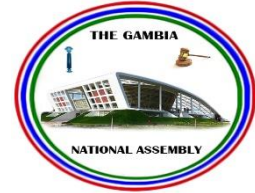




REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

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



COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR (HON. SPEAKER) **SITTING OF MONDAY 13TH MARCH, 2023**

Honourable Members, as I welcome you to today's sitting of Monday 13th March, 2023, I wish to express my utter dismay to this Assembly about the unfortunate situation of Thursday 09th March, 2023 in which the Assembly could not proceed with business due to lack of the required quorum. Honourable members, this is indeed unacceptable to the Assembly and as people's representative in a democracy.

It is the fundamental and sacred duty of every parliamentarian to attend to the business of the Assembly irrespective of that day's business. Our primary duty is to be in parliament, especially when the Assembly is sitting either at plenary or at committee level. This is what we are elected or nominated for. When the Assembly calls all other business is secondary.

Honourable Members, as I did communicate at the beginning of this Ordinary Session lamenting the concern of the Assembly Business Committee and that of my Office, the gravity regarding the failure of some Hon. Ministers to appear before this august Assembly on their scheduled business during previous sessions. However, we will be devoid of moral authority to condemn or even sanction Ministers for non-attendance if WE, as NAMs, cannot respect our own schedule by attending our own sittings. This is indeed worrying and alarming for our Assembly.

Honourable members, my Office is very concerned about this issue and its effect on the integrity of this august Assembly that we all ought to protect. Thus, I wish to reiterate that request for permission to be absent from a sitting of the

Assembly would only be considered by my office with at least a day's prior notice. For emergency cases, you may, on exceptional circumstances, inform the Table Office on the very day, requesting for permission. However, the Table Office's responsibility is only to take note of the request and engage my office for approval. Thus, a call or message to Table Office does not mean an automatic approval of the request. Rather the Table Office must get back to you, and I emphasise, the requesting member must wait for my Office's approval or otherwise.

Pertinently, if non-attendance of members is persistently obstructing the business of the Assembly, I will not hesitate to issue a policy directive to the Office of the Clerk for the payment of session allowance to be attached to the daily attendance register being administered each day, verified by the daily Record of Votes and Proceedings. This directive may further provide that deduction should be made for each day's absence as provided for in the policy document that was given to every member during our first day in the Assembly after the general elections. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all of us, as Honourable Members, to ensure we attend the daily sittings during each Session as our primary duty to our electorates who sent us here for representation.

Furthermore, I wish to draw the attention of this Assembly including all Honourable members to section 91(1)(g) of the 1997 Constitution which states and I quote: *"A member of the National Assembly shall vacate his or her seat in the National Assembly if, without the permission in writing of the Speaker or reasonable cause, he or she is absent from ten or more sittings of the National Assembly during any period that the National Assembly is in session and continues to meet."* Therefore, I hereby formally instruct the Clerk and Table Office to ensure that only those Honourable Members who are present signs the attendance register as well as only those whom I have granted permission are listed under absence with permission. Otherwise, all other Honourable members who absent themselves without my Office's permission must be listed

as absence without permission in the record of Votes and Proceedings of that day and they shall face the consequence.

Similarly, Honourable Members who are persistent of not attending sittings of the Assembly may be considered in contempt of the National Assembly under section 91(1)(h), and a resolution may be initiated for his or her expulsion in accordance with the said constitutional provision. We will not allow the action of some Honourable members to harm the image of this sacred institution of Parliament. We will take all means necessary to protect the integrity and dignity of this Assembly. This is our collective responsibility.

In conclusion, I hereby request the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters to immediately start reviewing the Constitutional provisions regarding non-attendance of Honourable Members to sittings of the Assembly as well as the quorum threshold for a possible introduction of a Committee Bill to lower them.

Finally, I would urge Hon. Members to, once again, take note of the relevant provisions of the Constitution and the Standing Orders of the National Assembly in our dealings in order to protect and serve this institution well. Thank you.

Issued: Monday 13th March, 2023