



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

[OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT]

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PROCEEDINGS

**3RD SITTING OF THE 3RD ORDINARY SESSION
OF THE 6TH LEGISLATURE**

DEBATE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

**NUMBER: 3
VOLUME: 3**

Proceedings of Monday 19th September, 2022

2022 LEGISLATIVE YEAR

CONTENT

1. Prayers

2. Communication from the Chair

3. Corrections and Approval of Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 12th September, 2022

4. Corrections and Approval of Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday 15th September, 2022

5. Tribute [Condolence] to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

- i. Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly
- ii. Hon. Majority Leader
- iii. Hon. Minority Leader

6. Motion:

Debate on the State of the Nation Address, 2022

[By: His Excellency the Vice President]

1. PRAYERS

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

[The Assembly met at 10:00 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 of the National Assembly, as we are about to start the debate on the State of the Nation Address, I would like to thank you all for your support and collaboration in making the State of the Nation Address, 2022 a great success. In the same vein, I wish to remind the Assembly that the President has outlined in his address the Government's policies, programmes and administration of the state for consideration and scrutiny. The President has indeed entreated us to continue being together in the best interest of the nation, peace, and stability amidst the difficult socio-economic challenges we face as a country and as a globe. Therefore, I wish to reiterate that we must nurture our young democracy for peaceful and prosperous Gambia. In doing so, I kindly urge Honourable Members to reflect and debate on the Address with diligence. I thank you all. Clerk, can we proceed?

3. CORRECTIONS AND APPROVAL OF THE RECORD OF VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SITTING OF MONDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2022

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 12th September, 2022 is before us for consideration and adoption. Can any Honourable Member move that the said records of both votes and proceedings be considered and adopted, please? Yes, Honourable Member for Jarra West.

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I hereby move the motion for Corrections of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 12th September, 2022 be considered and approved. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, it has been moved. Any seconder? Yes, Member for Lower Saloum.

HON SAINY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to second the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, it has been moved and seconded that the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 12th September, 2022 be adopted. Now, we look at the Record of Votes. I think you all have copies. We are looking at the one for 12th September, 2022. I suggest that we do it page by page as usual. So, we begin with page 1. Is there any comment or observation?

Honourable Members, we can move to Page 2 which is the list of Members in attendance. Do we have any comment on page two? Yes, Member for Serrekunda West, page one.

HON MADI M.K. CEESAY [SEREKUNDA WEST]: It looks like the full National Assembly Members were present. The following Honourable Members were not present, Number 6.

THE SPEAKER: Number 6?

HON MADI M.K. CEESAY [SEREKUNDA WEST]: I was not here.

THE SPEAKER: OK, Honourable Madi M.K. Ceesay, you were not here. Honourable Members, this one, Monday 12th is the first day of the sitting. Honourable Ceesay is correct. OK, Kombo East.

HON ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]: Honourable Speaker, I notice that my name is not reflected on the list of Members that were in attendance on Pages 1, 2 and 3. I have not seen my name.

THE SPEAKER: OK, pages one, two.

HON ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]: And three as well.

THE SPEAKER: OK, noted. Honourable Members, can we move on to Page 3? Yes, Honourable Member.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Yes, thank you. Page 3, under number two, the paragraph under the first line, "Honourable Omar Darboe [Member for Upper Niumi] moved the motion that the Assembly considers and approves ...", so the 's' should be removed and be replaced

by 'ed'. So, it should be 'Honourable Omar Darboe [Member for Upper Niumi] moved the motion that the Assembly considered and approved ...'.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, any other comment or observation? Now, we move to Page 4.No issues and/or comments, and then we move to Page 5.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Where you have motion without notice, Order 53, second line: "... the Committee on Trade for scrutiny and Advise", it should be Advice instead. Have you seen that?

THE SPEAKER: We have noted it, right. So, is there any other on page 5? Member for Sanimentereng, can we hear from you?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: On Page 5, [Members Debated on the Motions] Number One, where you have "Honourable Billay G. Tunkara, **Majority Leader for Kantora**". It should have been "Honourable Billay G. Tunkara, **Kantora and Majority Leader**" instead.

THE SPEAKER: OK, where you have "[Ensuing Debate] Number One, Honourable Billay G. Tunkara Majority Leader and Member for Kantora?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, any comment or observation still on page 5? OK. We now move to the last, page 6. Any comment? Yes, Member for Kombo East?

HON ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]: Honourable Speaker, my name is omitted here too, under the list of Members that contributed on the debate. I want that to be noted.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, do you mean that you are being omitted again for those who contributed during the debate?

HON ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: OK, Table Office has noted it, so your name will be inserted. Do you have any other comment on Page 6? OK.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agree to]

[That the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Monday 12th September, 2022 has been approved with amendments.]

4. CORRECTIONS AND APPROVAL OF RECORD OF VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SITTING OF THURSDAY 15TH SEPTEMBER, 2022

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday 15th September, 2022 is before us for consideration and adoption. Can any Honourable Member move that the said Record of Votes and Proceedings be considered and adopted, please? Yes, Member for Jarra Central.

HON KEBBA JALLOW [JARRA CENTRAL]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to move that the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday 15th September, 2022 be considered and approved.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder, Honourable Members?

HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to second the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, it has been moved and seconded that the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday 15th September, 2022 be considered and adopted. We can now look at it for any issue or observation Members may have. As usual, we will do it page by page beginning with page one. Yes, Member for Serrekunda West.

HON MADI M.K. CEESAY [SERREKUNDA WEST]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Like I said earlier on, my name is captured (Number 6) as part of those present on Thursday's SoNA but I was not present at all.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, Number 6 should be deleted. Yes, Honourable Member for Sanimentereng.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Honourable Speaker, it appears again "*Majority Leader for Kantora*" instead of "*Kantora and Majority Leader*" and the same with the Minority Leader which should have been "*Minority Leader and Member for Brikama North*". Also, the same thing applies to the "*Deputy Majority Leader for Old Yundum Constituency and Deputy Minority Leader for Serrekunda West*" which should be corrected as "*Deputy Majority Leader and Member for Old Yundum Constituency as well as Deputy Minority Leader and Member for Serrekunda West*". Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Deputy Minority Leader should be deleted in Numbers 3, 4 and 5, so it should be "*Majority Leader and Member for Kantora, Minority Leader and Member for Brikama North, and Deputy Majority Leader and Member for Old Yundum*". Honourable Member, it is noted. Does any Member have any other comment?

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, we are simplifying it by just putting Bakau. So, if we say "*Majority Leader*", it is only Kantora which remains. We do not go in details. That is the method of writing it.

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: I want to concord with him that we want to rhyme it with the previous ones. There is nothing like Member for Bakau or Jeshwang. It is just Honourable Assan Touray, Bakau. So, that format is okay for all be it Kantora, Old Yundum, and Serrekunda. It is okay.

THE SPEAKER: Are you coming back?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Honourable Speaker, Yes. Just to simplify it. Instead of adding "*and*", there has to be "*a comma before Kantora*" or insert "*Member for*" Kantora. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: English Language, Honourable Members. Yes, Member.

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. The reason why "*and*" should be maintained is because I am not the Majority Leader for Kantora rather I am Majority Leader in this Assembly. So, it really suffices to say "*and*" Kantora. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Do you have any other opinion on the matter? I do not know. For me, the signal "*Majority Leader and Kantora*" sends are different from "*Majority Leader and Member for Kantora*". Others have constituency names stated. It is just the name of the constituency and not Member for Serrekunda Constituency, but we are using your title, Majority Leader. However, let us share opinions. Let us have the Member for Lower Baddibu.

HON KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I believe it should be "*Majority Leader comma Kantora*".

HON MADI M.K. CEESAY [SERREKUNDA WEST]: If you ask my opinion, I would add "*Member for Kantora*". That is what I would take.

THE SPEAKER: You are saying "Majority Leader and Member for Kantora"?

HON MADI M.K. CEESAY [SERREKUNDA WEST]: That sounds better than "*Majority Leader and Kantora*" which sounds very ugly.

THE SPEAKER: Member for Foni Bintang.

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you so very much, Honourable Speaker. This is why we keep on asking us to speak our own languages. This is more confusing than anything. Honestly, I am not confused when it comes to grammar because it is just for understanding. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, we are not talking about the language that we are speaking, but the text. You know that we do not write our languages. Now, Honourable Members, do we correct it to,

“Majority Leader and Member for Kantora”? So, Honourable Members for Numbers 3, 4 and 5 should be Majority Leader and Member for Kantora, Minority Leader and Member for Brikama North, and Deputy Majority Leader and Member for Old Yundum respectively. Can we proceed to page 2? Yes, Member for Kombo East.

HON ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]: Honourable Speaker, I have seen the name of Honourable Yaya Gassama [Member for Kiang East] present [Number 35] and he said he was absent. Is Honourable Yaya around? He is absent and then he was absent on the day itself.

THE SPEAKER: OK, Number 35 is deleted, Honourable Members. Any other observation or comment on page 2? Can we have Member for Sanimentereng?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Honourable Speaker, I heard them asking whether Yaya Gassama is absent or not. He just stepped out, but he was here and has signed in. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I did not follow you. We have relieved his name. They said he was absent. Are you saying that he was in?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: No. I know he was absent on that day but he is present today. I just heard them asking if he is around that is what I am trying to confirm. He just stepped out. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Yeah, but he is not around. Stepping out means he is not around. We move on to page 3. Yes, Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you. On Page 3, we have a list for absentees with permission [2 people], but we do not have

any list for the absent without permission. The Honourable Member is saying that he was absent but there is no space here for that, so we should capture that.

THE SPEAKER: Are you saying that we have a list for those absent with permission?

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: There is a caption for those with permission [*Absent with Permission*], so we should have a caption for those absent without permission because he does not have permission. Who gave him permission? He was deliberately absent.

THE SPEAKER: Permission to absent oneself from the Assembly comes from the Speaker, alright. Members have a right to absent themselves for a period of time. You can come and go without permission. You can stay home without permission, but if we were to indicate with permission, we have to have that on records. If we have those with permission stated, I think we should also have indicated those without permission. What is the way forward? What are you suggesting, Honourable Member?

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: I am simply saying just like we have those absent with permission, we should also have a caption for those absent without permission because they deliberately absented themselves without any permit.

THE SPEAKER: OK, Table Office would note that down and do the relevant corrections. Yes, Honourable Majority Leader and Member for Kantora.

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: I think going forward we have to observe the line of authority. Who has the authority to give permission; Table Office or the Speaker? So, seeking for permission to stay away from a particular Session in the Assembly has to be in writing to the Speaker. That should be the trend or the line of communication rather than informing Table Office. One should write to the Office of the Speaker for permission. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you are right. I have just discussed with Table Office when he said absent with permission because I think they were notified. I asked him whether he granted them permission. He said that he should notify me so we will surely regularize that one. Members have rights to absent themselves for a number of times, but if anyone is to be absent with permission, then it must be official. We will take note of this thing and regularize it. Do you have any more on Page 3? Yes, Member for Tumana.

HON NFALLY M. KORA [TUMANA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Member for Central Baddibu raised a Point of Order relying on Order 24 requesting the President to attend the debate, but I think he requested the Office of the Speaker and not directly requesting the President himself. I think it should be indicated that he has sought request from the Speaker who will then request the President. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I think that is a valid observation because all communications on orders are directed to the Speaker. I do follow that. Now, let us hear from Honourable Member for Lower Niumi.

HONTAMSIR CHAM [LOWER NIUMI]: Honourable Speaker, good morning. On Page 3, letter B under Motion; I have observed the phrase *'His Excellency the President of the Republic which* should be completed. I prefer we use *'His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia'*.

THE SPEAKER: What the Honourable Member is saying is just after Number 2 under Motion. He said that the phrase "His Excellency the President of the Republic" should be "His Excellency the President of the Republic *of The Gambia*". Am I right?

HON TAMSIR CHAM [LOWER NIUMI]: Yes, and the phrase "His Excellency the President of the Republic, Mr. Adama Barrow" is repeated again. So, *"of The Gambia"* is missing there again. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Majority Leader.

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Honourable Speaker, I think we need to clarify this issue. When he said "His Excellency the President of *'the'* Republic", the word *'the'* is technically referring to *The Gambia* because we have only *one Republic*. Basically, it is captured, so the way it is suffices. I think it is correct as it is referring to the Republic of The Gambia since we have only one republic here. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Member for Serrekunda West.

HON MADI M.K. CEESAY [SEREKUNDA WEST]: Honourable Speaker, I think the issue here is, was he the one who moved the Motion? It indicates that the President moved the motion. [*Yes! Responded the Members*] It is

OK then. I was asking whether the President moved the Motion or not, then my colleagues responded in the affirmative. So, I am fine with it.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, do we leave the proposed correction as '*the Republic*' or '*the Republic of the Gambia*? Is there anything wrong with 'His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia'? Alright. Honourable Members, we are still on Page 3 and I think that is the last Page. Yes, Honourable Member for Banjul Central.

HON ABDOULIE NJAI [BANJUL CENTRAL]: Yes, a slight observation here. Honourable Speaker, under Motion [Page 3], it states that "the State of the Nation Address, 2020" rather than 2022. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Honourable Members, do you see? On the same Page [Number 2] under Motion, "State of the Nation Address, 2020" is recorded instead it should be '2022'. Thank you, very much Honourable Member.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday 15th September, 2022 has been adopted with amendments.]

5. Condolences to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II by the Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, the Honourable Majority Leader, and the Honourable Minority Leader

THE SPEAKER: The world including the Republic of The Gambia received with great shock the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II which occurred on Thursday 8th September, 2022 in the United Kingdom.

On behalf of both sides of this august Assembly and indeed on my own behalf as the Honourable Speaker, I wish to convey our deepest and heartfelt condolences to the Royal Family of the late Queen Elizabeth II, the Honourable Speakers of the Houses of the United Kingdom Parliament, the Government and people of United Kingdom, and indeed the Commonwealth of Nations. It is with humility that this Assembly join all Parliaments of the Commonwealth to pay tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and to eulogize in her memory and the life of an extraordinary public servant.

Her Majesty the late Queen Elizabeth II will be remembered for her sense of humour, charisma and statesmanship in the global governance structure, most particularly in the Commonwealth of which we are a part as a nation and parliament. She was a citizen and an outstanding leader of the world throughout her reign.

The Gambia has special historical ties with the United Kingdom and of course with the queen herself. As one of the 5 English speaking countries in British West Africa, The Gambia gained independence from the United Kingdom during Her Majesty's reign. Though we were the last Anglophone West African colony to attained political independence on 18th February 1965, the Queen peacefully granted our request. It is noteworthy and historic that the late Queen featured prominently in our colonial transition to a Republican status in 1970. There is no doubt that we immensely

gained from her guidance and wise counsel as a nation. Notably, she deeply appreciated Gambia's political history and, thus, she made a three-day visit to The Gambia in December 1961.

Her Majesty's leadership was exemplary and inspirational. We praise the Almighty Allah for her service to humanity and many lives she touched during her life here on earth. She has faced and overcome challenges with fortitude and has witnessed countless technological advances and human achievements.

Once again, Honourable Members, on behalf of the National Assembly we extend our heartfelt condolences to the Royal Family of the late Queen Elizabeth II, the Honourable Speakers of the Houses of the United Kingdom Parliament, the Government and people of the United Kingdom, and the Commonwealth of Nations. On that note, Honourable Members, I wish to request for the Assembly to observe a minute of silence in honour of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. A minute of silence Honourable Members, please. Thank you, Honourable Members. May I now invite the Majority and Minority Leaders to give their statements on behalf of their respective groups, starting with the Majority Leader?

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. Honourable Speaker, as we mourned the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, it is with great sorrow and sadness that I stand before this august Assembly to pay tribute to her after a long life of faith, duty and service. A great light has gone out.

Honourable Speaker, Her Majesty was an exemplary person who lived an extraordinary life for us to remember her reign of 7 decades of leadership. Her Majesty was an epitome of duty, stability, wisdom and grace. She has had enormous love and gratitude for the Commonwealth, and has managed to visit every part of the Commonwealth of Nations more than any Monarch in the history. She was always a generous host and a consummate diplomat.

Honourable Speaker, the growth and vibrancy of Modern Commonwealth is credited to Her Majesty and a testimony to dedication, wisdom and leadership. Before she accepted the throne in 1974, she stated: "*My whole life whether long or short will be devoted to service*". In 1931, Her Majesty defined our family of nations as one which bears resemblance to the empires of the past. It is entirely a new conception built on high qualities and spirit of man, friendship, loyalty and desire for freedom and peace. To the new conception of an equal partnership of nations and races, I shall forever continue to be grateful to her for the steadfastness and commitment to the values of Commonwealth.

Honourable Speaker, Her Majesty's vision for Commonwealth and the beginning of her reign have been fulfilled by her dedication and commitment. Inspired by her life of duty and service, the responsibility to achieve her vision is what we all now share. Her long years of interaction and partnership with generations of the world leaders, and their people particularly the young, gave her extraordinary insight which brought over more life and meaning of her service. I will miss her greatly. Equally, the

Nations of the Commonwealth and the world will miss her greatly. We will never see the like of her again.

On behalf of both sides of the National Assembly and indeed on my own behalf, I express our profound sadness at her passing as well as admiration and gratitude for all she has given. We send our prayers, love and heartfelt condolences to the entire family. It is also gratifying to inform this august Assembly that during her visit in 1961, Her Majesty visited Lower Baddibu Kerewan with Kairaba Jawara and there is still a well named after her. It does give us the historical connection between Her Majesty the Queen and The Gambia. I thank you so much for your kind attention.

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

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. On behalf of the Minority Caucus and indeed on my own behalf, I join the world in mourning the demise of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as she will be laid to rest today in King George VI Memorial Chapel at St. George's Chapel.

Queen Elizabeth II lived an exemplary life of selflessness, tenacity and dedication to service. The duty, service and dedication she demonstrated throughout her reign was not just exemplary but extraordinary. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II embodied the Modern British Nations' continuity and unity for over 7 decades. She was a rock on which Modern Britain was built.

On behalf of the Minority Caucus of the National Assembly of The Gambia and its wider Membership, we offer our deepest condolences to the Royal Family, the Government and people of the United Kingdom, the British Realms, and Commonwealth of Nations. Also, our thoughts are extended to colleagues in the United Kingdom Parliaments with the House of Commons and House of Lords. Queen Elizabeth II was steadfast in her commitment to Parliamentary democracy.

In addition to being the Head of State, Queen Elizabeth II was a great supporter of democracy, human rights and rule of law. People around the world are still demonstrating numerous occasions throughout the seven decades of her reign. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II addressed hundreds of Parliamentarians from around the world and did underline the core values of multilateralism and the importance of bringing Parliamentarians together to find peaceful methods of solving disputes and to understand each better. At a time of uncertainty and upheaval in the world, Her Majesty's charismatic leadership and unifying presence will be sorely missed by the people of The Gambia and the Commonwealth family in general.

Our thoughts and hearts are with the people of the United Kingdom and all those mourning around the world. In the difficult days ahead, we pray to the Almighty Allah that Her Majesty's lifetime service to humanity will be a source of inspiration for the present and future generations of leaders. May her soul rest in peace. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member. May her soul rest in peace. Clerk, can we proceed?

6. MOTION:

Debate on the State of the Nation Address 2022 by His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Clerk. Honourable Members, I recognize the presence of His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia, representing the President on this debate.

May I request that any Honourable Member who wish to take part in the debate to raise his or her constituency tag for us to record the names. However, before giving any Member the floor, may we remind ourselves to respect the rules of the debate on Order 29[1] of the Standing Orders which reads: *"Every Member shall restrict his or her observations to the subject matter under discussion"*? Furthermore, Order 30[1] 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"*. I, therefore, call on all Honourable Members to respect and observe the rules as indicated. I thank you.

I now open the floor for any Honourable Member who may want to debate. Honourable Member for Kombo South the floor is yours.

HON KEBBA K BARROW [KOMBO SOUTH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I also want to join you to welcome the Vice President to this debate.

I do not know to what extent did the Deputy Clerk, Legal and Procedural Matters as well as Table Office invite all the other Ministers of this great

nation. We have said this over and over during the Fifth Legislature that we cannot be talking to ourselves here. The Ministers have to come and listen to what the Members have to say because that is the responsibility we owe to our people. We are representing our people and our core mandate is legislation. Therefore, when we are in the Chamber, it is important for the Vice President and all the Ministers to be present to listen to what the Members would say because the President anchored on all the Ministries, Departments and Agencies. The Ministers' presence will ease the burden on the Vice President for follow-ups and other engagements of the National Assembly.

Having said that Honourable Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to also thank the President for fulfilling the constitutional requirement as stipulated in the 1997 Constitution, Section 77[1] which states the presence of the President to the National Assembly at least once to brief the National Assembly Members on the status of Government programmes and activities, and to share some information presented by the different Ministries, Department and Agencies. Also, Standing Order 24 is more elaborate as it states a specific time for the President to deliver his presentation. Clearly, Standing Order 24 stated that the President shall do his address during the first quarter of the year. That is more democratic and it prevails in other jurisdictions and countries because it gives National Assembly Members the opportunity to follow-up and also work with other institutions, departments and agencies in their oversight on all that has been enumerated or said by the President during his address.

Looking at our tight schedules, this is the Third Ordinary Session Honourable Speaker; the Fourth Ordinary Session is geared towards the Budget Session which is going to be very tight. The 2023 Budget Session is going to be an extraordinary one because we need to look into a lot of things. So, I want to implore the Deputy Clerk –*Legal and Procedural Matters* and Table Office to engage the exact team so that the President can come to the Chamber to address the nation.

Having said that Honourable Speaker, I am now going into detail on what the President has submitted to the Gambian people. I must say I have not heard any strategy laid by the Government for the after effect of Covid-19 that has devastated the nation which was unexpected. At this time, we should be able to know clearly what strategies the Government is going to take so that we are more prepared for post Covid-19. How far has the Ministry of Health gone with the vaccination of the Gambian citizens? How many people have been vaccinated in this country and what is the rate? What do we do to implement these things? All the funds acquired and disbursed to the Ministry of Health have not been enumerated, especially the **734 million** or there about out of the **750 million** that went to the Ministry of Health towards Covid-19. All the details have to be done.

Honourable Speaker, I think the report also lacks a lot of statistical data. We have said this over and over that statistics is the bedrock of development as it helps in the planning and implementation of our programmes. So, I think giving us statistics on the issues and programmes said and done will enable us see the gaps and where to build on so that we

are safe as a nation. Without correct statistical data, it would be difficult for us to do clear budgeting to improve the livelihood of the Gambian people.

Honourable Speaker, Finance is the bedrock of our entry point. The Ministry has not given us the details, the rebound of gender and also the low rate of budgetary support. What were the details? Why was that not forthcoming in the report? That will also help to inform us in the preparation of the 2023 budget. Are we still going to rely on budgetary support from our partners and donors even if they are not forthcoming? Do we still continue to put them in our budget line? So, that is also a thought for the FPAC Committee to engage during our bilateral in November to ensure we take care of these things.

Another thing left out by the Minister of Finance is the popular Vehicle Policy. What is the status? The former Minister did inform us that the Government is reviewing the policy and will report back to the National Assembly. Over **D300 million** has been misused as per the Act and still now more budgetary allocations are going to the purchase of vehicles for the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies to be used by officials. Honourable Speaker, looking at the confusion, the condition of the country, the economic down trend happening in the world all around, there is need for the Vehicle Policy to be looked at so that the **D3 million** or above that is been used will go into other service areas like health, education and agriculture.

Honourable Speaker, when it comes to the Centralized Services in the budget, I think we need to look into how they are being implemented by the Ministry of Finance.

On Petroleum and Energy, as I keep saying here, Kombo South is the biggest constituency in the country and I want to give some statistics. Kombo South as a constituency has over 200,000 people, 72,000 registered voters, over 7 Major Health Centres, the natural resources, and more than 5 fish landing sites. Agricultural production is very ideal as the land is fertile and everything is there, but we have a big problem with our electricity and water supply.

All the boreholes supplying water to the greater Banjul area were dug in Kombo South, yet we have major towns in Kombo South grueling with water supply. So, I think Ministry of Petroleum and Energy should look into this so that the people of Kombo South with the fish landing sites can be able to descale and prepare the fish for marketing. Also, the Ministry should provide storage facilities that will help improve productivity and the economic status of the people.

As I said, linking electricity to the fish production and vegetable gardening is very essential. Kombo South has the biggest land area for vegetable production in this country. The women vegetable growers are complaining and crying that there are no storage facilities in the market to enable them keep their produce so as to have more money. Those are areas that have been identified. The Vegetable Growers Association has engaged the Ministry of Agriculture on the key areas such as improving and increasing electricity supply in those areas so as to have better storage facilities for the women. Also, The Gambia Commercial Agriculture and Value Chain Management Project [GCAV] and other projects coming to encourage women, young school leavers, and other entrepreneurs into poultry

farming and those things cannot be done without adequate electricity supply. So, Kombo South as I said is an area that we need to consider in all our development aspects. As I said in the statistical data, Kombo South alone is more than all the 6 constituencies in LRR by 17,000 votes. So, that is why it is important to consider these areas for any development to be done. We need to do it to improve the income of the people.

On agriculture, Kombo South has the biggest land cover and the soil is fertile. The President, in his speech, talked about the tractors, but I do not think the Ministries or those who prepare the report have given him details of how those tractors were distributed and what is behind the distribution. How are the farmers going to access those tractors? Who are managing those tractors and the funds raised? As a developing country, what are they going to do to improve the agricultural production of our farmers which is the bedrock of our communities as 75% of our production comes from agriculture?

Honourable Speaker, both the President and the former National Assembly Member for Lower Baddibu said during the President's Tour that the fertilizer which was supposed to go to the farmers have been taken by unscrupulous people to unknown destinations and nothing has been said about that. Honourable Speaker, farmers have been complaining about the high rate of fertilizer. The rainy season is ending and nothing is happening. So, I think we need to put the farmers at the centre of our development programmes if we want to move as a country. We should ensure that agricultural production is at the best stage so that the farmers can be

alleviated from the poverty they have been battling with over the last 50 years.

Honourable Speaker, on defence, as most of the fishing communities in the West Coast Region are becoming cosmopolitan towns [namely: Gunjur, Sanyang, Kartong and Tanji], all the Police Stations on the coastline in Kombo South are without proper vehicles to patrol and to do their work efficiently. The only military post in the area is the one in Kartong. I think there is need to increase the presence of military personnel along the coastline from Kartong right down to Brufut. Although Brufut is in Sanimentereng Constituency, a lot of activities are taking place there and the rate of insecurity is quite alarming as many young people have been killed in 2021. About five young people were killed along the coastline and the most disheartening one is the killing of Buba Jammeh of Gunjur by somebody who was arrested and taken to Mile 2 waiting for trial, but the guy escaped. Buba's family are in pain and nobody knows the whereabouts of that guy. This shows the lapses in the security apparatus of this country, Honourable Speaker.

On Interior, the issue of the Police needs to be looked into. The collection of funds, all these institutions collecting funds, what is the Government doing to appropriate certain amount towards the development and the running of their programmes? All the Police Stations in Kombo South do not have a roadworthy vehicle to do their patrol. Some women leave their homes 3:30 to 5:00 a.m. to go to Serrekunda, Brikama and even farther places, so security needs to be looked into, Honourable Speaker.

On Ministry of Fisheries, my favourite, it has been said that the Fishing Agreement with the Senegalese Government will be brought to the National Assembly for review, but a lot need to be done for the fishing communities and those involve in fishing activities, especially our young people.

Last year, the Minister said that they have signed partnerships with FAO and also Japan, but the state of implementation, the provision of fishing gears, and the training of young people are lacking. It is demotivating to the young people. I think statistical data needs to be available to give us data on those trained, where they were trained, the location they come from, the duration of the training, and what was provided to them so that it will be easy for the Select Committee on Environment, Sustainable Development and NGO Affairs to monitor issues of environment, fisheries and water resources during their monitoring and follow-ups to submissions made to the committee.

On Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, the President has instituted the Land Commission three years down the line, nothing has been done and the composition of it does not meet the needs of the very people at the centre of land problems in The Gambia. There is nobody in that Land Commission who comes from Kombo South, Kombo Central, Sanimentereng, Busumbala, or Old Yundum. All the people there are without the background information on land tenure and management in this country. So, it is important when we constitute commissions, we have people with the expertise to share their experiences, listen to the people and make reports to help people move the agenda forward.

Honourable Speaker, all the major cases at the district tribunals in the West Coast Region are land problems between the agents and individuals. So, there is need to review the composition and reconstitute the Land Commission so that land problems can be resolved.

As I said, at the moment, there is a big problem in Gunjur and the Minister who was the General Manager of the Gambia Teachers' Union Cooperative Credit Union is at the centre of that. They bought a piece of land in Gunjur for over **D5 million** for the teachers and all the payments were done. Five years down the line, a small boy who does not even originate from Kombo South claimed ownership of that land. Honourable Speaker, I think the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs needs to go back to the drawing board to remedy these issues.

Honourable Speaker, The Gambia has a land tenure system. Gunjur was established in the 18th century while Berending as a village sprung up from Gunjur just in 1921. So, how can a 35-year-old young man claim ownership of over 500 hectares of land which does not belong to him because his ancestors were not even from the Kombo but Kiang West? The District Tribunal and High Court all have given the land ownership to these people. That very young man killed Jammeh in Gunjur and now he has absconded from the prison. The Minister of Interior told us that they will investigate that. Upon raising that question here, I was told that the case is in court. The gate was opened in a broad daylight on the 27th December 2020 for the boy to escape untraced. So, I think we need to look into this.

Honourable Speaker, education is the key to development which we need to take seriously. The University of The Gambia is the highest educational

institution which needs to be resourced. We need to give them the capacity to be the eyes and ears of this country. We will not move without a proper university. I would like to thank the former Minister of Higher Education for expanding the operation of the University to MDI and GTTI which shall be fully fledged universities. Honourable Speaker, I think the University is neglected as it needs structures and more resources to invent in order to be the bedrock of our development programmes. We need to use the expertise of the university in all our departments and agencies.

I commend UNDP for taking the lead in partnering with institutions. I also commend all the local councils and even the National Assembly which currently has about 100 young people from the UTG on internship helping the National Assembly Members in research work as well as in their oversight functions.

Honourable Speaker, talking about institutions, Rural Development Institute [RDI], which is under the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, trained all the major development workers who have served the Department of Community Development as Directors. Most of whom were working in the international arena as consultants, experts, advisers and development protractors to communities in the Caribbean and Asia, but are in the country here. All Former Directors of Community Development are in the country. I do not want to name names, but those of us who have been in this country from 1979 to 1990 know them. They were at the centre of the decentralisation process, so we need to tap their expertise to revive that institute. Community development work is key or the centre point of any development. The Community Development

Assistants in the regions are assigned as Secretary Generals of the tasks because of their knowledge in community development. RDI has excellent curricula, but it is dying down and nothing is happening because of this the young people are frustrated. I spent 6 months in PAID-WA and their curricula are almost the same with that of RDI. So, when RDI is revived, there will be no need for the young people to travel to PAID-WA in Buea Town, Cameroon. It is important for more resources to be given to such institutions. The institution is seeking for funds from some projects working in the country to revive it.

Honourable Speaker, to avoid any duplication the Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery need to harmonize its work with institutions like Community Development, Department of Water Resources and also NAWEC [the main water supplier] because they are doing almost the same work. There are plans to have a bill that will coordinate the supply of water, but how do we have strategies to have the synergy, the linkage and the coordination needed at the level of the communities?

Honourable Speaker, regarding the Ministry of Gender, the National Assembly has ratified the Women Enterprise Fund Bill and ***D17 million*** was given, but no statistics is given to that effect. Who were the beneficiaries? What is the disaggregation of data per region? We need to know those benefiting from the ***D17 million***. How is the money disbursed? All the criteria are set in that Act and now it is functional. The Budget Session is approaching, so we need to know those details so as to see whether it is important to increase it twofold hence it is reaching out to the most vulnerable members of our community.

Finally, things are happening in this country and it is time we speak about them. There are wide spread rumours of corruption going on in this country, and corruption is a killer. People say we should be bold enough to say it is definitely happening. Who are the people involved in it and what do we do? Honourable Speaker, I have seen in the newspapers not long ago that there was corruption at the Judiciary. I was shocked as we are not talking about hundreds of thousand but millions. So, that is why the street boys are saying billions are giving to people free, so talking about million is nothing. This is a very serious issue which we need to address. I think the GPA, GNPC, and the Airport sagas are with the committee here.

[Point of Order]

HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Point of order, Honourable Speaker.

HON KEBBA K. BARROW [KOMBO SOUTH]: I am not giving him the chance. These are issues ...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, may we hear the Point of Order?

HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Honourable Speaker, Standing Order 29[1] *"Every Member shall restrict his or her observations to the subject under discussion"*. Honourable Speaker, the subject under discussion is the State of the Nation Address by the President. What the Honourable Member is trying to put across is extraneous to the issue. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, there is a Point of Order and there must be a ruling. Thank you very much, Honourable Member. The

President's Address is cross-cutting as it touches on every aspect of development in this country. So, we will ask the Honourable Member to continue.

HON KEBBA K. BARROW [KOMBO SOUTH]: Honourable Speaker, I think the Member was sleeping when the President himself was mentioning corruption here. All what I am saying have been dealt with by the President. He talked about localizing [Gambianizing] our Judiciary. If it is rumoured that there is corruption in that sector, we need to talk about it. GPTC is a Government Agency, so we need to talk about it. The **\$20** Airport fee that is being collected from passengers is also in the newspapers. So, these are things which have happened.

Finally, Honourable Speaker, I think the Minister of Youth and Sports should resign because he defrauded the state **[taxpayers' money]** over **£3,000 [D170,000]** and gave it to his wife, a non-resident of the Republic of The Gambia, who is not a member of their delegation. He should ethically come forward and resign if the President or the Executive does not want to sanction him. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Kombo South. Honourable Members, certain concerns affect the Assembly and they are noted. The President's Address to the Nation is cross-cutting and affects all sectors of Government. If the Vice President avails himself to come and listen to the debate on behalf of the President, I think various sector heads like Ministers should also endeavour to be here to listen and then help give out facts on the deliberations. This will be noted and we will henceforth endeavour as much as possible to ensure that Cabinet Ministers

do come to join the Vice President during the debate on the President's Address.

HON SALIFU JAWO [JOKADU]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. Let me first of all thank His Excellency Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic, for fulfilling his constitutional requirement by coming to this Chamber to address the entire nation about his programmes, policies and development agenda.

Honourable Speaker, I know I will not be able to touch on all the areas, so I will just summarize my deliberation. His Excellency the President has done his mandate to address us. However, what he has presented was not written and compiled by him but by the various Ministries and Agencies. I concur with the former speaker that it would be better for the Ministers to be present while we debate on these very important issues.

Honourable Speaker, the problem of this country has started long time ago. As the Englishman says *"When you tumbled on a rock and then fell meters away, you should not look at where you fell when you get up, but you should look back at the rock which you tumbled on"*. So, the problem of this nation started from the First Republic to the Second and then to the Present one. So, all the needs and aspirations of this country for the past five decades cannot be realized overnight. It has to take time and we all have to accept that things are moving. We cannot say that everything is moving, but some things are gradually moving. This is not a blame game. We cannot just blame an individual for any wrongdoing in this country. We are all part and parcel of anything good in the country so we should equally accept to be part of any wrongdoing rather than pointing accusing

fingers at an individual. It will never work that way. So, we must collectively put our hearts and hands together to bail this country out.

Honourable Speaker, the current Government is at least trying in all aspects of development. So many roads are being constructed recently. Also, in education, schools are being built as well as staff quarters with electricity though the rural electrification is still going bit by bit. The same progress is happening in the Health Sector. Since independence, we have only one Health Centre in Jokadu which is located at Kuntaya. The people in the interior were finding it extremely difficult to access Kuntaya for medical services. Thus, we thank God that the interior is now having a health facility under construction in a place called Kissemajaw which is at the verge of completion. So, that is a commendation for the Government.

Honourable Speaker, regarding agriculture, the previous speakers have said that the problem of this country is that people occupy positions only for their personal gains without having the interest of the nation at heart. That is indeed the problem of this country. The tones of fertilizer brought into this country last year would have been here still if put into good use, but people just took these fertilizers overnight transporting them to other regions which is not good at all. All the corruptions and bad deeds we are saying here are not done by foreigners but us, the Gambians. Who then are we going to blame? We should blame ourselves.

Honourable Speaker, the President has done his quota, and now it is the responsibility of the Executive and the technocrats to take their work seriously because they all swore to serve this country. So, I want us to go back to the drawing board since we know that no one will develop this

country for us. We, the Gambians, should take the bull by the horn and develop this country. We should start now to fix one after the other all the things that we missed, so in the long run we will have a Gambia that we all desire, a Gambia our children and grandchildren will be proud of. Thank you very much.

HON GIBBI MBALLOW [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me time. I thank the President for addressing the nation on that faithful day. When I went through the speech, I realized that the President at some point was not properly informed by the line Ministries.

My Constituency, Lower Fulladu West, is believed to be the food basket of this country. Almost 8 projects in Agriculture are centred in Lower Fulladu West, yet we are not getting the desired benefits of those projects.

Looking at the Jahally-Pacharr rice field, the President has not gone into detail the issue of revitalizing it as it is currently in a very bad shape. The land needs a survey, the water channels require serious maintenance because they are not working, farms need to be mechanized since the women and other farmers use crude tools and methods of farming thereby losing a lot of harvest and the Government is yet to address that. This is a big concern to the people of Lower Fulladu West.

Furthermore, we are seriously disadvantaged with the issue of water since few villages in the area have access to clean and safe drinking water. The rural water and electrification programmes have not benefited us in the manner we want.

In connection to health, the President's speech did not touch the issue of current drug supplies in the country. There are no drugs or equipment available in any Government health facility, and I think this should be highlighted.

Before I forget Mr. Speaker, on that fateful day, the convoy of the Vice President disrespected National Assembly Members and that was very wrong. The convoy obstructed National Assembly Members in traffic to the extent of confiscating a key while they [NAMs] were going to attend Assembly Sittings. The said NAMs need an apology from the Vice President's Convoy. Look! National Members need to be respected.

Despite belonging to different political parties, we have to face the reality that the country should always come first. Some opposition political parties wish this country to go down which is unacceptable. *'Alla mang bankoo tiinyaa la'* meaning "*May Allah destroy the country*", has been the utterance which is wrong as this country belongs to all of us. Therefore, we need complete attitudinal change in the manner we perceive things. Our political differences should not go to that extent.

Also, the same attitudinal change is required in journalism. I believe journalism should be a profession with ethics and code of conduct to safeguard journalists. Someone told me to bear in mind that one day journalists will set this country on fire because of the kind of information they give. Everyone becomes a journalist since there is no code of conduct to avert this. We as a country need to be serious with this matter.

On road network, Lower Fulladu West has poor road network which disadvantaged most of the people, so the President of this nation should

understand this very well. The roads linking communities from Sare Ngai to Fulla Bantang and also Sare Malang to Sinchu Alhagie on the highway are in very poor conditions. Pregnant women in labour sometimes deliver on the horse carts on their way to the health centre. Notwithstanding, we thank the President for initiating Community Ambulance Services which we believe is one of the biggest success stories that the Health Ministry has registered in my area.

On Tourism, I cannot understand seeing in the President's speech only two paragraphs under the Ministry of Tourism which to me is too small. We need more information regarding the area because we know Tourism contributes greatly to the economy of the country and we need to know to what extent Covid-19 affected it. The two paragraphs are insufficient for the President to tell this august Assembly about the said Ministry. As National Assembly Members, we expect the President to present more success stories from the Ministries next time. The speech should also capture burning issues as well as the challenges and the plans put forward to mitigate them. The speeches sometimes are continuously repeated. I believe a motion should be moved because we need to face the challenges.

The number of people dying in this country is alarming, but this was not featured under the Ministry of Interior. The rate of crime, accidents and other issues happening in this country were not seen in the speech either. These are concerns because we do not want our people to be dying like that. Strong policies need to be formulated and implemented because I do not expect to see a killer being imprisoned and be given everything. The culprit should feel the pain of committing wrong. Thank you all.

HON LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members of this august Assembly, Vice President, Ministers here present, I thank you.

First, I would like to thank the President very much for fulfilling this important constitutional requirement of addressing the National Assembly, the most democratic institution in any democratic nation, on the policies and programmes of the Government. Having heard from the President and gone through the document he presented, I would say it was a great job.

Before I proceed with the deliberation, I would love to differ a little bit with what the Member for Kombo South has said that is the comparison between the inhabitants of Kombo South and that of LRR where I am from. If we want to talk about distributive justice with regards to national benefit or entitlement, it means equity in giving every individual what he/she supposed to have, or what is due to him/her. So, the principle of equity would help us better understand why the comparison between LRR and Kombo South is inappropriate. I believe even if it was a single community or two communities in LRR inhabited by 2000 people, they are all citizens or taxpayers, so they deserve equal rights. It would have been fitting for Kombo South to be given what is due to them which relates to the principle of equity.

I would start my observation with the Ministry of Health. Honourable Speaker, the President's deliberation indicated that the major achievement of the Health Sector is the introduction of the Health Insurance Scheme which is in progress. The day the President was delivering his speech in the Assembly, if you were to work from this Assembly to the major Health

Centre of this country, you would realize that premature babies died in the health centres on that very day, and there was no water to sanitize women who gave birth. It was so crazy, honestly. These are facts. So, I think the Ministry of Health should come back to the National Assembly and give a report about some of their achievements, and what they have done with the budget allocated to them.

Taking you through history about the budget prior to 2021, the 5th Legislature did approve funds to be allocated to the Health Ministry for Covid-19 response. Initially, the amount was ***D500 million*** which was used during the budget implementation. The same Minister of Health came to the Assembly during the 5th Legislature to report about corruption scandal in his very own Ministry. These issues are on records. What has been done about that? After the corruption scandal, a supplementary budget has been approved for that very Ministry after the exhaustion of the ***D500 million*** without going through the National Assembly. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare had an approved budget in 2021 of *one billion, six hundred and two million, six hundred and twenty-six thousand Dalasi [D1, 602,626,000]*.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Please, May we hear the Point of Order?

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, the Member is saying that a supplementary budget was done for the Health Ministry without coming to the Assembly. That is an error. Supplementary budgeting cannot be done without coming to this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: This means that the Honourable Member is misinforming people.

HON LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Honourable Member for Wuli East, this is a fact and it is on record. We have videos of it.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Member for Central Baddibu!

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Member is still insisting that this is a fact which we cannot accept in this Assembly because all the supplementary budgets passed through the National Assembly. So, if he is now saying that it was passed without passing through this Assembly, it is inaccurate, and he cannot continue saying that.

THE SPEAKER: I have told him to take note of the comment that it was misleading. You can continue, please.

HON LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker and all other Honourable Members who made observations on the matter. The matter came to the Assembly after the approval of the budget. The Assembly sat over the budget and told the Ministry that it should have come to the National Assembly before approval. This was what happened. We have the record of it, and we have videos of National Assembly Members deliberating over the matter that it has been done without following the right procedure. I was trying to give a highlight of the allocation of the Health Ministry in relation to the health condition in the country today. The Approved Budget of the Ministry in 2021 was *one billion, six hundred and two million, six hundred and twenty-six thousand*

Dalasi [D1,602,626,000] while in 2022 *two billion, one hundred and twenty-five million, six hundred and thirty-seven thousand, nine hundred and forty-two Dalasi [D2,125,637,942]* was approved.

Budget was revised for this particular Ministry in 2022 which was *two billion, two hundred and sixty-nine million, seven hundred and twenty-four thousand, six hundred and seventeen Dalasi [D2,269,724,617]*. The difference between the Approved and the Revised Budgets is *one hundred and forty-four million, eighty-six thousand, six hundred and seventy-five Dalasi [D144, 086,675]*. These funds are going to the Health Sector. Relating to the Health Sector across the length and breadth of the country, Kiang West Constituency which I represent has only one Major Health Centre [Karantaba Health Centre with more than 10 satellite communities] and no better road since the First Republic. Today, when a woman delivers in that hospital, getting water to sanitize the individual becomes a huge problem.

In addition, there was an electricity project in Kiang from Sangkandi to the West, but Kiang Karantaba where we have our only Major Health Centre is without electricity. We need electricity in Karantaba for people in the remote areas to access proper health care. I am making this submission to the Minister of Energy down to NAWEC for them ensure that the health centre has electricity. The Hospital was supplied with a major generator but it was later withdrawn. Electricity in Kiang West excluding Karantaba means there is no electricity in our Constituency. The electricity stopped in Keneba at MRC [Medical Research Council]. If the Government of The Gambia can supply electricity in a particular institution that does not belong

to the country and leave its own people, it does not tell well. So, I definitely think the Minister needs to look into this to ensure that we have an improved health facility in Kiang West and the country at large.

Honourable Speaker, I want to proceed to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. Is it safe to leave the country in the hands of students graduating from Senior Secondary Schools considering the mass failures in examinations? The Ministry is struggling to build more than hundred schools across the length and breadth of the country, but the schools are registering mass failures among students. The children who should be National Assembly Members, Speakers of the Assembly, Presidents, Ministers or Directors of the different directorates are failing woefully in both internal and external examinations. The future of this country is at stake. Of course, the President did highlight in his deliberation under Basic and Secondary Education that 2,797 female students passed with 5 credits and above in 2019, and in 2020 the number was 2,882. The difference is 85 which is a class because Muslim High School has more than 90 students in a classroom. The Minister may state that the 85 female student pass is an achievement they have registered, but this is too bad because this is just a single classroom in certain schools.

I think we [*parents, the policy makers and the National Assembly Members*] are all responsible of the situation and we should all be part of the process of proffering practical solutions to the problem. Corporal punishment is abolished in our schools. Of course, there should not be any corporal punishment, but there has to be control mechanisms to make students concentrate on their education. Parents, teachers, the institutions,

and the authorities at school level should all take their stance so that the future of this country which is currently at stake can be brighter.

In the Second Republic, students had free tuition fees with stipend at Gambia College and the dormitories were properly sanitized, but students are now paying for themselves without stipend and the Ministry is saying that the Government has recruited over one thousand [1000] teachers from Gambia College. Where are we going? If students pay their own tuition fees, they will go to schools of their choice upon completion rather than being posted by the Ministry to where their services are needed. Government did pay for students previously and when they graduated, they would be posted to various schools. The Ministry has now lost that control over the posting of students who completed Gambia College hence the reason of them running to private schools where they are better paid since they bear the brunt of paying their tuition fees. So, I think Gambia Collage should be reconsidered very well if we want proper education in our country. Students can only have proper education when their teachers have gone through proper and rigorous training in a conducive learning environment. In the absence of the above, students are going to continuously fail and we are going to fail woefully as a nation because the College is not very well considered.

With regards to the University of The Gambia, President's deliberation highlighted that 70% of the civil work at Faraba Bantang Campus is completed and it was built from grants and loans which will be paid by taxpayers. The children of the taxpayers, the peasants, the poor and the marginalized do graduate from senior secondary schools with good grades

but cannot further their education because they lack scholarships. So, I think the Ministry should stop awarding scholarships to the sons and daughters of Ministers, NAMs, Directors and other top officials and give scholarships to the children of the peasants, the poor, and the marginalized in order for them to also have opportunity to become National Assembly Members. We are confronted with such issues in the education sector, so it is better to go back to the drawing board in order to have a better society.

Finance and Economic Affairs is the most important aspect but the report failed to inform the National Assembly about the GDP and the Per Capita Income of the country. These enable us to clearly identify what each and every citizen is entitled to [the distributive justice]. Therefore, if the Per Capita Income is **D3,000**, Member for Kiang West can use it with the population of his Constituency to estimate what they are entitled to which should be used to help renovate Karantaba Health Centre and to construct Kiang West road. We need such important statistics or information about the economy of the country for the National Assembly Members to understand. What is the GDP of The Gambia and what is the Per Capita Income?

Concerning debt service, it is stated in the document that the debt service of the country is **D5.01 billion** which is very high. **D1.9 billion** of that amount is external debt service and **D3.1 billion** is domestic debt service. Our debt is going higher and higher to the point that even children or generations yet unborn are heavily indebted. Is it that our Ministry is valuing the total resources of The Gambia when borrowing from outside so that when we default, our creditors can take the resources including this

National Assembly and all of us? So, we need to look at serious economic issues to ensure that The Gambia graduates from continuous borrowing.

Certainly, tax collection cannot raise the needed revenue for it will kill the economy. Our taxes are too high for investors. Our import levy today is very high that is why we bargained at some point with a State Own Enterprise responsible for this department to cancel some of the internal levies causing the escalating price of food stuffs and commodities. So, it is better we negotiate with investors and encourage them into the country as it will improve employment. The young people idling in the streets lead to high crime rates which we are currently witnessing. People are being raped and houses being intruded as a results of the high unemployment rate.

On Defence and Security, it was so disappointing that the State of Nation Address could be heard from the President without talking about the presence of the foreign forces [ECOMIG] in this country. What are we doing about that? Of course, I know the President read it but the draft came from the Ministry. ECOMIG Forces are still present in the country. If it is a security advice that their presence is needed, that should be known. What is the rationale behind their presence in the country? For the very first time since I was born, I have never heard that security personnel [ECOMIG Forces], the law enforcers, trampled on six Gambian youths who died mysteriously at Mariama Kunda Junction. Mechanisms should be in place to have a proper security sector reform in which our people should be inclusive and participatory. Investors fear to come because of the presence of the foreign forces which indicates that the country is not stable. We are lacking a lot. So, we need to look at the security sector and

definitely inform the Gambian people mechanisms put in place to ensure that our men and women in uniform take charge of security affairs. If they need to go to school to learn proper skills or be equipped, let them go through proper training and be equipped.

Our President is protected/guarded by foreign security. We should make sure that he is guarded by our own people. Is this helping in securing our National information? Do we really know? So, I think deliberating on issues of defence and security without talking about the presence of the foreign forces in the country is not ideal. Why are they still present? What mechanisms is the Government setting up to ensure that we have proper security reform and our security to be in our own hands?

It was so disheartening that a young girl [a student of St. Peters] was killed and her womanhood was cut off, some time ago. There should be a march pass for that student calling on the Government to put a stop to the mysterious killings. Also, the dead body of another man was found hanging and nobody knows who did it. A five-year old girl was raped and died few days ago. What is the security of this country doing? I believe it is time we all join hands to develop this country. The President cannot do it alone for it is a collective responsibility.

I will conclude by addressing the National Assembly Members. Of course, you all know that we are performing our oversight functions over Government Agencies and State Own Enterprises. In as much as we hold others accountable, we should endeavour to meet up our own obligations. While Committee Sessions are in progress, Members do come to sign their names and then go home without attending sessions. This happens here.

Some come before the sessions and leave and others come at the tail end of the sessions. If everybody does that, then where are we heading to as a nation? The President alone cannot develop this country, so we need attitudinal change. Of course, we need a leadership that is responsible and responsive, but we should all endeavour to meet our obligations as citizens which should start from us, National Assembly Members. Honourable Speaker, I submit.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Kiang West. You have posed a challenge to all of us; the various Committee Chairpersons and Members are around. I am not sure the statement you gave is correct but if it is so, I think Honourable Members, especially Chairpersons of Committees, must ensure that those ones do not come up during our committee sessions again. I now invite the Honourable Member for Upper Fulladu West.

HON BAKARY KORA [UPPER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, my Honourable colleagues, the Vice President, and the Ministers present here. First of all, I would like to thank His Excellency Adama Barrow, the President, for fulfilling his Constitutional requirement to address this august Assembly and the Nation about the Government's programmes and policies.

Honourable Speaker, I just want Gambians to understand that we all have a role to play in the advancement of this country. So, as Muslims and Christians, we should all believe in eternal life and the fact that death is inevitable. Therefore, we have to execute our responsibilities just as my Honourable colleague said before he took his seat. The Honourable

Member for Kiang West did say that there should be a collective responsibility for this country to move forward. We should understand that when the country succeeds, we all succeed together likewise when it fails, we all fail as a nation not just President Barrow. President Barrow is just one out of the lot [about two million Gambians]. Therefore, he cannot be the President at the same time be a Minister, National Assembly Member or a Police Officer. I am urging every Gambian to please put our political differences aside and see Gambia as ours. We were preceded by others and we will also be succeeded by others one day whether we like it or not. The most important person on earth, Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him], died. So, we will all die too, but before we die, we should strive hard to develop this country.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to elaborate on some of the areas mentioned in the President's last week speech. It might be very difficult for me to elaborate on all the areas as a new Member of the National Assembly. Notwithstanding, under Health, the President highlighted that his Government successfully expanded and improved health care services within the country during the past years, and I think we can all attest to that in terms of infrastructure. The Government has built a lot of health facilities within the country and Gambians should understand what Lionel Robbins [an economist] said: "*Man's wants are unlimited*" meaning 'man is never satisfied' since we always want more. So, people should understand that it is practically impossible for the Government of The Gambia to provide everything for the citizens. Even in the most powerful nations like America citizens are complaining. Well, if citizens complain in this country that is normal to me. What is more important here is for us all to strive

hard and stop the blame game. As National Assembly Members, we have a big role to play; that is to speak the truth because it helps the leadership. As I said, Government's major achievement in the Health sector is the introduction of the National Health Insurance Scheme, which will benefit the poor and the vulnerable. So, I think this is very important as far as health services are concerned.

Another success story is statistics. As one of my Honourable colleagues mentioned that giving statistics is very important because it helps us to know our direction as a country. Since the data is not shared, we see in newspapers and hear from radio stations that the maternal mortality rate is high in The Gambia which is incorrect. The maternal and child mortality rate are going down as far as the country is concerned. If you go to the Ministry of Health, the statistics or data is available there. Skilled birth attendance, postnatal care, and nutrition have drastically improved in the country. So, these are the data or statistics. I think the Ministry of Health is really trying but has lot of challenges which we all know.

Also, the Health sector now offers training on health related programmes up to Bachelor and post-graduate levels at Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital [EFSTH]. So, these are all achievements under the Ministry. Some might see the introduction of Community Ambulance Service as politically motivated or but we, the people of Upper Fulladu West, are really enjoying the service. We have to thank the Government of The Gambia for distributing 80 new community ambulances country-wide. So, I think we should tap the Ministry of Health on their back for providing communities with ambulances where health facilities are not available. The sector is also

constructing an Emergency Treatment and Blood Transfusion centre at Farato. So, all these are successful stories as far as health is concerned.

Nonetheless, I am urging the Ministry of Health to help provide Bansang Hospital with dialysis machines as promised. The Hospital is in dire need of this dialysis machine for it is the main referral hospital in CRR, and it also receives referrals from Basse and parts of Senegal Oriental. We were promised that Bansang Hospital will have a dialysis machine, but we are yet to have any. The Minister knows the importance of the dialysis machine as many of our adults and children are dying as a result of kidney problem. The Hospital is without an orthopaedic surgeon. Consequently, all surgical cases are referred to Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, thus putting more burdens on them. So, I am urging the Minister to look into that as we need a surgeon at Bansang Hospital. The Hospital is running an ICU which is not up to standard, and it receives on daily basis more than one thousand patients, especially on Mondays. I want the Minister and the Government to come to our aid in this regard.

Honourable Speaker, about Agriculture, as my colleague said CRR South is the food basket of The Gambia. The land and water suitable for rice cultivation are there. However, women farmers at Bansang Rice Field cannot cultivate rice and no work has been done because of a project which started since last year or year before last but has stopped operation. I want the Agriculture Minister to look into that. Also, there are 8 projects in agriculture which amount to about ***\$294.13 million*** through the help of partner support and Government, so this is also a success story. The Government has invested heavily in agriculture to transform or mechanize

agriculture through donor funded projects. Last year, over 6,000 hectares of land was used for rice cultivation and 400 hectares was used for vegetable cultivation which shows the way things are unfolding as far as the sector is concerned.

As regards Security, one of my colleagues mentioned that the Ministry of Interior should look into the security matters of this country. I sponsored a football tournament in my Constituency, but I have currently suspended all football activities in the area simply because a boy stabbed his colleague with a scissor, and he eventually died. Crime rate is alarming, and I want the Ministry of Interior to definitely look into that matter. People are just killing one another on daily basis for no reason. Also, about 19 barrels of petrol have been packed at the Bansang Police Station for about 5 years now and these are highly inflammable. If these barrels catch fire, God forbid, the whole Police Station will be burnt to ashes. Sankareh, the Police Commissioner in the area, has reported the matter to Banjul High Command but still nothing has been done.

I, therefore, urge the Minister of Interior to look into the issues otherwise things may get out of hand. Besides, the police in my Constituency sometimes find it very difficult to move from one place to another though they have an old vehicle of about four years at the police station. I would like the Ministry to provide them with at least two pickups because the problem of mobility is affecting the police.

Concerning the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, it was projected that the economy will grow by 4.5% in 2021, but due to the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic it could not. However, the Ministry of Finance came

up with a modest and robust projection which will make the economy to grow by 3.6% this year. I think the Ministry is facing serious challenges because The Gambia is a tax-based economy. So, I call on every Gambian to pay our taxes. If we call ourselves Muslims or Christians, we must pay tax if not; God is going to judge us when we die. *[Applause]*

Tax compliance in The Gambia is a problem. Out of the number of those expected to pay tax, approximately 55% are paying and 45% is lost, and Gambians are complaining that the Government is not doing A and B. For example, there are about 2,000 or 2,500 compounds in Bansang, and there is a specific "kabilo" which is 100% tax compliance because some call themselves "*ntol leng lang sarol tee*" meaning *[we are the indigenous]*. These people do not pay tax for over five years now. So, how can the country move when the people are not paying tax? In order for this country to move forward, we have to pay our taxes.

In connection to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, we used to watch football matches and support our team at the Independence Stadium but we are never qualified until last year when, for the first time in history, The Gambia participated in the just concluded Cup of Nations. We have to thank the Ministry and the Government for registering that great achievement.

Also, our athletes have done extremely well in the Commonwealth Games and the Turkey Athletic Championship. Presently, if The Gambia is to meet any country whether in terms of football or athletics, it will get scared because The Gambia has changed the narrative. This is what we all want. I still implore the Ministry of Youth and Sports to look into the affairs of the

youths in this country because the unemployment rate is high. Anyway, you will be tempted to ask yourself the question, are Gambians youth willing to work? Neither can we all be in offices nor have everything on a silver plate. So, I call on my fellow youths to please try to create avenues for ourselves since Government cannot employ all. I will give a brighter example; my brother's son came from the US, and he needed some people to work at his place but he could not get anyone in Bansang. All the workers there are foreigners and when those people start earning the same Gambians will complain that Government does not empower them. I want us to change the narratives which we can definitely do it if we are ready.

Before I take my seat Honourable Speaker, I would like the line Ministries to tell us the successes, challenges, and the way forward in their various Ministries next year for us to know where we are heading. The Government should not fear to highlight its challenges before the public because it helps to generate practical solutions.

I thank the President and Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia, the various Ministers, the National Assembly Members, the media fraternity, and each and every one here present. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity. *[Applause]*

HON SAINEY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I would like to also thank the President of the Republic of The Gambia for doing what is expected of him. Equally, I thank the Vice President, and Cabinet Ministers.

Before going further, the truth is that the President is doing his responsibilities because he has appointed Ministers, Heads of Department and/or Agencies. He cannot be President at same time a Minister, a Police Officer or a National Assembly Member. So, every individual has a responsibility and if any individual cannot do his/her responsibility then he/she should resign. I have to be frank about this, Honourable Speaker. Succession also comes with challenges which need a lot of efforts to convert to successes.

Honourable Speaker, we must change our attitudes as Gambians. Whoever is charged with a responsibility should fear God's judgement and not what people will say. The President appointed Ministers to take charge of the different ministries. As my Honourable colleague from Kombo South said, there are a lot of corruptions happening in this country and put under the carpet. I got scared when our Judiciary is involved in corruption. If the place where justice should be served is involved in a corruption scandal of millions of Dalasi then where are we heading, Honourable Speaker? Corruption is not only taking place at the Judiciary but also at the Trans-Gambian Bridge. The culprits are never sentenced for economic crimes rather they remain silent. This means that the people in charge of the offices are helping those involved in corruption. We must say the truth; we are being watched and paid to look into that responsibility. We have to say it whether we do it or not, and whether we like it or not. His Excellency the President is not corrupt, and he is not there to check people who want to be corrupt but the Ministers who are appointed should. The entire corrupt people should be called to face justice.

Honourable Speaker, this country will not move because people charged with particular responsibilities are enriching themselves as they would build storey buildings and drive limousine cars within 6 months or a year. Where are they getting the money from? We have to speak the truth and find solutions to the problems. We cannot be here murmuring things for fear of being reported for saying the truth. We have passed the era of reporting. I am here to represent the people of Lower Saloum and nobody else.
[Applause]

We are supporting the President because he promised to bail this country, and he has a vision. The question is, are people helping him to realize that vision? No! We will speak the truth.

Honourable Speaker, I will start with Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. I thank the Minister who brought here the Revised Budget on 30% increment of salaries even though it is not sufficient. The increment was not really an increment because all the prices of goods escalated the day the revised budget was approved. For instance, a bag of rice is increased from **D1,500** to **D1,675**; a gallon of oil from **D2,250** to **D2,350**; the price for sugar has increased too. The Ministry should take its stance now to adjust that 30% increment. They should have even leave things the way they are because the low-income earners are now suffering while those highly paid are enjoying. How can this country move? It cannot move forward because the people doing the hardest jobs are suffering. As the Vice President said, he does not want to see any Police Officer taking bribe, but they must take bribes because they receive meagre salaries. The Police Officers are rendering good services in protecting the lives and property in

this country. Every Minister has an orderly but we do not have orderlies as National Assembly Members. Those orderlies must protect Ministers they are assigned to, and if they mistakenly fail their duties, they will be in serious trouble. These Police Officers are paid less than **D6000**, yet they have to buy bag rice at **D1675**, a gallon of oil at **D2300**, and kilos of sugar every month. How can these Police Officers avoid taking bribes? He/she will take "dukoo"[bribe] if given. *[Laughter]*

Honourable Speaker, the Executive has to consider the people serving them. Any Minister who is successful, it is his/her staff that make him/her succeed. The reason why even you the Speaker is working the way you are is because of your staff. Therefore, we have to focus on the low-income earners to be able to help their families which will go a long way in solving the corruption we are talking about.

The increment is just there to help the high-income earners to the detriment of the low-income earners. Definitely, Honourable Speaker, the affairs of our civil servants need to be looked into because they are suffering. I thought the Minister would advise the President on the issue of salaries. We need to have a policy on salary structure and do away with this grade issue. We are not sure whether PMO was communicating with the Ministry of Finance or not, but PMO made a press release on a proposed salary structure which could have helped the civil servants rather than the 30% increment.

Honourable Speaker, we are representing these people, but we cannot all occupy the ministerial posts. The Minister is given the chance so when executing his responsibilities, he should remember those low-income

earners whom he serves. People serving in particular offices do enrich themselves. We have to say this corruption whether you like to hear it or not. If you do not want to hear it, you can go out.

Honourable Speaker, I would now shift attention to the Ministry of Agriculture. As a farmer, I am saddened by the current state of the Ministry of Agriculture. If I were the President, I will oversee that Ministry myself. Honourable, I beg to differ from you that there is success. The Agricultural sector is only encountering failures and most of the people in that sector are doctors or PhD holders. So, why is the sector not moving? None of the staff in that Ministry is poor. We all know one another here, so we all know what they have and what they are capable of doing. The amount of grants received in this country is just too much, but our people never benefited from these grants.

The Select Committee on Agriculture went on an oversight visit to the rice fields, but what we saw at the fields is not encouraging, Honourable Speaker. Nowadays, when people heard about a project, they will work in that project while on secondment in an attempt to get huge salaries and fat allowances. In fact, they are paid more than Permanent Secretaries or the Ministers. All these projects would buy priceless vehicles, and pay night allowances and per diems.

Honourable Speaker, we have to be strict with this because grants come to this country without the notice of the National Assembly. There is a particular sector that swallows all the grants, and if they cannot swallow everything, then only a small portion goes back to the beneficiaries. I disagree with the saying that Agriculture is the backbone of the country.

The money invested in Agriculture is more than any other Ministry. Despite that the state of the 'faroos' [rice fields] in Jahally-Pacharr, Sakulay Kunda, and Janjanbureh leaves much to be desired. We would not be talking about the hiking prices of rice and the effects of Russia-Ukraine war on our economy if we had developed our 'faroos' [rice fields]. In fact, the projects are trying to frustrate subsistence 'maroo' farms. Now where are we heading to? Contract is given based on particular interest instead of land development because the project must give out some tips. There is a proverb which says: "*Iye ninso sitii damento aka domoroo kewoleto*" meaning '*a cow grazes where it is tied*'. That is not true. We have to stop this issue of tips.

Honourable Speaker, we have to take the bull by the horn by speaking the truth and acting accordingly. As National Assembly Members, we only approve or disapprove anything that comes to us. The funds are normally given to the various Ministries where corruption happens. In fact, the Ministries do programme-based budgeting but none of the Ministers or their technocrats consult the regions to know their problems or constraints regarding all their development budgets at the time of budgeting. For instance, a particular health facility in Lower Saloum lacks drugs and other building equipment. The health facility has been there before the Queen was born.

Honourable Speaker, we have to be serious with what we are doing. We are representatives of the masses whose survival we need to check. To them, we have everything at our disposal. I am driving a vehicle while the

people who voted for me lack fares. We must devise new ways to make Agriculture progressive rather than relying on these projects.

Regarding the Interior, I thought the Minister of Interior would advise the President on the issues happening in the country like the crime rate as the killings are too much nowadays. People are even scared in their own houses now. Honourable Speaker, I blame the Ministry of Justice because after going through court procedures, a thief should not just be fined for two or three months and then be freed. The said thief will start bragging to his victims that prison is my second home. That should not be the case. Whoever committed an offence like break and steal or kill someone, he/she should be killed too so that the killings will be stopped. We cannot confine ourselves to the issue of Human Rights. These are Western regulations. Just recently a boy was killed by his girlfriend. Honourable Members, do not laugh for this is a serious matter. Honestly, capital punishment should be enforced. Whoever kills should also be killed. With that, it will stop. This was what President Jammeh was doing here and the issue of crime rate drastically reduced. What Human Rights do you mean? Now, my own relative is killed for no reason like what the Honourable Member was saying. In fact, the boy who was killed is very skilful. He was a national asset and has a bright future. The nation and his entire family lost him. The culprit will just be imprisoned for maybe 5 or 10 years while the nation will take charge of his feeding, and a TV to watch every day. I totally disagree with that. Left to me, they would not be fed and they will all go to the rice field from seven o'clock in the morning without a rest until closing time.

Honourable Speaker, the killings and robberies are too much. The Interior Minister and the IGP should take the necessary actions on the said issues. They are all protected but the masses are insecure. We have to say the truth. People are scared to go on their business errands. So, the criminals should be taken to the Sapu 'faroos' in CRR South to cultivate more rice feed themselves and the nation in general as President Jammeh used to say 'go for hard labour'. Honestly, this will stop or minimize the crime rate in the country. The Gambia is very small but the number of crimes is increasing every day. In fact, these criminals come with knives to people's house in a broad daylight and they would say 'give us or we kill you'. I do not know anybody but as for me I would give out what they requested. The Office of the IGP needs to protect the police who are not protected. Today, if an incident occurred in a particular place, the Police would not have vehicle to go but then the Minister and the IGP both have official and utility cars. Now, the masses are suffering.

Honourable Speaker, in the budget ***D900,000*** was allocated for vehicle maintenance. Which vehicles are to be repaired? Probably, they would repair their own official and utility vehicles because almost all Police Stations do not have vehicles. Sometimes, even if they a vehicle, there would be no fuel. So, the victim has to fuel it from his/her own pocket which should not be the case. The office is charged with that responsibility, so if those responsible cannot do it, let them resigned and give chance to people who can do it. Not everything should be 'mbokanise' or 'maslaha'. I respect the Vice Present 100% because he speaks the truth. He is a technocrat and we trust him. Therefore, you should support the President.

Honourable Vice President, you should not mind what people are saying. Just speak the truth and God will be with you. Again, you should tell the Ministers the truth since they are all under you. The President is politically elected but he is very honest. When anyone is doing the right thing, he/she is always with him because he does not have informants.

Honourable Vice President, if this country sinks, you will make us sink too. Therefore, you have to speak the truth. I am not afraid of anyone because nobody feeds me. So, if you like do not give me your hands when I ask for a handshake, but I will say the truth. Nobody in this Chamber loves the President more than I do. I love him more than he loves himself because he is a man of wisdom. It is not because I am supporting the President, but he is accompanying me to develop The Gambia. This is what we are doing and will die for. Anytime he leaves that path, I will tell him and then suggest what is right. Leaders are not the most knowledgeable, but we help them. Obama once said that when you are hoping to see the downfall of the President, it means you are also ready to see the downfall of the country. We the youths will not allow this country to fail. Whoever is not doing the right thing we will tell him/her whether he/she is the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Minister, Vice President or President. The individual will be corrected. I am currently 32, and I want to take that position of yours in the future. I urge people to take their responsibilities seriously. S

I thank everybody here present.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Lower Saloum. Honourable Member, I am just worried because if you should tell armed

robbers that you will give them as they request when you are attacked, they will always come for you, especially if you say it publicly.

Honourable Members, I want us to remind ourselves that we have all the powers [i.e., the legislative and oversight powers]. So, let us never forget that. I now call the Honourable Member for Foni Kansala.

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I also welcome the Vice President and other Ministers present. It is indeed a great day. As we all believe as Honourable Members, the vision and mission of this country is in our hands, so we better stand firm to attain the wishes and aspirations of the people. I thank the President for his State of the Nation Address in accordance with the Constitution and Assembly proceedings [Standing Orders]. There are elements which will change the narrative in the workforce, Security Sector, Agricultural Sector, Health Sector, Educational Sector, and a whole lot of sectors within the Government.

Honourable Speaker, skills acquisition is essential for the youths of The Gambia today. No government in the world can employ its citizens 100% but skills are core in any meaningful development in addressing the aspirations of the youth folk. The Ministry is doing extremely well in some areas in terms of skills; for example, the GIZ and YEP are instrumental in this regard. However, I believe almost all the skills development initiatives are concentrated in the Kombos forgetting about the rural areas. So, let us not only work to develop policies and programmes in the Kombos, but encourage the development of skills in the rural areas. You will realize that a lot of youths in some of the GIZ and YEP skill centres are now venturing

into their own businesses, but 80% of those are all from the urban areas making the rural folks disadvantaged. This is one way to abort the back way syndrome relating to migration. I think the Minister concerned should revisit to involve rural areas in order to improve the rural sector.

Concerning the Ministry of Youths and Sports, we were informed vividly that the Independence Stadium built decades ago is no longer in good shape for football games and athletics. As a result, we had to go outside countries to play matches. We want to be informed about the status quo of the independence stadium. We want to know the developments or outcome of the funds given. If you go round the Independence Stadium, bricks are not even in the right positions. Sometimes, you wonder who the contractor is and how was he awarded the contract because the bricks are falling down just after one or two weeks. So, the project should be given to the right people who would attain contract objectives. So, I believe the Ministry should take note of this.

Regarding Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, within my Constituency, gully erosion eroded one side of the road from Sanghajorr to Kanfenda which is very risky to access the other side of the road. Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs as well as National Road Authority were informed, yet nothing is done about it. The villagers within the said areas take it upon themselves to do '*tesito*' [communal] work to see that a temporal bridge is made to ease passage to the other side.

Cognizance of the fact that most areas of Bwiam are gullied and not safe in the rainy season I believe the line Ministry should visit the areas to see

how best the issue can be addressed. Also, I believe the people in my Constituency, are very compliant in paying taxes, so their tax compliance should be reciprocated in the form of development.

Honourable Speaker, the President talked about modernizing the Agricultural sector which is good to hear. This is the best for any nation to attain food self-sufficiency. If Agricultural modernization is anything to go by, the hiking prices of basic commodities will be a thing of the past. However, the former regime did give tractors to seasonal farmers across the country irrespective of regions and political affiliation, but all those tractors were taken from farmers and sold at reasonable prices. Today, no tractor was given to farmers in Foni, so what measures did the Ministry of Agriculture used in distributing those tractors because we are all taxpayers. When we talk of national development, the government should ensure that no region or constituency is left behind. In other words, equal opportunity to projects or issues should be ensured at all times.

In the area of Health, when I assumed representing my Constituency, I visited the Bwiam General Hospital. Honourable Speaker, it is rather unfortunate and sad indeed to see the post-natal ward leaking when it rained and children sharing the same bed. The Bwiam General Hospital looks attractive from the outside but the situation inside is quite terrible because it lacks proper facilities. The welfare of the staff and that of the patients is shocking. There is only one toilet to take care of the newly born babies. The women of Foni refuse to go for anti-natal care because of the deplorable condition of the rooms which normally cause discomfort to the women. This is causing serious havoc to the people of Bwiam and the

satellite areas of the hospital. Today, this particular hospital needs proper instruments and to renovate the leaking roofs of the quarters of nurses, senior officers, heads of departments because they do pack their baggage aside and return them when the rain ceases. This is what is happening three weeks ago when I visited the hospital. I spoke to the Minister that urgent action is needed to abort this particular situation.

Honourable Speaker, it is rather unfortunate that the table at the minor theatre is in terrible condition. How can surgery be carried out in such condition? The major theatre is a room without anything. These are hard facts affecting the lives and the livelihood of the people. Health Care is absolutely necessary for every Gambian irrespective of where we belong and it has to be addressed. If the issue is not addressed, women will be having health issues and still be avoiding the hospital because they have lost confidence in the health sector. Therefore, I think we have to do something to avert the current happenings. Also, I went on a tour within my Constituency to a hydrant where fire disaster occurred. Three weeks ago, a major fire outbreak happened in the nearby hospital.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Is it an observation or a Point of Order?

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: It is a Point of Order.

THE SPEAKER: Okay, may we hear the Point of Order?

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you. I am rising on Order 30 [Scope of Debate] [1] "*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 a case of a motion for debate on the adjournment of the Assembly". The issues he is raising are relevant as they are affecting his Constituency, but we should narrow our deliberations to the policies and programmes of Government presented by His Excellency the President. We should peruse the information given in order to better them. We believe they are cross-cutting but we must limit ourselves to the policies and programmes and then reserve issues confronting our constituencies until adjournment debate when we will have ample time to elaborate on them more. Thank you so much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member. There was a similar Point of Order and I did say that the President's speech is cross-cutting, but I also observed that people are contributing as if we are on an adjournment debate. Honourable Members are taking advantage of it to talk about their constituency problems, so I want to observe that we restrict ourselves to the issues at hand. Generally, when we have the adjournment debate, constituency concerns can be raised, please.

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I believe I am on tract as I am deliberating on facts about the President's wonderful speech.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Interior is one of the most important Ministries since it is the sole protector of our welfare [i.e. easy movement of goods and services internally, and protection of lives and properties]. I believe the Immigration Department should be examined properly to make an informed decision concerning their revenue collection. Bundung alone

collects more than **D2 million** a year but some of the Immigration collection points rent taxis to go on revenue collection. So, line Ministries should take note and change the approach so as to gain more revenue in the near future.

Furthermore, there is no Police Station from Foni down to Kombo with a movable vehicle. They are all kaput. So, I believe when we talk of Interior, the plight of the Police should be expressed because they need to have vehicles for patrol. As some of my Honourable Colleagues have said, Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries have utility vehicles while Police Stations have no single vehicle. When there is a case, they use a taxi. I think it is high time we change the internal security of the country. We need to be cognizant of this and be more pragmatic in making sure tools are readily available for those units to perform their functions.

Again, the Police Uniform is a problem. Some of the Officers need new uniforms since the ones they have are worn out, so let us work with the Ministry to address that. I would still continue to commend and defend the arm and other security forces for the wonderful job they are doing in The Gambia. Also, remuneration is a serious issue because a Police Officer/Sergeant is paid an allowance of **D250** as house rent. Which house is rented for such an amount? You will not have a house even in Foni for such an amount. All of us [*the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary*] know the allowances we are having. So, let us visit some of these affected areas and make the necessary considerations for us to have robust security checks and balances as well as have people who are ready to implement the laws to the letter. In certain stations, accommodation is

sometimes a problem, so the Minister should also make efforts to improve on the issue of accommodation.

About Fisheries, there was a fire disaster at the Ministry of Fisheries some years ago, but I have not still seen a report on that. If it is available, I would like the Honourable Members to share it for us to know the cause[s] of the fire and the extent of the damage as well as be informed of the current happenings.

Honourable Speaker, there is no hydrant in the areas of Foni near Kombo end. The empowerment of the Fire and Rescue Services is of utmost importance. It is not about my Constituency but a whole region where only 2 villages have hydrants. A fire outbreak once occurred, but the Fire and Rescue Services could not do better because they had to run from one village to another. For instance, if it happens in Kalagi, they have to come to Bwiam or Kanilai to get hydrated. Even if it happens in Besse, they have to either come to Bwiam or Kanilai. So, Government should work with NAWEC to diversify and have more hydrants available. Moreover, we have seen that the hydrants are not compatible with the Fire and Rescue Services' vehicles. So, the Government should discuss with NAWEC to see how best they can avert that for prosperity.

On Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, TVET education is fundamental for every individual. Educational institutions of this nature should be diversified to improve the status quo. As alluded by the President in his speech, about 70% of the civil work at the Faraba Bantang Campus of the University of The Gambia is completed but still students are roaming in Brikama, Kanifing and also Faraba. It is high time students have comfort

in their education. They need to be stationed in one particular area in order for them to yield dividend in education. I believe we can achieve better if we do just that.

Regarding Basic and Secondary Education, as my colleagues alluded to that Government should critically look at Gambia College. Why privatize it in the first place? There should be measures in place to find donors and/or partners to make sure Gambia College is fully funded and accommodation available so that Government can have full control over college students with respect to postings upon completion of their studies. If students pay their money, they have the right to accept or reject their postings. Having quality teachers in the regions is always a problem because most of them prefer teaching in the Kombos to the provincial Gambia because of incentives. So, incentives need to be created in the provinces to serve as pull factors for those teachers.

In addition, the School of Nursing needs to be reconsidered because most of the health centres have unqualified nurses since the qualified ones will either choose to work at MRC or Private Health Clinics. If bright students are sponsored and bonded by the Government, they will by all means serve in the Public Hospitals. So, I urge the Ministry and the Departments concern to make feasibility studies for the betterment of The Gambia and her people.

Finally, concerning Defence and Security, today all of us are seated happily and comfortably because the security is well fitted. I believe it is a collective duty to put all hands on desk to defend this country even if it will cost our lives. Let us sacrifice to make sure peace prevails in this country.

Security Sector Reform is good but I sometimes wonder about the proper implementation of the policies and programmes. These are hard facts. We want to see the dividend of the policies we are talking about.

What measures are put in place in connection with the Kerr Ali Morr incident? What are the causes of the occurrence? Do we have any plan to make sure that particular area is revisited and studied to have the necessary preventive measures? Also, the effects of the fracas between Senegalese Soldiers and Cassamance Rebels are felt in the entire length and breadth of Foni, especially in the area of education. I believe plans should be made for such eventualities so that the educational sector will not be affected again. Security is paramount as it is the bedrock of any meaningful country.

We should be ready to take charge of the security because it is in the hands of foreigners in some quarters. How soon are we ready to take ownership of our security? Our internal information and protection are not in our hands.

The President needs to be protected by Gambians. Honourable Speaker, I submit to this august Assembly that the internal Security of The Gambia is worrisome. Why do I say so? A particular group is still being branded and are seriously discomfited in the discharge of their duties as security officers. I think the Minister should ensure that a commission of enquiry is set to make sure that security is separated from politics, tribalism and religious interference. Records proved that only one tribe is being singled out from 2017 to 2022 relating to alleged coups. The lists are all available. So, it is time we take ownership of our security and set a general

commission of enquiry on the alleged coups to know the people involved and arraign them before a competent court of law. They should be jailed if found guilty to avert future occurrence. The Gambia Arm Forces should be investigated because people are not happy and are being affected on daily basis. Tribe does not develop a country. We come together to build the country and disregard the issue of tribal segregation. I thank you so much.

[Point of Order]

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: I was trying to raise a point of order. Matters at court should not be discussed on the floor of the Assembly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Indeed. Honourable Members, I have been observing some of my colleague Jarranka MPs yawning. I think they are feeling a little tired and hungry. So, I want to suspend the session for an hour. It is about 2:15p.m, so we break off and resume session at 3:15 p.m.

Assembly Session Suspended

[The Assembly Session is suspended until 15:15 p.m.]

Assembly Session Resumed

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Assembly resumes and we will continue from where we left off. I now invite the Honourable Member for Niamina West to take the floor.

HON BIROM J.S. SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would take this opportunity to thank the President, the Vice President and the Ministers present.

First, I would want to deliberate on points that I consider as credit for the Government and then talk about the shortcomings.

With regards to Finance, I have heard a lot from my colleagues about the prevalence of corruption in the country. On the contrary, the relentless effort in fighting corruption is a big plus for the Government. Also, the Public Finance Management System, the Public Financial Management Strategy 2021–2025 and the IFMIS are put in place to regulate public finance. We have the Treasury Single Account [TSA] for public resources or finance in The Gambia. The Government ensures that the Local Government Authorities use the IFMIS as we all know how the Local Governments were working previously. These are all geared towards mitigating corruption in the system.

Honourable Speaker, regarding Foreign Affairs, I would give credit to the Government of The Gambia for ensuring peace and stability in the country which is recognized by the UN Secretary General and the entire international community. The Peace Building Commission also makes The Gambia a role model, so this is a laudable effort which we should not joke with. Maintaining peace and stability is a collective responsibility. The level of adherence to human rights in The Gambia through the new democracy nurtured by the Government cannot be underestimated.

It is a praiseworthy achievement for the Government to have for the first time ever a seat in the United Nations Human Rights Commission for a

three-year term beginning January 2022. Development is not only in the form of physical or financial activities, but all these human right issues as well as the nurturing of democracy are all part of the developments registered by this Government. I urge all Gambians to be respectful and tolerant to one another because we make our leaders to react in a manner that will be detrimental to the betterment of the country. People keep saying that the President does not react; he does not do this or that, but let us be tolerant, please. The President is just nurturing democracy and he does not want interference, but for the law to take its cause.

Honourable Speaker, the 8 major projects in Agriculture to the tune of ***\$294.13 million*** are indeed laudable achievements. However, we are concerned as to whether these projects will not end up the same way as the projects we inherited because my colleagues expressed their dissatisfaction about the projects when they went on an oversight visit to the project sites. So, we are calling on the Minister to please take charge of the responsibility so that these projects will change people's lives ultimately.

Also, we are told that almost 6000 hectares of rice have been cultivated which is a good initiative. However, it is very important that Government establish state own farms and take good care of them so that the harvest realized will be used to feed the nation. Perhaps, we may stop rice importation. We believe that Gambia can feed itself if we make best use of the rice fields in CRR and the vast fertile land in the whole country. Considering the fact that both banks of the River Gambia [in CRR and URR] is fresh water which makes year-round rice cultivation possible. So, we

have every opportunity to be food self-sufficient but are we not utilising this advantage. The Ministry of Agriculture should definitely venture into cultivating rice throughout the year. I would like the Minister to take the necessary steps to achieve food self-sufficiency in The Gambia.

Another issue in agriculture is the stores, locally called 'mangazinolou'. Many of these stores in the provinces are dilapidated since some of them are older than most of us here. Farmers are complaining to us every now and then because we have direct contact with them as their representatives. They really need help in the area of stores to keep their grains after harvest. So, I definitely want the Minister to help in that regard.

Concerning Ministry of Health, many of us spoke about the community ambulance which is a laudable initiative, but I need some clarifications about the issue of drivers, maintenance, and fuelling of the said ambulances. If there is have any policy or document on that, we would definitely want it shared with the NAMs to help us at the community level as we face many questions in relation to the above issues. Because we have no policy or memorandum of understanding to help us explain better, we are at times dumbfounded.

Honourable Speaker, about Ministry of Higher Education, we really appreciate the work being done at Faraba Bantang, and we thank the Ministry for the project. Students of the University of The Gambia, including myself, do struggle here and there to have lectures. Some lectures used to be conducted under trees and verandas, so such situation will soon be history. I have to commend the Ministry for that.

Honourable Speaker, E-Commerce Policy and Strategy, cyber security and cybercrimes, and data protection are very important for our country. I believe instituting them here by the Minister of Information will definitely advance development in our country. Today, cyber economy is very important as people do business online. These cyber issues and IT cameras can help with regards to security issues, so we have to be digitalized. Most of the workplaces have those instruments installed. Today, people sign in and out digitally whenever they report to work which is a plus for this Government. I expect that the Minister of Information and other Ministers work hand in glove to see that we move to e-governance so as to help track criminals through the cameras and the internet.

This reminds me of our Malawi Forum on the African Parliament Networks of Internet Governance and its major targets are on cybercrime, data protection, affordability and accessibility of internet which are very important. We have learnt a lot there and one of which is women leadership. I realised that women can do a lot when given responsibilities, so I would like this Government to give chance to the women. I am certain that they will execute their responsibilities to the fullest.

The President's introductory remark is for all Gambians to take note of as The Gambia is on transformation. Have we ever thought of how the first five or ten years would look like after 22 years of dictatorship or who will take over from Jammeh? I used to think about it. Thank God, we have the kind of President The Gambia needs. Imagine after 22 years of dictatorial regime, we have President with a different.

[Point of Observation]

HON AMIE COLLEY [FONI BEREFET]: An observation, Honourable Speaker.

HON BIROM J.S. SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Go ahead and observe.

THE SPEAKER: Observation is to be directed to the speaker on the floor. If he wishes to give you chance, he would sit down. Otherwise, he would continue speaking.

HON AMIE COLLEY [FONI BEREFET]: Ok, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Then, you can continue.

HON AMIE COLLEY [FONI BEREFET]: We are not here to talk about Jammeh's regime because it has already passed. Let us deliberate on what is happening or what this Government is doing.

HON BIROM J.S. SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Okay, thank you. I said we are on transformation after 22 years of dictatorship. Please, I am talking to Gambians. We need to be tolerant and accept each other. On that note, I take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Niamina West. I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai. Oh, he is out. Then Honourable Member for Jeshwang the floor is all yours.

HON SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: Thank You, Honourable Speaker.

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank You.

HON SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: I am given the floor, please.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai, you must behave like a responsible person, Please. Honourable Member for Jeshwang, you may proceed.

HON SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would join my colleagues to thank the President for doing his constitutional requirement by addressing the nation through the National Assembly. I would also say “koroma jorko njall” [thank you in Serer] to the Vice President who is here to deputize the President as well as welcome the Ministers and their technocrats who are his lieutenants.

I would start with the Honourable Vice President. During the Cabinet retreat at the time of his appointment as the Vice President of the country, every Gambian welcome the statement he made in the retreat. Honourable Vice President, I think it is very important to work on the points you raised. We are one Gambia and we do not see any place but this country. If you work hand in gloves with the Ministers, the President will achieve his dreams. Likewise, if at all there is a failure from your end, the President will also fail. So, you should work together. This is possible because we are given mandates as NAMs and the Head of State. I think you would task the Ministers to give their yearly or monthly programmes to monitor what they have achieved within the time frame. If not achieved, then you look at what needs to be done.

Concerning the President’s deliberation, I would start with the Ministry of Environment. I do not know what the Ministry is doing with regards to Tambi wetland within Banjul, Jeshwang, Tallinding towards Abuko. We are losing Tambi wetland because of floods. What causes the floods? I do not

believe this is caused only by flooding because I, with the people of my Constituency, went round and have seen that most of the mangroves within Tambi wetland are no more there. People are cutting the mangroves down to build structures in the area for residential purposes, and most of the people who build such structures are not Gambians. They only stay there temporary and then go back to their hometowns leaving us to feel the pain. I think it is important for the Ministries of Environment, Works as well as Lands and Regional Government to form a Joint Committee to visit the area and see what is happening. If mangroves are planted today, the next minute you will not find them there because they are being cut down not only for building structures but also blocking the water ways. We cry for fish. Yes, I am a Serer. We cry that there is no more fish in this country and attribute it to foreigners which is one contributing factor. However, mangroves are the breeding place for the fish if we do not have any breeding area how will they reproduce? The worst of all factors is heavy rainfall. If these two factors combine, it will be a big disaster because the water has no place to flow. Based on what we have observed during the past days, this will be a disaster. So, let the two Ministries work together to see what is possible. If not, it is going to be a problem.

As regards Ministry of Health, I saw a press release about the issue of banning Paracetamol syrup the last time. According to what I heard, it is very harmful to the extent of even causing kidney issues among children in this country. Honourable Minister, I think it is important we control the medical drugs coming into this country by having a laboratory where we can test the imported medical drugs before use. There are many cheap pharmacies within the KMC selling medications to people. I will not name

any pharmacy but if you go round currently, you will find people queuing at those pharmacies because they always say 'Daffa Yomba' [it is cheap in Wolof]. It is cheap but is it of quality? Medicines would be prescribed for sick people, and they go there instead of curing themselves, they would be preparing to go to the Jola's compound by taking the wrong medication. So, it is important, Honourable Minister, we control the imported medicines by having them properly tested before use.

We did talk about bad results in the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. It is important to establish the problem of the system. This is a collective irresponsibility of both parents and Government. The question to all of us is, are we training and controlling our kids? We have a lot of schools in this country, but no student fails examination because all students are being admitted whether they pass or fail. Maybe Honourable Billay Camara opened a new school and admits students even with aggregate 54as long as they can afford to pay fees. They are only concerned about money not the quality of education students will require. There used to be cut-off marks, during our time, which made students to struggle to have the few high schools in this country thereby producing excellent students, even the students attending secondary schools were good. So, we have to examine the educational system to see how best we can improve the current situation even if we are going to bring back the old system.

About Defence and Security, we always blame the security for the rising crime rate in this country as earlier mentioned by one of the NAMs. What is the cause of the recent killings? Why is it happening? Our young ones are

killing innocent people. Any time you hear about murder it is our youths within the ages of 15 to 20. This is as a result of the drugs they are using. The tablets they use cost **D5** during our time, but I think it is **D25** now. Can you imagine a 15-year-old boy taking such harmful tablets? They feel unconscious upon taking the tablet, and they can even kill in such a state because they cannot differentiate between correct and wrong actions. Drugs of this nature are often used by the youths in this country. We have to control this menace because they can do anything to get money from people to buy it. That is the truth, so we have to help the security because we are no more secure. For example, my son goes out any time and comes back late at night while I enjoy my sleep. I do not care about him, so if he kills, I start complaining about security. Thus, let us control our children at home and let Government also control the importation and use of such drugs. I even heard that some of the youngsters boil pampers and drink the water to become drunk. So, there are many substances young boys abuse even at school level. We should work together to rescue this country if not, we will fall into their traps.

Furthermore, I would like the Ministry of Interior to reconsider the conditions of the prisons. Yes, some prisoners are guilty of crimes, but others are innocent and they are there in the prison. However, their living condition needs to be properly improved because if not the trauma in the prison will worsen their situation. The toilet facilities are very poor and need to be rehabilitated. The budget of prisons was about **\$1 million** [almost **D60** or **D50 million**] for all the prisons in the country. Their food and everything come from the D60 million. So, I believe it is high time we improved the living condition of the prison service.

[Point of Observation]

HONBILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: I just want him to withdraw the word “innocent” as he said that some people are in the prisons but innocent. That statement is serious because it is an allegation.

HON SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: No. I use the word innocent because somebody might be accused whilst he is not guilty of the crime, so that is an innocent person. What I am saying is that they were charged guilty while they are innocent. Thank you very much.

Honourable Members, we have young Gambians who are trying hard to venture into agricultural sector, poultry to be specific, in a bid to forget about the back way issue. They have started and helped with funds to operate by international organisation, but it is no more operational because they lack feeds to feed their animals. There is a well organised factory in Jeshwang around Kamalo with all the equipment, but it is not operating. Why is the factory not operating? Who owns the factory, Government or an individual? If own by an individual, do engage him to make the place operational so that we would not go to Senegal to buy those materials. It is better to make them here, in The Gambia. The country is losing because the land belongs to the Government and the factory has been there for years. So, let us look at the agreement made between the Government and that individual because it is a Government land. I remember when I was a councillor, that land was used by the people but they were later told that Government needs it. So, Government should make that factory to start operating as it will help the Gambian people.

According to the President's speech, a lot of money is being pumped into Ministry of works. Honourable Minister, there are very competent young Gambians in this country...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, address the Speaker.

HON SHERIFF SARR [JESHWANG]: Noted. Honourable Speaker, there are young Gambians in this country who have companies. I know when they team up with the foreign companies, they can do a lot. Foreign companies come to this country give us grant or loan, and then go back with the money. Also, they have the knowledge and equipment, but when returning to their home country, they go with everything leaving us empty handed. Honourable Speaker, as a Government we need the knowledge, and equipment from them to build the capacity of our local contractors, our people. It is very important.

The road construction in Kanifing is coming to eight months now, and the progress is still less than one percent. We need to know what the problem is. Why is nothing happening still in slots one and two? Most of them are at concrete stage, which can be done by Gambians. If at all it was given to a Gambian contractor, we terminate or charge for the delay and damages. Why is that happening? Let them expedite the process as people are suffering because all the roads are blocked. Nobody has access to those roads. So, let them look at it properly.

Honourable Speaker, as some of my colleagues mentioned with respect to Ministry of Finance that this country depends on taxation. It is very important we control our revenue by putting in measures to tighten our

revenue collection. They collect what supposed to be collected but after collecting, is it put in the right place?

GRA and Gambia Ports Authority Honourable Speaker, our port is dying out because fewer containers are coming into this country now hence most of the people come via Senegal. From Senegal through Karrang or Farafenni, to The Gambia and then to Cassamance. That is why Senegal is building another port in Funjung and if it is ready with the one they are proposing in Ziguinchor, it will have serious consequences on our sea port? I think the best thing is to reconsider reducing our tariff in order to compete with Senegal. It is better we allow young Gambians to be employed within the industry than to allow everything to go out of The Gambia. This area needs to be examined critically because we need to expand the port. I do not know the state of the expansion but it needs to be fast tracked. It is through that we will expect more vessels which I think will definitely boost our revenue. So, it is important that we have a study tour to see what is happening because people are complaining that our port is too expensive. We need to look at it properly and come with a solution. Thank you.

HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me this opportunity. Let me first recognise the presence of the Vice President and other Cabinet Ministers present, and then thank the President for fulfilling his cardinal constitutional requirement of addressing the Members and the nation on Government policies and programmes as well as the challenges. We are really appreciative of that.

Honourable Speaker, I would not take long because many Members deliberated on most of the key issues. On Agriculture, the President said

that there was an increase in the harvest of major field crops like groundnut, rice, sesame and other crops last year. However, this was due to the accessibility and affordability of fertilizer [**D750 per 50kg**], and also free supplied of seeds and small farm implements [like hoes and seeders] to farmers with animals like donkeys and horses. That was the reason why, the bumper harvest was registered last year. Honourable Speaker, the price of fertilizer this year is so expensive for our farmers to purchase. The government through the Ministry of Agriculture has to work on that. Nonetheless, we thank the Ministry for their efforts in subsidizing fertilizers [**at D2000**] for the farmers to get.

Honourable Speaker, as stated by previous speakers that there are ongoing agricultural projects to the tune of **\$294.13 million** which is a large sum when converted to Gambian Dalasi [**D10 billion**]. When are the experts in Agriculture going to accelerate our drive towards food security to rescue this country from starvation? When we went on tour, there were successes registered at the fields, but there were failures of the projects too because some of these projects are given to Gambian contractors who do not have the capacity to implement these projects to the fullest. That is why the projects are failing at the field level. Why are Government money taken for granted by giving work to contractors who lack the capacity to implement these projects? What is the essence? What interest do project coordinators or procurement officers have?

I think we have to change our attitude. Government and Gambian people are losing lot of money. I call the issues of procurement as undetectable corruption because these are very inconspicuous. Something which

supposed to cost **D5**, procurement officer will conspire with a vendor/supplier to bill it as **D150**. This is undetectable because auditors will not detect any corruption since it is clearly and properly documented. Honourable Members in their oversight function would unknowingly describe it as "Correct", yet there is something fishy. This is not good and we have to change. Lots of projects are failing because of such bad practices. If a contractor fails to deliver, project coordinator[s] cannot force him to deliver because of kickbacks. That is the fact. So, we must change our attitude.

Honourable Speaker, the President did mention [under the Ministry of Works] the on-going Hakalang Road Project in my Constituency, but there is lot of murmuring around the project because it is not going as the people of Upper Niumi wish. I have made a lot of follow ups regarding whatever might be the problem. I am appealing to the Minister of Works to do everything possible to resolve it since the situation is not in the interest of the people of Upper Niumi. We want to see that road completed so that we can enjoy Tourism and Agriculture. Nonetheless, we thank the Government for that project.

Honourable Speaker, under Tourism on page 26, [number 3], President said: "*Turning to the culture subsector, in April of this year, the National Centre for Arts and Culture embarked on a multi-million Dalasi project geared towards strengthening National Capacity for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.*" I have been saying here over and over that Upper Niumi is the most famous Constituency in The Gambia in terms of cultural heritage because the famous James Island now called Kunta Kinteh

Island is in Upper Niumi. Honourable Members, let me make clear that Kunta Kinteh, the most famous man in The Gambian history and also well-known in Africa, hailed from Upper Niumi. Upper Niumi played an integral part in safeguarding historical heritages, but James Island or Kunta Kinteh Island is being eroded by the river every day. The jetty to access the island is dilapidating and even the local jetty used to get into the island is also not in good condition, so having this is important to preserve these heritages. What is the Ministry of Tourism doing to preserve this important structure and resource of The Gambia amid the multi-million-dalasi project?

As regards the Ministry of Health, the community ambulances are rendering important services to the people of Pakau Njogu, and Pascal. Another one is given to replace the ambulance at Nema Kunku. Honourable Speaker, this has really reduced the problems and complications our people have been facing for the past 50 years. So, we have to thank the President and the Minister with his entire team for what they have done for us. Thank you.

HON MODOU LAMIN B. BAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I would first of all respond to the Member who asked whether Gambian youths are willing to work. Yes, we are to be honest because we are the citadel, the cream, and the current and future leaders of this country.

I would thank the President of the Republic of The Gambia for his marathon speech and for understanding that the National Assembly is the apex authority having the constitutional mandate and power to exercise oversight functions over all Government institutions, including the Office of

the President. He has exactly manifested fulfilling one of his constitutional requirements.

Honourable Speaker, I want all National Assembly Members [NAMs] to really understand that sense of purpose [that is the service] is much more important than sense of identity. So, my submission will be centred on three thematic areas even though many things were mentioned by the President during his speech.

Honourable Speaker, I would make reference to number 4 [page 37 of the SoNA] which talks about Transport, Works, and Infrastructure. I quote: "*In the Capital City of Banjul, the Government rolled out the Banjul City Rehabilitation Project to reconstruct the city's dilapidated roads, sewerage, and drains, using local funds. Relentless efforts will continue to modernise Banjul*". This is clear, but not enough because we [the city dwellers] expect more. Why am I saying this? I am more concern about the most fundamental elements which are the impact and the sustainability of this project. Also, we believe it is one of the facets that contributed to the recent flash flood in Banjul. In that regard, our expectation was for the President to give clear information about this project hence it is locally funded. Really, this is the most talked about project in the country even though we have the OIC Project and other projects. The Banjul Rehabilitation Project has some things hidden from the people. So, we, the people of Banjul, need clarifications in that regard.

About the health issues stated to us by the President, bullet point 5 of page 16 which says, "*Government's introduction of Community Ambulance Service, following the distribution of eighty new ambulances in areas*

without health facilities, is wildly applauded in the country". Honourable Speaker, we, the people of Banjul, do not see ourselves in this and a clear manifestation is during the flash flood when we created an evacuation centre to accommodate more than 68 families [almost 315 people including pregnant women, children, and men]. I personally spoke to the Permanent Secretary [Ministry of Health] to provide us with an ambulance, but it was futile. A woman almost delivered in my private car because there was no ambulance provided by the Ministry of Health during that trying time which is undone.

I am very much interested in Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs. As a former staff of Banjul City Council, I know some constrains currently facing the Council. I would be more specific regarding the proper usage of land in Banjul. We have all seen how the Tambi wetland is being degraded as such the people of Banjul do not really appreciate as we are expecting the Government to come up with strategies to remedy the situation because it is one of the factors that we realized caused the flash flood.

Furthermore, the construction of stores in the City of Banjul is another problem. What is the Ministry doing through Physical Planning, and Land and Survey in putting regulations for whoever wants to construct and also to understand the zoning of the city, particularly the residential and commercial areas. This is indeed very important because the number of stores erected currently is turning the city into a ghost city because it forces people to go to the Kombos. People do not have anywhere to reside in the City of Banjul. So, this is indeed a very big concern and I believe it is

important to be included in such an important speech. Like I always say, success will always happen if our dreams are bigger than our excuses. And that is the level we are as parliamentarians. Honourable Speaker, I would just quote what you once told us during a committee meeting, *"If the President and the Executive fail, the National Assembly also fails"*. We have to understand and try by all means to work together internally and with the Executive to move this country forward. In that regard, I submit. Thank you.

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I thank Allah for I have lived to witness today.

Honourable Speaker, I wonder what success the Government talks about, especially in Ministry of Higher Education as the President clearly stated that they are registering great success in education. We changed government to better the situation but not to worsen it. Usually, there was no payment of tuition fees at Gambia College before 2017, but since then students started paying **D7,000**. The payment for Advance Diplomat Secondary is now **D13,000**. We need to think about that amount of money because it is too difficult for the poor Gambian farmer and fisherman to afford for their children.

Also, students are facing the same situation in GTTI and those offered admission at the University of The Gambia struggle hard to have scholarship but to no avail. Indeed, it is very painful that we cannot access tertiary and higher education in our own country. I definitely want everything that the President told us to be realistic in all the senses

because the Gambians' hopes for a better education system were high. Regardless of what is said here, some of the Diplomat and Advance Diplomat students could not be posted after graduating from Gambia College while some schools are without teachers. So, I am definitely wondering what success is registered in the area of education.

Also, we have seen the teachers suffering greatly time and again. How can the Government better their lives? It is true that the Government is building classrooms and quarters, but if the teachers are not well paid, how can they perform better? Most of the officials in Government departments are receiving clothing allowance but the teachers are not. Can we think of the way forward?

Honourable Speaker, the President clearly stated that, during the conflict in the Fonis, there was a patrol team around the conflicting areas. However, the patrol team never secured the people of Foni because most of the students were not going to school at the time and they were not compensated for the lost hours after the conflict. I channelled it to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, but nothing was done about it.

[Point of Order]

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

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: I insist to rise on Order 30[1] and it 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*". Members should really debate on the

matter before us. Nevertheless, constituency issues are relevant, but there is a platform to say those things. For that reason, let us peruse through the policies and programmes presented to us to add value or to critique them. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, this is almost the third time ruling is being made on this issue. When we started, I did caution that we try as much as possible to abide by the Standing Orders governing our operations here. So, Honourable Member, please note that and confine your submission to the speech of the President.

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you so much, Honourable Speaker. Still on education, it is important that people have equal opportunities in the country. I believe His Excellency the Vice President is here to clarify certain concerns that will be raised so it is against this reason I raise the issue.

With regards to Defence and Security, the President clearly addressed the National Assembly that they have had success. I do not know what success they are talking about when we still have foreign soldiers in our midst. What is the Government planning to do about the foreign soldiers whom I would say are colonizing us? What mechanism is put in place to make Gambia Armed Forces take full responsibility of our security because this cannot continue? I want the Vice President to tell us what The Gambia is doing with regards to that? Is the Government spending on or contributing anything towards the welfare of the foreign soldiers stationed in The Gambia? Is that the reason as to why we are running into this funny economic situation? In addition, we want to know why Gambian soldiers

are not put at the forefront most of the time instead we have Senegalese soldiers all over.

I would now shift attention to the Ministry of Agriculture. I think all the Ministries registered success without challenges. We are told that the Ministry of Agriculture registered success but without food self-sufficiency. I cannot say the Ministry registered success as it is stationed in Banjul which is not a farming community. If we are really interested in attaining food self-sufficiency, the Ministry should be relocated. Let nobody call a point of order for destruction purpose, please.

Under normal circumstances, the government should transfer the Minister himself and all the technocrats of the Ministry from the story building in Banjul to the Jahally-Pacharr rice fields in CRR if they are truly serious in developing agriculture or attaining food self-sufficiency. Only then we will definitely believe that they are in for the attainment of food self-sufficiency or nation development. How can they develop the nation with this status quo? It is practically impossible.

The major challenge facing The Gambia today is Health. The health sector continues to cry as most of the time patients are without treatment, especially in Ndemban Clinic. It is always very difficult because I confirmed it myself for 3 to 4 days, especially those requiring surgery. I believe His Excellency the Vice President and other Cabinet Ministers here should take note of this seriously.

We are in the 21st century, yet most of the places in the country are without electricity supply. How is the Government prepared to support our people with electricity?

We are still mourning the death of Queen, but we are not mourning for our fishermen, farmers and security men who struggled day in day out. In fact, we are not mourning our ancestors who struggled to liberate us from colonialism. So, as a nation, Honourable Speaker, we should be very well prepared to take up the challenge. Instead of telling us that the youth are not ready to take up the challenge, we should always cherish the young, as a nation. Of course, we [the youth] are ready! At times, we are humiliated by asking us to behave as youth. We are ready for the challenge to develop our nation at all cost. I thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai. It is heartening to hear that youths are willing to take up the challenge.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I would thank the President through the Vice President. I would also commend the Vice President for the speech he made during their Cabinet retreat. I believe he can change the narrative. Personally, he owes me a lot and my eyes are on him. Also, I commend the Minister of Higher Education for I interacted with him, and I have seen the plans as well as the foresight he has. I recommend that he works in that direction because this country needs to be saved.

Let me start my deliberation with the first page of the speech. We cannot continue talking about the 22 years of dictatorship claiming that it is holding our development down and forget about the other problem, corruption. No one is talking about the disappearance of millions in 6 years. Most of the challenges we are facing today is as a result of corruption. We

talk about institutional reforms, but I think those are just policy reforms. We must reform ourselves first because we formulate and implement those policies towards achieving our goals.

Every institution has its core values like the National Assembly which we have to live by. I am familiar with 3 which are Professionalism, Integrity and Accountability. Leadership is difficult if a leader makes it difficult for himself because leaders work with people to achieve results. This is why, to me, "L" in leadership stands for "listen and learning". Are we listening and learning? What is happening to our people? I am not here to commend anyone in order to have recognition or because I am being forced to do so, it is all about The Gambia, the only place I will call home. I will never undermine the development of this country for any political reason. I am here to point out the errors as well as say thank you for the good works.

The change in The Gambia was not through barrel of gun but through democracy. It is the democracy people are calling for today because people in the street prefer to go back to dictatorship than continue in this democratic atmosphere. Now people are stabbed and killed on daily basis. Also, many people go to bed hungry every day. Instead of addressing those problems and others such as the deportation of our youths and the joblessness of school leavers we still continue to talk about the 22 years of dictatorship. Are we enjoying? If anyone is not ready to face the challenges of fixing the problems of this country, he/she should resign so that Barrow can appoint someone competent and willing. There port was not prepared by President Barrow but by Ministers, Permanent Secretaries for him to

read. So, let them not fail Barrow. I continue to say that Barrow is not alone in this we have leadership crisis in this country.

To develop this country, we need to seriously prioritise three sectors: Security, Education, and Agriculture. Let me start with security. During our recess, I visited Police Stations to find out their concerns. I sometimes drank China Green Tea "*Attaya*" with them and engaged them into conversations elicit information regarding their constraints as security officers. Thus, some of their complains as my fellow Honourable Member mentioned here are the meagre house rent allowance of ***D250***, and lack of transport. Most of them even struggle to go to work. In the Fonis, there is nothing because there is just one old vehicle "Push Mu Taka". The security officers board that vehicle to curb crime, but before it starts, they have to always push it. What would they do if the vehicle could not start in the territory of enemies? I do not know whether they should surrender or not.

Considering our security, there is definitely no development and we can never achieve any meaningful development without considering security. It is sad for us to eat and forget about our security officers who escort us to workshops and meetings to give us protection. We sleep on our comfortable beds while they are always out there for us even during Tobaski and other occasions. It is very sad that we do not consider them. Some might not like to hear that the State House is under foreign occupancies. This is not politics because there is no country in the world where its State House is occupied by foreigners. I believe we will be well protected if the money we spend on the foreign security is given to our security personnel. Now, people are striving and complaining everyday

about human rights. I do not think those human rights are stated in the Geneva Convention. People are being stabbed and the culprits go scot free or bail after 72 hours. The victim's people would mourn the death of their loved one.

Another sector to be prioritised is Education. I have been visiting schools and I realised that teachers are also facing situations. People think that I am the one to solve their problems, but it should be solved through teamwork. We can never make any positive development in the country without working together and putting into practice the core values of our organizations or institutions like transparency, accountability, and professionalism. Every individual be it a NAM, Minister, Vice President or President has to work in accordance with those core values. We have to be accountable of what we do daily. That is why, I said since day one that I am elected through a party, but I am here to represent the interest of this country. Imagine the income or the profit to develop an organization is taken by one person and disappears. The next minute Government lost the case, and they say it is democracy. Is that really democracy? I do not understand when Government lose cases and people say it indicates democracy. It means that Government is not employing competent people in those places.

The leadership has to listen and learn to be able to engage people to achieve development as it cannot work in isolation. It is through teamwork that we achieve results. People are crying in every institution. I once said it here that no institution is working because everything is moving backwards. People are not happy. I said am not here to look for any

political recognition or for somebody to praise me, but to serve the interest of this country.

According to the speech, remittances from Gambians abroad constitute 40% of our revenue. What is happening to these people at the airport? **D2000** is being collected from them at the airport. I do not know whether it has come to the National Assembly before or not. I am not aware of it coming to the National Assembly for approval. This is making us lose a lot of businesses because many people even Gambians travel through Senegal just to avoid paying that **D2000**. Are we not losing economic benefits in this case?

Pertaining to our trade policies, I sometimes wonder when we say that The Gambia and Senegal are one and the same. Senegalese drivers bring 30 vehicles from Senegal into The Gambia without any disturbance. No one charges those taxi drivers anything or asks them to return to Senegal, but that is not the case with Gambian drivers in Senegal. Even if Gambians are with a bag of sugar or a cup of sugar, the Senegalese will take it from them, yet we say that we are one. We have already lost our ports to Senegal, and those ports can boost our economy. We compromised everything because of the so-called dictatorship. That is why we compromise everything to foreigners saying it is better for foreigners to rule us than the dictatorship when most people are better off today because of that dictatorship. Today, security posts and schools were established everywhere because of that dictatorship. So, we have to stop making references in the past and strive to develop the country.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Can we hear the Point of Order, Honourable Nominated Member?

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: I rise on Order 30[1] which states: "*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*". Honourable Speaker, I submit that the Honourable Member is talking out of the motion. The President's address to the National Assembly did not mention anything about the previous Government. Therefore, talking about dictatorship is making reference to the Government of former President, Yahya Jammeh. So, I humbly submit for him to withdraw that statement. Thank you.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Sorry but I am not going to withdraw that statement.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I think this is the fourth time Members are quoting this particular Standing Order reminding us to confine ourselves to the speech of His Excellency the President. I have said it myself that the President's speech is cross-cutting in the sense it touched almost all spheres, but let us be specific to the issues mentioned. When it comes to adjournment debate, we can talk about our constituencies or what we believe in, please. For now, let us restrict ourselves to the content of the President's speech as much as we can.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you very much. I do not think I have deviated because paragraph 3 on page 4, of the speech reads, "*Very complex and challenging circumstances informed my address*

this morning. It portrays the experience of a transformed nation, a nation of peace-loving people who stood up against dictatorship in a peaceful manner..." Dictatorship may have caused a lot of problems, but corruption is now another serious problem ruining the institutions and the country as a whole. We do not only have to mention what favours us but also key problems holding the nation backward. That is just what I am saying. So, for the country to move, we need to work as one people.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, let us not beat about the bush on this issue. You can go ahead but confine yourself to the content of the President's speech, please.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Sorry and thank you very much. On security, the approved amount for the Ministry of Interior in the 2022 Revised Budget is *one billion, three hundred and eighty million, three hundred and thirteen thousand Dalasi, thirty-seven butut [D1,380,313,000.37]*? When you look at the Ministry of Interior...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, if you are making reference to the speech, you should help Honourable Members by making reference to the page.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Honourable Speaker, I am not quoting from the President's speech but the Revised Budget. I just note this down.

THE SPEAKER: The Revised Budget?

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Yes. I am just quoting the amount.

THE SPEAKER: Okay.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: We only approved the total figure but we do not know how much is allocated to Immigration Department, Fire and Rescue Services and Prisons Service, cognizant of the problems confronting them. The various departments would send their requests to the Ministry, but they would be told that there is no money when we have already approved such an amount. That is why, maybe this year, we will look into every security institution to know how much is budgeted and then what is disbursed to them.

Honourable Speaker, Agriculture needs to improve. During the recess, I was in the village farming, but I could not even buy fertilizer because the price was exorbitant. Majority of farmers complained throughout the season because it was extremely difficult for them to afford fertilizer. So, I think we need to do something about it. Another problem in Agriculture is the availability of tractors. I remember in 2019, I supported rice fields in Foni Jarrol and had bumper harvests. I have photos of everything. I am saying this because Government cannot do everything. So, we need to play our role as individuals because this country belongs to us. I am not here to oppose because I am an opposition member, but to make sure The Gambia advances in terms of development.

Micro finance projects should be encouraged to generate employment for our people. Remember, many of our youths are being deported from Europe adding to those graduating from schools. So, we need to be initiative. In light of this, I am very much impressed with the speeches of the Vice President and the Minister of Higher Education. I am not saying

this to please them, but to rely on them in changing the narrative. Many people are jobless which is not good for this country. High unemployment leads to high crime rates hence the reason for the frequent stabbing and killing of people for no reason. I think we all have to be soldiers now and buy our own guns like in the case of America so as to defend ourselves against criminals. So, we have to look into this properly since we need a better Gambia. We have been retrogressing for the past five years. I think we have learnt lessons as we are tasked to correct the situation for the betterment of The Gambia. I thank everyone for listening.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol. I now invite the Honourable Member for Nianija. Is he around? Oh, he is not. Honourable Member for Illiassa, you may take the floor.

HON SANKUNG DAMPHA [ILLIASSA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. First of all, I want to recognize the presence of the Vice President, Ministers, and my colleague Honourable Members.

I want to join my colleagues to thank His Excellency President Adama Barrow for his State of the Nation Address. Definitely, it was a very good one. From his speech, I understand that there were some improvements in some departments and declines in others so far. That is normal hence we cannot have everything hundred percent. I believe some departments like education have registered tremendous improvements. I was a teacher, so I definitely know what we encountered which is unlike today. Today, some schools are definitely impressive in terms of the structures. Many new

classrooms are built all over The Gambia as compared to the insufficient classrooms before. I think that is an improvement in that sector.

Also, the Ministry of Agriculture has registered a tremendous improvement by supplying tractors to the various regions in the country. Definitely, the farmers are making best use of those tractors to improve their farming methods. So, we have a problem in The Gambia because people are not ready to work, especially youths. Majority of our youths are very lazy. They do not want to venture into farming which is very profitable nowadays.

[Point of Observation]

THE SPEAKER: You should look at the person on the floor if you want to make an observation. If he sits down, you can take the floor but if he does not, you let him continue his deliberation.

HON OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: Honourable Member, can you kindly give me the floor? I want to observe. I am appealing for us to stop discriminating our young people by referring to them as being very lazy. It is disheartening. So, I would like you to withdraw that statement, please.

HON SANKUNG DAMPHA [ILLIASSA]: Thank you, Honourable Member. I do not think I should withdraw my statement because I am not referring to all the young people. Obviously, I am not going to withdraw the statement, Honourable Member.

HON OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: That is fine. You can continue, but I would put it to you that it is disheartening to hear such from you.

HON SANKUNG DAMPHA [ILLIASSA]: Thank you. The Interior Ministry has also registered improvement because I was privileged to visit Farafenni

Military Barracks where I had a lengthy discussion with the Commander. The problems were numerous then, but when I visited for the second time, I was very happy because he confirmed that there were improvements. I can dilate on this improvement. According to him, the Government gave two pickups and a truck too. Also, shelter was a problem there, but he informed me that Government is building a storey building whereby many soldiers will be in the campus. So, there is improvement in that area.

I want to seize this opportunity to appeal to my fellow Honourable Members to work as a team to develop our country, The Gambia. Moving this country forward should be our collective and ultimate aim. I think we have a big role to play as Honourable Members to make the President successful. The President's success is the success of all likewise his failure is our failure too. This is why it is important for us to support the President in his development agendas not his political agendas because we all have different political affiliations. However, we have a vital role to play as far as his development agenda is concerned. So, we should support him for our own success.

Again, our Qur'an and Bible as National Assembly Members are the Constitution and our Standing Orders. We should always refer ourselves to these vital documents in anything we do here, only then we will be in the right direction and we will succeed as well. If we fail to do just that, things will always fall apart. Therefore, I call on all Honourable Members to put all hands on deck to serve the country to the best of our abilities during our tenure in the office which will be our legacy. I thank you very much for giving me the floor.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Illiassa. I now give the floor to Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I would also join my colleagues to thank the President for fulfilling his constitutional mandate of explaining to this august body how his Government is running the country.

Honourable Speaker, on number 15 of page 63, the President said that it is imperative for this Assembly to work along bipartisan line to fulfil the people's aspirations and to safeguard the honour of those whom we represent rather than seeing the Assembly as NPP, UDP or PDOIS. That is commendable because if we all work together as a team, we will achieve a lot in these five years. However, I want to observe that if the President wants this Assembly to work together in bipartisan lines, then he should not have come in a partisan manner because all the "*Yayi Compins*" I have seen here were all dressed in NPP T-shirts. They filled this place from top to bottom singing and dancing around.

[Point of Order]

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Honourable Speaker, I am rising on Order 30 that the Honourable Member should speak about the President's speech not the Jamboree that took place outside. The Member is complaining about the "*Yayi Kompins*" here and there. He should know that we are discussing the President's speech not the "*Yayi Kompins*" that accompanied him. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I would suggest that you respond when you take the floor to speak. The Member made reference to the paragraph where the President talked about all of us working together as one and he saw it differently. If you take the floor, you can say your own side, Majority Leader.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: I know the Majority Leader does not want us to talk about that because it is Government's weak point. However, a renewed spirit of political bipartisanship should happen if we want to work together. In transforming this country, our manners and ways of doing things should also be transformed.

Honourable Speaker, I would also want to say that the President, in his introductory remark, said that complex challenging circumstances have informed his address which he said portray the experience of a transformed nation. I would concur with the President on that, but I still believe that this country is far from being transformed. Simply engaging in a change of government does not signify the country's transformation. A lot more need to be done to attain the status of a transformed country. Many people spoke about issues of education, enlightenment, and attitudinal change. So, before we transform the country, we must be transformed in many aspects. One cannot refuse to accept the truth and call oneself a transformed person. Also, the Ministries refuse to accept the corruptions taking place by giving excuses. How can everybody be blamed for the corruption taking place in the country? I am not in a position to steal public funds and the funds are stolen and then you said I am responsible. That is not true. So, if we continue to do things like that, we

will not be transformed. We, National Assembly Members, must begin to accept the truth when we are confronted with it.

Honourable Speaker, to transform this country, we need to create a solid base for investment which I have not seen being created as we are not attracting more investment. The President said that remittances from our own brothers and sisters are about ***\$777 million*** within a short period, but the investment for the whole five years is not even up to that figure. Also, to create a transformed country, we need to plan what to attain in stages and even operational implementation of that plan should be planned too. We had Vision 2020 and many others just on paper, but unable to implement them. How could we attain transforming the country without planning? We cannot attain it.

The National Council for Civic Education is the institution responsible for educating and enlightening the citizens, but it has almost nothing in the budget to do just that. The council cannot do much other than sensitizing the people during elections.

As for Finance, the President himself said the Finance Ministry will shed light on the highlighted challenges and circumstances together with the considerations that influenced the decision they took. Finance dictated everything he said since the economy and finance are the most important in a country that I agree with him totally. We must put everything to ensure that we give the right analysis of the type of Financial Sector we are creating so that everything will be in place. He did say that Covid-19 pandemic brought rebound to *four hundred and five* **[405]** in 2021. Let us accept that statistics although the growth remained below the pre-

pandemic levels. It is still significant. However, the slowdown of business activities in 2020 and 2021 affected the economic recovery. So, our projection has been reduced to 3.6% instead of 4.5% growth. As the situation stands, we may even reduce the projection again because we are not taking the right steps.

Honourable Speaker, the President said in point three under Ministry of Finance that revenue collection has reduced by 14% in 2021 which in fact led to the review of the budget. This is not about Area Council Tax but other taxes the Central Government collects as somebody was blaming ordinary people for not paying compound taxes which are for the Area Councils. We are talking about the National Budget. So, every effort must be made in the collection of tax since the economy is tax-base. Government will not get into any meaningful production because it depends entirely on taxation. So, in order to pay civil servants or do anything, we must collect tax. So, what do we do? What do we put in place to ensure that we collect the tax required?

Now, what plans or mechanisms are put in place for the long-term growth of the economy? Actually, the President talked about coming up with a plan to transform this country by 2050. If we do not plan creating the basics for the economy and stick to it, then the occurrence of every little thing will make our projections to go down. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war all affected our economy negatively. We will continually be in crisis hence the world is full of crises too. So, we must plan ourselves and be ready to create an economy based on our capacities to ensure that small things anywhere will not disturb our economy. I am

not speaking to you [Majority Leader] but the Speaker. Honourable Speaker, please tell the Majority Leader to stop disturbing me. I do not interrupt him when he speaks, all right.

Because our economy is just tax-based, we will be disturbed by anything that comes our way like Covid-19 and the Ukraine war which occurred in the other side of the world. So, we must venture into Agriculture as somebody indicated that he has started his own initiative of rice production in Foni. The people of Wuli also have their own initiative of producing rice. I think some of the Members went to the rice field in Sutukoba which is our community's own initiative. The Government started intervening just recently but since its intervention with The Gambia Rice Value Change Project, some proposed project requirements like a store to keep up to 50 tones, machine to pull water from the river as well as to level the ground of the 200 hectares rice field ratified here are yet to be done. The project should also better the road linking the people to the rice field which was a village initiative. Everything is static and after 3 or 5 years the project will phase out then it will be declared a failed project. The President is very proud that something like 8 projects are operational in Agriculture but all those ones will phase out and fail, and then another 10 projects will be initiated. Nothing works because project money is directly given to the Ministries while the Accountant General is not aware of. It is directly in the hands of Finance Ministry to keep us in the dark so that the Ministries will not be affected when doing budgeting here. As a result, we would continue to give them more irrespective of what grants or projects they have. We need the required information to be able to budget properly. If they continue to hide information from us, how can we make a better budget

for the country? This is what is affecting us. We have 8 big projects worth **\$294 million** which will go down the drain because our budget cannot support them once they phased out.

According to the project designs, 40% goes to the beneficiaries and 60% remains with those implementing them who often buy very expensive vehicles. I know that project vehicles are often being utilized here and there on other errands but hardly go to the beneficiaries. We just keep taking loans and give them to projects which often go down the drain while the country continues to become more and more indebted. We need to have mechanisms to overcome that type of corruption in the country so that the essential productive base can be built in conjunction with tax collection. We should collect tax and support individuals, institutions or organizations to help create the productive base because the farmers are in dire need. The type of farming the world is looking for is to feed the world's population. When I was young, the population of The Gambia was about **400 thousand** but it is about **2 million** now. So, the population of this small country is growing rapidly, and we are not ready to do the production it demands. The Gambia is crying because we do not have rice due to Ukraine war. We will continue to complain of hiking prices of food items if there is war in another country. How long shall we continue like this?

Honourable Speaker, number 4 of page 8 reads, *"Notwithstanding the challenges, the fourth review of the Extended Credit Facility with the IMF was successfully completed in December 2021"*, which involves the usage of big vocabularies like 'extended credit facility' when taking credit from

IMF. It will not be indicated whether it is a loan or a grant. We need to understand what is meant by 'extended credit facility' because we are scrutinizing them. No amount is being mentioned there and it is a loan. How much did the Government take from IMF for this extended credit facility in 2021? We need to know that. I know a credit facility in 2017 was to the tune of **\$16.1 million** and I know there were other credit facilities from 2017 to 2019 and also in 2021. So, we need a loan from IMF to rescue us every time we fall into a difficulty.

Balance of payment difficulty is the main reason we take credit facility, but they would attribute it to low tax collection and Ukraine war. Eventually, they convince IMF to give them credit facility. This credit facility is taken mainly when there is balance of payment difficulty. For instance, if The Gambia wants to import commodities from outside and lacks foreign exchange to do so, credit facility is taken to do that. So, we should plan ourselves to avoid having difficulties which would require IMF's intervention because IMF makes huge profit since we pay in Dollar. It is only created to give out loans and it never loses. Even if one gives flimsy excuse like my country is suffering from severe drought, a credit facility will be given with an interest attached.

These multi-lateral debts in addition to our bilateral debts make our debt to grow. Now, our debt has gone up to plus **D80 billion**. That is why the President said we are going to pay **D5.01 billion** in 2021. What we allocated for debt service in our budget is **D5.29 billion** if I remember very well, so our debt is growing. Every year, we repay debt with what we should use to develop the country. That is why people should listen when

we complain about taking loans. We must come up with strategies to reduce our debt if not; it will take 100% of our budget very soon. What are we going to do then?

Honourable Speaker, I want to move a motion to extend the time to complete my submission then we can continue tomorrow. Is there any seconder?

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I would give you chance because at 6 o'clock we would adjourn until tomorrow. The proposed motion should be moved 30 minutes before 6 o'clock and we have passed that. I have decided to give you chance. When you finish, we will adjourn sitting until tomorrow. So, let us continue.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Okay. Anyway, the President also talked about VNR. I think that is Voluntary National Review. I recommend that we request the VNR document from the Ministry because if my memory serves me right, the recommendation was for The Gambia to do a lot of sensitization and education on how we can develop the social safety nets. So, it is said that everything went nicely, and we were commended. How we go about doing that is a concern. Anyway, if we get the document, it will inform us even more.

Honourable Speaker, I would now talk about remittances under Foreign Affairs Ministry. According to the President, **\$777 million** remittance is equal to 40% of the GDP. This means that remittances have now overtaken both Tourism and Agriculture. Do you understand? It seems that it has also overtaken investment. So, remittances are now the most important foreign exchange earner in the country. We should not play with

remittances because they are mainly brought here by our Gambian brothers and sisters abroad. So, what mechanisms or plans have we put in place to consolidate this so that we do not lose them? We no longer have Agriculture and Tourism as our main sources of revenue; we must not lose remittances as well. What actual plans or mechanisms do we put in place to ensure that those people who send remittances are also supported to get into partnerships? So, that they will not just finish the money send in building their houses and then go back to struggle? That is why anytime they want to come home; it is a problem since there is no way to sustain them here. So, if we help create something which can keep them here and build the economy, then after some years, they will just return and live in their country rather than living abroad for eternity.

Honourable Speaker, I am trying to summarize now because there is no time. Under the President's Office, I believe the issue of **D17 million** distributed among 23 thousand beneficiaries is too minimal when it comes to social safety nets in relation to the VNR mentioned in the President's SoNA. I do not know how they did it, but if **D17 million** is distributed among **23 thousand** equally, each person will have **D700**. So, I do not think it is worth putting it in the President's speech.

Honourable Speaker, Environment is another key area, but the President's SoNA concerning it appears too nice. It should not be that pleasing because people are seriously cutting wood in the provinces as if there is no law. People just go into the bush and cut any wood. As a result, all the bush mangoes "*duutoolu*", all the rose wood "*kenoolu*" and everything is fast disappearing in the bush. Very soon, we will find ourselves into a

desert, so we must have mechanisms to reduce the unscrupulous harvest of wood in that regard. In fact, even the forestry people who are supposed to protect the forest do connive with unscrupulous people to harvest all the wood without restraint.

Honourable Speaker, I would now move to number 4 of page 32 [under Transport], which is relating to Banjul, the Capital City. The project is not only bituminizing the road but also including sewage and drainage. So, as a result of a light rainfall in Banjul, everything went into submersion. Well, I called it light rain because it is not supposed to happen that way. One rain, you want to call it big. Okay. One big rain fell and then Banjul nearly submerged. That means the sewage is not working. Did this project put that into consideration?

Honourable Speaker, this is a project that did not come here. We have no knowledge of it. We just heard it rumoured that it is a contract to be pre-financed by the contractor. After the completion of the project, he will then calculate everything and tell the Government the amount he has spent, and the Government takes its responsibility to pay. I think that type of exercise is not a good practice. Since it is an internal loan, there must be another way of doing it so that we know exactly what is happening because this Assembly was completely absent from that arrangement. If it were a loan or a grant, it would have come here. So, it did not come here, and we did not know anything about it. The arrangement was done behind closed doors after which the contractors started working. We are not informed how much has been spent on the contract. We should have been informed. It just says, "*We have made the roads and all these things, and*

we will continue to beautify Banjul". The amount spent on the pre-financed contract to beautify Banjul should be known to us. However, we will call them to tell us the total expenses/cost.

Honourable Speaker, I am not ready.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you promised that you are winding up.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: No, I did not say that. I said I am fast tracking.

THE SPEAKER: Are you summarizing?

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, Youth and Sports, a lot of initiatives are taking place in the provinces. Look, be patient.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, it looks like I underestimated you.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: You underestimated me?

THE SPEAKER: Yeah, because I gave you chance at 5.30 p.m. believing that within the next 30 minutes you will round up.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Just give me two more minutes to finish. They want to disturb the whole situation but it will not happen. Honourable Speaker, concerning Youth and Sports Ministry, we all know how passionate our youths are in sports. I take example of my own village where youths are contributing to fence their football field and they want a mini-stadium. What is the Ministry of Youth and Sports doing or plans to do to support such initiatives? Their support will be very useful

because people with such initiatives deserve to be encouraged. They are trying to do it for themselves because they have seen that the Government is not doing it. At least if they fenced the field, the Government should also put a very good pavilion for them so that when it rains, their matches will not be disturbed. I think such initiatives should be supported.

Also, a lot of talents are in the provinces. I do not know whether it is being tapped, especially in football. Majority of the youths are engaged in football and they are very much talented in the game. So, how do we scout such talents? What can we do to ensure that their objective of playing at international level to help their parents becomes a reality? If the Government cannot create jobs for them, then it should create avenues for them to be seen or noticed so as to explore their potential somewhere else. I think that is something we need to encourage.

Honourable Speaker, on Page 31, bullet point 3 [under the Office of the Vice President], it states that they have disbursed **D450,000** for rice, oil, sugar, mattresses, and other essential items to support **1,161** Senegalese affected by the Sanyang riot, but I just did a small arithmetic to convert it into monetary terms and then discovered that each person will receive about **D270**. If we are really helping disaster victims, we should give them support that will keep them for at least a month rather than something that will keep them for only one day. I do not think it is worth putting in the President's SoNA. On that note, I thank you for your patience.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Wuli East. Let me thank Honourable Members who have contributed and those of you who are yet to contribute for taken time to be with us. Your Excellency the

Vice President and Cabinet Ministers here present, we thank you for sitting and listening to us all day long. We are proud of you.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Assembly be adjourned until Tuesday 20th September, 2022 at 10:00 a.m. prompt to continue the debate on the President's State of the Nation Address.]