. In other countries, they have the necessary tools to do proper checking on the construction taking place, so Office of the Clerk should help the Committee though it depends on the funding. I thank you all for your kind attention.

HON. YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. These two projects, in full disclosure of facts, are not new to me. I have worked in the University Project for about two to three years. We started everything up to procurement stage as well as the hiring of contractors. The same thing for the OIC Project as we started from the scratch up to the awarding of the contract. Therefore, I have good knowledge about these two projects. So, I would urge Honourable Members to kindly approve the Loan Agreements.

The Honourable Minority Leader did express concern over monitoring project implementation, but I can assure the Assembly that things will be very different this time around as I am the Chairperson of the Select Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Government Projects. In fact, I said to the Ministries when we interacted with them that before the National Assembly gives its blessing to any project, we must see the feasibility study of it. So, this is one of the measures to ensure that our Project Monitoring Committee is very effective this time around.

For the Bertil Harding Highway Project, there are funding gaps and I am sure this Agreement is meant to close those gaps. When I was there, I think three funds were ratified in this National Assembly, so it is left with this last one.

Thus, I still urge Honourable Members to kindly approve this project so that the Second Phase can continue in earnest. The only problem I have with projects in this country, especially the one concerning Bertil Harding Highway, is the interference of government in the procurement process. I remember very well that the former first lady was a problem for she interferes with the University Project process until it was subsequently awarded to SAPOJI. This interference has affected the quality of work and a good example is the OIC project, so I would urge the Government to stop interfering in the procurement process of projects. Also, I remember how the Office of the President was so influential in awarding the project to Parbiford Contractor, and the President himself travelled to Saudi Arabia to convince the Saudi donors to award the contract to Parbiford. That is why when I heard the President saying he was very unhappy about the progress, I just laughed because I knew what happened.

Once again, I appeal to Honourable Members to kindly approve these projects, and I assure you all that we are going to be very proactive in monitoring all projects. Thank you very much.

HON. MOMODOU LAMIN B. BAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would just want to seize this opportunity to say “Salam alaikum” [may peace be upon you] to Members even though I have not been talking since morning which is due to a reason best known to me. Also, I would like to commend the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs for coming up with this very important motion for us to ratify in the interest of the country. It is very important to know that we can only achieve success as a team when our dreams are bigger than our excuses. Looking at me,

you will realize that I am among the youngest National Assembly Members in this country. So, we are learning a lot especially from Honourable Members who were here during the last legislature. So, it is important for them to always put that at the back of their minds, and for us to represent our country to the fullest. It is timely to come up with this important motion so that we can look at it and see the way forward.

I also have concerns to share with my fellow Honourable Members. When I received a letter from the Assembly in relation to the Extraordinary Session, I have consulted my people because I will address their needs and concerns. This is what I called better representation. In that regard, the people of Banjul North are really concerned about the loans The Gambia is going to pay. So, they want to know the overall impact of the projects to the economy, the Internal Rate of Return of the projects and the Net Present Value of the project because I understand that the Loan Agreement for Bertil Harding Highway Project was sign since 24th of March 2021. Also, they want to know when The Gambia is going to pay the loan.

Before I conclude, it is important for me to make some contributions in connection to Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. I believe we should work as a team to put the following into consideration. First and foremost, debt ceiling should be legislated by the National Assembly to control the unnecessary barrowing by the Government. Also, the Ministry should review investment in Agriculture to establish benefit from the grant component and to adhere to strict procurement.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Can we hear the Point of Order? Honourable Member, you can take your seat for the time being.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, we appreciate all the experience the Honourable Member is narrating to us, but can he restrict his contribution to the two loan agreements we are dealing with instead of going to agriculture and all those things?

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you can take note and continue.

HON. MOMODOU LAMIN B. BAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Wuli East, for that observation. However, I would have expected you to allow me to land in order to understand what I am trying to communicate. I believe there must be an end result in any effective communication. Notwithstanding, it is important even though you distracted me a little bit.

Like I was saying, it is important for the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs to make reforms relating to the above mentioned recommendations without which the Government will continue to borrow to fund both current and capital expenditures using T-bills to fund deficits which I believe we can avoid. From what the Minister has said, he understands the current economic situation of the country. So, I believe with little efforts from the Assembly the Ministry can make a difference. It is not that the Ministry has manifested something extraordinary today, but as genuine Members of the National Assembly ready to serve this country, we will work with the Ministry to make a difference. Thank you.

HON. LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, Members of this august Assembly and Honourable Ministers here present. I rise to share my contribution in respect of the motion presented by the Honourable Minister.

Firstly, I would like to submit that these motions will have my blessings. Agreements and estimates were made with respect to the loans, so it is not a question of whether to approve it or not. The question is whether the funds will be put into good use or used for the intended purposes. These loans are going to be paid by ordinary Gambians. I am not an economist but, of course, we know that at the end of every fiscal year, per capita income for every citizen is calculated as per our GDP. This does not include any farmer, carpenter, teacher or mason, but they are all inclusive when these loans are going to be paid. So, it is better to put the funds into the right course.

About the university loan, I would like to thank the Government and the department responsible for the implementation of it. By September the opening ceremony of the University of The Gambia might take place to ensure accommodation in a conducive learning environment. Inclusively, I would love to applaud the contractors for that.

However, I want to make a submission to the Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology seated before me that this institution is built from the funds (loans) to be paid by taxpayers more so the peasants (farmers) whose sons and daughters are graduating from senior secondary schools. So, if they have good grades, give them scholarships to learn in this environment because their parents and they themselves are going to pay

these loans. If they merited these scholarships, the Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology should give these peasants' children scholarships instead of the sons and daughters of the National Assembly Members and the ministers. This is serious and needs to be put into consideration. Brilliant students from poor houses graduating should be considered because of their financial status. So, I challenge the Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology to put this into consideration so that the sons and daughters of the poor people who will pay this loan can access the same university to have quality education and thereby have opportunity to represent their various constituencies in this honourable Assembly.

Honourable Speaker and Members of this august Assembly, I want to agree with the submission of the Honourable Minority Leader with respect to proper monitoring and evaluation of these projects more so the Bertil Harding Highway. Honourable Majority Leader, do you want to observe me?

I want to make a submission with respect to this road. The duration of every project is very important because the implementation of the project is attached to the lives and livelihood of The Gambians. Thus, the fares from Coastal Road to Turntable is now D15 which is supposed to be D8 because of the bad condition of the road. The sideways created for vehicles are all bumpy and are not helping the vehicles. Honourable Members, Ministers and workers who drive through the road would definitely know that those sideways are in very bad condition. This is why the fare is increased from D8 to D15. Our mothers and fathers who go to the market spend the little they have on fares, so the project duration is very important. We want to submit

to you that you ensure proper disbursement of the funds as per the phases of the project as well as monitor the quality of the work in progress. You should also ensure that the project is completed within the specified timeline. Whereas it is exhausted without the completion of the project, that has to be explained to the people as to why the project duration need to be extended. Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

HON. BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the platform.

I am confused as to how the Government of The Gambia wants to bring projects and development. We cannot base all our programmes or plans on loans as a nation. As I said initially, Government should learn how to generate income as opposed to depending on loans, grants and donors. Besides, I am not well informed as to how the Government plans to pay these loans. In the event we fail to pay back these loans, what are the consequences we are likely to face as a nation? These are things we need to consider as Members of the National Assembly. I am not anti-development but in as much as I am in for development, I do not want our neck to be tied up to a point where we cannot breathe any longer.

It is of utmost importance for us to have the university extended likewise the Bertil Harding Highway. These are very important but time and again loans are taken to build Faraba Bantang Campus of UTG which is yet to be completed. We need to properly scrutinize those in charge of the projects because these monies are going to be paid at the end of the day, so we need no compromise at all.

If the loan is taken, it should not be used for any other cause and we should not turn a blind eye where the contractor connives with any ministry to embezzle the fund. At the end of the day, we all have to bear the brunt of paying the loan. Honestly, let the Government start thinking critically to come up with solutions to our problems rather than constantly depending on loans.

During campaign, they told the people clearly their plans but now they have no plan except to depend on loans which is not sustainable and will be unaccepted in the long run.

HON. ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, other Ministers and colleague Honourable Members. The two bills are the widening of Bertil Harding Highway ...

[Point of Correction]

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: We are dealing with loan agreements and not bills.

HON. ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Sorry, they are loan agreements instead of bills. Thank you for the correction.

Honourable Speaker, the agreement regarding the completion of Faraba Bantang Campus of the University of The Gambia is indeed great. As we all know, a nation without quality education is a nation that would not achieve its dreams in terms of development, technology and enhancing government systems.

The University of The Gambia project is long overdue in terms of its implementation and we all know that every project has a starting and an end. As the project has started long since in accordance with the Loan Agreement, the project has already done first and second slots in terms of furniture and consultancy services will also be paid. We all know the current status of the University of The Gambia as students of the University of The Gambia use other institutions like GTTI, GTMI, Gambia College, Daddy Jobe and Greater Banjul Senior or Upper/Technical School. So, we believe that this loan would cut that mass exodus of the UTG students and would even bring comfort to the students in terms of knowledge and reading. Sometimes you find 50, 60 or 70 UTG students in one classroom, which is not attainable. Looking at it critically, we believe approving this will pay off and those complains will finally be history.

We want proper clarification regarding the Bertil Harding Highway. Honourable Minister, would you help clarify in terms of the road design since we have lot of messages criss-crossing that the road will have 3 lanes, 4 lanes, 5 lanes etc. The other problem I have seen yesterday as I went through that particular road is that the road has been left opened. The job is unfinished and has not even gone halfway. So we believe authorities through the Ministry would take proper stringent measures for people to avoid that road and for better sideways to be made to ease the movement of people in that particular area.

Honourable Speaker, we believe a lot has been said about this road project. Demolition exercise has been made from the Airport Junction to Senegambia. As they have made demolitions on all sides of the road, the

expectation of people is that the road should also be expanded to that particular end. So, we need an informed decision and clarity for most of the people are confused. My house has been demolished, but the road size as per the look is even halfway lane. So, these are issues we want the Minister to help clarity to relief the people's fears.

Honourable Speaker, Since the initiation of the University of The Gambia Project, I have taken the lead to know the dimension of the entire landscape of Faraba Bantang Campus. We want an informed decision regarding the size of the campus. Again, we want to make sure that the University takes ownership of it and properly fence the territory or else the it will end up losing the land. A lot of issues would happen in that particular area because it is not properly protected. They are working on those projects so far, but let them also work towards proper fencing of the territory or else commotion will start. As we all know, land grabbing is all over the country, so they should be firm to make sure those realities are put in place. I think it will also help to have proper checks and balances in the University of The Gambia. So, I believe we should give it a try this time.

Sometimes for months if not years, the National Assembly Select Committee on Monitoring those projects would not even do proper monitoring. So, what do you expect? People do what they like and at the end of the day the projects failed. The President inaugurated the road six months ago and never visited the site until the seventh month in which he was disappointed with what he saw. So, I think we should put in measures in terms of visiting projects regularly to ascertain and make informed decision. Governments come and go but projects stay. So, it is better for us to sanction and develop

proper checks and balances of projects if not, we would continue to depend on taking loans and grants to initiate projects which will not be realized. At the end of the day, these will fail so I believe we should act wisely. Two important bills of this nature would definitely be supported, but with conditions. We put it to the Select Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Government Projects that we will follow them to also follow the relevant authorities to ensure that these projects are successful because if they fail, we all fail woefully. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, we have finished the bill, so we are now dealing with loan agreements.

HON. SAINY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am in support of the two loan agreements which are for the continuation of the projects. We all have seen what had happened already as these projects are ongoing. For the Kuwaiti loan, if schedule one payment provision is all taken care of, then how will the Government make the payment of the loan? Again, in the budget estimates for 2022, there was allocation for payment of this loan amounting to one hundred and eighty-six million, nine hundred and something dalasi which is also taken care of.

Honourable Speaker, the description of the projects entailed everything as it will take care of the Bertil Harding Highway from the Airport Junction to Sting Corner. I have an issue because the project funding will elapse in 2024. Honourable Minister, if the project does not finish until that time, will the payment continue or will there be a shortfall regarding payment of this Loan Agreement which might be passed today? I guess Honourable Members will

support it, but if this loan is passed and the project is not finished, what will be the repercussion of the payment of this loan?

Honourable Members, I am urging everybody to support the two Loan Agreements to help the citizens carry on their economic activities. Thank you.

HON. FATOUMATTA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I think my contribution is going to be short. These two loan agreements are, in fact, very important because we know the state of the roads. I am particularly concern about the quality. From what I have seen, there is no quality road being built. Road construction is not only a matter of pouring tar and levelling it but it involves an expertise job. Though I am not an expert, I have eyes. From what I have seen so far, I am not very satisfied. I think we should be mindful of quality. In as much as I was against the former regime, the Government at the time has at least constructed some good roads. I remember coming back home in 1999 when the coastal road from Senegambia to the Airport Junction was being constructed and that road is still in good condition. I think we should give the former regime that credit.

I have seen the roads built by the previous regime being ruined. So, I expect the Government to build a better road rather than ruining the ones that we had. Also, I would refer you to Section 155 of the Constitution which tells us how we can acquire and use loans. I am not as assuming, but asking the Honourable Minister whether the commencement of the roads is based on these moneys we are expecting? Honourable Speaker, Section 155(2) of the

Constitution states "An agreement which subsection (1) refers to shall be laid before the National Assembly and shall not come into effect until it is approved by the National Assembly". So, I am just hoping that the moneys are not being used before this august Assembly approves the loans. If that is the case, then the Government has gone against the provision of the Constitution. That is my main concern and apart from that I think it is a good initiative. We should only ensure that the roads are of quality.

The loan for the University is Apt because we need to advocate for good education. Without good environment, we will obviously not have the quality education we desire. The students deserve to have a very good state-of-the-earth campus. Even if the money was to be increased, I would have supported it because even the first world countries take loans. Loans are okay, but what these loans are used for should be a concerned to all. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Banjul South. I now invite the Honourable Member for Niamina Dankunku.

HON. SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I will start with the Loan Agreement between the Republic of The Gambia and the Islamic Development Bank concerning the University of The Gambia which is highly welcomed. I would join my colleagues to lend support to it. Also, I thank the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs for coming up with such a loan contract. Considering our debt situation, I think these are the types of loan that the Ministry of Finance could actually contract. I welcome the idea of

contracting such concessional loan. Page 8 of the loan gives a breakdown of how much money is allocated for civil work, furniture, consultancy service, and audit service, so the loan is very detailed. Honourable Speaker I will not dwell too much on this loan because a loan of 25 years, especially to a country like The Gambia, is welcomed.

I just have an observation on the loan contract regarding the widening of Bertil Harding Highway. I do not know if Honourable Minister can help me because on the Order Paper ... *[Inaudible]*

I assume 6 million Kuwaiti dinar is not equivalent to twenty million dalasi because the exchange rate of Kuwaiti dinar to dalasi is 3.3. So, if you multiply 3.3 by 6 million, you will get nineteen million, eight hundred thousand instead of twenty million as actually contained in the document. So, I think the Minister of Finance and Economic affairs will actually help us.

The previous loan dealing with the University of The Gambia has a duration of 25 years and a grace period of 7 years, but I could not see the duration of the Bertil Harding Highway loan. All I could see is a grace period of 3 years and nothing more. Therefore, I would like the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs to actually help me with that. Also, the bill of quantity on the University's Loan Agreement is clearly spelt out, but the bill of quantity is not given on the Bertil Harding Highway Loan Agreement instead we have the artwork, paving and consultancy. Maybe in the near future we would want to know how much is going into construction and consultancy.

On that note, I actually support the two motions which are timely and very important for our country. Nowadays, the widening of Bertil Harding

Highway will mitigate traffic congestion and save time because if I close from this Assembly at 4pm, it takes me 2 hours or even more before I reach Faji Kunda. So, any decision which will reduce traffic congestion is highly welcomed. I thank you very much.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. Allow me join my Honourable Colleagues to give support or blessing to these two loan agreements to be ratified. As alluded by the Member for Banjul South, this is actually in accordance with Section 155, Subsections 1, 2, 3(a) and (b) of the Constitution that no loan shall be contracted without coming to this august Assembly to get its approval through resolution by a majority. I thank the Government of the day for fulfilling these constitutional requirements by coming to National Assembly to ratify loans contracted on behalf of country before they come to effect.

Honourable Speaker, Government is always charged with the responsibility to make sure that the welfare of the people is taken seriously. Government's failure of this responsibility regardless of the circumstance it may find itself, it cannot shy away from it. Governments can hardly make it through internal resource mobilization to address the pressing concerns or needs of their people, so it is in view of that the Government thought it wise to contract loans. One must be dynamic in a sense to get highly concessional loans and invest them into the productive sectors of the economy to help generate income for the Government. That is the trajectory this Government has taken in terms of investing into our productive sectors such as education. No nation's survival or future will be brighter if it jokes with education. So, for

the Government to invest in the education sector is a step in the right direction and for the National Assembly to approve such money is also the right thing to do.

In terms of infrastructure, this loan contract will create revenue for the country in the long run if properly utilized. We have seen countries contracting loans to make bridges and toll gates on roads to generate revenue. So, the important thing is what to do with the loan in question not the amount. I think widening Bertil Harding Highway is the right thing to do with the money as it will ease traffic congestion and communication.

Honourable Speaker, people might say borrowing is not the way out, but it would interest this august Assembly to note that America is indeed part of the highly indebted countries in the world while statistically The Gambia is not even ranked among the ten heavily indebted countries in the world. The list contains Angola, Benin Republic and other countries, so we are in the right direction.

Honourable Speaker, I think my honourable colleagues will believe that if loans are properly utilized, they would really yield dividend which will catapult this country to the higher height.

For effectiveness in our oversight functions and responsibilities, I would want the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs to give a breakdown of these long components for us to know how much have gone into the civil work as well as consultancy so that our select committees will ensure that what has been ratified had positive effect on the ground. So, it is important for us to put that at the back of our minds.

Finally, I want to seize this opportunity to thank all for showing positive signs towards the ratification of these Loan Agreements and for your indulgence. I thank you so much for giving me the floor.

HON. KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. First of all, I would want to thank the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, the Vice President, my National Assembly colleagues, security forces as well as the media present here.

The two loan agreements before us, namely the extension of Bertil Harding Highway and of course the University of The Gambia Phase II Project, are paramount to the lives and livelihood of Gambians.

I would start with the University of The Gambia. No nation can achieve progress without having sound educational policy or without having good education. Education is key to the development of any Nation. A Nation without highly qualified people would find it tough to achieve what it desires.

On the extension of the Bertel Harding Highway, I think this initiative will lead to the economic growth of The Gambia. If that way is fully constructed, it will ease the movement of our sisters and mothers who ply Kombo East and North roads to transport their goods from the growing centres to the market. So, this honourable Assembly should give its blessings to this loan. We should try to approve it so that we can achieve in totality what we are yearning for.

Honourable Speaker, I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to air out my opinion on this issue.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu. Honourable Members, I have no more on my list, so I now call upon the mover of the motion, the Honourable Minister, to respond to issues raised and wind up the debate.

HON. SEEDY KEITA [MINISTER OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]: Good evening Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members of this august Assembly. Thank you very much for all your contributions which are very enriching. I will attempt to respond to the questions and concerns raised during your deliberations.

The Honourable Member for Wuli East did ask a question on the late payment. Unfortunately, he is not around to hear this. If payment is not done on time, the balance will be transferred to charity. With your permission, I would like to explain this. In Islamic Finance, there is no interest and there is no penalty as well. Normally, in a bit to ensure that clients pay on time, they are technically charged a penalty if they failed to pay on time, but because Islamic Finance Principle does not allow the bank to receive penalties or interest that amount is transferred into a charitable account for the charitable activities of the bank. So, that is the explanation he was seeking.

The issue of disbursement is indeed why we present this loan agreement today. We are at the tail end since the loan was signed, and we have six months to get it ratified otherwise the agreement will be elapsed. So, that is why we urgently put it as part of the Certificate of Urgency. Diligent

disbursement will be ensured because as we all know service fee is attached so we will disburse on time.

Response to the concern raised by the Member for Brikama North. Of course, due to the slow pace of work, the University of The Gambia suffers from resource mobilization but now with the ratification of this Agreement, we believe the funding will be closed for effective implementation. We have just returned from our last trip to the annual meeting of IDP on the last outstanding financing close. So, we believe the pending issue of the financing close is not an issue anymore. Financing has already been closed and we expect the project to continue.

The Member for Banjul North raised a very valuable concern on the impact of the project and asked whether this project has positive Internal Rate of Return on net present values? These are social projects and not commercial projects. In social projects, we look at what they called the Economic Impact of the project not the Internal Rate of Return (IRR) on net present values which are ideally suited for commercial projects but as a government, they are what we called the Spill over Effect, the positive externalities of a project. Once these roads are constructed, the level of economic activities will be boosted as a result of ease of traffic congestion and reduction of fuel cost because all of these are calculated to arrive at the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) not the IRR or NPP.

Notwithstanding, debt ceiling is a trouble for even the United States. We could remember sometimes ago when the US government nearly close down because they boosted the debt ceiling. We do not need debt ceiling. There

is what they called debt suitability assessment which the Government in collaboration with partners periodically conduct to ensure that we have the capacity to service any debt contracted, that is why any debt that Government goes in for must meet the concessionary requirement.

The Member for Kiang West asked whether the funds will be put into good use. Of course, it is morally imperative that government will not take money and not put it into good use. By default, I am sure you all trust us that is why we are occupying the positions we are in. So, we will ensure that the funds are put into best use.

The Member for Foni Bintang Karanai asked, why loans and the loan repayment? Yes! These are long-term projects. As you can see, our domestic resources are not adequate enough to meet our recurrent expenditure not to talk of long-term capital projects like these. Until such time that we have adequate domestic resource mobilization, will continue to utilise loans to finance long-term projects. Of course, we cannot comment on repayment or embezzlement of contractors because it is within our moral and ethical responsibilities to ensure whatever we do is right, but just be rest assured that the Executive is mindful of that.

The Member for Lower Saloum did ask about project implementation. If this project date line is not met until 2024, what happens? Of course, the project is never open ended, it has a timeline. The object is that all efforts will be done to ensure its completion and submission within the time frame.

Member for Banjul South mentioned about the quality of roads and the use of loans in this construction which I have responded to, but I think we do

have deliberations from the esteem Members of the Assembly, particularly the Select Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Government Projects. They will be also doing oversight role to ensure that the constructions are fit for purpose and value for money.

Member for Niamina Dankunku asked some questions relating to tenure of the facilities. Yes! It was not mentioned but if you look at the Agreement, the schedule has an amortization table which is for 50 periods and each period is annual so that makes it 25-year facility. In terms of the breakdown of the facilities, \$18 million is for civil works and \$1.5 million is for consultancy. There is a slight movement in terms of the total because of the exchange rate movement. The Kuwaiti Dinars pay, but we have exchange rate movements occasionally. These are the points I took note of and I hope I have satisfied you in clarifying your concerns. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Minister for responding to the issues raised by Honourable Members. Honourable Members, as promised, I would separately put the questions for each of the motions before us. I now put the questions:

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That this Honourable Assembly do ratify the Loan Agreement between the Republic of The Gambia and Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development for the widening of Bertil Harding Highway Project amounting to 6 million Kuwaiti Dinar, equivalent to \$19. 8 million US Dollar].

[Question proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That this Honourable Assembly do ratify the Loan Agreement between the Republic of The Gambia and the Islamic Development Bank regarding the development of the University of The Gambia Phase II Project amounting to 7 million US Dollar].

On that note, the two loan agreements have been ratified. Honourable Members, as we come close to the end of the business of the day, I want to seize this opportunity on your behalf to thank His Excellency the Vice President and Cabinet Ministers who have been with us from morning to now. It only indicates the importance attached to this institution in particular and government business in general. Your Excellency the Vice President and the Cabinet Ministers, we are very grateful and we thank you very much.

Also, we are grateful to the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs together with his technical team for leading us through the budget estimates and the Loan Agreements. We thank you very much.

Adjournment

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Assembly be adjourned sine die]

The Assembly is therefore adjourned sine die.