

INTRODUCTION

The Honorable Members of the Sixth Legislature converged at the Chamber of The National Assembly at 10:00am Thursday 28th July 2022, for the First Ordinary Session in 2022. Following a request of – *Certificate of Urgency*– put forward by the President of The Republic of The Gambia, as the representatives prepare for a one-month annual recess, the Members of the Assembly voted to hold the sitting. The agenda tabled forward was of the Appropriation Bill by the newly appointed Honorable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Seedy Keita.

HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

Below are some highlights of what happened in Parliament during the sitting of 28th July 2022.

Bills and Papers

Agenda tabled to the House– presented by the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs

- i. Laying of the Revised Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Year 2022
- ii. Committee of Supply on the Revised Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 2022
- iii. Appropriation (Amendment Bill), 2022

The Appropriation Bill consisted of a Revised Budget and a Salary Scheme Increment which a Member described as been brought forward at the “eleventh hour” which has resulted to the non-payment of the salaries of civil servants for the month.

Be it resolved that the National Assembly of the Gambia has approved the Appropriation Bill, by passing the law to increase salaries of the Civil Service by 30% and agreeing to the revision of the allocated budget, cutting into the budget of certain institutions.

MPs Statements

- The Honorable Member for Kiang West said the increment in salaries for civil servants gives segregation and a huge variation. The low-income earner getting D2500 take home pay will only get D700 increment which is not enough for fish money for more than a week nor a bag of rice. Those getting D3000 will earn D900 more who would not afford a bag of rice. Those taking 10,000 home will get D3000 increment which will earn them 1 or 2 bags of rice whilst those getting 20,000 will get D6000 increment earning them 3 bags of rice. He called to the Minister to have made it a necessity to properly look into it, a salary scale review which would look into the observation of those earning little or a lot to be given certain percentages respectively.
- Honorable Member for Foni Kansala next took the floor putting it to the Minister that there was a common understanding, an overall change of salary not just an increment, structural based and proper pay structure, that aspects of their living conditions are made better. He expressed that this is not what was promised, and would crash the hopes and aspirations of civil servants. He advised that they need to be realistic in their approach in terms of governance to change narratives of low-income earners and top brass of government.
- Honorable Member for Sabach Sanjal, said, he wanted to focus on the issues that have resulted to the review of this budget, downward revision of total revenues amounting to 3.3 billion. He continued that it is important to remind ourselves that the country depends on international funding and cannot exceed certain things. Highlighting the issues of corruption, he said if people are

expected to stop then they should be paid well to eradicate it. If the 30% is put into review, in connection to if committees of the Assembly do their work well, they can make sure it is sustainable and can improve the economic growth of this country. He moved for it to be approved, stating salaries can never be equal cause responsibilities are different.

- Honorable Member for Jeshwang, Sheriff S Sarr outlined that the salary grading needs to be looked at. He believes that the salary grade should start from Grade-five (5) as it takes almost 5 years before one moves from grade 1 to another grade.
- Honorable Member for Banjul South, whose Private Members Bill to promote the representation of women was invalidated at the end of the last Legislature, said no genuine person will be against the salary scheme. She mentioned if the promise of salary increment was made for good intentions or used for politics to win the elections. She threw the question about the necessity of creating new Ministries by the President. According to her, it makes no sense to create two new ministries and as well asked a general question if the addition of new ministries is necessary, if it's not there is no need.
- The Honorable for Foni Bintang went on that they cut the budget of other ministries, continuing before they went to create new ministries, they knew salary increment was due, they should not have created new ministries if unable to satisfy civil servants. He heavily advised that government should learn to generate income on its own instead of relying on loans and later want to increase salaries. He believes it is not sustainable and spoke against excuses, advising we cannot depend on Russia-Ukraine war, if not that then he expects them to use Covid. He completed by saying If the President cannot generate income, then he should resign.
- Honorable Member for Niamina Dankunku who has been in the Parliament since 2012 took the floor, Samba Jallow said the government has the intention for all to have good earnings. He went further that not all can get the same salary but the intention is for every Gambian to have enough.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- Downward revision of total revenue amounting to D3.3 billion, 11% reduction of the approved 2022 budget
- The reduction of expenditure of D1.2 billion from domestic debt service and cuts from MDAs, 34% of the approved budget
- The funding of the salary increment, a sum of D575 million. The necessity for Salary Restructure and not just an increment
- According to the Minister (MOFEA) there was an unexpected inflation as well as Russia-Ukraine War and Covid-19. He went on that inflation is not only due to domestic factors but import driven factors which goes round to exchange rate. The budget proposed is not inflationary, effectively cutting total expenditure by one billion (1,000,000,000). There has been a reduction therefore avoiding inflation –called deflation.
- Though many of the Members assumed the creation of the new ministries and salary increment were reasons for the revised budget, the Minister cleared that the salary review is not the main point of the budget review but only 17% of the total adjustment. The review is where the issue lies with a 3.3 billion shortage, describing a budget as a projection, coming from 3 essential elements.
- A lot of questions on the sustainability of the salary increment were raised. The Minister has outlined that had the budget not be sustainable, it would not have been proposed and this is not a budget to support the President.
- According to the Minister there was a full salary restructure exercise done, discussed in cabinet and they adopted an option of 50% increase in wage bill which was later realized to be

unsustainable. It was assessed, adding you just cannot do things because you said it. When the approvals were made there was no Russia-Ukraine war, the economy is managed with the latest information affecting the macro economy fundamentals and if they change, it leaves you no choice but to change. You cannot keep your pride, you change as the fundamental dictates.

CONCLUSION

- The Minister informed the National Assembly that they will be coming quarterly to update them on implementation of the budget
- The National Assembly has been adjourned sine dine
- The Members of the Gambian National Assembly will be going on annual recess from 1st August to 31st 2022.