



**National Assembly, New Assembly Building, Reverend
Pyne Lane, Banjul, The Gambia**

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

FOURTH SESSION – FIRST MEETING

FRIDAY 3rd APRIL, 2020

SESSION – 2020



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Lane, Banjul, The Gambia**

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Fourth Meeting of the First Session of the Fifth Assembly
of the Second Republic of The Gambia.

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House on Friday 3rd April 2020.

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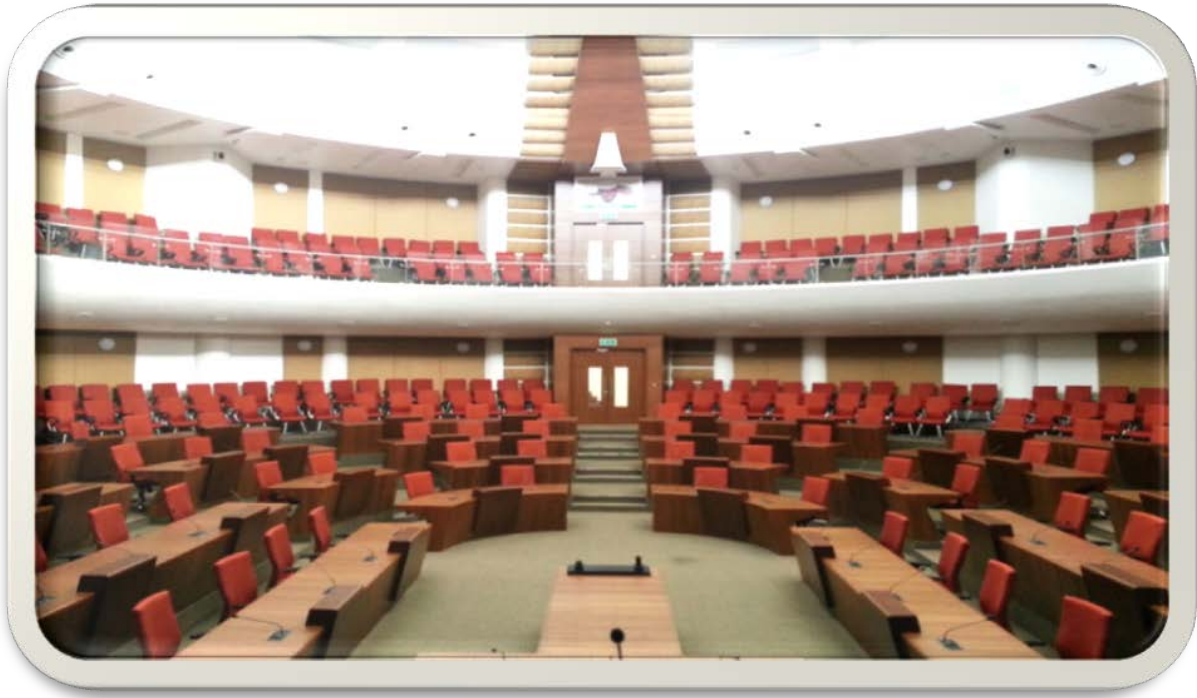
Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters on the Motion for the Extension of a period State Public Emergency in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the 1997 Constitution, for a period of 90 days, effective 3rd April, 2020.

(By: Hon. Suwaibou Touray, Vice Chairperson)

5. MOTION

Continuation of the Debate on the Motion for the Extension of State of Public Emergency in the whole of The Gambia, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the 1997 Constitution for a period of 90 days effective 3rd April, 2020

(By: Attorney General and Minister for Justice)



THE CHAMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE GAMBIA
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF
THE HOUSE

FOURTHSESSION – FIRST MEETING
OF THE FIFTH ASSEMBLY
OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC

FRIDAY 03rd APRIL, 2020

1. PRAYERS:

[The Speaker, Hon. Mariam Jack Denton, Reads the Prayers].

[The House met at 10:00 a.m. in New Assembly Building, Reverend Pye Lane, Banjul].

[The Speaker, Hon. Mariam Jack Denton, in the Chair].

The House was called to Order

2. Correction and Approval of the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday 2nd April, 2020.

for network, I met with somebody around 7, he said he was selling coos. I said you are selling, where are you from? Are we not saying that the borders are closed? Let us have concern for everybody. We should all share the little cake. Those days are gone now. If things come, I look at what favours my people. I am here because of my people. Without my people I will not be here.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at their recommendations, they are very good. They have done a very good job. We are talking about this virus; do they have testing equipment for this virus at the health centres? They do not. I went round with the health personnel. All these 70 villages, I went with the health personnel.

We should be very careful when we declare this; let us all look at it critically. We do not reach that stage yet. Let us do more sensitization. In fact, we should go back to our people and sensitize them more. If you do not want to shake hands with some people, they tell you if you do not want do not come here. I used to tell them it is something happening. It is a preventive method, let us try and follow those preventive methods. We are saying that this is the only thing we can do. Let us close all the borders. Let us close and see what will happen.

Even if it is going to be, let us say a very reduced period, we can look at it but 45 days, what for? Look at the schools, they said this initiative, radio (GRTS) and that money is for all of us. Our people are not benefiting from it. How many villages in Sami? Only two villages that have electricity. The rest, they do not have it. Even radio sometimes is a problem. That is not captured here. I do not know why they do not feature that one in their report. That is another constraint because it is all brought about by this Covid-19. That is why they said they want radio programs and GRTS programs which our people are not benefiting from. Honourable Speaker on that note, I want Honourable Members to let us all look at this issue critically. Thank you.

HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for the opportunity. ... *interruption*... Honourable Speaker, I said there is a situation that we are in, a very funny situation, that the whole world is battling the

spread of Covid-19. In that regard, I want to first thank the government through the Ministry of Health and all other Ministries that have endeavoured to realize the needs of the people and the relevance of the National Assembly Members in the fight to slow down the spread of Covid-19 in the country by involving us in the crusade, giving us the opportunity to go to our constituencies to talk to our people, trying to sensitize them with materials.

Honourable Speaker in that regards too, I want to thank the committee or first the National Assembly Members with the foresight to follow the due process to refer this motion to the relevant committee. The committee did a very good job. This is exactly what we would have done if at all we understood each other yesterday. As due process demand, we referred it to them and they came out with recommendations that I do not think anybody will go against. Only just to commend them and add a few suggestions to their recommendations.

Honourable Speaker, at their introductory part they said that they engaged or called some Ministries or Ministers with their technicians to come and answer to them. The Ministry of Justice was there as key stakeholder. Ministry of Finance was there. I did not see Ministry of Health. I do not know whether that was an oversight because all that we are talking about, Ministry of Health should be the key in the process to inform and give them the situational analysis of the Covid-19 in the country. We have gone out, we talked to the people, we have heard from them, we need analysis from the Ministry of Health.

POINT OF ORDER

THE SPEAKER [MOMODOU L.K. SANNEH]: What Is your point of order?

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. It is quite unrelated to what the Honourable Member is saying. I have been calling the attention of those at the gates. We are here in an enclosure and according to WHO recommendation, these enclosures with AC can be a source of transmission. I have been telling them, let them open all the doors so I want you to make an order for all the doors to be opened so that we will get fresh air to be circulating. That is the point of order, thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for your suggestion. Temporarily we will open the door but if noise is coming, we will certainly close it.

HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you Honourable Member for Banjul for the point because we are here to prevent ourselves, prevent the country and we should be the first to prevent ourselves and follow the procedures and recommendations of WHO. If we need doors to be opened, please let us open doors.

Honourable Speaker I was talking about situational analysis of the pandemic. We had 4 cases, 1 died, 2 released, and How much are in quarantine is not known. I believe we need to have that situational analysis. If we have only 1 right now under treatment, then why should it warrant for us to go for the extension of the state of emergency? By looking at the plight of the people economically, we need to put it to them. From my own research, I believe government wants to come up with this extension for the best interest of the Gambian people. That means they are privy to technical information that we are not. They are seeing that extending the state of emergency could be the best to control the spread. We want to hear from them, what are some of the issues that are troubling if we have only one and there is no case of person-to-person local transmission since the outbreak of the pandemic in the country. We want to know why would they want us to come up with this extension if the citizens are not hearing any person-to-person or local transmission of the pandemic?

Honourable Speaker, I also want them to talk to us because all the four cases were imported cases, they came from outside. We want to know what are the stringent measure they are using because already the airports are closed but the borders are the problem what stringent measures are they doing to strengthen the border in order to avoid any other importation of the virus into the country? Honourable Speaker, the issue in the country is 90-day extension of the public emergency.

As the case is in the world, as we are following the media, nobody will want to see what is happening in other countries to happen in The Gambia. If the Ministry sees that only to keep us at one place could be the best, I do not think anybody will go against it or deny that. We know that in reality Gambians feed from hand to mouth every day. We will want to hear if mechanisms are put in place to help people to be

able to stay free from hunger, with their family at one place. If we are able to hear those plans from the government, if it is even worth for a year for Gambians to be at one place, we will want to be because we do not want the pandemic to reach the country as it is in other countries. We want to hear from the government but they said, from the report of the committee, that they are looking into it. Some said no, they believe or suspect that the Ministry should have said already we have a plan and this is what we want to do. We could have discussed on that. As they are looking into it, I thank the committee for suggesting the reduction the 90 days to 45 days. Yet still, the question remains how best are we going to help our vulnerable people in their homes, who live from hand to month from their daily economic activities to feed their family. I want the Ministry or the government to look into that.

Honourable Speaker, we want to hear from the government the social relief package that they could have for the people, the vulnerable ones for that matter. As they said they are looking into it, I want to suggest to them that let it be operationalized, not politicized. This issue is far beyond politics; and then when I say politics it is not from the government side but from the realities of ordinary Gambians. As it is now, many people think that anything that government spearheads, for example the President talks about it, many will define it as politics. I want to tell everybody, there is no such thing like politics in this issue.

In that regard, I want to suggest to the government that let there be a social relief package for the vulnerable families in the country to be operationalized. I want to suggest, for example, issuing of soft loans to small business holders. Why I want to bring this is because they said they are looking into it. I want to suggest this side of giving soft loans to small business, considering single families or single mothers renting in urban areas. Also, collaborating with World Food Program (WFP) office in the country. They must have data of vulnerable families/individuals living in the country, to liaise with them, so that if there could be any package it will reach the rightful person that needs it at a time.

Honourable Speaker, I want the Ministry to fast-track that package of relief for the people. Even for the civil service, somebody mentioned about it here, giving example

of the tourism sector but even in the offices here, some of our officers here are even asked to go for 2 months, 2 weeks leave or so. If you ask somebody to go home, the family needs something from him. Yes they depend on salary but when they come to office, they do some "*raba-raba*" to uplift their family. Obviously, if you are going to ask me to go and stay at home where my salary cannot sustain me, I have to do some work aside to sustain my family. Please I think they need to be looked into. I am suggesting, a month's salary could be paid to the civil service that they call non-essential staffs of Ministries or Department to stay at home. They can get what they want for a month all through the period of this public emergency.

Honourable Speaker they talked about regulations that they gave. My colleagues have talked about so many regulations but my concern is going to be on transport. I do not think the regulation they want to bring is going to be easily swallowed by transport owners. It is a time or situation where everybody needs to sacrifice but in a situation like this, people expect government to sacrifice more than ordinary citizens. If you give a regulation that commercial vehicles should carry half capacity of their vehicles, and then the fares are going to be the same. These past 7 days, there were lots of complaints. Drivers create stops for themselves where they charge exorbitant fares on the ordinary citizens. If you want to bring same regulation, not even giving the same price of fares but reducing it, Honourable Speaker I think the government needs to look into that. If there is going to be sacrifice, we expect the government to sacrifice more than ordinary citizens. If for example they have reduced the pump price of a litre by a Dalasi, let them not reduce the fares. Let them leave the fare as it is and reduce the pump price and then ask the drivers to carry half capacity of their vehicles. That could be easily swallowed by transport operators than the reality in the regulations.

Honourable Speaker, people talk about the monetary issue of it. D500 million has been approved by the President to fight against and then we are hearing that more donors internationally and locally are coming up. Through our research and consultation with people we are seeing what other countries are doing. Yesterday the Minister said it here by quoting a Section that depending on the reality of situations you bend some procedures to respond effectively to situations. As we are in a situation of emergency, the National Assembly might be an oversight institution,

but in this I think we should be an active stakeholder/player in this case. I am suggesting to the government to setup of a committee that the National Assembly should be part of, which is going to be responsible for all funding.

I have a case, whether it is factual or not, I know most of the National Assembly Members are aware of it because through their interactions with officials they detected some malpractices. It is not conclusive but this is something that we suspect and this is what many people outside are crying about. Some government officials are going to use the pandemic or the emergencies to enrich themselves. To avoid that, I am suggesting to the government to setup a committee which is going to be responsible. The D500 million to be funded by the government, the donors that are coming from outside and locally, to be monitored and controlled by the government, where the Ministry of Finance will be there. They are the custodians of our finance.

If for example, I am just hearing they say Gambian Vice Captain Omar Colley is donating half a million Dalasi to Ministry of Health to fight against this case. If there is a committee anybody who wants to donate locally or internationally you give it to that committee. The committee will now give it to the Ministry of Finance to know this is the amount of money being donated towards the fight against Covid-19. Then if Ministry of Health wants to do anything, they submit their plan to that committee. The committee allows the Ministry of Finance to disburse the money. At the end of the day, there is going to be transparency throughout.

If the National Assembly wants to wait, let us allow them to do the work after they will come back and report to us when the corruption and malpractices have already done, we are only going to talk. This is a suggestion from me, for us to have a national committee responsible for the fight of this Covid-19.

Honourable Speaker, sensitization is very important. So many things came up here. My Honourable colleagues mentioned about the football fields, somebody mentioned it here. Somebody even told me Honourable let me tell you this, this is not a black man disease, do not disturb us. This is a white man disease even the one who died here is not a black man. You see, this is a concept that people are having. That means we need to sensitize. I am suggesting to the government, you see sometimes

they come with things and leave people in dilemma/ambiguity. People start to talk, fabricate stories on their own because they are not being informed.

I am suggesting to the government, we have so many radio stations and TV stations here. For example a proclamation from the government, people might not understand it. Let us have a technician to go to the TV and radios to sensitize people that this is the intention that the government is coming with. We believe that it is going to be in your interest, in the local languages, people could be at the same level.

The work that the National Assembly Members are doing, I am sure we will continue to go to our people but sometimes what you want to put to them is technical. Let me tell you this, sometimes it is politicized. I am a politician; some feel that when I talk, I talk in favour of somebody or a group of people. The others that are against that group will never listen to me. I endeavoured to pay my own airtime to go to the radio just to open the air for people to give us their contributions. Do you know what they do? First they ask, which political party are you representing before we contribute? This is something that we need to sensitize the people about. If we do not, what we are trying to fight against will be very difficult.

My last point Honourable Speaker, if we want to tell the government to strengthen and do more work in order to control the spread, I think we need to be in control of our own case and see this pandemic as a national issue we need to fight together. We have heard that at the airport there are some people who vehemently refused to be quarantined. There are some people, we heard, that ran from the quarantine centres but they are within the country, they are with us. Why would we not take the risk or take the duty to report them? To tell the government that my uncle came on so and so date. He refused to be quarantined but he is here. By telling your uncle to go to the quarantine centre, you are saving yourself, your family and the whole country.

Honourable Speaker, I think Gambians need to take this responsibility. Let us not see the disease as if it is somebody's disease. Let us not see the regulations as somebody's regulations. The one that is there, he is given the mandate but any

regulation that he comes up with is in the interest of the Gambian people. So Gambians should see and have that respect for authority, it is also very important.

Honourable Speaker, these 7-day lockdown has even affected me. It has even come to the extent that we say Honourable Speaker you want to bring a motion to ban "*Attaya*" in the country? I am an addict to "*Attaya*". When all the shops were closed, I had my good lunch I wanted get "*Attaya*". I went round the whole village and all shops were closed, it even affected me. This is something that we all need to accept but again, I am very happy that they are bringing regulations to define when they say non-essential what do they mean, which shops should close and which should open.

On that note Honourable Speaker, I urge the government to take these 3 things: committee to be responsible for funding. Whether you know it or not, but you must be following social media, people are blaming the government, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance, that they are going to enrich themselves with this money. To avoid that, have a mechanism where you bring everybody on board. When National Assembly Members are there, I can talk to my people and say this is where the money is coming from and this is where the money is spending as we go along. Then there will be no blame-game as it is growing up. Let us take blame-game from this disease.

Honourable Speaker, if it is only for me, I even want to suggest the 45 days to be reduced to 30 days because the government is not yet ready with funding to help people. It is left to the Assembly to go with the recommendations. On that note, I thank the committee for doing a very good job and I pray that God protects and saves The Gambia from Covid-19 spreading further in this country. Thank you very much.

HON. SUNKARY BADJIE [FONI BREFET]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. This House has a critical Motion before it, at a critical time, and that require critical thinking. However Honourable Speaker, government has a responsibility and the citizenry also has a responsibility towards the fight of this pandemic, Covid 19.

It appears, Honourable Speaker, all the concerns of National Assembly Members are the same. However, I want to seize this opportunity to thank the Standing

Committee on Human Rights and Constitution Matters for injecting enormous energy into the report that has been presented to us for consideration. In addition to that Honourable Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of this honourable House, the need for the recommendations of the Standing Committee to be adhered to by government as quickly as possible.

It has been mentioned over and over by a lot of Honourable Members, I do not want to take too much time but just to highlight its importance, that is the provision of social safety net to the vulnerable people. Speakers before me have alluded that a lot of people in this country live from hand to mouth. If their activities are restricted, that could lead to something else and the Member for Sami has stated that hunger is more dangerous than Covid-19 and I agree with him.

The second issue is the issue of transportation, reduction by half of passengers by commercial vehicles needs to be considered. Imagine vehicle plying from the provinces coming to the Kombos that are meant to carry 20 people as at now by regulation are required to carry 10 people. For instance, D40 by 10 that is D400 and imagine the amount of fuel they have to buy. That will cripple the transport system and some of them will resort to staying at home and that may cause a lot of difficulties to commuters. To me, let the government consider them because it is an issue which is very critical and it requires critical thinking as I said.

The other issue is the issue of compliance. I think a lot of sensitization has been carried out by these National Assembly Members, the radios, the government and all stakeholders. However, my findings have indicated that there are a lot of sectors who do not believe in the existence of this dreadful pandemic, Covid-19. These regulations have come to enhance that. Now the fundamental question we should ask is, what is the government's strategic mechanism that should ensure these regulations are implemented to the letter. Having a regulation is one thing, its enforcement is another thing. The Member for Busumbala has said that if you go to certain areas of the country football is very active. Even in the community where I live in Brikama, I wish the Member for Brikama North is here. Really I had to pick a phone and call him that there is lot of social activities going on here. The sensitization needs to go on and government has to come up with a strategy to enforce these regulations. No matter the amount of money we try to inject into the

sensitization, it would go meaningless if people are not compliant particularly if social distancing is not respected at all. That is a cause for concern.

The coordination, a Member has said it here, that is quite very essential because the government could have conducted a research to inform this National Assembly about the state of the situation as at now that warrants them to they arrive at 90 days that they intend to ask the National Assembly to extend the state of emergency to. How do they arrive at that? Did they do the necessary assessment to indicate that the situation really needs 90 days to allow government to put in short-term, medium-term and long-term measures in a bid to fight Covid-19. Those issues need to be answered.

90 days has caused a lot of fear within the public, which requires lot of sensitization. Limiting the sensitization to the use of GRTS is not enough at all. I would like to implore every National Assembly Member to intensify the sensitization by sensitizing our people that the government has a responsibility and as a result of that they feel prudently that this number of days will be sufficient to allow them to put in the necessary things to address the spread of this Covid-19.

Sensitization is key and I would like to bring you a case. In my constituency I went to the Alkalo's compound in my own village and a group of kids came and said Honourable wash your hands. I was kind of very embarrassed. They said you must wash your hands before you enter the compound. That indicates that despite government's intention to close all borders, they have limitations. Our borders are so porous that with all its intentions it is practically impossible for the government through the Police to be present at all our borders. All we need to do as a people/community, we must take the lead by making sure that we become police officers of our own by watching who comes in and who goes out, that will help us a lot. We all know that with limited resources, we have a limited economy. The government would have its intentions but definitely they would not have the financial resources to reach out everywhere. The issue of social safety net, that could be very crucial.

Honourable Speaker to conclude, since nearly all concerns said by National Assembly Members are the same, I do not want to be repetitive to go over what others have

said over and over. In the report the government has indicated that they are thinking, as someone has said, but the fundamental question I would like to ask is when and how does the government plan to provide social safety nets to the citizens particular to the vulnerable. This is key because the situation is so critical so any day that is lost could be detrimental to the citizens. I want to implore the government to act as quickly as possible to ensure the concerns raised by the committee and National Assembly Members that have spoken before, so that these issues would be addressed in the best interests of the nation.

We need to do more and each and every one of us has a responsibility to monitor who comes into your compound, who goes out of your country who enter into your village because we do not have enough security to man all our porous borders. On that note Honourable Speaker, I want to rest my case. Thank you.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SEREKUNDA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. We are being heard by the whole world. We must guard what we say. Law, facts and conscience most constitute the guard. Honourable Speaker, hunger can be cured but we are told that Covid-19 cannot be cured. We are talking about two different things and we must focus on what is before us. Last night, I spoke to someone who was in Sierra Leone and he said when they announced that Ebola was a killer there were many doubters but when the nurses and doctors started to disappear, no one was there to take care of the ill. When Imams started to disappear, many people began to abandon their relatives and they became untouchable. That was when national action had to be taken to deal with such a terrible tragedy. This time, the world wants to avoid such a scenario and that is why it is considered a pandemic and the world should act together and learn from each other as we act to defeat what can be a terrible tragedy not only for our country but humanity at large. That is how serious it is.

The Attorney General came to us to request for the state of emergency to be extended to ninety days that is the issue. We charged our committee with the responsibility of looking at the issues so that what we do is in line with law. What we do will take charge of the facts on the ground so that we can act as one nation to deal with the problems. That is what the session is all about. Honourable Speaker, the committee has told us that in terms of the declaration, there were two

proclamations made under different Sections of Section 34. The concern is clear, Honourable Speaker, and we should come to terms with what is said and hopefully in the final statement of the Attorney General to put certain matters behind us.

Page 3 paragraph 8, the committee tells us that on the 27th day of March, a second proclamation was made. When we look at the statement of the Attorney General, the first page also told us that the President declared a state of public emergency on Friday, 27th March 2020. When we look at the actual Act itself, the gazetted proclamations were said to be issued on the 26th day of March 2020. When we look at Section 34, the President may at any time by proclamation published in the Gazette so it is important that we tidy up the dates so that we know that the proclamation is published on the 26th so that whatever we write should actually reflect that but the Attorney General should be able to clarify.

Honourable Speaker the point that is of importance to me, that the Attorney General needs to stress on and clarify once and for all is the section 34 (1) A and B. Of course one is talking about a state of public emergency, the other is that the state of public emergency may come into existence. So it is talking about what may be and what is and of course the two provisions are different. Honourable Speaker, two things are important here: after declaring the state of emergency regardless of the two provisions, what should follow and what is of relevance to this National Assembly? This is where we need to tidy it up and then we will move with speed.

Honourable Speaker Subsection 2 asserts and I do not need to read it the Attorney General knows what is there, when it comes to the session of the National Assembly being in place then whatever is proclaimed lapses in 7 days. If the National Assembly is not in session, it goes to 21 days and it lapses.

Every proclamation is followed by something that is relying on the Emergency Act to be able to come up with regulations. This is where the Honourable Attorney General needs to become very clear to us so that we agree on point. Looking at what is gazetted, the proclamation, we are told that the President going further: "Now therefore I, Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia..." on and on goes further to say "...hereby order the taking of the following additional measures". This is the President moving away from proclamation of a state of emergency to

actually tell us the measures that he has taken. These measures go further to indicate all non-food outlets in all markets and enclosed shopping areas shall immediately be closed. People were hearing this and it means well this is now the regulation.

Honourable Speaker, I do not want to waste time because we are dealing with emergency but read all the terms it goes even further at the end to say the number of people attending social gathering such as wedding, naming ceremonies and funeral shall be restricted to a maximum of 10 people. But then when you go to the Closing and Restriction of Non-Essential Public Places it talks about 5 people. I think Honourable Speaker, we need not go into the details but what I am emphasizing here is the fact that the starting point is to make a proclamation of a state of emergency and to me the Presidency do not make any pronouncements regarding the measures, that the measures come by relying on the Act which actually indicates what should be done.

The Act goes further to indicate what should be done, that when an emergency proclamation is in force the president may, subject to the Constitution, make such regulations. We are talking about subsidiary legislation. He can make regulations and those regulations must also be published in the Gazette. We were given these, that these are the regulations. We have a date, our committee has looked into them (the 4 regulations) but essentially it mentions, but the date that is here is 31st March for the date of the regulation, that is when they were published.

Honourable Speaker, the issue of 18th March came into being because of the fundamental question that a mere proclamation is not enough. It should be followed by regulations to be able to enforce. What were the regulations made under the 18th March proclamation? What was being enforced by who? That was why the matter was referred to the committee to review whether anything was being enforced and if nothing was being enforced then it was just a mere proclamation without enforcement provisions. This one we are being told that a proclamation is made but now these are the provisions that are required to regulate. That is the clarification that Honourable Attorney General needs to make so that the issue will be very clear to us in terms of technicality.

Honourable Speaker, what is significant is the issue of whatever is proclaimed, whatever is provided as regulations should be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. Not that conditions cannot change but even if conditions change, responding to those conditions must be reasonable and justifiable. Under the regulations Honourable Speaker, it is very clear, Section 5 of the regulations state very clearly that "All emergency regulations if not sooner revoked shall cease to have effect when the emergency proclamation in pursuance of which they have been made ceases to have effect". If 18th March up to the end and it lapses, whatever is done in terms of regulations, once it lapses becomes null and void, that is what is being said here. That is why the position was being emphasized that this is teamwork between the Executive and the National Assembly. That the lapses is to restrict the power exercised by the President and then to cooperate with the National Assembly for extension. that is the teamwork that is required by the law.

Going further Honourable Speaker, it says "Emergency regulations shall not have effect during a period when an emergency proclamation is enforced by virtue of not having been approved by a resolution of the National Assembly under Section 34 of the Constitution or extended by a resolution of the National Assembly under Section 34 of the Constitution unless the National Assembly has, by a like resolution in such case, affirmed that those regulations shall have effect during that period". So, clearly the National Assembly is a partner of the Executive in this regard and that they should assist the National Assembly Honourable Speaker to understand how it should carry out its powers to avoid delay.

This is why the matter was referred to our committee and within a short period of time the consultation has taken place. Executive and the Legislature working together to try to make sense of what is before us and instead of delaying the process you can hear Members saying 45 days is okay, 30 days. At least horse trading is taking place so that we may be able to make a speedier decision but informed decision Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, just to come closer to conclusion, Section 34 Subsection 2 indicates very clearly about the lapsing of a declaration but what should follow? It says that once this is done, the National Assembly may support by not less than a vote of one-third of the Members support a resolution for extension. Once that is

done before the 7 days, it means the proclamation will continue. Honourable Speaker, that is the best practice this Parliament and the executive should adopt. That in case of any other declaration of public emergency before a day it lapses within 7 days, the matter is brought to us so that we can continue. So that we continue to monitor the regulations and see whether they are reasonable and justifiable in a democratic society.

Honourable Speaker, it goes further and further to show that we can have more and more resolutions to extend. The Executive is given power to revoke under Subsection 3, a declaration it made so nobody can tie the hands of the Executive. It can make a declaration but it can also revoke. That is why Subsection 6 is applicable. It can make declaration, when it revokes it, it does not exist, it can make a declaration again. The National Assembly also can pass a resolution and also revoke its resolution. Both powers are not restricted to ensure that they keep track of the situation. When a particular situation no longer exists, they can revoke the emergency because it is a state of emergency. It is not a state of permanence. It is dictated by a situation and that is what we are trying to understand, Honourable Speaker.

That concluded Honourable Speaker, we will move to our recommendations by the committee. In terms of the regulations, yesterday I went quickly to know the content and I made my test trial by calling some people who are shopkeepers and said Restrictions on Open Market and Shopping Areas Emergency Powers Regulation. What was declared with the proclamation by the President had a different interpretation. Some said mosques are being closed. So many things were there but looking at this particular one, I saw that markets will be opened at 6:00 am and will close 2:00 pm but only those who are selling food items will be there. Non-food items, they will not be allowed to open. Initially, people were going to shopkeepers and closing those shops. But then looking at the regulation, it is saying 100 metres from the market those shops can open up, whether food or non-essential they can open up. When they open, they should make sure that they respect the social distancing. That people who come in to buy should not be more than 2 people and when they sit it should not be less than 2 metres.

Maybe we will change the terminology of social distancing and maybe even say safe spacing of human beings. We must inject certain understanding that this belongs to the people; it is their safety. I tested it with people and told them what they want is to make a safe distance because they are saying that this virus when the person coughs it cannot move that distance it will fall so it will not get to your nostrils, it will not infect you. It is easy to explain that to somebody and the person understands but is that also a fact?

Are we being taught because we are not the experts? Is it the 2 metres that is required? Could it be less? That is the knowledge we need to have in order to make sense of the regulations.

Honourable Speaker, some people in the mosque asked me if people who are selling can keep the 2 metres and still sell for their survival, I, the spiritual leaders who believes in my prayers, should I be stopped from opening my mosque and then meet the same distance so that we know that in this mosque this is the distance that is required? Only this number of people and when they are praying, this is the distance they should keep, why should that be prevented? People are thinking so you explain what is there scientifically based on the recommendation of the health officials but you interpret it in terms of social application in all measures to avoid any form of discrimination. This means that if that is the distance that is required, then in all social engagements, in all theatre, that is the distance that should be maintained and the activities will be able to continue. Therefore, you have uniformity of interpretation of the regulations as well as its application and in that regard no social stress, no confusion will be created and people like us who are National Assembly Members should go to our constituencies to explain to our people why this pandemic must be addressed. We will be given the weapon to be able to do that.

Honourable Speaker, all the regulations should move in that direction. You cannot just command 5 people, 10 people, what does that mean? It means that the health officials must guide the formulation of the regulations because this is an emergency power dealing with a health threat, not political threat. This has never happened in this country, maybe rarely in any part of the world. This is a new element and therefore we need to be given the weapons to be able to handle it so that we will not create any confusion or misunderstanding in terms of what is being done.

Honourable Speaker it goes into essential commodities; it should be well-defined. It should go into public transportation. All the measures that are being taken, if you say this is the space that should met in the transport, we should be able to explain why. The economic consequences must actually be computed and what should be done about it from the angle of the State. Is it an angle of tax rebate for those people who own those vehicles at GRA, if they are properly registered? What do we do to compensate at the level of the State that becomes very important to deal with the problem. People are talking about businesses closing down because even the micro finance institutions will say since you cannot sell why should I give you any credit? Is that what the regulation is saying, that people cannot sell?

It is important then that we go back to basics to understand that the proclamations are made, that the minds of the public should not be prejudiced by adding other elements in that thing that deals with the regulations but then the Act to rely on to come up with the regulation. Actually we are having the Subsidiary Legislation Committee. Really, it is time that we constitute it, we delayed the last time in the composition but we should waste no time in doing that and consulting with the Attorney General so that ultimately what we provide in our Standing Orders we will actually put in the interpretation and wherever they believe that it is better put so that we implement that. So that even subsidiary regulation will come and we speed up the process that there will be no delay. It can be a state matter, whatever, so that we make sure that it carries the spirit of the parent Act and why those powers were given. If we do that, we will not be running into the problem that we are having.

Clearly Honourable Speaker, I would conclude by saying that 90 days is not ideal for the state, it is not ideal for the National Assembly because we do not even know what we are going to do within those 90 days. What we know is that a pandemic is confronting us. Social spacing, safe spacing, health spacing is necessary, cleanliness is necessary and therefore how do we reorganize our whole society to ensure that whatever we do we primarily take into consideration in preventing this illness from spreading because it cannot be cured?

How the regulations help us to do that is what the Attorney General and those who provide the basis of such subsidiary legislation should assist us to do. How to

educate our population is what the health authority should do. How to compute the economic consequences is what is required because the Taskforce must be there with the competence, multi-sectoral, looking at the economic implications. How many drivers are on the road? Take the transport for a whole day; monitor some of them, register them get the statistic of how much they were earning. How much are they earning now by virtue of the situation? Look at the losses, it must be a cost-benefit analysis.

The experts are there that is what should be done and we should make them come and report to us what their findings are. I believe if we do that within 30 days, we will give them the opportunity to do all the tracking that is necessary in all the elements that are significant: talking to religious leaders, talking to everybody to see what their complaints are and how they are conducting themselves, to see whether the space that is given for them to utilize, what is regulation, to implement it, is actually serving the purpose.

How can they respond to it if they are religious leaders? Could everybody who goes to a mosque, make sure that they indicate the number of people who will go to a mosque or church? To ensure that the mosque takes only the space that is required for the 2 metres but that also you take your own mat to pray on it because you can pray on the ground and leave it there and somebody comes and prays and then takes it along. So what do you and how do you disinfect the place? We are creating measures; this is the response. The response is action, changing mind sets so that people know what to do. It is not hoping that just by regulation all problems are solved. What do we do with the regulations to prepare to change mind sets, ways of life and conducts?

Honourable Speaker, that is what we are here to do and for me 30 days is sufficient in the first instance because we can come again to deal with another resolution and move on but within the 30 days we expect a report of all the facts that are required so that we know what is the next step we should take. Thank you very.

HON. SAIKOU MARONG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. Let me also join the rest of my colleagues in thanking the committee i.e. the Standing Committee on Human Rights and

Constitutional Matters on the Motion for the Extension of the Period of State of Public Emergency and also let me thank the Minister for Justice and his team for the Motion. I also want to seize this opportunity to thank the Minister of Health and his entire team for putting up the fight against the Covid-19. Also, to inform this august Assembly that Covid-19 is real. If you look at the statistics, our neighbouring country here in Senegal today they are really suffering. Yesterday I was watching the news, in Spain in 24 hours they have 950 deaths and they have over 800 new cases. So, it shows that Covid-19 is real.

We are dealing with an emergency situation here. We are all in a very funny situation. This august Assembly, we the Members are in a very funny situation, and the Executive as well. Nobody wants this State of Public Emergency to happen.

Honourable Speaker, I think my take in this will be very short and brief because a lot has been said by other Honourable Members. Covid-19 is real and then we are going all out to fight against it. BUT, we have something that we are leaving behind, that we are not doing anything about. If you ask me, I would tell you it is very simple, it is the hunger. We are talking about Covid-19 (corona virus) but very soon if you go to some parts of Kiang, they will start talking about hunger virus.

Honourable Speaker, when you ask people to go and stay at home for a period of 90 days, you should tell them on which basis do you want them to sit at home. It is very important Honourable Speaker. 90 days is too much. It has been cut down to 45 days but to myself even 45 days is too much. I would propose to this august Assembly to cut it to 7 days and give space to the government to come back and tell us the plans that they have. If you just tell a driver that is buying petrol that we just reduced D1 but now you have to reduce your fare from Westfield to Banjul, not only that but if you are carrying 12 passengers now you should be carrying 6 passengers.

We are not fair to that driver. We understand that we are in an emergency situation but also we need to consider these people, not only the drivers but those selling at the market. If you ask them to go and sit at home for a period of 45 days and what the Minister told us is very clear, he said they are going to look into it, they did not come up with any specific plan to tell us we have this amount of money in place and this is how we are going to spend it. This is how we want to tackle this.

Honourable Speaker until that time the Minister of Finance, Minister of Health or whosoever will come before this Assembly and tell us that we have this amount of money in place and this is how we are going to spend this money. Until that time, I am proposing for this august Assembly to approve only 7 days. We give them time for them to go back and do a study. Yesterday we assigned our committee here. They were here up to 3:00 am in the morning. Let the Executive also go back and follow the same steps.

Honourable Speaker, we are in a very serious situation. We know Covid-19 is serious and deadly but we cannot also forget that we have our people that we need to support. You know stress alone is something else. When a 90-day emergency period was declared, each and every member of this august Assembly has been called by 1 or 2 people telling them why are you guys approving a state of emergency for us? The 90-day period is too much. What they are complaining Honourable Speaker, is true. They are right. What I expect from the Executive even before tabling that motion of a public emergency, the first thing they should do is that they should come up with measures that they are going to put in place before public emergency. I think that should be the first step that the government should take.

Tell us, those people selling at the market, I have said this and I will repeat it again, those that I am representing i.e. Latrikunda Sabiji constituency we do not have farms. The only farm that we have is our market. This is where those women are having their daily food. If you ask them to go and sit at home for 7 days. The 7 days have elapsed, these people are at home. We are extending it to 45 days, let us calculate 45 days plus 7 days, that is how many days? This is why I am proposing to this august Assembly please let us peg it as 7 days. We have the power to come back and extend it, if the need arises. Psychologically, if you tell people 45 days, you are going to affect their lives. I am just appealing to this august Assembly once again to peg it at 7 days. I think 7 days is enough. If our committee is assigned a job and they were here yesterday till 3:00 am in the morning, I see no reason why the Executive cannot also go back within the period of 7 days and then report back to us.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Finance was very clear when they talked about it. What he said was that they are going to look at it. We understand,

that is fine. If you look at the transportation area as I said before, they have reduced the fares and right now everybody is crying. We know the purpose of doing this is to isolate people in one place. That means to control the movement of the people from one place to the other but the basic commodities that are rice, oil, and stuff like that when people do not have it in their market, you cannot implement these. If I do not have what to eat and you expect me to stay at my house, do you think I am going to stay there? No, I will not, I will go out! What I will say is, look let me be arrested but I will go out and look for something for my family to eat. Yesterday night I had series of calls and what some people are telling me is "If you people approve this, just be ready that we are coming for our bag of rice." This is what they are saying and then if you just look at it, I think what they are saying is true. Let the Executive go back. We give them a period of 7 days to look at this emergency. The motion should come up with the measures that this is what they have for their citizens, that is important.

Honourable Speaker, let me use this opportunity also to thank all the Gambians that are really supporting the needy people in this country. We have been seeing a lot of active people that are giving out rice, oil and other items. They are doing great but Honourable Speaker as some Honourable Members said here let us also understand that if I have a house and I am renting it out, you expect me to say that for this period of the time you do not pay because of the Covid 19. How do you expect me to survive? How will I feed my family? It is also very important.

I think we are in a very difficult situation right now but I think it is the government that should come to the rescue of the citizen this time around. Please, Honourable Members, let us peg it at 7 days. Let the Executive go back and work on that 7 days and come back and report to us. If there is a need to extend, then we can extend from 7 days. I thank you all.

HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor to speak on the report from our committee and also the Motion from the Minister for Justice.

However, before I start Honourable Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to salute the entire health workers in this country for the sacrifices that they are

actually making. They are the frontline people and they have families behind and they are catering for the needy Gambians in this country. I think what we need basically is to commend them, to give them a pat on back, especially the Minister of Health who has been so busy to make sure that everything is under control. I want to thank him and give a salute to all the health officials in this country, including the people from the Ministry and the MRC and other officials also, who have been really very helpful to ensure that we bring everything under control. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister.

To continue Honourable Speaker, I think we need to maybe differentiate certain things. State of public emergency whether is 50 days, 100 days, 30 days or 120 days, the most fundamental thing people need to understand is the regulations that go with them. How do these regulations actually affect the population of this country? What needs to be done? We have very vulnerable people in this country so really, for me, essentially it is not about 30 days, 60 days or 90 days but the regulations that accompany them that affect the lives and livelihood of the people of this country. I think those are the most fundamental things that we really have to look at.

Honourable Speaker if you look at the Motion from the Minister, he clearly indicated the rationale behind him asking for 90 days. If I may read, he said "A 90-day extension of the period of state of emergency will allow the government to do just that with proper planning and organization for the implementation of the immediate, medium and long term preventive and precautionary measures not only to save life but also to balance the competing political, social and economic interests expected in such times of national and global crisis".

Honourable Speaker, there is no debate about the crisis that this country is undergoing at this point. There is no debate about the situation the entire world is actually going through as far as this pandemic is actually concerned. That is the reason why the Minister is coming here to ask for 90 days so that they can do proper planning. This is an emergency situation, it is not business as usual, we must understand. In extra-ordinary circumstances Honourable Speaker, I think there is a need for us to critically look at this request. I want to also thank the committee for the report they have actually given to us today. If you look at the report that is

presented to us Honourable Speaker, they have actually made several recommendations. I really want to thank them for taking the time to make certain recommendation to us.

However, one of the recommendations basically is instead of agreeing to 90 days, they are recommending 45 days. I wanted them to give me really, what is the difference? Can I have something that would inform me that the 45 days you recommending is actually okay. I just want to have something because the Minister came, we reasoned for the 90 days but the committee when I go through their report actually I have not seen any conclusive evidence that tells me it should be from 90 to 45 days or 7 days as some people are asking. Can we have something that would guide me? I really need to have something that would guide me to ensure that 45 days is okay, 30 days, 10 days or 7 days as alluded earlier by the Member for Latrikunda Sabiji. I want to have something because if the Minister came with 90 days and he gave reasons why he needs that, if you are going to tell me to go for 45 days, I expect the same thing from you. Give me something that will guide me. I want to be guided essentially.

Honourable Speaker, to continue further, I think it is important to understand that if we have a public emergency without a regulation essentially you do not have anything. The regulation is going to guide what the Executive is going to do. It is going to guide what the other institutions of government are actually going to do. So the regulations are actually the most important thing we really have to consider, knowing the conditions of the country.

Again, we have over 30% of our population that is living below the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day. More than 30% of our population actually depend on that. Essentially, it is not about people that receive monthly salaries but it must be about people that depend on markets for daily survival. The market women that go to the market, the shopkeepers that open on a daily basis where their earnings depend on who comes in and goes out on a daily basis. Those are the people that we really need to consider and they are really very vulnerable in society. It should not be about me getting my monthly salary but the market women. When you pass by Serekunda market on a daily basis, Latrikunda, Old Yundum, Farafenni and Basse, even those in Panchang that actually go to weekly Lumos that are actually

banned, they are affected. What do we do for them? These are the kind of things we really need to be discussing with the Minister of Finance and also with the Minister of Interior because the coming in and out of this country I think is one of the most dangerous things we have. Like my district, actually from the beginning of the district to the end of Upper Saloum, we have borders with Senegal.

We have 2 Police Posts and none of them has a Motor bicycle. How do you expect those people to actually help to guard the border? How are they going to do that when you are talking about a stretch of over 50 kilometres? No Motorcycle, no motor vehicle in that area and you know our neighbours, you know what is actually happening there. At the borders, you know people come in and out. Where I live, the next 300 metres is Senegal. My step-mother, my mother's sister actually lives 300 metres or 400 metres from where we are. Really it is difficult to say those people cannot come into The Gambia but at least let us have some form of security to ensure that people that are going in and out we know who they are and the preventive measures that the Ministry actually recommended. I think it is very important that we have some answers to those things.

Honourable Speaker, on this Motion, I really want to have something from the Minister of Finance in terms of the financial impact. He came here earlier and told us that probably they expect to lose around D1 billion if this thing goes beyond 3 months. I wanted to have an update on the current situation because the month has ended. We wanted to know exactly how did the Gambia Revenue Authority do for the last month? What kind of collection and how were they impacted? Also, some of the things they expect to come into the country. Really, I wanted to know the strategy that the Ministry of Finance actually has in terms of the economic strategy and also what they have for the SMEs.

The SMEs are shakers and the breakers of this economy and I have mentioned this several times. We also have the service industry likely tourism, which is part of it and they control over 50% of the GDP of this country. Now the tourism industry is in fact almost completely closed down. What are we going to do for those people? What strategy does the government actually have in terms of reviving or supporting those areas? I wanted to really know that so that I can make informed decisions?

We are also told that the President has allocated almost D500 million to fight this pandemic. I really want to know exactly where exactly this money is going to come from and it is only meant for the Minister of Health or it is mean for a national fight in terms of the Ministry for Interior, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Health, I wanted to know so that I can make an informed decision.

We are also told about the World Bank, the grant of \$10 million that has been approved. I really want to know exactly where are we targeting what exactly are we going to use that for. All these are going to help us to determine whether we need 30days, 60 days or 100 days as a state of public emergency. Those questions are still unanswered. Perhaps during the course of the discussions, we want to know some more information about those areas.

Honourable Speaker, to continue further, I think it is indeed one area that we really want to mention about this Motion from the Minister. Effective communication is actually key in emergency situations but it looks like there is lot of misunderstanding about the people that are on the streets trying to enforce these regulations. Some of them when you talk to them, what they tell you and what the regulations actually say are two different things. There needs to be a comprehensive communication strategy from the government just to ensure that everybody that is actually given the mandate to enforce you know exactly what you need to enforce. Without that, there will be lot of pandemonium and there will be lot of unnecessary arrest or unnecessary disturbances around the country. We do not need that at this point in time. Let us have a very clear strategy. The people that are enforcing the law must understand it to the letter.

Yesterday, I had a lot of calls from around the Serekunda market area. Some of my people are there, they are away from the market more than 200 metres and they were asked to shut down. They called me and I said no the regulation does not say that. We went back and forth so I have referred them to go to the nearest Police Station and then make a report so that you can talk to them so that you can understand but the regulation does not say that. They are above 200 metres from the market itself so essentially, we need to have a very clear understanding about those people that are enforcing the law and what the law says. People need to be sensitized on what actually it is so that they can understand. The only thing that I

request from them is to ensure that they have those cleaning materials in front of their shops and to ensure that they do not have more than 2 people at any particular time in their shops. That is exactly where I can stop, the next day I have to go. I can understand that even those that are enforcing it really do not understand it. We need to have a very clear communication strategy to understand that we are all on the same page.

Honourable Speaker, to conclude, I think there is lot of misinformation that is going on social media. A lot of misinformation about Covid-19 that we can help. I am part of a lot of WhatsApp groups in my area but the recommendation I made to them is to only listen to the information from the Minister of Health, Medical Research Council and WHO. Outside that, please disregard any other information because if you see people sending lot of information on social media telling that this is good, no this is bad, these are not coming from the health officials. We have a Ministry of Health that we depend on. Let us listen to them and let us transmit the information they are telling us. Let us see what MRC and WHO are telling us and ensure that our people understand. Anything else, please we put it on the backburner.

And I suggest to all our people here present today, any information that is inconsistent with what the Minister is telling us or what MRC or WHO tells us, I think these are things we really need to discard. Let us not confuse the population, let us give encouragement to them to understand that we are in an extra-ordinary situation and it is no longer business as usual. We need to sacrifice, everybody must sacrifice.

Coming to the recommendations Honourable Speaker, I have one observation to the committee about the 45-day recommendation they made. I do understand from the schedule from the Table Office that we are going to end the session *sine die* by next week Monday if I am correct. Now what that means is if we agree on the 45 days, God forbid, and we are needed again it means what we can summon is Extra-Ordinary Session. Extra-Ordinary Session, there is a financial impact on that. It is going to cost the State over D1.2 million to have an extra-ordinary session. I was thinking if they are going to make a recommendation about 45 days, have they considered also making a recommendation for us to forfeit that particular allowance that is paid during extra-ordinary sessions. I am just asking whether they actually

thought about that because I am just asking them whether they have really thought about that because if you look at the total if you call on for Extra-Ordinary Session we know D20,000 by 58 we know it is almost D1.2 million will be expended on that alone and that could mean we can use that somewhere else. I want to see if they also can make their recommendation to the population in case, God forbid, I am not praying for us to comeback after 45 days or so depending on whatever we agree. I am just saying in case that actually happens we can also agree on one thing that is to actually help to minimize the expenditure that we may incur during this kind of sessions.

On that note Madam Speaker, I want to thank you and also thank again the entire health workers of this country for the tremendous service they are doing to this nation.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member and thank you Honourable Members as well for your interventions. We still have quite a lot on the list we still have more interventions as you all know and is getting to 3 o'clock. I am suggesting, if we all agree, we go for a short break and reconvene to complete the exercise.

The House stands suspended till 3:30

THE HOUSE RESUMES

HON. AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the flow. I just wish to take part in this debate but first to all I wish to thank all Honourable Members who took time to go to their constituencies and sensitize their people on this Covid-19. Actually, there are lot of misinformation but the reality is that we are faced with a situation that is a global problem and The Gambia is no exception so we have to take measures. What we are debating here today is the issue of the State of Public Emergency in order to put in regulations or measures that will help the government and also the entire Gambians to contain the spread of the Covid-19.

Honourable Speaker, the Executive has done their part in making the proclamation and now it is left to us to approve the number of days that we wish for this to be in effect. What is left on the side of the Executive that is very fundamental, and that has been highlighted by many speakers before me is the issue of having a plan in

order to help sustain people. If you put in measures or regulations to restrict certain rights of people's movement here and there all of which are geared towards containing the spread of Covid-19, definitely you should have measures also to support them where the need arises. So, Madam Speaker on that note, I wish to associate myself with the previous speakers to call on the government, that is the Executive, to come up with measures with which they will be able to help our people or assist in any form during these difficult times.

Madam Speaker, one thing I will appeal to the entire Gambians is that let us adhere to the health regulations provided by WHO and also our own Ministry of Health. The only thing that we can do as a nation for now is to come up with measures whether we like it or not to make sure that any single case that is identified here does not have the opportunity to be transmitted to another person. Once we relax in that, there is no way we will be able to contain the virus. Though it is very contagious but not fatal, let us remember that we are living in a population where there are many people who have underlying health problems. There are many people whose immune system have been compromised. Definitely we have to be careful and we have to adhere to all measures provided by WHO and Ministry of Health in order to contain this virus.

Madam Speaker on the other side, what we are talking about here is not about being in a complete state of emergency for 90 days or so. How I see it is like giving the opportunity to the Executive to put in regulations here and there, regulations which should be practical. Actually, if you tell people not to do some public gatherings, not to be congested in vehicles, not to be having these "Bantabas", "Attaya" and the likes, definitely you have to monitor that to make sure that these things are not happening, not pronouncing it and stopping there. It is unfortunate that some of us, especially within the urban areas and even at the rural areas, are not taking this thing seriously. You do not know who is infected or who is not infected because according to what we learn from the disease you can have the disease without manifesting any signs and symptoms up to 14 days. Who knows if you are with it and you are among us the National Assembly Members here or among the members of the public. You might be transmitting it to others without knowing. Definitely, we have to take all these measures very seriously to protect all

the Gambians, to protect everybody from having this. It is not a difficult thing on one side though it is difficult on the other side because if you ask me to stay at home and then I have my corner shop at the market side where I have my daily fish money, definitely it is going to be a challenge on me and my entire household. That is why definitely the government needs to come up in that aspect.

Madam Speaker if you look at the countries that are most affected, countries like USA, Italy, Spain, you will not compare their health system to ours. They have one of the best public health systems in the world but until today, some of them are struggling with this. What happened is that when this was happening in China, some of these European countries and others were just sitting without putting in any measures. When it hits them, everybody was infected. They were doing everything as normal: going to bars, going to nightclubs, infecting one another. Before they realized it, almost dozens of people were infected, thousands and millions now. So definitely, as a country, we need to put these measures right now. To me it is a bit late. We have to put these measures to make sure that we contain people. It is difficult but let us also come up with practical measures to make sure that everybody lives happily.

Honestly, I think there is no need like saying this should go for 90 days or 30 days. The laws are here, there are people like the Attorney General and others who are very much *au fait* with the Constitution and also the laws of The Gambia. The President can make proclamation and then it lasts for 7 days if we are in session. Today we are in session and we are trying to extend it to 90 days. If we see that it is too much, let us look at a very reasonable time and peg it there. I know we are going to adjourn sine die then after that if still the condition persists, which I do not pray for, they can also come up with another proclamation and maybe that one will last for 21 days because we will not be in session, if that is possible. If that is not also possible, the best option that I will go with is let us go for 90 days which can be revoked at any time by Parliament and also by the President revoking his proclamation. These are both ways that we can consider so I think it is not very much essential for us to be talking about these days. Let us see what we can do as a Parliament and come into conclusion in that aspect.

Madam Speaker going to the report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights, definitely I just wish to thank you all because this was brought here yesterday and you had to stay and then look at it critically and also advise us. You based your advice on these four important points which were highlighted as summary of issues which we have all gone through. Madam Speaker going through the recommendations that they have brought forward here, if I may read the last recommendation, that is number 5, which reads: "As the Committee advised the Minister of Justice to clarify to the Assembly the reason that led to the declaration of the second proclamation and the non-applicability of the 21-day duration of the first proclamation and then the National Assembly was in session". I think I do not see this as a recommendation because it is already captured in your report. The explanation of all this is captured in your report already. I will just propose it to be removed as a recommendation because if you go through the report from the introduction to the body these explanations are definitely captured in the report so it is not necessary to put it here.

Madam Speaker going further, I just wish to clarify certain issues. If you talk about a confirmed case, you know that as a country currently we have 4 confirmed cases. These are cases which have undergone some laboratory tests and the test result is positive. That is what we refer to as confirmed case. We should be mindful before we keep on mixing these terminologies here and there.

If you say a suspected case, that is somebody that is showing at least one of the signs and symptoms of the disease like coughing, fever, you know it better than me so we should be careful before we keep on mixing it here and there. It is also important to differentiate between what we call isolation centres because I heard some saying hospital having isolation centres and some quarantine centres. It is important for you to differentiate between these two. If you say an isolation centre this is the place where you have people that have already been confirmed with the disease, laboratory test confirmed positive, that is where they are kept. If you say a quarantine centre, if they suspected that I manifest some of the signs I can be taken there, put at one place so that they can keep monitoring me, possibly to show some of the signs and symptoms of the disease. That is what we call quarantine centres.

Definitely, it is important that we differentiate between these two before we misinform the people.

Madam Speaker, the last but not the least, is about information and also sensitization. I was in the provinces but some of the people if you talk to them about this Covid-19 disease they will tend to take it as a joke. I believe we are not doing much in telling people what actually Covid-19 is. I have a stake in it, you have stake in it, somebody has a stake in it, as far as I am aware. It is my responsibility to go and tell people about Covid-19. It is a reality; it is not a joke. It is not about global politics or whatever and I think the Ministry of Information should definitely step in and help us contain or control some of these Social Media messages. I know it is going to be difficult but there are so many misleading messages regarding this. These are things which are not helping at all. We are fighting a global enemy and it needs the effort of everybody. We should not be doing this positive thing here and there somebody just sit at a corner you eat until you are okay you are sending audios trying to bring some confusion here and there. HONESTLY, Minister of Information and also the Minister of Justice you definitely need to help us with this.

We will see how best we can counter some of this misinformation about this Covid-19 because I might hear it and I know the fact, somebody might hear it he does not know the fact; he tends to go alongside with those people. Unfortunately, you do not know how you are going to be infected along the sides because if you take something as a joke definitely you would not take it as something serious. You would not adhere to any health advice regarding that.

Definitely, it is important we use the opportunity of the TVs available, the radios, all of them and share the same message from WHO to the Ministry of Health, to the last person. Whosoever is sharing knowledge about this Covid-19, we should all speak the same language honestly. On the broader side, I have started to encourage my colleagues (NAMs) for us to go back to our constituencies again and continue on the day-to-day sensitization of our people. It is important and it is definitely helping. Madam Speaker on that note, I do not wish to go back to what people have said already. I just beg to take my seat, thank you very much.

HON. MUHAMMAD NDOW [BANJUL CENTRAL]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. Madam Speaker, I will like to thank the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters for the job well done because they have given us good recommendations and observations that I believe will help us or guide us to do justice to this Motion.

Madam Speaker, I do not have any objection in supporting this state of emergency but according to some of their recommendations, I will want the government to adhere to or implement, that is observation number 23, Essential Commodities Emergency Powers Regulations 2020 which reads: "The committee was of the opinion that commercial businesses should not be totally banned but rather the regulation should only restrict their closing and opening times". I want the government to implement this. The second one is the fourth recommendation which reads: "The Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs and the relevant line Ministries example: Health, Trade, Tourism, Transportation, Interior, etc. to work with the Attorney General and Minister for Justice to come up with compensatory mechanism to provide some relief packages to the most vulnerable during the time of restrictions". These recommendations and observations are very important for the government to look into.

Madam Speaker, people should believe that Covid-19 is real and we have to make a state of emergency at the moment, it is very important. If you look at Sierra Leone at the moment, they have declared one-year state of emergency because they know the catastrophe that Ebola did in 2014 to their people. Thousands of people died because of Ebola. People in Sierra Leone or in the neighbouring countries did not believe that Ebola was existing or was real. People were saying that it is not true. WHO advised people to adhere to their guidelines but people did not care. Even if they have the dead body of an Ebola victim, they will say that they must wash the dead body. They will not stop shaking hand with each other. This was why the pandemic killed thousands of people in Sierra Leone. In The Gambia here we are doing the same thing, we are not adhering to the guidelines of WHO.

People are going to the extent of saying that God will punish all those who are in support of this, who are closing the praying places. I think it is better for them to read and understand the Scriptures or their religious books. This is something real

but some people do even come and force you to shake hands with them. People are still gathering, drinking Attaya; 10 people drinking from 2 cups of Attaya. People are still going to football fields, playing, social gatherings. We are ignoring these things and it is very serious. We have to do sensitization, 100% sensitization and 100% enforcement which will make the state of emergency useful. If not, it will not be useful. It will be better for us not to do it. Sensitisation and enforcement should be 100%. We should learn from what catastrophes like this did to some countries. This is deadlier than Ebola and The Gambia cannot contain this so we have to take the right and correct measures to ensure that the state of emergency will be very useful and will help the population of The Gambia.

Madam Speaker, I believe we have different opinions about the number of days, weeks and months and the like. I believe that we can still approve the 90 days and then if we see that things are normal we then revoke it. We have the powers to do it. It is better than going and coming again. We can do it to make sure that this thing will not disturb us because if it happens to affect so many people here it will be a catastrophe in The Gambia. The Western people who have the financial muscle, the facility and the amenities cannot contain this disease. If you watch television, you look at the Social Media you will see in Western countries like America and Italy, all hospitals are full with patients. 800 people or 900 people dying every day. Do we have those hospitals here? There are some constituencies that do not even have a health centre talk less of a hospital. I am appealing to government to take the necessary steps and adhere to the recommendations and observations of the committee. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HON. MUSA AMUL NYASSI [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I believe my intervention here would be very short because I virtually do not have anything that is outside what has been said. I just want to remind myself, Members and the general public that we are in a very crucial moment that need critical thinking to enable us to make an informed decision. Therefore, let us heed the advice that are being given to by the medical personnel.

That being said, Madam Speaker, I equally want to commend the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters because looking at the time they took to review this Motion and the time they left the Parliament yesterday, it

shows that they are really committed and have interest and passion on what they were doing. If not, they could have shelved it and said we are tired and we are going to retire but that was not what they did. Instead, they continued working. I was equally informed that this morning they were here to re-converge to review the write-up to ensure the report captures all that was discussed.

Madam Speaker, I did engage some health personnel and what they told me is like The Gambia we are in the peak period. Being in the peak period, then it means there should be no room for complacency. Each time we talk, we say only 4 cases but 4 cases looking at the population of our country is a huge number and what can we do to ensure that the transmission actually is controlled? A lot of information was shared from the Ministry to the Parliamentarians and then we were trying to use this information to convey it during our engagements with our various constituencies, with our electorates at the constituencies.

Madam Speaker what I want to say is, there are few recommendations from the committee I guess the report is with the Attorney General together with the Minister of Health. General observations on page 4 bullet point 16 and 17 and page 5 number 18; again page 5 number 20. These are key issues that I really have concern about and I would definitely be interested if during the response to the concerns raised either the Attorney General or the Minister of Health can shed light on the level of preparedness of the government in implementing the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters.

To wrap it up Madam Speaker, there is room for, if need be which we do not pray for, extension of the period that we may approve and as a result I want to join former colleagues who are advocating for the one-month period and if need be, the extension can be given. Of course, none of us here is praying for a period of one month or even one week for us to go beyond it that is not our wish but the funniest thing is that it is a pandemic that the world over there is no cure. There is no vaccine; there is no medicine. That is why we have to be cognisant of that fact but thank God that the regulations like other colleagues have cited I think there is need for the regulations to be properly reviewed such that any other person or people that will be going out to sensitize the populace would be able to send the right

message because there was confusion, that we must all agree, based on how people understand what the regulations are saying. Interestingly enough, those who were even enforcing it were not *au fait* with the language of the regulations. It is very important that I want to appeal to the Attorney General that communities like ours, there are certain remote communities within our area that is even difficult to listen to the radio talk less of TV. Please exploit all source of information dissemination in the country. That way, the entire country will be at the same wavelength in terms of understanding what is actually going on. Madam Speaker on that note, I beg to take my seat.

HON. MAJANKO SAMUSA [NOMINATED]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor to associate myself with my colleagues. Madam Speaker, a lot has been said. I think this time I will be very brief. Madam Speaker, I must first of all thank the Right Honourable Minister of Health. I must thank him and his team for the good job that they are doing. Since this crisis came to our knowing, they took it upon themselves. This is what is required by an honest, a valid citizen. This is what is expected. When this thing happened the Honourable Minister tirelessly, with his people, then well before even they were promised about the funds, they were managing doing their best to see how they are going to control the borders and other mechanisms to take place.

Madam Speaker, that is why I said I must first of all thank him and continue the contribution for the help he has been giving, efforts he makes for this honourable House or Parliamentarians to be seen in the field which is welcomed by their electorates. Though the resource that was delivered to them is not enough at that time, yet still it is a very good gesture as far as the electorates are concerned.

Going further Madam Speaker, when you come to the state of emergency, as far as I am concerned I have no problem even if the President asks for one-year state of emergency. I should have, in my view Madam Speaker, one-year state of emergency.

Madam Speaker what is happening in the world we are seeing but where it is more serious there are thousands and hundreds of thousands of kilometres away from The Gambia. This is why people are querying about 90 days. Woe betide us, had it

been it is in Mali, even if the President says 10-year state of emergency people will welcome it. Nobody will say, in this august House, no to it. We are seeing what is happening at a distance of hundreds of thousands of kilometres. People are dying still the world did not come across with the medication to solve this problem. That is why people are saying 90 days is too much because you have hundreds of thousands of kilometres.

The conditions of our relatives, sons and brothers who are living in Diaspora, if you listen to what they are encountering sometimes I find it very difficult sometimes even to have my food. How many of my sons, daughters, brothers and nephews are in the Diaspora? They are lost in the houses. If one can come to this august House in my view, challenging the 90 days, people want to play with the gallery. They want to make it a political issue Madam Speaker. This is beyond that. This involves lives. Where I am, I am thinking of my family. I cannot lay hands on them and I know the condition that I cannot give them any help other than to pray.

When issues like this come to the country, to this august House at least we should be unanimous. We should make it a matter of urgency. This problem should have been solved since yesterday without involving any political hypocrisy. This is our problem Madam Speaker but thank God since the majority agreed the matter was referred to the relevant committee and they came up with a proposal of 45 days it is still welcome but we have to be very mindful. It is a country less than 2 million our neighbours have almost 40 to 50 million. They are doing everything every second you open all the television stations, all the radio stations, no other programs, no dancing. They continue on advertisements and programs of sensitization on this matter. Sensitizing people so that people will be very mindful, they will be very careful of what to avoid. Let us copy, let us emulate our neighbours rather than trying to bring issues because I cannot understand what hidden agenda the government has as far as this issue is concerned. Madam Speaker, what hidden agenda? I do not think people even understand what they mean by hidden agenda. The President has approved with his Executive (the Cabinet) half a million announced over the radio everybody heard it Madam Speaker. Processes are going on the very Parliamentarians were given materials to distribute in their

constituencies, what is hidden? Where does that money come from Madam Speaker, other than the amount approved?

Madam Speaker, as I said I will be brief but these are the issues/points. I am just almost at the end of my deliberations. The other point Madam Speaker, people are talking about the sensitization. I share my view with them. The government now should make it very serious. At least the sensitization should be very active really. Though the public they were afraid, they were scared when they heard it is 90 but is how it was interpreted to them. I have seen state of emergency in this country in 1981 abortive coup. In 1981 when Sir Dawda Jawara was in exile. In 1981, I witnessed that Honourable Speaker. Who then in the Assembly complained or challenged it? It was indefinite until the time the coup failed and he came back to this country. The coup makers suspended the Constitution and put the country into state of emergency and curfew in 1981, it is 39 years now. How many of the Parliamentarians can say something about that, Madam Speaker? How many, only few out of 58.

In 1994 it came again, when the junta came to power, made a coup and a curfew, we have witnessed those things. Gambia, it is unfortunate, every generation we encounter the state of emergency but this is more serious than any of these two because currently we know what is happening in the world. Is not only Gambia to declare state of emergency, but virtually wherever there is a case of Corona Virus a state of emergency has been declared. Even in some countries before they have a case, like Sierra Leone, they declare one-year state of emergency. People should be very current, we have to be current watching the television and listening to radio particularly National Assembly Members. Issues like this, when you are current, you will be able to know what is happening in the world other than your country. These are all happening, Madam Speaker. I witnessed all these things here but this one cannot be compared with 1981 and 1984 state of emergency.

As I said before, we have seen people going in thousands everyday so it is a cause for concern. On that note Madam Speaker, I thank all Parliamentarians, all those who contributed before me we all share the same view. Let the Honourable Minister of Health redouble his effort in sensitizing people. He and his team to make sure that the borders are controlled. Gambia is very lucky, Madam Speaker, a country

within a country. That is why our rate of cases is lower than Senegal. That is why people are laughing, jumping here and there as I said when the case of about hundreds and hundreds of thousands of kilometres away, Madam Speaker. On that note Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

HON. MOMODOU S. CEESAY [JANJANBUREH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. Madam Speaker, I want to first of all join my former colleagues in thanking the Standing Committee for coming up with a very brilliant report that is fairly and squarely balanced. You looked at the subject or the assignment properly and then you came up with this report. So I join my colleagues in thanking you for that.

Madam Speaker, the debate here today is on the request from the Executive to extend the period from 7 days that is ending today to 90 days. I do not think there is anybody here who would deny that there is a need for extension. The argument would be more on how long do we need to extend it for and I think that the debate is more based on that rather than not accepting the extension.

Madam Speaker, the committee came up with a recommendation for 45 days. I was initially with the opinion that we could have extended it by 21 days by the end of which the Ministry of Health would have come up with a proposal but since the committee came over with 45 days, I accept that. I know the Ministry of Health is giving daily briefing but by the end of every 14 days, I think there is a need to have a comprehensive list or a comprehensive report of the situation in the country. We have been told that today 41 people who were quarantined would be out of quarantine. That is all we were told. We have a 100 and some 70 or so that were under quarantine and the rest in the next 14 days will be out of the quarantine zone if they are found not to have the virus. Therefore, there is a need in the next 14 days to have a comprehensive list from Ministry of Health for the situation of the country, up to that time would we have suspect how many will be, God forbid, those who are positive. There is that need for that report.

Madam Speaker, on the question of these non-essential commodities, yesterday I had a visitor in my house who happens to have a place on the street where he sells the second-hand clothing and he told me you guys are going to the National

Assembly tomorrow for this extension. My business is termed as non-essential commodity. Well, to other people, it maybe but to me who sells this second-hand clothing, this is where I feed my family. Every day when I come here before midday when I sell one, two or three things, I send it to my wife to come to the market to come and cook. How or where would you put us? I cannot answer that question. I told him probably you look at the television today there will be a debate. People would come with suggestions and at the end of the day we will come up with a recommendation for the Executive whether it is going to be 90 days, 1 week or 2 weeks.

Madam Speaker, I have a feeling and a lot of other Members have expressed it here that there is a need for certain members of the communities, they are to be compensated. Somebody like that second-hand clothing seller who is paying his tax, I asked him do you pay your tax? He said yes and at the end of every 3 months he goes to GRA for them to assess him and he pays. So, to be able to get those type of people for compensation is very easy because if you go to GRA you should be able to get their figures, names and business.

Madam Speaker on the side of the emergency, on this issue, like I said, nobody here is with the opinion that we should not increase but to be really honest what do we do when we increase this duration to 90 days and how are those people going to be affected? He said for the last 10 days he had to go from one compound to another to be able to get 50 dalasis or 75 dalasis for his family. That was for 10 days, if this is increased to 90 days, that is going to be disaster for him. I think Honourable Minister, there is a lot of misunderstanding that needs clarification because if you do not inform people you leave them to speculate and there is a lot of speculations going on.

The President has given D500 million. This morning I saw it on the papers that \$10 million Dollars is given by WHO. Are these the same amount? If they are not, we are talking of a billion Dalasi. If D500 million is given to Ministry of Health, how is that money going to be spent? I think we need to know that. We need to know whether the D500 million plus the \$10 million from WHO are the same or they are different? Somebody told me that the \$10 million when you convert it to Gambian Dalasi is

D500 million, so is it the same and I said no I do not know. I do not want to pre-empt so I will ask the Minister to clarify for us.

Number two, when the Minister of Finance came here during our last sitting he explained that the Ministry of Health requested D6 million initially from them and they gave them only 4 million. Is this 500 million exclusive of that D4 million or not? This is not clarified so like I said, if these things are not known to people, you leave them to speculate and government needs to come up to explain this to people. I think the D500 million given to Ministry of Health before they start spending from it, it has to be very clear that this and this is what we need.

Again rumours had it, somebody said it here, that majority of that money is going into allowance payments. Whether it is true or not, that is left for us to know and the only way we can know this is when we have a thorough breakdown of what the Ministry of Health needs to do with the 500 million or the one billion that is already at hand.

Madam Speaker, for transparency sake, I am going with the opinion that we increase the extension to 45 days but hopefully before the end of probably next two weeks when the Ministry of Health is to give us a thorough breakdown of what and what they would need to buy from this 500 million or one billion, we need to know the situation. In the event in the next two weeks those under quarantine are found to be negative, what is going to happen? Do we have to come back? The Ministry of Health should tell us what would happen then. This was why I was saying probably if suggestions were to be taken other than that of the Standing Orders, I would have gone in for 21 days so that before the end of the 21 days the Ministry of Health would have given us a report of the remaining people that are quarantined a general report on the country situation as at then.

The Minister himself is here so I would want to know the D500 million declared at Cabinet level, how this is going to be used by Ministry of Health and whether the \$10 million from WHO is part of it? So on that note, I beg to take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: Please, Honourable Members of the Select Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters, I think it is only fair to allow other Honourable Members to make their interventions before you come last, thank you.

HON. ALHAGI S.B SILLAH [NIANI]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. I also want to join my colleagues to thank the Health Committee first. The Chairman and his team for what they have been assisting us and the Chairman also was really standing on his toes to make sure that we were all equipped to go to the constituencies. So thank you very much. Secondly, I will also thank the Standing Committee for Human Rights and Constitutional Matters for the report they have presented to us.

I do not think I need to say much but just to add my voice and to say to this august gathering that this sensitization is very timely and it was very useful as far as I am concerned. I went round just this past 4 or 5 days and I think it was at least a bit successful and it was awareness creation because I have already covered most of my villages which is almost about 76 villages in my constituency. I think it is only 3 villages which I was not able to reach due to the breakdown of my vehicle. During this sensitization, I have also gathered a lot of information which I would like to share with you people.

First of all, though some people are aware but some people do not believe that it is a real pandemic. I normally explain to them like you all know Wassu. On Mondays, everybody is in Wassu from my constituency and other parts of the country. What I normally tell them is today is Monday, where are we now? Everybody is indoors so this is a clear indication that the reason you are staying indoors is because of this virus. I think what is most important is to stay at home, wash your hands clean. And the children, make sure they wash their hands clean. Washing their hands clean also, you cannot just tell them. Though I did my initiative because maybe the detergent I have cannot serve all but I made sure that I bought a lot of soap. Any village I go to, I give them two or three bars for a sample and for them to start with that.

That has created some initiative from me which I did and which I am supposed to do. As you all know here, if we come on an adjournment debate, we normally discuss a lot about our constituencies.

As I said here before, my area is a very porous area. Most of the villages, almost about 20 to 30 villages, are all at the border. Anytime we say wash your hands what

they normally ask me is where is water because most of my area do not have access to water. In fact, I join with some of the health personnel at Kuntaur Health Centre. They really joined me and appreciated joining with me for sensitization. They have also encountered most of those communities who were claiming for water. In fact, instead of staying at home they had to go to the border to their neighbouring village which in Senegal to find water. How can you be able to make them stay?

HON. FAKEBBA NL COLLEY [KIANG WEST]: During these 7 days it was a tough time for the people of Kiang because the drivers are not ready to ply the road with a fare of D105. To my disappointment today, I went through the tariff. I realised that the D105 is being reduced to D85. Drivers are not able to accept D105, how can they accept D85?

At this time of the year the people of Kiang West are engaged in harvesting their horticultural produce. As early as three o'clock in the morning they will join those few vehicles that ply the road from Kiang West to Brikama or Serekunda with their products to come and sell. Now that the transport fare is reduced from D105 to D85, the drivers are not ready to move anymore. It means there is going to be a standstill in the area which means that the drivers are not moving and if the drivers do not move it means the products of those gardens will just perish because there are no storage facilities for those people in the area.

Away from that now, I come to education. I was asked by some students that they were told that some students are learning lessons from the television and radios. I said yes I heard about that. What they are complaining is that they are not accessing that facility because there are few radios and no television. There is no electricity so if they are told that D35 million Dalasis is given to the education department to facilitate without them enjoying it is another thing. I told them that if I go I will find out. Now that the Minister of Finance is here, I think they will try to do something so that our children who are outside and have no access to televisions and radios will benefit from these radio programmes.

Away from that now coming to the Motion given by the Minister for Justice. I am not sure if the Minister and his government were prepared for the implementation of this programme. Looking at his speech on page 5, first paragraph, if you allow me to read

it says "A 90-day extension of the period of State of Public Emergency will allow the government to do just that with proper planning and organisation for the implementation of the immediate, medium and long term preventive and precautionary measures not only to save lives but to also balance the competing political, socio-economic interests expected in such time of national and global crisis".

Madam Speaker, this portion needs to be explained fully, thoroughly. Maybe I do not understand. I want the Minister to explain this clearly to this august House so that we can understand. Maybe this will give the perception of their planning for the implementation of this emergency. From that point Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

HON. YAYA GASSAMA [KIANG EAST]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. Let me begin my intervention first of all by acknowledging and appreciating the effort of the Health Committee, especially the Chairman of the Health Committee. During the preparations for our sensitization programmes in the constituencies, he played a very vital role in linking the National Assembly Members with the offices of the Ministry of Health. We know that he went through a lot of challenges before he was finally able to have the materials delivered to the National Assembly Members so that we could go to our constituencies to do the sensitization. I would also like to thank the Standing Committee on Human Right and Constitutional Matters for the Report.

We are living in very difficult and challenging times because this is a situation that is widespread throughout the world. Every country is having its own share of the problem and normally what happens is that for our country, we are so weak that we entirely depend on assistance from our partners in other countries. Right now the situation is that they also are grappling with their own problems so it will become extremely challenging for them to come to our aid. Of course we know WHO and some other international organizations have chipped in to try to help us.

Madam Speaker, during our visit to our constituencies to sensitize the people, we have come across issues about this virus which is Covid-19. I have identified 3 major challenges and to be able to fight this Covid-19 all these 3 challenges must be tackled; they must not only be tackled but they must be tackled efficiently.

One of them is the mind-set of the people regarding this virus. The government is doing everything possible within its means to convince people that Covid-19 exists. Covid-19 is ravaging through the whole world but at the same time there are a lot of misinformation out there that are confusing the people to the extent that some people do not believe this at all. I think the Honourable Minister of Health will take note and all of us together will join hands and intensify the sensitization programme so that people will really understand that this is something that is not to be played with.

Another challenge is the porosity of our borders. Our borders are very porous. In my constituency you only walk across the border to another village in Senegal and the challenge is that monitoring the borders is very difficult.

We do not have adequate security or even if there are security officers that can help us manage the borders, there are no vehicles to do the work. We only have to depend on the goodwill of the people in the border villages to help us but even that one is very difficult: one, it is not going to be possible to send them back and two, you cannot make everybody who passes through your village to wash their hands. Even if you can, there are times they will cross the border without your notice because some people can cross the border at night when people are sleeping especially people who smuggle goods into the Gambia from Senegal so that is another challenge. And we know that Covid-19 is more widespread in Senegal than in The Gambia and I think we must also understand that we are fighting an enemy that is not seen. Nobody sees it. You may have it but until you manifest the signs and symptoms, you will not be able to know that you are having it, much less another person. This is why it requires a lot of cooperation and commitment from everybody to fight this virus.

The third challenge I have observed is the level of poverty in the country. People are very poor in The Gambia especially in the rural areas and the regulations that we have in front of us here are not helping very much. I will tell you why. For example, if we look at the Restriction on Public Transportation Emergency Powers Regulation 2020, it is placing a restriction on the number of passengers that commercial vehicles can carry. They are required to carry half of their capacity and when this was done the cost of fuel, I think was not factored in. If you are a commercial vehicle

driver and you are operating between let us say Brikama and Jarra Soma. The normal price was D100 and if you reduce your capacity to 5 assuming you were carrying 10. If you want to charge D100 you are only going to get D500 that is not even enough to buy fuel to take you to Jarra Soma. So, what are you saying? It means the vehicle has to stop or they have to increase their fare. No wonder at some point last week, the fare between Jarra Soma and Brikama suddenly rose up to D400. This I can tell you because they want to cover cost. I think that one needs to be looked at properly because after all the vehicle owners are Gambians. They are human, they are not immune to the virus and if we make life difficult for them, we are not going to solve the problem.

And then relative to that also is the restriction on market, shopping area and emergency power etc. During the course of last week and even part of this week, I have not seen them but heard report of security men forcefully shutting down some shops in the market and sometime sending some people home. These are people who are making their daily living by selling in the market. For many of them, they have to go to the market in the morning to sell something in the market and get that money to buy foodstuffs and come and prepare meal for the family. The majority of Gambians are like that so now if you stop those people from selling under the restriction that they are selling non-essential items or products, what are you insinuating? Go back home, sit in your house with empty stomach and that is not helping.

People need to understand that when people are hungry they are not only angry but they become fearless when the hunger intensifies. People would prefer to go out and confront the virus if they do not have any food in their houses. I am not saying that you should not restrict people in the market but even if we have to do that, adequate provision must be made for these people so that they stay in their houses. Give them food.

When I look at the report of the Human Right Committee, they have made a number of recommendations, of course including the recommendation to provide or to make provisions for people during the state of emergency but even that one is not expressing any certain terms: what these provisions are going to be, when they are going to be delivered to the people is not stated. Providing provisions to these people

require some money. We all know that D500 million the President claimed to have approved for this purpose. It is not mentioned here because I was expecting that when the committee made recommendations or during the consultative meeting they would have engaged the Ministry of Finance on that fund so that in their recommendation that could also be factored in so that you know exactly what provisions are going to be available to these people and when. The government is silent on that.

This one I do not understand. Even if you keep your goats or sheep in a pen, you have to provide them with feed. You cannot stop people going to the market to look for their daily living and yet you do not give them any provisions. What is going to happen is that the overall effort is going to be counterproductive because when people are hungry they will force themselves out even if they have to fight with the virus in the street they will go out. Nobody can stay indoors with hunger. I think this is what we need to understand.

With regards to that D500 million, I am also interested in knowing where that money is, it is available? If it is available, has it been spent? If it has been spent, how much of it is left? This, I want to know because we cannot be hearing about funding for programmes being available when we cannot actually know what these monies are spent on. Eventually, my fear is that by the time you know it there is no funding available and then we still have to continue fighting this problem.

Madam Speaker, on that note I would like to take my seat. It has been a long day and of course being one of the last speakers, most of the points I wanted to raise have been raised by my colleagues. Thank you.

HON. ALHAJI SANKUNG JAMMEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. First of all, what I just want to say is very simple. We have taken the bull by its horns, we have to speak the truth. All this crisis or noise is caused by the government. I have reason for saying that. Since when the crisis from China was announced, it took days, weeks and months before we react. We should have reacted, in that I mean during our last session here there was some MPs who were saying let us control our borders let us close borders but within ourselves some were even against that and today we are in that soup.

People coming from outside Gambia according to the Ministry of Health their information we suspect or those that are identified as victim of the virus are all people coming outside The Gambia. Had it been that the borders, including the airport wherever, is controlled like other countries did, by now will not be talking about this state of emergency. We have to say the fact, this happened here when Ebola crisis was announced. Borders were controlled and Gambia was save, there were no Ebola cases. Now is a pity, it's on our heads. I donot know, the Minister for Justice is here, whether justice is served.

The President went to Senegal when corona virus crisis was announced in Senegal. He went to Senegal when he came back but he wasnot quarantined... *laughing*... We have heard in UK the Prime Minister was at least put aside because he was suspected of having the virus. Who is us here The Gambia even with myself if I am a suspect why can I not go and then they check on me?

Now imagine 4 suspects, 1 died, 2 released because it is found that they are free and 1 is still with them. Gambia is at risk; we are all at risk now when we have a death announced by this virus so we are all at risk. This is why it is not bad Madam Speaker to proclaim for a state of emergency because you do that when the lives of your citizenry are at risk. Again, we have to see things or at least sit and put things into consideration and see how best we can make those vulnerable people at least to be as others who are not because now some markets, or as the Minister for Justice said, these are essential commodities. Members mentioned it here maybe only few commodities maybe if I may say that is the one that is imported from Niumi that one is not essential. You cannot allow that to go to the market but other than that as the proverb goes "*one man's meat is another man's poison*". If you are calling my product as non-essential to me, it is essential because that is where I get my survival. If we cater something for those people also there will be no trouble even if the emergency goes up to what level. Let people get what they need, there will be no problem. If government didnot tell the people those whom we think are vulnerable like whose survival place maybe be closed. Donot think that you are safe if your survival place is opened, you are not safe.

History teaches us sometime in the past like what happened in Sierra Leone. During their crisis when there was that noise, people disagree, the big men

were going to the shops, buying foodstuffs and taking them into their houses. When things went to climax, a gunshot was heard everybody ran into hiding but a hungry man cannot stay inside. Those are the people who went out to take guns and then follow where those foodstuffs are or were. They have to ask you to take it out and if you refuse they gun you down. We have to be very careful, let us not underrate this issue.

Government was very weak, honestly, to resist against this pandemic. They should have closed the borders no matter what because it is in one of the regulations, Restriction on Public Transport Emergency Powers. Airport transport, that all flights coming from countries identify to be affected by the Covid-19 virus are suspended expect maybe medical cargo flights and special flights which require special permit before arrival. It is very sad and now we have to dance to the tune. I am sorry but that is the fact of the matter. Since the health sector have declared that there is a death case of this virus, then we are all at risk. Who knows because that person was living in a community and I donot know whether the Ministry of Health went to that place to make a thorough research, to see those whom that person was contacting with whether they have been contaminated.

I have a question here but before the question I must thank the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters. You did your quota and that is what is expected of us. This is why sometimes I do tell Ministers let them work hand in glove with us. We as elected Members we will not want to see them fail but we want to see them prosper. In that we will advise them the best in the interest of our people. If they side-line us, they will fail because if they do not do what our people expect we have to tell them it is the government that has failed to do what is expected of it. So, Honourable Minister for Justice, Health, Finance, Trade and in fact the Cabinet at large, is your responsibility now to save Gambian. May God forbid, any victims from the Gambian side, you will be held responsible. We will take you to a commission for letting Gambians die because of giving blind eye to what you should have done.

Coming to the committee on your general observation on Page 4, number 17 where you mentioned that the committee noted that restrictions are imposed by the regulations but without compensation. You see, the Minister of Finance and Economic

Affairs has confirmed that as for now there is no compensatory mechanism. So you see, we are at risk. You think that those people will sit and listen to you? They will come out because a hungry man is an angry man. If you are enjoying and somebody who made you to enjoy is suffering you think he will leave you? He will attack you.

We the revolutionaries believe and there is a slogan that we believe. That is, if a man of peace did not prevail, give us a man of blood. It is not like killing people or what but we need somebody who is very firm. You have to be firm in your decision making. You have come with this thing so let see how best we can see as Gambians because all of us are from the provinces and most of these victims or vulnerable people are all in the provinces. Let us see how best we can at least help our Gambian people.

Come onboard, tell Gambian people what you have for them. If what you have for them is what they like, The Gambia will be at peace, no doubt about that. Even if we still extend the period of the emergency that will not be a problem because there you want to save the lives of the people which is very key but again donot forget to give them what is due for them if you donot do that, it is a crime.

I want the Minister who had assured the committee that government is looking into the situation for the possibility of providing such sort of relief package for the most vulnerable, how sure are you to tell us that these are what you are putting in place for the vulnerable? You have to tell us so that we go and tell our people or you go to the media and tell everybody that this is what government has provided for you. Other than that, on paper, now we are not taking it.

Having said that Madam Speaker, still on Page 5 of the same report point 19 if I may read: "In addition, the committee recommend for the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs to state and disclose all the funds that were given by donors before the Parliament". So, the Minister you are here, this is the recommendation from the committee. I donot know whether you are in a position to tell us that and I would want to add with that amount given so far how much has been spent on this fight against Covid-19? If you can tell us that also is very key so that the people of The Gambia will know this is what we have and this is what is spent on us so that people will now see government has an institution which is taking care of them and they will

adhere to your advice but without that, this is why my colleague from Tumana said some people still donot believe because government itself is not serious with the case.Had it been that we are serious with the case, no matter what, people will adhere to your advice because they will see it and they will hear but if everything is restricted here and not in the provinces,it is a problem. If you go there and tell them they will say donot kill us with this talk. So Minister you can now tell us if you are in a position to do so, how much from the donors because we heard colleagues saying some amount which myself I am not too sure because no record but now you as the Finance Minister and if possible the Minister of Health if you can tell us how much and how much was spent on this fight it will be very helpful when we go back to our people then we tell them your stance as a government.

On the final note Madam Speaker, the closure of non-essential public places like you have mentioned here:bars, cinemas, and video clubs etc. Before this crisis, they were embarking on these things to get their survival.Because of this now their places are closed.What have you put for them?Remember some of them are like us, they are family members who need to feed their families.If you close where I used to get my family's survival, you are creating a suicide.It is a crime so Justice Minister you have to come up with how justifiable it is for government to close these areas without providing provisions for the owners. If you donot do that, I will also be a Minister of Justice to challenge you.On that note, I thank you very much.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Thank you. I am very much amazed with what has been happening in this Assembly today. Everybody has talked about essential, urgent and extra-ordinary circumstances.All of you have talked about that and here we are.You all talked about the difficulties you have had in convincing your people to do what you want them to do and here we are gathered here. We are sitting from 10:00 am up to now.We sayit is extra-ordinarily important, then we shouldnot be here now.You are convincing people!An Alkalo dispersed a naming ceremony in my presence.He dispersed people in a mosque in my presence.Health workers disperseda wedding ceremony in my presence.Here we are sitting down and we were the people who were telling those people donot do this and we are sitting very happily like we are not concerned. Who tells me that we are not potential carriers of the virus, tell me?Who tells me that we are not going to be transferring

this to each other here? There is no measure being taken here. You go around that staircase here, they should be cleaning/disinfecting everything there every morning but nothing is happening. We all come whistling and go ... *laughter*... and we said we are extremely concern about the gravity of the situation.

Madam Speaker, Parliaments are symbols and models. They should inspire others to emulate what they are by virtue of the fact that they are the supreme law-making institution of the country. If we fail to do that, we have a problem. Madam Speaker, when and how are we going to develop expertise in this Assembly?

How are we going to refine our processes and procedures in this Parliament? This fantastic document on which people spend all their time yesterday up to 3:00 am. They came out with this fantastic document and we are not treating that. Our job is to review this, whatever we say must be related to the merits and demerits of this document. We shouldn't have been here up to this time if we were doing that. We all agree that this is a fantastic document, is it not? They have taken care of everything that we have been talking about here. You either agree with their recommendations and the position that they have adopted. If it is agreed, you say that and you make a suggestion. The fundamental reason why we refer issues to relevant committees is to help expertise to come out, to cut down the time we take to deal with matters, particularly in this so-called special circumstances, we shouldn't have been here!

In fact, if had I not forgotten, I would have suggested that we hold this in-camera. This session should have been held in-camera because of the seriousness of the situation that we have been talking about and we shouldn't have taken all this time to deal with a matter so simple and easy as to extending a state of emergency. It is not difficult but it is not just easy to jump to 90 days or 45 days. What is guiding you to jump into 90 days what is there to justify 90 days? What is there to justify 45 days? It has not come out; nothing has come out to convince me that we should go for 45 days. Are we prepared? No we are not. I am from there; up till now no single material has been distributed in my constituency from the Ministry of Health. Not a single material has been distributed because there is nothing. They give me 17 empty buckets, no other thing. Even the pump heads are not there. Up till now, Wuli West, Wuli East, I don't know the other places but this is the situation there. This matter, before the declaration of the state of emergency, we

were in it from that time to the state of emergency up to the end of the first state of emergency. Government is still looking; they cannot see... *laughing*... You are laughing, this is not laughing matter. They are still looking; Minister of Finance are looking but they cannot see. I applaud all my colleagues, Members of this Assembly who dip their hands into their pockets and bought materials to distribute it to their constituencies to provide hand washing materials for their people. We did that and that is the only thing that has taken place in my constituency and Wuli East up to now.

And you are telling me 90 days, how prepared are we to sustain the weak and vulnerable for 90 days? How are we going to sustain them? You are asking people not to sell and you asking transport owners not to take the number of passengers they are usually taking. If they donot do that, what are you going to do? A shopkeeper who is closing his/her small shop where he/she gain his/her livelihood, how is he/she going to survive? You are not telling me how that person is going to live and yet you want to convince me to say yes 90 days and even 45 days I do not agree with. 45 days, one month 15 days, one and a half month. Can you imagine a family person who struggles to make ends meet by selling this or that and you ask that person to stop that and you expect that person to be able to prevent himself/herself from this virus? What means does he/she have to do that? To eat is fundamental, one of the things that gives cure to a sickness is to eat, to be able to have energy. If people cannot provide food, how can they eat to strengthen themselves?

I agree with everything in this document except one thing and that is the 45 days. That is the only thing I donot agree with because there is no basis for it. Tell me, the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum said it, you have not convinced me that government has the means because I have not been told anything. They talked about a fund, what is in the fund? How much is in there? How are you going to deal with that fund? What are you going to help the weak and the vulnerable with? You havenot told me anything like that. If you tell me that mathematically and convincingly, I will be able to determine whether that can be sustained for 45 days, 30 days, 2 weeks or 3 weeks. That is the only yardstick I have.

If you tell me that we have this sum of money and materials to give to the weak and the vulnerable, those who have been prevented from doing certain things while they earn their livelihood. This is what we are going to give them in compensation then I will be convinced to accept either 45 days or 100 days. This virus has exposed our country terribly. It has exposed the disorganized nature of our country.

If we were organized from Kartong to Koina, you will have an inventory of all business persons, small or big. You would have had an inventory of everybody here. When there is a crisis like this, you know what to do because you have everything here. We do not have that. How are we going to deal with the situation? Even if you have billions, how are you to deal with the money? How are you going to distribute it? Who are you going to give it to?

The Member for Serekunda said a lot of things which are fantastic. You have to do a lot of work to identify what needs to be done in order for people not to do certain things. I must say with joy that the health team in URR they are working very hard, day and night. The dead person who came from France who died of the virus. Who, historically, was a Gambian by origin but because he was going to France he decided to take Senegalese documents. When he came, documentarily, he was a Senegalese. They wanted to come and bury him in BoroKandehKasseh but health team in Basse, the intelligence told them and they intercepted them at the border. They went back and buried him in Senegal in BantangTinting. They are doing a fantastic job. They must be empowered. Those are the people who must be empowered, the frontline soldiers. Day and night they are working. I dealt with them on Sunday it was like a Monday. Everybody was in the office but they cannot give what they are not given. They give 17 me buckets and it should not be only 2 big buckets but there should be a small bucket. When you wash, the water goes into the small bucket, otherwise it will be flooding.

I went to Basse at the front of the Trust Bank they had this washing thing but there was no bucket. The water was flooding. That is terrible so there are a lot of things we have to do Madam Speaker. Honestly speaking, I am here today because of this exceptional circumstance of having to extend this state of emergency. If it is done today, I will not come here on Monday.

Honestly what I was expecting from the committee yesterday, they were all there: Minister for Justice, Minister of Finance, I think the Minister of Health was also there I didn't see you in the list but I think you were supposed to be there. Maybe something happened you were not there but I was expecting a comprehensive assessment of what has happened from before the declaration of the state of emergency, to the declaration of state of emergency: in terms of implementation of the recommendations that you made to be taken; in terms of what the Health Ministry and health workers are doing; in terms of finances.

I will say this in the presence of both of you here, the Ministry of Health is not adequately resourced. If you give me 17 buckets, my constituency has 46 villages, what am I going to do with 17? I was attacked there because what I bought out of my pocket could not cover all the villages. One of them came and said to me "I have heard about you. Why did you not come to us? Are we not part of your constituency?" You give me 17, what is going to happen? These people are creating problems for us the MPs. If you cannot cover all the villages, please stop it. That is better because it gives me a bad name and I do not have money to provide for everybody. I do what I can but I do not have the means to do exactly what is supposed to be done to cover the whole constituency.

These are the things that show whether we are prepared or not. Up till now, we cannot even provide hand washing materials for our people and we are saying 90 days. For how many months we have been in this terrible thing we cannot still provide hand washing devices for our people and yet we want it to be extended for 90 days, on what basis?

You have not convinced me and 45 days is too much because an ordinary person cannot withstand the odds of 45 days. We have to think this matter very seriously and we have to completely change our behaviour in the face of this terrible virus that we are all talking about. We must change because of touch wood. It has not come here like Italy that is why we are behaving the way we are behaving. However, it is here because it has killed people. It is here, there is no doubt that it is here. We have to take measures; we should not be complacent. We the Members of Parliament should not be complacent. Let us go back to our people and help organize them to prevent themselves from this terrible thing.

There is nothing extra-ordinarily important in the Order Paper to warrant this parliament to continue sitting. In fact, I will make a motion that this particular session remains open throughout the critical period of corona virus. The parliament should remain open throughout the critical period of Covid-19. It makes things easier for us when there is a crisis we can come and do whatever and go away. If you close it now, you have to come back to re-open it again, that is my position. I propose that this Parliament remains open throughout the critical period of Covid-19 to make it possible for us to come at anytime, according to Section 34 Subsection 5 (a), we can do that. That is my position. If anyone wants to second it, please do so when I sit down.

THE SPEAKER: Are you asking for a seconder or is it for the Chair to ask for it?

HON. SIDIA S JATTA [WULI WEST]: NO but seriously, the Ministers here must bring something more convincing than what you have presented to us so far. Even the 7 days that have elapsed, people would have lived a terrible situation. It is not easy to survive by business in this country, it is the most difficult thing. There are too many business persons; everybody is a seller so who is going to be a buyer? That is one of the problems in our country so we must take all the fundamental things into account when we are talking about how to address the situation. The situation is grave so we must we must address it as such, not the way we have spent the day here today, but differently.

The Ministry of Finance must tell this august Assembly how much money you have in that fund that you have created? How much of it has been spent so far and how was it spent? What is there, how are you planning to spend it? How are you planning to help the weak and vulnerable? When I say the vulnerable, you know what I am referring to; the weak, you know what I am referring to. The small business persons and workers who have been asked not to go to work because of the situation, how are they living with their families? I always ask myself, people earning less than one thousand Dalasis in this country, having a wife and children and they are going to school, and you say they are people who are living in this Republic that we have fought so hard to have freedom from colonization. We are still colonized in one way or the other, we are not free. People who do not have their livelihood means in their hands, controlled by themselves, they are not free. That is what we are supposed to

do here as Members of this Parliament, that is our responsibility. Our people must be helped to be free once and for all. That is our load anybody who cannot shoulder it, please resign and go, that is what we are about here.

Can you imagine since the declaration or the emergence of this virus this country is still not prepared to handle it adequately. We are still not prepared; I am saying it. You are here Minister of Finance, Minister of Justice, Minister of Trade, all of you are here. Trade you have a big load; Finance you have a big load and all of you are carrying it. You still need more efforts to put into what you are doing. All these days I have spent in the provinces I have not seen anything being distributed to anybody.

The health centres are as impoverished as they have always been because even a hand washing device was not at Yorobawol. Please, I agree that there is a need to extend the state of emergency but for how long will be determined by our preparedness. You alone can tell us how prepared we are to handle the situation for 10 days, 20 days, 21 days or 45 days. 90 days is out of the question.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much but you did not complete your Motion so, I will take it that you are withdrawing it. Honourable, you wanted to move a Motion but you did not pursue it. I take it that it has been withdrawn. Actually, we are thinking of convening the ABC Committee on Monday for the sitting to be suspended not adjourned just like we did on the 17th. We did not know what was happening so we thought of suspending the sitting until further notice. Maybe we can use the same method and just suspend it. I take it that you withdraw your Motion.

HON. SAINEY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the floor. State of Public Emergency is not declared during ordinary times but rather during extra-ordinary circumstances like the one we are facing right now.

Madam Speaker, I read the Motion and the submission of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters. If you put all these things together; the prayers that are sought in the mover's Motion and that of the Standing Committee Madam Speaker, they are all speaking the same language. If you put them in a nutshell, they are all meant to assuage the plight, the concerns or the threats that

we are facing as a country. That is the long and short of the Motions presented here Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I must thank the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters for mellowing down the 90 days to 45 days. Madam Speaker, it goes without saying that every bullet has a pellet or if you like, there is no smoke without fire. Madam Speaker, the reduction is informed by a special circumstance that we are confronted with as a country and this is a test case for Gambia. Whether the country is going to stand the test of time is anybody's guess but it boils down to our level of preparedness, commitment and sincerity by extension. Madam Speaker, previous speakers have spoken so eloquently about the extent of the issue at hand i.e. Covid-19. Madam Speaker I am not in any mood to dilute the eloquence of their speeches. They have done fantastically well.

Madam Speaker, for any government to succeed or for any parliament to succeed you must try to transform the fantasies of your people into reality. When that is done, such a government is deemed to have succeeded. Once the wishes and aspirations of our citizenry is found at the heart Madam Speaker, we can beat our chest for having satisfied, for having stood for our people. If this is not done Madam Speaker, we are not yet out of the woods, may God forbid. Therefore, the onus is on us to take our people out of the woods, to avoid our people being at crossroads.

This virus Madam Speaker, please grant me leave to wet our appetites historically. Madam Speaker this thing happened, it was such a plague of high magnitude during the Caliphate of Umar (may God be pleased with him) and the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) sent a word for those that are trying to come to the plague-prone country to stay put. Another word was sent to those who were found in the plague-prone area to stay put, principally to contain the deadly malady.

Madam Speaker the measures highlighted by the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Justice and that of the mover of the Standing Committee must be seen as palliative measures, measures that are meant to serve as mitigation measures, measures that could be seen as buffer or to cushion the effect of this deadly novel Covid-19. Do we have what it takes as a country to tackle head-on, this deadly malady?

Madam Speaker, I call this deadly malady a marauding beast, very ferocious. It knows no border or boundary and it says no to diplomacy. Therefore, we must strengthen our surveillance mechanisms and we must strengthen our fighting mechanisms so as to nib this in the bud once and for all but that can only be done when we observe WHO guidelines concerning containment of the virus. That is the only panacea for this virus to be nibbed in the bud. Without that, forget it. We must never be complacent.

Madam Speaker, speaker upon speaker made mention of the astronomical sum of D500 million. Madam Speaker, you will agree with me that this sum is quite colossal by all standards. I am not Pythagoras but I did my calculations yesterday when the night was very young, with my better half, and when we distribute it we arrived at each Gambian likely having D250,000. My Mathematics is not good.

POINT OF CORRECTION

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Madam Speaker, if you divide D500 million by 2 million people, it gives you D250. Thank you.

HON. SAINEY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: You are my Pythagoras. That was a wrong calculation. Thank you Member for Kantora. Madam Speaker having said that, I am concerned about how this whopping D500 million is going to be utilized. I am concerned about the trickle-down effect which is very key. It goes without saying that corruption is never a kidney stone in Africa but always a cancer and the cancer must be nibbed in the bud if you want to make any significant headway. I repeat, Madam Speaker, corruption has never been a kidney stone in Africa but always a cancer. That cancer must be eliminated forthwith. Those officers who are asked to preside over the disbursement of this fund must learn to do it correctly. Madam Speaker, we are going to fail totally if there is an element of financial malfeasance in this disbursement and I stand to be corrected that it has begun to rear its ugly head.

We have been coming to the Assembly here for a fortnight just to come and lay hand on the materials, the hand sanitizers, the buckets. For two weeks we have been going and coming when this pandemic is at its height, even if not here but in other

jurisdictions. We have been coming here for two weeks. I have been coming with my driver but guess what? Everyday new tales, I wonder who is to blame.

Madam Speaker with that type of attitude, we risk failing in giving a heavy blow to the virus. If we cannot lay hands on our materials on time, when the virus reaches its climax, how can we succeed in defeating the virus? The buckets that were given, Madam Speaker, was 17 but 4 of the covers were under-sized. I had to dip my hand into my pocket to buy certain things for my people.

Honestly, I was not happy because I came under a barrage of criticisms which is not my making. I was confronted. This is quite exiguous, quite infinitesimal. I have 33 villages in my constituency. Imagine 17 buckets. Even I am not a Pythagoras, I know that is quite infinitesimal. It puts me in a very funny situation, to be very frank. At one point I thought maybe the government is trying to pit me against my people. That is the notion that I had.

I also noticed something which I was not satisfied with. The Health Committee have done tremendously well but when it comes in terms of procedural, the matter should have been handled by the Office of the Clerk. The Ministry of Health should have liaised with the Office of the Clerk because the Office of the Clerk serve as a conduit for all types of businesses in the House. This Parliament should observe procedures and due process. I was taken aback. They have done extremely well but is it under their domain? Why is it that the Ministry did not liaise with the Office of the Clerk?

I was thinking that when I come to my Pidgeon Hole I will find a letter there from the Office of the Clerk. That is communication but everything was handled by the Health Committee and that is not procedural. That is a serious flaw despite the fact that they have done extremely well, that is my deserved opinion. That is a serious flaw. Whatever that was transacted here must be given to the Office of the Clerk. They are the conduit, the only conduit in terms of dealing with affairs of the House. If you usurp their powers, that is unacceptable and unparliamentary. Having said that Madam Speaker, that goes to show that there was a form of disconnect, a massive disconnect between the Office of the Clerk and the Ministry. Such practices should never be allowed to happen again. It is not correct, there is a serious flaw.

Madam Speaker, essential commodities. I must thank the Member for Foni Jarrol for stealing my mind. When I saw essential commodities I said one's man meat is another man's poison. Maybe he spoke before me that is why he stole my ideas. Madam Speaker, if you weigh this against economic sense, with your indulgence, economists will say *ceteris paribus*— all things being equal. Madam Speaker, these are concepts because all things are never equal and this is why Aristotle, with your indulgence I quote says "*Equality means equals to be treated equally and unequals, inequally*". Equality is an abstract; it cannot be visualized. It is not a concept so if you say essential commodities, Madam Speaker, some petty traders, if you ask them to clear their wares from their stalls, you will create a problem for them. Some of them are bread winners of their families and they go out to ease out a living. They must fend for themselves and their families. If they are deprived from selling at the market, Madam Speaker, that will be a very big problem. The cushioning effect that I was talking about, government should try and do something as a matter of palliative measure because an empty stomach cannot stand.

If you ask people to stay put, there must be something for them to bank on. If that is not available, it will have a corresponding link with their ability to find food. When the ability to find food is nowhere to be seen or given, there is a tendency for them to resort to criminal activities. I think government should look at these things very closely. This is very key. If you ask people to stay put, that is okay but why can you not replicate the Rwandan experience, what is happening in Rwanda right now? If what is making rounds on the social media is anything to go by, the President has taken the bull by the horns in Rwanda and is at the forefront.

Madam Speaker, why we say the President of The Gambia should do the same thing. I must thank the President because I watch his telecast on TV but the President must be mentioned here because he dictates the National Diary and its timeline on behalf of the governed, that is the fact! It is President Barrow who dictates the National Diary and its timeline on our behalf so he must be mentioned and this is the time to show statesmanship. The government has done extremely well but it is never enough. To keep people in their houses Madam Speaker, is very difficult. They must have something to bank on. When that is not there, then you are telling them you can go and do anything you like which is not good. So to stay put

without banking on anything is a recipe for confrontation, it is a recipe for criminal activities. The government must be reminded about that.

Madam Speaker, sensitization. We need to sensitize our people on the dangers of Covid-19. It is real, whether you take it or not it is something real. Although expectations were raised but after a reality check, most of them were dampened because of the type of people who are presiding over certain things. These things call for attitudinal change, commitment and love for one's country. If that one is lacking, Madam Speaker, we cannot make a head way. Forget it!

I went to my constituency; I went to almost all the villages but could you believe there are some people there, there are some families there that are living in abject poverty. Like all other constituencies, there are people who are living in untold suffering. Even to afford one square meal is a problem. Even to buy hand sanitizer by respecting WHO standard, is a problem there.

Madam Speaker, if you go to the recommendations of the Standing Committee, I read it very well but I have not seen the purchase of hand sanitizers. I have not seen WHO health guidelines being mentioned i.e. to observe social/physical distancing. I was of the view that the committee will capture that because those things are very key: social distancing, decongestion, frequent and thorough hand washing, I have not seen them and those things are very key. It could be an oversight but I was of the view that the committee was going to highlight them by respecting WHO standard but I have not seen them in the recommendations.

Madam Speaker, we have to go to our constituencies and sensitize them adequately. You have people there who are considered as Doubting Thomases, they still do not believe. You have to do a lot of work for you to convince them and that advocacy must be spearheaded by NAMs and we cannot do advocacy with empty hands. Madam Speaker, this is why this D500 million is a talking point in the country and it will continue to be a talking point as long as Covid-19 is with us here. Those who are presiding over the disbursement of this D500 million, whether you know it or not, you are already under the microscope. Please for the health of our country and its citizenry, let us make sure that these monies are utilized on what they are means for.

Madam Speaker, as an environmentalist and someone who doubles as the Chairperson of the Environment Committee, the environment in me is telling me to admonish the Ministry of Health to fumigate our environment so that we can live in a decent fashion. Madam Speaker, you will agree with me that our forefathers handed the environment to us in one piece we must also learn to make sure we hand over to the generation yet unborn not in pieces because it was given to us in one piece. Lest we forget, we must never hand it over to the generation yet unborn into pieces. If that happens, it means you have failed woefully.

This Covid-19 is true, is a reality, we must all try and observe the WHO guidelines to the letter because that is the only way we will be saved from this Covid-19. It is deadly and we all know the incubation period is 14 days so it is difficult to tell who is having the virus. When we pay heed to the WHO standard, there is the tendency for us to be saved from this deadly malady. Madam Speaker to that end, before I take my seat, I want to pray to Almighty God, the Omnipotent and Most Clement, so as to save us from this deadly Covid-19. Thank you very much.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. Madam Speaker, I was following the debate keenly. Sometimes it appears to me: are we really on adjournment debate or are we really discussing the State of Public Emergency and the regulations brought forward for us to peruse through? Bearing in mind that the state of public emergency does not come from the thin air, circumstances warrant it.

Before going further, I think it is incumbent upon us to understand some of the world statistics of this deadly Covid-19 virus. Currently the US has recorded or confirmed 256,816 and registered a death of 6,574. Spain 117,000 plus and death of 10,000. These have really turned the entire dilemma in the world. In Italy, it has about 115,242 cases, deaths 13,945. Countries from the periphery nations or the LDC (least developing countries) begin to put up measures. These giant countries, these so-called developed countries or advanced world are registering the magnitude of these deaths despite having got the state-of-the-earth equipment, testing laboratory machines, medical facilities, yet they are really struggling to contain this deadly disease. It is through daily updates that our neighbours registered 4 cases and now it is in 100s. As we speak, The Gambia registered a few cases. As the saying goes, when

Senegal coughs, The Gambia catches cold. That is why there is a need to have state of public emergency.

Before going to my intervention proper, I want to accept and recognize the robust intervention made by Senegal in putting in measures to curtail the spread of this deadly virus. What is really incumbent upon us now that we are in a situation which is very unusual, we found ourselves in an unusual circumstance that has dictated the state to proclaim a state of emergency, is to look at those regulations that are being accompanied by the motion to see if those regulations actually tell us or are those regulations geared towards curbing this menace. That could have been the bone of contention. What are some of the regulations? What is the disease prone to? What are the WHO guidelines? Social distancing, why the need for us to minimize the market? Why is the need for restrictions? The disease really does not like crowds. That justifies the restrictions in these areas. When you come also to public places gym areas, nightclubs and co, you will really agree that the precautionary measures that WHO is giving is actually in line with the said regulations by the Executive. It should be our responsibility to look at these regulations. Are they actually policies that are meant to control this virus? How effective are they? What is the policy being put here? What are the policies meant to achieve? What is the rationale behind the policy here? Then you will know that this particular policy is actually working towards how to safeguard our people? How do we protect, curtail and contain the spread? Are the regulations telling us in that manner?

If you look at the statement by the Minister in his motion, it went further that people also do take opportunities on ordinary circumstances to compete social and economic interests especially in such times of national and global crisis. There are people who also want to capitalize and enrich themselves within this particular period. What is government doing to safeguard the vulnerable poor people in the country? It is coming with such regulations whereby the issue of extortion/exploitation is discouraged. That was why the issue of price ceiling comes in place. I expect the debate to be more on the regulations versus the emergency (Covid-19). How is the regulation achieving the non-spread of Covid-19? How is the regulation also guiding and protecting him the exploitation of our citizens? This should be the bone of contention.

Of course we agree that this Covid-19 has its social, political and economic impact already be it in the tourism sector, be it revenue collection even on the side of government, be it trade, business, etc. Currently the US has registered 6.6 million jobless. Under normal circumstances this would not be the case. We found ourselves in usual circumstances. You can see the magnitude of job losses in their country. What is really incumbent upon us is to task the Executive to come with regulations that will discourage exploitation, that will discourage the spread of Covid-19. If we are also looking at the policy impact, then it will be very difficult for us to make an informed decision. The policy which talks about restriction in public place, where would our people feed? What we can do here is to encourage government to come with some recommendations or some regulations in terms of subsidising some essential commodities in the market. We know that government cannot go round by giving everybody money. What they can do is to come and subsidise. We are approaching the Ramadan experience, what is the price of bag of rice? How could government come and subsidize? These are some of the recommendations we should be dealing with if you really care about this particular virus.

Madam Speaker, I also think Covid-19 is beyond individual intervention, it is beyond political lines and it is beyond the political blame game. It calls for a collective effort; it is a national issue, not political issue. Then it requires national intervention; it requires collective intervention. Enough of the blame-game, what are the solutions we can proffer? What are the recommendations that can serve as policies or regulations that better the solutions? Certain times there are impacts felt but how we minimize the impacts should be the bone of contention. We should not also lose sight that this Covid-19 is highly contagious.

Last night, I was watching the news, they said even through respiratory breathing you could contract this thing. If you are so close to a patient that is confirmed to have Covid-19 virus, exchanging the breath, respiring very close to him you could contract it. It is now been qualified as an air-borne disease. Therefore, there should be a rethink in the mind-set on how to approach this thing now.

I really appreciate, let me make reference of the Member for Upper Saloum, for asking the Standing Committee what evidence, yardstick or proofs do they have at hand to arrive at the 45 days? Knowing fully that this particular virus is highly

contagious and we found ourselves in a very difficult situation, how does the leadership come in to curtail and protect the citizens from exploitation as well?

Going through the restrictions, I am really happy that the policies are really speaking with the matters at hand. The policies are really reflecting reality of the situation we found ourselves in. The only way to control this thing is through social distancing. That is really the guideline and that is really the idea of the policies.

The issue of D500 million grant can come on even on the adjournment debate. However, it is your opinion but I would have loved that more intervention be done on the document at hand based on the regulations versus the motion.

With those few remarks, I want to thank everybody for their indulgence but I also want to reiterate that it is more of how do we share these policies that will fit the current reality on the ground? How do these regulations actually address the current situation? Therefore, I also challenge the mover. Why does he think that 90 days is not feasible but 45 days is feasible? If he is able to convince us beyond reasonable doubts, knowing what is really at hand, we will give our blessing and support to the 45 days. Thank you so much.

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: This is a highly affected country and they are coming in on daily basis because the public emergency is not being adhered to. People go on their daily business and that is why the Minister of Interior and Minister of Defence have to be around so that they can make sure they enforce this public emergency. It is very sad to know that certain borders do not have security checkpoints and you have other points trying to oversee those areas. These are very serious problems and since the Minister of Health is around, you have in our constituencies where we do not have health teams until now and it is a very sensitive border. These are issues that we need to look at critically.

Again, Honourable Minister, I want to inquire since we are talking of the extension. I quite agree with the Standing Committee on the decision to reduce it to 45 days depending on if there is going to be a compensation package without which this will never be effective. How prepared are we? We have to understand the dynamics in the country especially when it comes to certain family setups? We have extended

family where you have the membership of more than fifty people, yet we have limited mattress and limited houses. What of a scenario whereby an infected member enters a compound? How are we going to decongest those families? These are very serious issues and there you ask them to be into the same place so it is going to be a problem. I think there should be a special attention for those types of families and we need to look at it.

Again, I just do not want to be bias since I am part of the Select Committee on Regional Government. If there is going to be a compensation package, I think the best institution to be dealing with it would have been our local governance in the country. These are very important because they have the structure and we have all our constituencies within these regions; we have our VDCs and all those things. They can be used to target those vulnerable groups we are talking about. I am sure these Councils will have the statistics of those things there and we can use them on community development. I think this will be more effective if the compensation package is coming.

Honourable Minister, I also want to observe a certain aspect. We have some of our students outside and they are in one of the most affected countries on studies on government scholarships. Currently some of them are without food and are stranded in their houses. How we take care of these people is something very key. They left this country for studies in one of the most affected countries and even communication has become a problem for them and their food is finished. How do we take care of those problems? That is something I want the Ministry, in collaboration with the Education Committee, to look at those issues.

As earlier mentioned Madam Speaker, whatever we are going to say has been lamented by the previous speakers. That is the unfortunate part of coming late. I think there is this suggestion of coming out with a Special Select Committee that will be monitoring the activities of this thing. Probably we talked about the Standing Committee on Health and FPAC/PEC and others together with the Project Monitoring, they will be very key. This cannot be effectively done if we do not have the strategic plan of the Ministry in trying to cope with this. That is very important. If we can have a strategy that could be supplied so that even at our own individual level in our constituency we can be monitoring these issues. As most of us said, if

you go to your constituency, it is very devastating some times. You have to dip your hand into your own pocket and pull out as much as you can in order to provide materials like hand washing buckets and sanitizers. Until today, people are calling so I am in support of the Standing Committee's decision to reduce it to 45 days, depending on the provision of compensation which is very key. If not, we are only going to waste our time and people will not adhere to it if they are not compensated. People will go out and our borders need to be secured. The Health Committee can deal directly with the respective MPs, especially with those at the border regions, to show you some of the escape routes because you have some people who are also depending on Gambia for their daily survival. They cannot starve in their houses; they have to come especially when our borders are not restricted. These are the issues I observed.

Much have been said and I do not want to bore the Assembly with a lot of debate. Thank you so much Madam Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable. I also wish to say we have to appreciate that we have about 56 members, so not each and every Honourable Member can be a first speaker. There has to be a first and a last speaker, so we just try to keep the balance.

HON. KEBBA. K BARROW [KOMBO SOUTH/MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much Honourable speaker. I also want to join my colleagues to thank the Standing Committee on Constitutional Matters and for the good work that they have done as assigned to them by the National Assembly. I think these are trying times and then they have really done a job that we expected from them.

I also want to continue to urge Members of the National Assembly to respect the rules that we have set for ourselves. Yesterday when a suggestion was made for us to commit this to a relevant committee, there was some misunderstanding or some people do not want that to happen but I think it is important that we respect the laws that we have set for ourselves to be our guiding principles. That is going to help us to better understand the situations we are dealing with and we can make informed choices which is going to help our electorates and the people that we are serving here.

Having said that Madam Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Clerk and team, through you, for the initiative they have taken to facilitate the movement of all the National Assembly members including the Nominated Members to visit their constituencies and talk to the people about this deadly virus which have given the signal to the Gambian people to understand the repercussions of not adhering to the standards that are set by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with WHO. I think that is commendable. We also are in the forefront; the National Assembly has set the pace being one of the first institutions to scale down activities to adhere to the social distancing measures where staff were asked to sit at home. We have done that two weeks before other institutions followed suit. This shows the commitment and the willingness of the Assembly to work together with all the partners in this country to ensure that we work towards the development of our people to serve their best interest as enshrined in Section 112 of the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, I think the committee had really done a very good job and we applaud them for coming out with very clear statements and recommendations for the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and the Attorney General and all the other key line Ministries especially the Ministry of Trade. The regulations that are being passed hitch on the lives and livelihoods of the rural people, the most marginalised of our society. It is important that the interpretation and also the nomination of these information are very clear and timely. On these regulations we have passed, I want to join my colleagues again to urge the Attorney General and Ministry of Trade to collaborate with other Ministries, Department and Agencies so that this information are disseminated to the people on a timely basis. That is the only way we will be able to situate ourselves and get the messages very clear to our people so that they understand what we need to do as a nation.

I have gone through all the regulations, especially the Essential Commodities Emergency Powers Regulations. I have seen that a committee was established which comprises Permanent Secretaries, Director General of the NIA, Director General of State Intelligence Service, Inspector General of Police, Commissioner General Gambia Revenue Authority, Chief Executive of the Gambian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Executive Secretary of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the President of Consumer Consortium of The Gambia. I also want

to propose that we have the representative of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. This is dealing with the social being of the Gambian population. Their participation is key. If you look at the composition, it is women that are involved in fish processing and marketing. Women are involved in petty trading and horticultural development. Their involvement in this committee is very key because they are going to work with the vulnerable members and they will be able to disseminate this information. I think that is very key. When the Minister of Health was here to give us the situational analysis, I appealed to the Minister to also incorporate the Civil Society Organisations. They are playing a very important role in this country and they are very key and have experts that can do situational analysis and vulnerability assessment with other people and they have worked with all sectors at large in this Country. Their involvement and participation in this committee will also be very key.

Madam Speaker, I also want to come back to the issue of empowering our institutions. We have the National Disaster Management Agency and by now they should be able to come out with an assessment of the vulnerable in the country and they can only do that with GBoS. I have been saying the important role that GBoS can play in ensuring that surveys are conducted where we can have a very good report that will give us informed choices and be able to have data. Without data it is going to be very difficult. How many small-holder livelihoods are going to be interrupted in this emergency? What are some of the impacts that people are going to face? How do we provide incentives for them, social safety networks so that they are comfortable in their homes and are able to get to their people and help them to be steady in whatever they are doing so that they comply to the emergency? Until that is done, we are not going to go anywhere. I think it is very important that we also use our agencies, departments and build their capacities. The last time I saw a press release from NDMA saying that it is illegal for people to hide. What is the premise? You do not even tell the Gambian people what your Act is, people do even know your existence. How can you come up with a statement and tell people what they are doing is illegal and they do not know your existence? I think it is important that we build the capacity of our institutions and let them play their rightful roles so that people will know when it comes and how can they save themselves to be able to help them in all issues. They cannot be going to *Bantabas* and communities to say

that you have buckets, they need to be able to come up with information and data that would enable us help the people so that we are better situated and protected.

I think it is important for us as Members of the National Assembly to adhere to the statements that are made at the international level, especially World Health Organisation (WHO). The Director General of the WHO is an African and he has been appealing to African leaders to adhere to the information and advices. Just two days ago he was speaking and called on governments in African to put in place social welfare measures to ensure vulnerable members have food and other essential commodities on the table so that they would not be affected in case of any emergency. I think this is very important and these are some of the things Members are saying. What plans are there in place for the government to prepare for the ordinary people so that you can tell them to stay at homes? If they do not have food how will they stay at homes? He went further to say WHO's priority is that frontline health workers are able to access essential personal protective equipment including medical mask and other respiratory gadgets that they need for their work. All of us here who have spoken since the report have been laid have commended the tremendous time and energy that our health workers have taken to ensure that this messages get to the people. They have been working round the clock and ensuring that the people do not contract the virus which is deadly. So it is important that we provide them those specific and needed equipment to do their work and ensure that we, as Gambians, contain this deadly virus. I think it is very important for us a nation as alluded to by the Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol. When the Ebola crisis was on there was a strict response from the government that they close all the borders to ensure that this deadly virus does not come into the country and Gambia was one of the countries in West Africa that had worked round the clock to make sure that Ebola does not get into the country. After our deliberations in the National Assembly, it took the government two weeks to close our borders and all these cases we have were imported. They were not from people residing in this country. I think it is important as a nation that in whatever we are doing to make sure that we work together with our partners. We should not be duplicating our efforts but rather to open our arms to take the directives so that the benefit of our people are there at all times.

Honourable Speaker, I also want to appeal to the Minister of Interior and Defence to write to the transport controller to decongest the State House and release all those vehicles and give it to the security to work 24 hours to ensure that our borders are safe. We need to take the bull by the horns. What are those vehicles doing there? People are not going to work, the vehicles are there and the security are saying that we do not have the mobility to do our work. Let us decongest the State House and all the departments and give the vehicles to the security to do this work if we are going to be serious to protect our people. The Gambia is at crossroads at this trying time as it is important to all of us to take the responsibility and make sure that our people are safe.

Donald Trump is saying that at the peak of this thing in two weeks' time, America is expecting over 240,000 people to die if it is not contained in America. Gambia as small as it is, we do not have all the resources we need to contain this disease so I think it is important for us to be very serious and very committed and make sure that we follow the standards and procedures to ensure that our people are protected.

Finally Honourable Speaker, I also want the Minister of Finance to tell us with the reduction of fuel prices to 50%, why is government not reducing the price of fuel? What is one dalasi? Some countries have reduced it by \$21 to \$22. You still want people to buy fuel by D49 and you are telling the drivers to reduce the number of passengers by half. What are they going to do? People traveling to Basse are charged D500 to come to Banjul or else you stay there, because they cannot buy fuel D5000 and you only have D2000. It is not economical so what are the incentives that government is trying to do to ensure that fuel pump price is reduced so that all these things are done to be able to help to transport people and ensure that all these rules are followed?

I think for these rules to be adhered to, enforceability is also very important. When we put in laws we must make sure that these committees meet very frequently and work with Assembly Members and all the other frontline institutions. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Gambia Red Cross Society for all the good work they have done. They have dispatched their people in all the regions in this country and they are working 24 hours to make sure that they are sensitizing the people to

use hand washing mechanisms and also ensure that we have this social distancing measures. Thank you very much.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I also wish to make an intervention on the Motion presented by the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Justices for the extension of the period of Public Emergency to a period of 90 days.

I want to start by saying that we acknowledge the presence of the Members of the Cabinet and what we have here are the key Ministries. In the morning, many of them were here. We wish they had stayed with us to listen to all the issues raised. Nonetheless, the four that are here are key in the efforts that are needed to curb Covid-19. First is the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance, Attorney General and Minister of Trade.

I also want to start by saying that the committee really did very well within a very short space of time. It was yesterday in the early afternoon that they committed themselves to work and I understand that they were here until very late and were able to present this report with the recommendations that we are considering during this session. Before I get into the report, I also want to acknowledge the efforts of the National Assembly Members for having taken the task of assuming the responsibility to go back to their constituencies. Some have even started before being given support by both the National Assembly and the Ministry of Health to carry out sensitisation. Of course, there were challenges as far as the support is concerned. The National Assembly provided what was needed to facilitate the movement of Honourable Members back to their constituencies and going round within their constituencies. The Minister of Health also provided resources to facilitate movement as well as sanitary materials. Challenges are being raised in terms of materials that were received. We were expecting complete sets but we did not get that. I want to also acknowledge the efforts being made by the Minister of Health in facilitating the support given to the National Assembly Members to engage in constituency sensitisation. I can attest to this Assembly that the Minister is doing everything possible as far as the institution is concerned but issues were highlighted here in terms of challenges, much needs to be done. I need not to go back to repeat some of the issues that were raised by Honourable colleagues but I just want to say

that The Gambia has so far reported 4 cases, one of which has passed away leaving us with 3 and 2 among the 3 have recovered leaving us with one. This is good news to some extent. It provides a window of opportunity for the Gambia to manage the situation. Covid-19, as we have seen, is very deceptive. The Committee on Health presented a report in which they indicated that the international Airport has all the measures in place as far as screening this Covid-19 from entering the country. Unfortunately, all the cases passed through the international Airport. That means when they were passing, their condition was undetectable, so this is Covid-19. Covid-19 is also like a sleeping volcano on the surface. It might look very calm but underneath, we wish that is not the case since we have had cases and these cases had interacted with the communities, it is like a powerful rocket which can just come like a wave "BAM". This is what has been happening elsewhere so we need to support the Health Ministry and our health system to ensure that what is supposed to be done is done. Subjecting contacts to quarantine is also in progress to some extent I can say but we still need to do more because that is where the challenge lies.

So I am urging everybody here both the National Assembly, Executive and Gambia as well that we do not wish for the worst but we need to prepare for the worst. It might not turn out to be like that, it might be that the cases will end before but it can get serious. Because this is not creating alarm but we have seen this happening elsewhere. It has not started, it will come, you will feel that the numbers are negligible and you do not take necessary measures to curb them and it just come "BAM". It has been happening to Senegal, they have imported cases that they thought it was imported and now they have communal transmission which is dangerous and that means you do not know who transmitted it to you. With the imported cases you will know that this is the cause like the index case and other cases that followed that this is the sources. This is where he/she went to and these are the ones he/she interacted with so these are the contacts. But with communal transmission, it is serious. So let us brace ourselves to do everything that is possible in coming up with the measures to plan for the worst. We will never be caught unawares, we will be able to contain even if the worst comes.

There is a window of opportunity in the sense that for us Gambians we do not have enough hospitals and our health system is weak but we have good doctors. I can tell you there are very good doctors in this country but there is inadequate materials that we use and the equipment are insufficient. We need to prepare the hospital system, get all the human and material resources that are needed to cope with the imported cases in our hospital. Our best bet, and this is the emphasis, is prevention. That is where our strength lies. Since this is the situation so far, let us also invest our efforts and resources in prevention and sensitization.

I want to acknowledge the work done by every Member of the Assembly including Nominated Members who were also given some of the materials to engage in sensitization. As I said, they were never adequate. Imagine seven drums of water tanks. Some with taps and some the taps were not fixed. We were expecting it to come with a package so that you would not need a bucket. These are challenges we will take up with the Ministry for the purpose of accountability.

I was very surprised that an Honourable Member would stand here to fault the coordination that was done by the committee in facilitating this work and nobody could have done that. The committee did not do this in isolation, we did this in close consultation with Office of the Clerk. It was the Director of Table Office who was working with the committee and our secretaries. Nobody could have done this coordination other than the Health Committee. Nobody, even the Office of the Clerk, could have done that. Moreover, this was as a result of a recommendation made by the committee which was tabled before the Assembly and adopted by the plenary that National Assembly Members ought to be engaged. They have a key role to play in this. In that engagement, this was what the committee was doing to facilitate that engagement. So it was a real surprise but anyway people are different. All the others have appreciated and acknowledged the work of the committee, so that suffices.

As I said, prevention is the way out for The Gambia. We need to strengthen our health system. I have heard interventions which were very good but there was someone pre-empting what the committee intends to do. What the Committee on Health intends to do is that this august Assembly has been informed that there is D500 million committed by the Executive from the Appropriation Budget 2020. The D500 million is not coming from anywhere other than the Appropriation Budget. We

got assurance from the Honourable Minister of Finance and he expressed his readiness to support. We have been engaging him and he is making do with his promise. We were told that they have received D500 million. We agreed as a committee, that we are going to ask the Ministry to explain through the committee.

It is the committee that they should be dealing with as an oversight entity. In the first place, what do they intend to do with this five hundred million? How much have they requested, how much have they received and had it been utilised? That is the information we would want to share with the Honourable Members but the Honourable Members are coming up with suggestions that they want to do right away. I feel that it has to be in that fashion so that we would get a written report from the Ministry of Health and share it with the committee. If there is any need for the committee to converge around it but there are also issues of finances.

We would also want to know, apart from this D500 million, what other sources of funding is the Ministry earmarking? Are there any sources of funding other than the Appropriation Budget? If so, what are they? How much have they received and how do they intend to utilise that?

The committee has planned all these things but because of the two days, the committee could not have done that. This is what we agreed that we would be doing just to continue the oversight. Even if we are on recess or whatever because we are to continue engaging. There are quarantine centres. We have heard issues around them so we need to engage to know the state of those quarantine centres, whether those people are getting the best, of course respecting the privacy of those people who are under quarantine. Is not our business to know who they are but the committee is interested to know what services are available to them because you keeping them on mandatory quarantine. They are not expecting all the comfort they get in their homes but at least basic things that can make them stay there. All of us are in this together: those that are considered suspects, those that are victims, those that are not and every person as we have indicated in our reports. Every person in this country is a stakeholder. The task to all members is how to ensure that every Gambian and non-Gambian in this country accept and assume the responsibility as a stakeholder. We have an obligation to observe the precautions: WHO recommendations, hand washing regularly and social distancing. In fact, they even

want to change the terminology of social distancing, saying we are breaking the human touch, so it is physical distancing. These are all the things coming up, but how do we ensure that we encourage people to adopt such practices?

There is one thing; if we succeed, we are going to get a New Gambia. A Gambia that is competing with the countries as one of the cleanest countries. You are talking about Rwanda, Gambia can be like that. This is an opportunity for us to change and transform our sanitary conditions both at the individual, household, community and country level. This is an opportunity for us.

Honourable Speaker this is what the committee intends to do. We will continue with our oversight. We also have to observe that we do not need to be converging. The Members should also not be exposed to risk. As you know, the conditions now requires more of confinement than moving about. We would agree as to how to do it where we will not compromise the health of any of those who are going to engage in this oversight. We have to continue doing our oversight, is not time for us to sleep.

On the report, they have done very well as I indicated. I just want to say that some of the observations, the specific and general observations that we have made can be transformed into recommendations because most of them are recommendations. I want to say that at this stage, the incubation period as we are told is 14 days. Gambia has got only 1 case and we have not known who and who else is a case because we have to realise that the 4th case was at home, sick and was not reported by his or her family members to the health authorities. It was a concerned person, whether a Gambian or non-Gambian who reported to the health authorities that this person is suspected to be suffering from Covid-19. We can have such situations in our communities, so that is the danger.

Rather than the 90, 45 days, why can we not start with 2 weeks on the suggestions? We were interacting and I can tell you the Honourable Minister of Health has been on top of things and very responsive. The suggestion was why not Gambia give a one-week grace period and that after one week we are going to enter a state of public emergency so everybody should get prepared and the State will also get itself organised. In fact, the Select Committee made a recommendation. It

was from this Assembly that the recommendation was picked up; that it is high time for the Executive to dedicate a body and it is going to be an inter-Ministerial body. It is going to include the Minister of Health because this is a health issue. He is going to take the lead because everybody concedes that to the Ministry of Health and the Minister. You have Minister of finance because we need resources to be committed in whatever campaign we are going to engage in. Ministry of trade because it is affecting business. Ministry of Basic Education because people need to be sensitised. Ministry of Communication and in fact most of the things can be found on the report of Health Select Committee. Honourable Members, revisit that report. We wish the Executive took that up. Honourable Minister of Health, Attorney General and Minister of Finance we wish that you look at that report thoroughly.

In fact, I can also concede that the government has been implementing some of the recommendations but we want the whole thing as a package. If that is done, these regulations are going to complement the work. They are just going to come and reinforce because that has set the basis. The recommendations on that report have already set the basis, the foundation for the efforts to curb the spread and eventually defeat Covid-19 in The Gambia. We are talking about the Inter-Ministerial Committee; we need it. The Minister of Finance will be coming up with a response programme that these are the resources we expect to be home generated and these are the ones we expect from partners like the IMF, grants or whatever. Even the private actors and individual donations, the Minister of Health would have prepared something like a programme package.

We ask the Ministry of Trade to go and engage experts. Like the Honourable Member for Serekunda and Wuli West were saying, go to a workshop. We do not have an inventory but it is high time we do that. I am just giving an example. You go to a garage or car park and ask how many drivers they have in number and they say we have ten. One could have asked them how much do you earn per month? The minimum that is sufficient for you to succeed, and they say three thousand for example per month. One-month lockdown government could have got resources. These are the types of relief we expecting from government to provide for the person to stay at home. You cannot ask a person to stay home without giving them anything to succeed on. This is the challenge that people do face.

I am telling you, I am not sure whether members of the Executive are detached but to tell you that each of them are confronted by people every day: "Do not agree on the 90 days, how are we going to survive? That is key – survival. It is important for the Inter-Ministerial Body, as the Honourable Minister for Health told us that it is in place, but we want to see it in high gear and motion. Please come together, review the situation.

In tourism, they are affected and every sector is affected. Get the Ministries to engage their experts within government and outside to come and present something that we will have as a country. We give the population a duration, I am not sure whether it is too late now but it could have been a one week duration that after this one week we are going to enter into a lockdown. Then everybody would have prepared him/herself.

We are talking about taxi vehicles and fares. Now I understand the reason why the fares are reduced. The reason is that they do not want movement. Banjul to Serekunda is D8; they said D7. They are refusing D8 now but this is not the way to address it. We understand that the objective is to restrict movement but it is having catastrophic effects. I am sorry to term it as catastrophic but it is really difficult for the average person. How do we ensure that we come up with measures?

We are all in this together. We know the interest of every person: the Executive, National Assembly and ordinary Gambians is to ensure that we defeat Covid-19 and we emerge out of it unhurt. That is our wish and I believe that all our efforts should be geared towards that. How do we come up with measures that are going to help us to ensure that there is no spread but yet people observe social distancing, hand washing, observing their movement and yet they are not suffering? How do we mitigate suffering? That is key?

We do not want to roast the lamb by destroying our hut, the wood or whatever we have because we are hungry. At the end of the day we will not have shelter. There is the need for a balancing act. We need to circumspect as a government. Health is key but there are economic and social implications. How do we make sure that we give health its due but also people do not suffer. I am really advocating for two weeks.

If you look at Section 34[5] it say "A resolution of the National Assembly passed for the purpose of this section shall remain in force for 90 days or such sort of period as maybe specified therein. Provided that: [a] any such resolution maybe extended from time to time by a further resolution support in [i] in the case of first extension by the vote". We can start with two weeks and see what happens in asking people to restrict their movements as much as possible unless it is extremely urgent. There are businesses that are urgent. What we are doing in these measures are going to affect everybody, particular businesses. I am telling you there are some people who are not paying heed to the advices but I am also telling you there is a large number of people paying heed to the advices. Lots of people are not going, out only when it is necessary. It could be that the majority are not still compliant but I can tell you that so many people are not going out now. How we continue sensitizing them is in your best interest and the best interest of your family and the country. For us to observe these measures, we have to give them something in return. You cannot ask them to sit down at home and then nothing for them to live on. I have neighbours who are operating a garage. There was a day they came, I think the day before yesterday. They were asked to close but yesterday I was told they were told to go back. It appears that they are easing the restrictions so that is the situation as far as that is concerned.

I also want to come to the regulations. If you look at the regulation on transportation...

...interruption...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Banjul North I really donot want to interrupt but I want to draw your attention to the fact that we still a have number of Honourable Members who want to make their interventions. Let us also look at the time.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: To conclude, there is regulation on restrictions on public transportation emergencies. [c] Transportation, the Ports, there is no regulations on the Ports. Also, the beaches, we have boats coming from Senegal. There is one that comes to Banjul from this place called Betenti in Senegal

to Banjul on a daily basis. If you go to Kartong, Brufut and Tanji, there are boats. The regulations should be applied there.

Also, the fines are really exorbitant. D5,000 to D10,000 and there is D500,000 for the business hoarding. Even with that they should have sympathy in these trying times. D500,000 is on the high side. For us the interest is not for the people to break the law. What we want is for people not to break the law. We have engaged in sensitization that has been said here. Before we have this in place, we should have engaged in sensitization. In fact, that week-long lockdown I was talking about was meant for sensitizing the population on these regulations in all the languages so that people will know. Honourable Attorney General, as legal practitioners say, ignorance of the law is not an excuse. At the end of the day, no one found liable would say I do not know. Those are the things I would want to say. The fines are high, if we can reduce it. We thank the committee for the work they have done and also the Members of the Health Committee for being very active and supportive throughout the whole process. The Office of the Clerk, the Speaker. That is on behalf of the committee.

POINT OF OBSERVATION

HON. YAKUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED]: I just want to observe for the rest of us who are yet to speak to limit our speeches because if we go up to 12 O' clock the proclamation will elapse. We would not be able to affirm it.

THE SPEAKER: So this is what the committee has agreed?

HON. YAKUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED]: No, I just wanted you to guide us for us to limit our intervention.

THE SPEAKER: I was going to do that. That was why I interrupted the Honourable Member for Banjul North so that he can speed up his intervention. Honourable Members, we have a couple of interventions from Members of the committee. I am just appealing for them to be precise and to the point, taking into consideration the time and the fact that the Honourable Minister will have to come and respond to the issues together with the Vice Chairperson before a decision is taken. If we go on and on, the whole purpose will be defeated. I am just drawing your attention to the time.

HON. DEMBO KM CAMARA [ILLIASSA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Although I lost my appetite, I still have to join you. Although I am part of the committee, my intervention is going to be the shortest.

I have three questions, which I want to ask the Minister of Justice. Madam Speaker, if we are asking commercial vehicles to carry half of the passengers, they should also try to advise or organise to allow the mosques to open so that people will be able to perform their prayers. If the capacity is hundred people, they can try to minimise it to seventy-five people. This is one of the most serious things in the Ummah. In Islam, they have no right to close the mosque because the mosque does not belong to them. It belongs to the Almighty God. If they are afraid of this coronavirus, what about if before midnight the world comes to an end? I am now urging them to open our mosques and try to minimise the people so that we can continue praying. It is very sad and discouraging. There is no mosque in the country that is performing five daily prayers because of a virus. There is nobody on earth who has the power to control the virus. There is no one who can control nature. It belongs to God.

Everybody in this world is reachable; even the coronavirus is reachable. You cannot do anything. It is so embarrassing, there is nobody on earth, even Mecca has no right because it does not belong to them, it belongs to God. What they should have done is to minimise the people performing the Hajj. I am disappointed that the Supreme Islamic Council announced that all mosques should close and that should not be. I am telling the Attorney General if they do not reconsider this problem, my constituency will start praying in their mosques. Thank you very much.

HON. KADDY CAMARA [FONI BONDALI]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. I want to apologise that you called me in the morning but I was in Foni. I went for a programme in Foni. Madam Speaker, I want to thank certain communities in Foni. I want to thank Foni Agency for Rural Development for supplying us with sanitizer and liquid soap to give it to our people. Foni Dinding Federation also has provided us with soap for our community. I also want to thank the Frank Francis Foundation. Today, they give us spraying materials to take to the health facilities in our area.

I am very disappointed when I went to Bwiam General Hospital only to be told that since this pandemic came to The Gambia they have never received even a single equipment from the government. If you look at Bwiam General Hospital, people from CRR, LRR and even Kombo visit that place. If that hospital is not secured, are we secured? I don't think we are secured. As far as the people of Foni are concerned, we want government to provide equipment to Bwiam General Hospital.

If you look at Recommendation 2 of the committee that the period for extension be reduced from 90 days to 45 days, I want us to ask ourselves: are we prepared to keep our people in our homes for 45 days? Or, as National Assembly Members, are we going to forfeit our one month salary to give to our people?

We are not going to do it so let us be prepared for our people so that we can keep them for 45 days if not we will not keep them for 45 days. We will never do it. I want the government to sit down and plan properly. We can give them two weeks to come here and tell us how prepared they are, because they are not prepared. They cannot ask us to keep our people for 45/90 days without anything.

Madam Speaker, what I want to say have been highlighted by my colleagues and I want to concur with the Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol that we had Ebola here but we never experienced any case in The Gambia because they have closed our borders. We sat until there is one case and then we say we are going to close our borders. It is too late for us to close our borders. God forbid, if at all the first case was from The Gambia, Senegal would have closed their border. They will not allow Gambians to enter their territory. Madam Speaker, I want to stop here until further notice. ...*laughter*...

HON FATOU K. JAWARA [TALLINDING KUNJANG]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. I would also like to join the previous speakers to add my voice to the report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters.

I will go by the recommendations of the committee and further add another recommendation or observation. I will support the 45 days that was recommended by the committee. My first recommendation is, I want the Information Minister to work with the Gambia Press Union to have a strong sensitization in all the local

languages. Give the information to the general public that this is what the government wants to do before we embark on this state of public emergency.

In Observation 17, the committee noted that restrictions are imposed by the regulations without compensation and the Minister for Finance and Economic confirmed that as at now there is no compensation mechanism but assure the committee that government is looking into the situation for the possibility of providing such sort of relief package for the most vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, I think the government should now move from commitment to action. If there is no compensation mechanism for the vulnerable and we want to put these people in confinement what language are we telling the Gambian?

Looking at the magnitude of the situation, as game changers, because we have all the representatives of Gambians in the Assembly, even if the government fails to do their responsibility we as citizens who are at the grassroots should not be rivals in conflict. Sorry for my language because I heard some Members saying that without this it can lead to people to walk out on the street or do something that, God forbid, we do not pray for. I think the language we should give to our people is that if our own citizens in the Diaspora accept to be in lockdown, why not our own Gambians here. If we respect foreign laws, why not our own laws.

Madam Speaker, the language of 30 days state of emergency is just a language of the constitution but it can be revoked at any time. If we are saying that our people cannot be indoors for 45 days, two or three weeks, if they are sick where are we putting them? Where are the ones who were at the quarantine centres? Are they not outside now? We should put all these things into consideration. We should teach them to understand that this is for their own benefit, rather than saying this is not in favour of A or B.

On the issue of transportation, the Restriction of Public Transportation Emergency Power Regulations, I think we all need to be sincere to ourselves. Scaling down the number of passengers to half, at least everybody can earn something and we all understand that this is a global problem and we need all hands on deck to sacrifice and do something.

I will commend the Health Committee and the Honourable Minister and all patriotic Gambians. Yesterday I was watching TV and I saw one metric solution giving a donation of rice to the needy people. I think if all Gambians can come together and contribute their quota, we will be able to eradicate some of the challenges we are talking about. On that note Madam Speaker I beg to take my sit.

HON. KAJALI FOFANA [JARRA WEST]: Thank you Madam Speaker. I thank the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters for the report they prepared between our sitting yesterday and today. It was within a short time but they have done a good job. They need to be applauded for that. I also thank the Health Committee for facilitating our sensitization to our various constituencies which of course paid dividend. Some of us find a very funny situation in our area; many of the communities did not understand and some do but they did not agree. For the NAMs to go back to them has really made them understand and some even agreed but then I think that would be my argument.

I want to thank the Honourable Ministers that have been here with us since morning: Honourable Minister for Justice, Honourable Minister of Finance, Honourable Minister of Health and of course the Honourable Minister for Trade.

Honourable Speaker, my intervention is going to be limited to only the regulations because of time reasons and I know so many things have also been highlighted. If one important issue is shared by 53 members, automatically if you happen to be among the last ten or twenty almost everything will be exhausted and we have to accept that because somebody must come after another.

In the regulations specifically, Closure and Restriction on Non-Essential Public Places Emergency Power Regulation 2020 is where I have an issue. In the regulations there is a list from A-J. For the purpose of the regulations, the following are designated as non-essential public places: bar, cinema and video club, gymnasium, museum, night club, public swimming pools, event holds, casinos and game polo, sporting areas and public gathering of more than 5 people. I did not see a church or a mosque and these places were closed before the declaration, before these regulations come to us.

My argument is that I think there is something left out when we were doing that proclamation. I always say human beings have so many aspects in life. Here we are talking about our health and economic aspects which are very paramount. This pandemic is a panic to every Gambian and we all want to run away from it as well as our families. I think if we want the people to follow the regulations. It is important to engage them without bringing regulations. Public gatherings are not allowed but there are many public gatherings that people are able to avoid. Naming ceremonies are cancelled, the Qur'anic recitations are cancelled and all other social activities, but there are two programmes that Muslims and Christians find very difficult. That is the church and the mosque. Laws are made for man; whenever you are making any law, the affected areas should be consulted or informed. It could have been better if the Imams and Pastors were engaged whereas we can find a solution to the problem without getting ourselves into problem.

As we are sitting here today an imam is arrested in my own community and taken to police when we have the regulations in front of us, what are the justifications? It is very important that whenever government wants to take this kind of decision that has a bearing on our faith, they do consultations properly before we do any legislation or regulation. For example, we the National Assembly Members are in our constituencies advocating for hand washing, social distancing and other preventive measures but there are other preachers *in any constituency more than ten or fifteen* that are preaching against the closure of the mosque. What is going to be the effect of our campaign now when we have counter campaigns against us? This is the reason why we need to be consultative in making this kind of regulations especially when it has to do something with our faith. I think this is the last thing we would give out.

Of course, it has been declared in many Islamic countries including Saudi Arabia that public places of worships are closed but how do you make people believe that and how are they going to take it? There are different information on the social media, some are coming from West some are coming from East. I believe that as far as the regulations are in good hands, both the Ministry of Justices and Health should engage the religious leaders and discuss with them. This is a problem that can easily be solved when we sit together to discuss.

Let me hasten to say we are so much careful about health and livelihood but remember the Bible also says that man should not live only by bread. We come from different schools of thought and we have different mentality but now we are dealing with everybody. Whenever a decision comes to that point, we need to engage our religious leaders and discuss with them. I know in certain religious like Christianity social distancing can be observed, hand washing can be observed and there can be other preventative measures in the church that could avoid contamination and yet they can do their worship. All this could be done when you negotiate but when regulations are against our faith, I am afraid it is going to be a very tough campaign to make them believe. So many of that kind has happened in this country.

How many years does it take us to make our people believe that female genital mutilation is not taboo against Islam. If it was not this argument I would have just rested my case but I want us to be very much careful when we are legislating or when we are making any regulations that have a bearing on our faith. 90% of our population are Muslims. The imams are not adhering to this. Otherwise, the imam that was arrested today may not be. If you go there they will tell you openly. I was able to convince my colleague but the first statement he told me was "*INNA SALAATEE, WA NUSUKEE, WA MAHAYAA WA MAATEELILLAHI...*" literally meaning "My life and my death all belong to Allah". How can you make that person believe?

Sometimes we need to engage them. I think that is what we left behind, this is why they could not listen to this advice. We can take them together, talk to them and they will simply understand that we are not doing this just to block them from worshipping but we are doing it for their own safety and there we can even think of a modality that even a congregative prayer can be conducted without having that distance. Whatever you call HARAM in Islam for example if there is a condition is HALAL. Sometimes you may find it difficult for somebody praying up that distance but is possible when there is condition that does not allow you to come closer to one and another. I think we have to engage them in one way or the other so that we would be able to make them understand otherwise we are not going to be in the same line with them. With that Madam Speaker, I beg to take my seat. Thank you.

HON. NDEY YASSIN SECKA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I just want to remind this august Assembly and the Ministers that are with

us that I have been crying for strategizing and prioritising. As far as this is not the issue we will be where we are and God forbid, we will continue to be where we are. With proper strategizing and proper prioritisation I think we will get to where we want to. I remember when we went to the sanatorium and I asked the Honourable Minister of Health what about the Campama Psychiatric Hospital. What he told me was that we will go there but I never heard what had happened.

I think these are really issues that we have to sit together and think about how to prioritise. We all live in this country, what doubts me sometimes is that what we are told here and what we hear from the radio; if we go to the grounds, what happens is always different. What is wrong with us? We know that Covid-19 is contagious so nobody is saying no to this emergency buy the mechanism that we should take to make sure that things work are not there. What are we doing to make sure that those things are there? With those remarks, I want to rest my case.

HON. MADI MK CEESAY [SEREKUNDA WEST]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I want to commend the Minister of Health and of course the Select Committee on Health for they have really been working very hard since the virus issues started. I am in support of the 45 days because I think the 90 days is a little bit on the high side and I am not convinced by the position of government to say that the 90 days will give them time to plan.

I remember in our last sitting in December we had this issue here, from December to now it is already three months. So if government had not planned from December to now, I do not know how much time they would want for us to give them to plan for the next three months again. This means it will take them 6 good months just to plan. In my honest opinion, I really think it is not a serious move. Obviously the proclamation and the regulations are affecting the movement of certain people and seriously affecting the livelihood of certain groups of people.

Going by the Emergency Power Act Section 3 (2) [f], if government fails to provide remuneration for affected people then they are violating the very laws that they are supposed to support. Therefore, even with this 45 days with the limitation of people's movement and certain rights, I think government has to have a package ready to give to the people who are affected. Failure to do that, it is not a good and

positive move. Our electorates are really worried whether they say it or not. We all know that the cry of the people is that they are afraid of the three months. Three months was really too scary for the Gambians. If I have it my way, we would not even have a state of emergency. To compromise i.e. government comes half way we go half way, I support the 45 days proposal by the Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters.

Madam Speaker, Covid-19 is real; as at yesterday over a million cases were confirmed and over 50 people died so there is no doubt that this is a real thing and it is killing. Therefore, to have a government that is really not proactive is very disappointing.

Madam Speaker, in The Gambia we are saying we have 4 cases. That is true but for me that is not the real picture. It is not the real picture because how many people were tested during the period? I think for the past three days it was 98 people who were tested. Out of that 98 we have a result of 4. We have 1.2 million Gambians so the 4 cases is really not the real picture. We may have more as we speak. Because those cases are not detected, the infection is going on. Therefore, I would like to ask a few questions for the Ministry to answer if they are intervening. How many testing centres do we have now and where are these testing centres located? I will also want the Minister of Health to tell us how many treatment centres are also available because it is from the testing that you will be able to determine that somebody is suspected. If we have only tested 98 and we have 4 results, fine, good news; 2 are released and 1 is still there. How many more are carrying the virus? We don't know, so that is scary. We really don't have any room for complacency. I think we need to spend the money into getting the right equipment so that proper testing and frequent testing can be done then we will know our real status. In the US that was what happened. At the beginning, the United States were not testing as many people. When the tests really increased, their numbers increased. So, we are really sitting on a time bomb.

Madam Speaker, I also want to urge the government to be very judicious in the way they will or they are spending funds that are here to fight the Covid-19. We know government has put aside D500 million. As of yesterday, World Bank has approved another D10 million and more will come. Therefore, we are not left by ourselves and

we are not left by the international community. But then, those monies should be judiciously and transparently spent. Therefore, I will urge Honourable Members of this House, civil society organization and the media, to put their eyes on these monies and monitor them very well. I will even urge people who are within the spending committees of government to serve as whistle blowers should there be any element of corruption, should there be any element of diversion of funds into other sectors that is not meant for. These monies are meant to save us so we all have to be very honest in the way we are going to spend these monies.

Madam Speaker, I will want to conclude because a lot has been said and there is no point repeating one another. I want to call the attention of the government not to use the state of emergency and tamper with the press freedom of this country. We should know that we need the media now more than ever before. Many speakers have said we need sensitization. You cannot do the sensitization without using the media. Therefore, I call on the government to be very careful not to tamper with press freedom in the country and allow journalists to do their work professionally. I will not also conclude without saying that the media or the people in the journalism fraternity should also use their mediums professionally and give more airtime and space for sensitization because Covid-19 is real.

HON. FATOUMATTA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Like you said, since I am part of the Standing Committee, I think my contribution would be very brief.

First of all, I would like to mention that after consultations with my electorates both on the ground here and abroad, they gave me their concerns to present and add to what this August Assembly has already done. I will still need to convey their concerns and have them factored in whatever we are going to do. We all know the importance, especially of the Diaspora, in both the financial and social-economic development of this country. Thus, their concerns need to be factored as well.

Madam Speaker, first of all, I will look at the restrictions and freedom of movement and other rights that might be expected during the state of emergency. We all know that, of course, something must happen for government to declare a state of emergency and in that case restriction movements, which is very necessary in this

case. I would like to emphasize because we all know that Covid-19 is transmitted person-to-person and if our movement is restricted, it breaks the chain of transmission. I would applaud the declaration of the state of emergency bearing in mind other conditions because we all know that the only way we can save ourselves is to stay at home. We can clean our hands, we can avoid other contact but how can we avoid other contact other than staying at home? Staying at home comes with other conditions as well.

Madam Speaker, on the other hand, my Honourable colleagues had mentioned the media. The media, we all know, plays a vital role in raising public awareness and enabling the public to get information on the pandemic. We have all heard all the speculations about what state of emergency means; people interpreted it as curfew, people interpreted it as a lockdown. I think this is the time that the government should come up and use the media rather than restrict the media. The media enables the public to get the information on the pandemic and if they get it directly from the sources then it will lessen the speculation and people will be more comfortable, at least then they will hear.

While we are sitting here, messages were being sent that the Head of State was addressing the nation and I would like to applaud that address because it was done in our local languages: Wolof and Mandinka. Whenever we speak, we speak in English. When we speak in that language, we only talk to a few. If 80 percent of us do not speak English and when we address them we address them in English, it means that we are talking to ourselves. Madam speaker, we should ensure that the local languages are encouraged, especially in this time of need because we need to talk to the whole country not just to you or myself.

Madam Speaker, the media also needs to be protected and supported to be able to perform their duties and sustain their work. It is not only the media that needs support, Madam Speaker, every person needs support. If we need to keep them at home, my honourable colleagues picked up something that I think most of us failed to pick up – the reduction in fares. I think that was a good strategy by the Honourable Minister, by putting that because obviously if you cannot afford to fuel your vehicle to take passengers, you will need to park. In that case, the passenger will need to be restricted. But then again, how is it going to affect us both

economically, health-wise and everything. If you are restricted without food, you might end up dying even before the corona virus kills you. We need to also look at that.

Madam Speaker, when I looked at the Restriction on Open Markets and Shopping Areas, we discuss it at the committee level but when I went home I looked at Section 2 Subsection 2: closure of non-retail outlets in the market. It says a person trading in food in any market shall open for business between the hours of 6:00am and 2:00pm each day. Somebody mentioned that but I have another aspect of it. Madam Speaker, being a wife, a mother and a female representative, I go to the market every week and I am very close to the market women especially at Banjul market which is part of my constituency. Madam Speaker, most of those women buy their goods daily. They go to Brikama, they leave their homes at 4 o'clock some of them as early as 3 o'clock every other day or so to go to Brikama market to buy their products. Madam Speaker, those people that they are buying from if they open at 6:00am, these people who will be there by 4:00am or 4:30am will not be able to buy products. If they open at 6:00am, by the time they move to Banjul it takes them an hour or so. It will not give them that much time.

Madam Speaker, in as much as I want the restrictions, I also want them to be taken care of. We can close down, we can lockdown, I will support a lockdown with a proper package any day. Even if we look at the European countries, they have lockdowns, only for essential goods and services but then they give them compensation.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Justice mentioned that they want us to be remembered as the generation that did all that it could to save Gambian lives during this pandemic, which will always be remembered in world history. That is very possible, we can be remembered in world history. We can be remembered by saving our country, but by also feeding our most vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, like I always say, this is not the first time I have been mentioning this deadly virus. I have always mentioned, like I said before, I did want the closure of borders because some other borders are very porous otherwise people will be

coming illegally. Madam Speaker, now is the time to take stringent measures to ensure that people stay at home.

We just heard that we have D500 million and an additional \$10 million. Madam Speaker, it is best to prevent things we cannot cure. We have testing equipment from China, yes we can use them, I am not saying we should not buy medical equipment, we should because we need them. This is the time that I am appealing to the Minister of Finance to come up. I will recommend for the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs to present its financial plan and also to prepare for approval by this August Assembly, a Covid-19 elevation programme detailing all funds directed to us so that we can properly execute our oversight functions. Not only that, I am also appealing for him to present the budget that was approved here in December because most activities in that budget would not be effective again because we do not know how long this is going to last. Even if it were to be cleared tomorrow, the after effects would prevent that budget from being functionally active.

This thing can last two months but the after effect can last a year. I do not expect us as a country or any other country in this world to be traveling, meeting, seminars, etc. because I think this is going to be a game changer. We should start thinking of virtual meetings now, virtual trainings, virtual seminars and that would save us a lot, not only as a poor country but worldwide everybody would start saving. I think that is the more reason why we should revisit the budget and re-appropriate because it is not business as usual. Like the Honourable Minister of Justice had said, these are extraordinary times that call for extraordinary measures.

Extraordinary measures means that we need to revisit, we need to take footsteps back. Look at the work that we did in January, it will be obsolete, it will be of no effect. If we sit and watch our people die because we do not feed them, we will not, like the Honourable Minister said, be remembered in world history. We will be remembered as murderers of our own people. I think this is the time for our government to show that we care, to show that yes we are keeping you at home not to restrict your human rights but to protect you and this is what we are going to feed you with, during this time. I am not saying that we should be giving them rice, oil, etc. Under the Emergency Powers Act, there is a Section... *interruption*... No, I am not allowing you to observe me. I need to continue, we do not have time.

THE SPEAKER:Honourable, you may not allow him but please let us just be mindful of the time.Please we know to focus on the time as well.

HON. FATOUMATTA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Please Honourable, we do not have time, it is nearly 12 o'clock.Madam Speaker, under the Emergency Powers Act, emergency regulations, it says when an emergency proclamation... and services essential in the life of the community.What are the services essential in our lives? Right now, medical equipment, food to keep us home.We need to stay at home and if we stay at home, we will not be doing our business and it will affect us. Madam Speaker, this where Subsection F comes in. It says,"Provide for payment of compensation and remuneration to persons affected".That is covered by the recommendation of the committee but the Minister said that they have not done that. How do you expect us then to approve a state of emergency if you have not prepared on how to take care of us in case we need to stay at home?Like somebody said, we might only have 4 cases but nobody knows because we are not testing everybody. I might be carrying it, the Minister might be, who knows?Unless we do checks, unless we check everybody, we can never tell whom this is affecting. Madam Speaker, we might approve this, which I would support but I would also want the vulnerable to be fed.

In that case Madam Speaker, donot give them food, this state of emergency Act also gives the government the right to take over properties other than landed properties.What I am suggesting, Madam Speaker, we have the Minister of Trade here.They know the importers and exporters. Let us work on promissory notes.Give citizens promissory notes so that they can go to vendors.That will reduce the traffic of people going outside shopping haphazardly. At least they will know that if the need arises, they will be able to be fed. Give them promissory notes, this is not the time to be walking with cash because this is the time that people will do fraudulent acts. We have seen letters going round accusing people of paying themselves, so we are not sure. I will recommend that we use promissory notes that at the end of the day these vendors, these retailers will take to the government to claim and that will be more transparentrather than the government calming that they are going to buy foodstuffs.Who knows?They might inflate it.I am not accusing anybody but I just want them to be accountable and transparent.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I would also join my colleagues to show appreciation to the Health Committee for the job well done. Also, to tell them that what the Ministry of Health has given us as Parliamentarians, personally I have seen it. I have sent it to my constituency, given it to my Councillors in my constituency to use it to sensitize and for that matter I will say thank you to the Health Ministry through the Chairperson of the committee and also to remind this august Assembly that the Health Ministry has been working tirelessly (24/7) but also to tell the other Ministers they must join hands with the Ministry of Health because this is a cross-cutting sector, it is not only health. At the end of the day if you don't eat, you will not be healthy. Other Ministers must join the Honourable Minister of Health to ensure that they come up with a plan of action to tell us how. If Senegal had come up with a plan of action since 16th of March; their Executive are not more educated than ours, their National Assembly is not more effective than ours. If they can do it, we can do.

If Niger, who is much lower in the poverty index ladder than Gambia, can come up with a package to feed their vulnerable, I think Gambia can also do it. We can do it to keep our people indoors and we must do it. I think this is the time we need to show our people that we care about them. This is the time we need to show our people that we have conscience. This is the time we need to show our people that they sent us in this august Assembly to protect them and ensure that laws that are there to protect them are implemented properly, thank you very much Madam Speaker.

HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker...

... interruption ...

HON. MUHAMMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Madam Speaker, what I want to observe, members of the Standing Committee are the ones who sat on these regulations throughout yesterday up to 3:00am. I think they have discussed on all the issues so therefore our expectation from them is to help other Members who raised issues to help answer their issues before the mover of the Motion comes in.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, I can assure you that all other Honourable Members have already taken the floor and make their observations. These are Members of the committee who are responding the issues that have been raised.

HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. The subject under discussion is either for the august Assembly to approve the 90days extension of the state of public emergency; to reduce and approve or not to approve at all. Honourable Speaker, we are aware of the fact that the corona virus in question, every individual in this country whether you are a President, Minister, National Assembly Member, businessman or woman, we are all in this fight together. Together we can fight this corona virus: together we can utilize our resources and fight the corona virus; we can utilize our knowledge to fight the corona virus; we can do everything possible in our capacity to fight the corona virus in question.

Honourable Speaker, I will announce to this honourable Assembly that in this fight I am very committed and determined to offer my next two months' salary for the people of Niamina East. I will challenge all organs of government, the three organs of government to do same so that we can help the most vulnerable people. I am committed to do this. Honourable Speaker the message that we send to our people is very important. For the Ministry or authority responsible that are actually releasing information to the general public: the message must be very substantial; the message must be accurate; it must be in line with actually what we want to talk about.

Can you imagine Honourable Speaker, after the first declaration was made, the next minute the authority had to come out to make that correction without proper consultation? We must inform the general public that we are not actually under lockdown; that we are not under curfew.

What we are actually talking about is a state of public emergency and the Honourable Minister for Justice did emphasize yesterday that this doesnot actually mean asking people to stay at home but they are really emphasizing that we should restrict the movement of the people, if I am quoting the Honourable Minister right. The people are not actually aware of this. Honourable Speaker, we are telling people that we are going in for the state of public emergency, asking people to close their shops when we are not actually under lockdown. At the same time, we are telling the people that the non-essential commodity shops should close. They are coming again to say if you are 100 metres away from the market, you can open. It is

very confusing so this message must be very clear to the people for them to understand the message we are delivering, Honourable Speaker. Let the Honourable Minister take note with the Ministry of Information; let them go and clarify this to the general public, that we are not actually asking them to stay at home we are just appealing or encouraging them to limit their movement.

The other point Honourable Speaker, if I may quote the Honourable Minister of Justice in his submission on the Motion, the only backup that I can understand that the Honourable Minister of Justice is using if I may quote page 5 of the Motion "A 90-day extension of the period of the state of public emergency will allow the government to do just that with proper planning and organization for the implementation of the immediate, medium and long term preventive measures not only to save lives but to also balance the competing political, social and economic interests expected in such times of national and global crisis."

If I could understand this, it means we are waiting for this day for the Parliament either to approve or not to approve so that the Ministries can start their preparation. So they are telling me since 2019 when we heard about this virus spreading boundaries after boundaries we were not in preparation to better prepare ourselves and start the fight. This is what actually we are talking about so what of in the event that this is not actually approved today, Honourable Speaker?

Meaning they will not go ahead and do whatsoever planning that they have to do. This is what the Minister is actually talking about. I would have expected the Ministries that are responsible to start whatever planning they have to do in order to fight the coronavirus in question, in fact before we register a single case in this country but this was not the case, if I could understand the statement, Honourable Speaker.

Moving forward, I know many people are talking about the D500 million and the D500 million in question can be accessed in five ways: loan, grant, contingency fund, supplementary appropriation and reallocation of funds. These are the five methods that can be applied. From the Honourable Minister of Finance, in our engagement, he is telling us the Ministry is applying reallocation of funds under Section 30 of the Public Finance Act that is not subject to parliamentary approval. This is what is

actually happening but that is not the most interesting part in this, Honourable Members. The most interesting part of this, the Honourable Minister made it very clear yesterday. That actually there is no package in the D500 million in question that will be used as a social support for the most vulnerable people, helpless people, homeless people, voiceless people, farmers, waiters and waitresses, according to the Minister yesterday.

In this, I will inform the Honourable Members, we have to be very careful. If we have to go ahead and approve whatsoever period that we are going to approve, it means there is no package that will actually help our people in terms of their survival as we speak, Honourable Members. This is what we are actually informed so the Honourable Minister is saying they are still looking at the situation, studying the situation to see what package they can come up with in order to help our people. What if we approve this today meaning it will come into effect tomorrow and our people have already started experiencing so much suffering... *interruption...*

POINT OF OBSERVATION

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SEREKUNDA]: I don't think it can be Section 30 because that is about revised budget so maybe Section 29 which deals with virements, I think it is Section 29 ... *interruption...* Honourable Speaker, he was talking about the Minister talking about reallocation. I was saying that the Section 30 that he mentioned is about revised budget. It is section 29 (of the Public Finance Act) that talks about virements.

HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]: Thank you for the clarification, I misquoted the provision. Honourable Speaker, what I was actually saying, by virtue of conclusion, I just want the Honourable Assembly Members to be very careful in whatsoever decision that we have to take at the end of the day. As we speak, there is no guarantee, there is no assurance that these vulnerable people will be helped in the long run while we are in this situation. During the 7 days, our people we had so many complaints. They are already into some trouble, catastrophe, disaster, and if we have to go ahead and approve whatsoever period, they will continue with this trouble.

This is what I understand from the entire situation because the Minister of Finance cannot give us the guarantee, assurance or certainty that they are going to provide or there is this package that is now available for the people to be helped for their survival so we must be very careful. If you go out immediately from this House, whatever approval we are going to make, they will question us; what help is the Ministry actually coming up with? Who among us here can answer that? Nobody, we cannot, so we must be very careful with the decision that we are going to take.

Again the donors, Honourable Minister, Honourable Speaker, we cannot rely on donors to help our people when they are actually in danger and this is something that is happening already. The IMF, World Food Programmes, World Bank and all other development partners whatever donation or support that they are coming up with, we are not actually relying on those people to have our people helped for their survival. This is not actually something that you want to have for now. We know that they must come and they will come. That we know for sure but now what we want to see is statistics/data of individuals who are going to benefit from this package. What we want to actually see now is the reality, how much percentage are these people actually going to benefit from the monies that are coming? This is what we want to know for now. The idea is not about that World Bank or IMF coming with something, that we know for sure. This should have been the time before the presentation of this Motion you should have clearly informed the Minister of Justice the data, the information, the number of people that are going to benefit from the resources that we have here and the resources that are coming into this country. Then this debate would not have stayed this long because my people will know straight away that they are going to benefit, Honourable Speaker. These are some of the things that we have to consider.

Just to conclude, Honourable Speaker, the regulations are coming and we have experienced something. We are not asking the police officers or the security personnel to go and torture our people out there because they want to enforce this. We are not asking them to go and harass our people because they want to enforce this. We are not asking them to go and violate the rights of the individuals because they want to enforce this. They must be advised and the Honourable

Member for Upper Saloum was even saying this, they must know how they must handle this in terms of the enforcement.

Honourable Speaker, this is actually what I want to say. The helpless people are there waiting; the homeless people are there waiting; the jobless people are there waiting; the people that are paid low salary are there waiting. Whatever decision we are going to make at the end of the day, they must question us; what package is coming exactly from the government to help us in terms of our survival? There is no one of us here, as we speak, who can answer that question. This is the problem that I have.

HON. ALHAGIE S. DARBOE[BRIKAMA NORTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I think I should also join my colleagues to thank each and every Gambian right down from the President, the Ministers, National Assembly Members particularly the Select Committee on Health through the Chairperson, Local Government Authorities, Political Leaders, Civil Society Organizations, businesses and individuals for contributing in one way or the other in combating the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid-19 is real, contagious, air-borne and deadly. The Minister gave some figures but I want to give an updated figure. Globally we have 1, 084, 015 cases. Out of this we have 58,153 deaths. The world economic and super powers are on top: United States of America 256, 750 cases, 6, 808 deaths; Italy 119,827 cases, 14,681 deaths; China 81,620 cases, 3,222 deaths; UK 38,168 cases, 3,605 deaths. These are taken to be the world's super powers economically and politically.

The Minister reported that The Gambia has 4 cases: 1 death, 2 recovered and 1 active case. Coming down to Africa, the number keeps increasing day-by-day and our close neighbour, Senegal has over 200 cases with 1 death so far. That means one can conclude that it is indeed real. It is in this vein that the government decided to put preventive measures in order to combat the pandemic and one way of trying to do that is to restrict movements, reasonable restriction on movements as the basis to avoid contacts to ensure social distancing. This is what brought about the idea of having the state of public emergency.

As my learned friend quoted it, people are trying to misconceive the whole essence of state of public emergency. It is not a lockdown per se, as we perceive, but rather

to provide reasonable restriction of movement and crowding to ensure social distancing and avoidance of contacts as advisable ways of trying to avoid the spread of the disease. Let us help ourselves not to mislead the people that the state of emergency is here to put a lockdown; that people should be kept at home. No, we have the restrictions on open markets and shopping areas, the closure and restriction on non-essential public places, the restriction on public transport and emergency powers and essential commodities. These restrictions as I said will merely put reasonable restriction on movement and crowding to guarantee social distancing and avoidance of contacts. That is the best way to contain it as at now. If the super powers cannot fight it, with the reasonable resources we have, let us utilize that and try to fight and contain it.

Madam Speaker, this brings me to our very report. We recommended for the state of public emergency to be reduced to 45 days. There was a question that the Minister gave reasons why 45 days and my learned friend read the portion that the Minister did justify why 90 days rather. If I may break that down: "For proper planning and organization and for implementation of immediate, medium, long-term for preventive and precautionary measures to be taken and finally to balance the competing political, social and economic interest..." These were the basis and reasons advanced by the Minister for the 90 days. If one may look at this proper planning and organization, do we need 90 days for the proper planning and organization? That is why when the Honourable Member for Wuli West said this is exposing The Gambia, I concurred with him. At this stage, if we are trying to say that we need 90 days to ensure proper planning and organization, one may question our commitment and determination in the fight. That is not a reasonable reason why we should say we need 90 days.

The other part is that to ensure implementation of immediate, medium and long-term preventive and precautionary measures. All these are part of the planning aspect; preventive measures, precautionary measures we need 90 days for that? Should we talk about that? We need 90 days for preventive measures, for precaution measures that is not justifiable. The last part, to create a balance between competing political social and economic interests. I think that part is of no important use as far as the state of public emergency is concerned. The bone of contention is

on how to fight and combat, the other things can be secondary. I may take one and two as the factors we should strictly look at. Now we said we do not need that maximum duration of 90 days. If you are requested to do work for a particular time, if the one who is tasking you to do the work wants to test whether you are committed to do the work or not, he or she will rather give you a shorter period to commit you. We reduced what you requested to have so that you can redouble your efforts. We want this to end if possible within 2 weeks. If I task you to do the work and try to combat this within 2 weeks, that is our desire. That is why we give you half of the period you requested to test the commitment and concern of the government to make sure they redouble their efforts and try to combat this within 45 days. In fact, that could be on the high side.

We have seen China, they have gone back to schools. That means they fought very hard to be able to contain it that is why they said life should be resuming. We look forward for our government doing that rather than give them the maximum time. Laziness could be there. I would not actually say that the government was lazy but I want to tell the government to be very serious and committed and that is why we give them 45 days so that they can redouble their efforts within that period and be able to contain it. Somebody asked us the reason for the 45 days. This is the essence why we reduced it.

Again, when we realized the Finance Minister did mention that government is looking into the compensation aspect of it, somebody said that at this juncture we should not be looking at it, we should be seeing it. That is what we were expecting and if we are not seeing, we want it to be seen, that is why we reduced it to ensure that commitment is attached to it.

Madam Speaker, if I may go to the portion of the report under Paragraph 22 the Members observe that the number of passengers has been reduced to half and no plans are in place currently for drivers. I think at this juncture the concern is not only on the reduction of the fares. We are told that the fares are reduced but on the regulation that I will come to, the passengers are reduced but the fares are reduced. If you reduce the passengers at the same time you reduce the fares, the drivers will be at a loss. What we recommended, I think that was at the tail end when we were trying to edit we added that in as much as the passengers are

reduced, the fare should remain as it is but it should not be reduced. I think that should be observed. The mover of the Motion please take note. Passengers are reduced and then the price in one of the regulations is reduced. That is not on a fair side to the drivers.

On 23, Essential Commodities Emergency Powers Regulation. There the observation is for it to be reflected under the Restriction on Open Markets and Shopping Areas Emergency Regulations. I want the mover to take note that the committee was of the opinion that the commercial businesses should not be totally banned. Rather, the regulations should only restrict their closing and opening times. This should come under 24, Restriction on Open Markets and Shopping Areas Emergency Powers Regulation 2020.

Under Recommendation 4, this has to do with the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs and the relevant line Ministries to work with the Attorney General and Minister for Justice to come up with the compensatory mechanism to provide some relief package to the most vulnerable during the times of the restrictions. Here I beg the Chairperson of the committee that I would like to seize this opportunity to share with the plenary our findings when we were engaging the hotel industry.

What we discovered from the hotel industry is that they were so much affected as far as the pandemic is concerned and that the industry is at a standstill as at now. The entire hotels are closed and then the small and medium businesses are closed as well. One will note that the hotel industry contributes about 20.4% of the GDP and then the revenue annually is estimated to D1.4 billion. The impact the pandemic created at the beginning of the season is that an estimated 289,000 arrivals are supposed to be in the country but as at now they have 101,930. From October 2019 to April 2020, the hotel occupancy rate was supposed to be 95% for the entire season but this has drastically dropped to 49%. As at now, the hotels owe about D350 million to the international tour operators. On this basis, the hotels are requesting and that is why we mentioned that they should be part of the compensatory package. They are requesting that the immediate intervention from the government is highly needed to address that financing, taxes, employment support and others so that those issues can be addressed. These were the issues that we picked with the hotels and these should be forwarded with a memorandum to the Ministry so that

they can share with them and see how best to address the issues at the industry. Madam Speaker, we are aware that there is an emergency committee. If so, this emergency committee should include all the sectors that are seriously affected by the pandemic. I don't think that should only be limited to health. Of course, I must mention that the hotel industry should be part of the emergency committee. Madam Speaker, if a comprehensive Covid-19 National Plan of Action is not in place, it should be formulated. This should be regularly reporting on the implementation of the plan of action.

The regulations that we have, it is always said that ignorance of a law is no excuse. I think we will be very unfair with our local people if these laws are existing and they don't know, if they should be offending, they are punished. Let us make the copies of these laws and make them available to all the Alkalos. Media sensitization is not enough, let them have these copies so that their people can actually know the laws they should follow. Media sensitization is not enough.

Finally, support to Local Government Authorities; they are doing extremely well. The government needs to support them in this crusade to fight against the pandemic. I thank you Madam Speaker.

YA-KUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker, I will try to be brief given the time consideration. Sitting down and listening to all the deliberations and watching what has happened through the period before we had a case and after we had a case, one word that comes to my mind is that the Executive, I would say, has trumped on us and this word is inspired by Donald Trump and his slow and erratic response to the fight against Covid-19. That is exactly what the executive has done in this case, they trumped. They slowly and erratically responded to the fight against Covid-19 and that is the truth.

We could have avoided this. I remember when we were here the last time, I posed the question directly to the Honourable Minister of Health and asked him. As the leader of the health sector, what will you advise in regards to the closure of our borders? I remember that morning both the Honourable Member for Banjul South ran to the Speaker's Office, literally, that we want to bring a Motion so we can pass a Resolution to close the borders because we were aware of the threat. The Minister,

in my understanding, belittled the threat of the corona virus and that is why we are facing this. I totally agree with the Honourable Member for Foni Bondali. If this government acted fast and closed our borders, we would not have had a case because all these cases were imported. I will give you the timeline; Senegal recorded their first case around the 2nd of March. We had an imported case directly from Senegal with the Bangladeshi national from the 2nd of March. We have time, 2 weeks, to have closed the borders so that that man would not have come into the country. This is the action we failed to do as a nation and now we are facing the consequences.

United Kingdom registered their first case on the 28th of February. This was before our first case came into the country. If we took action and close our borders, we would not be here now. I think the government has the responsibility, they have trumped on us and now we are here and they are still trumping on us. This is what is happening in this situation.

I will first start to answer the question why we decided as a committee to give them 45 days. We have realized that no matter what has happened, what is happening or what is going to happen, it is important as a country for us to have social distancing in order to curb this. Whether they have done what they are supposed to do, it is our responsibility as Members to protect the people of this country and we need social distancing so there must be some restriction to restrict people to stay in their homes to curb the spread of this virus. That is why we said 45 days but after listening to everything here, I am proposing that even though we were agreeing to give them 45 days, let us give them a condition on that. Now, we will give them 45 days on the condition that within 2 weeks of these 45 days, you are going to give us a plan and I will tell you why.

If you look at all these countries that are declaring a lockdown or state of emergency, I will use America as an example, while this lockdown is going on, their Parliament was preparing for what will happen, what packages their people will have. Just America, they have passed three Bills since this lockdown started. They first started the Corona Virus Preparedness and Response Supplementary Appropriation Act 2020. This was \$8.3 billion to prepare for medical supplies.

This was something I was expecting from the Ministry of Finance to come to us. When I heard Barrow said D500 million for Covid-19, the first thing I wondered was where this was coming from. That message was not clear, they just said he is allocating D500 million. Until yesterday, I did not know this was coming from our budget and the Minister explained that it was going to be reallocation and virements. I am a little bit uncomfortable with this. I know virement is allowed within a budget line and within Ministries but if you look at the Constitution, and I have always had this problem, the Constitution will tell you under Section 153 that "If in respect of any financial year it is found that the amount appropriated under the Appropriation Act is insufficient or that a need that has arisen for a purpose to which (I emphasize) no amount has been appropriated by that Act, a supplementary estimate showing the sums required shall be laid before the National Assembly before the expenditure has been incurred.

If we are to vire for something that we did not plan for, is this possible? I really want the Minister to come and explain this, the powers given to vire for something. This Covid-19 is not planned; this country has never planned it in the budget. Can you use money, for example allowances from the Office of the President, for Covid-19 fight given the Constitutional provision, regardless of what the Public Finance Act says?

This provision set precedence so I would really like an explanation on that. I do not want us to do the right thing the wrong way. I understand this is important and we need the funds but if we really require the Appropriation Bill, I think that needs to come and it is necessary for it to come. The second legislation the United States government passed was the Families First Corona Virus Response Act. This was to provide for food security support for the unemployed people.

This brings me to my next point which is very important and which the Executive failed to take into consideration. If you look at the Emergency Act it is saying when an emergency proclamation is in force the President may, subject to the Constitution, make such regulations that appear to him or her necessary... and also maintaining supplies and services essential to the lives of the community. With these regulations, I know these are necessary but they should have gone further. The government needs to tell us what regulations they are putting in place to guarantee that there

would be enough food supplies i.e. food security during this period. This is very important and this is what we do not see that is why we have a problem giving you the entire 90 days. I think the government needs to come up with a strategic plan addressing all these issues.

The second thing the Act says under Section 3 (2)(f) "They should provide for payment of compensation and remuneration to persons affected by the regulation". This means, these regulations must have been accompanied with a plan on how to compensate those affected. That is straight forward, it must have been accompanied with the plan on how you are going to compensate those affected and also a helping hand.

The reason why I asked yesterday whether the Minister of Justice, in coming up with these regulations, had liaised with Finance is that there must be economic regulations as well. There must have been economic regulations on what we are going to do during this period; what the budget can offer, what the donor partners can offer and these have to be budgeted for. We know line by line this D500million where is this going and where is that going.

For example I will suggest that D200million out of the D500million be put aside, for social protection packages for vulnerable families. This is what I expected the government to do. I do not know why they were not thinking along these lines because you have enough time from the first case which was registered on the 17th or 18th of March up to now the 2nd of April. You had at least 15 days to have done the strategic planning.

This brings me to the Ministry of Health. This D500million and the 90 days you are asking us, what is your plan during these 90 days? You need to tell us how many isolation centres you are going to put up during these 90 days and most importantly how many tests you are going to conduct during these 90 days because that is very important. It is commendable, the work you have done during this period, we appreciate that we have only 4 cases. If that is the case and we were certain that these were the only 4 cases, we would not have even needed a state of emergency because all these cases are imported. However, you and I know that there is a danger that there are people walking around with this virus and they do not

know. How many tests have we conducted? Did we follow the line of tracing to the end? These are the reasons why we need the state of emergency but you need to have a plan of what to do during this period. You need to know how many tests you need to conduct. For example, you could say we would sample and each of these constituencies we will come to your constituency and test 300 or 200 people. This is the only way we can be certain that we do not have many more cases. This has to be done and this should have been included in the plan that was coming with these regulations. There should be a strategic plan on how we are going to move forward during these 45 days.

Another important thing is how many orders of the ventilators have you placed? How many are we buying from this 500 million? I have heard information that we have only 5 ventilators in the country. If we have more than 5 people with this virus and they need these ventilators, people will die. We need to know this money; how many have you placed for ventilators? When are we expecting them? These are the information you have to give us so we can make an informed decision. Whether we will give you 90 days or not, we must need this information for us to make a decision. How many isolation centres are you going to set up? How many tests are you going to conduct upcountry? All these things we need, to address this pandemic. Sorry, I have my notes all over so I just want to be careful that I do not forget something important that I wanted to mention.

This brings me to the economic measures. The Honourable Member for Brikama just mentioned that the hotel industry is owing D350 million to tour agencies. These are things that the Minister of Finance needed to think about throughout this period. What stimulus packages do you have? What guarantees that this economy will move from this? We need these plans. What plans do you have to make sure that after Covid-19 our economy will not collapse? What are your plans? This is what we need to hear from you by now, to make sure that we have these measures in-built to plan for after Covid-19. If the hotels will not get a stimulus package to help them take care of their bills, what happens to those businesses? They will collapse and we all know how much tourism contributes to our GDP. I will want you to start thinking along those lines. That is why I say we will give you 45 days on the condition that within 2 weeks the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Trade and

Ministry of Justice will liaise to come up. We want to bring Bills and more regulations in this regard and with a plan. We need to have a strategic plan on how to move forward.

I totally agree with the recommendation that we should set up a committee because I will take this opportunity to register my disappointment on what has been going on online about the Covid-19 Committee trying to put aside allowances for themselves which the Minister dis-associated himself with. I would like to commend you for such leadership but I would also like to criticize that if you felt that you did not need this allowance then they should not be needing this allowance and you should, from now, make sure that they do not have that allowance. I agree with allowances for nurses and doctors who are risking their lives to save us but for those who are put aside, I think as civil servants, as members of the National Assembly, this is a period of sacrifice. If we are asking those at the market to sacrifice in opening their stores, then we should sacrifice something like an allowance. I really would like to register my disappointment in that and want those civil servants to be named and shamed, and if possible, taken out of the committee. We do not need that kind in this desperate moment.

I will just give another example of the emergency powers. We do understand that certain businesses are being prosecuted for failure to abide by the regulations. This is why it is even more important because you have the responsibility to prosecute, you have the responsibility to also compensate. If we want people to adhere to these regulations, these compensatory packages and the plan and strategies we must have. It must come to the Parliament for us to approve. For that reason, I would say again we give 45 days on the condition that in 2 weeks they are going to come up with a strategic plan on how to address all the issues we have raised here. If we are satisfied with the plan, we extend to 90 days. If not, we revoke the state of emergency.

I beg to take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. At this point, I will like to invite the Vice Chairperson to reply to the issues that have been raised by Honourable Members.

SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. My task is made simpler by the interventions of members of the Standing Committee on Human Rights. Honourable Speaker, the committee is a Standing Committee for human rights and as such, we were looking at the whole issue from the angle of human rights and that is not an easy task.

We decided to reduce the 90 days to 45 days because we thought that the state of emergency is part and parcel of the whole plan of action that the government wishes to take. We have come to discover that the state is giving us reasons that they need the 90 days to be able to prepare to tackle the issue and that was not convincing to us. We thought that there will be a holistic plan which is already done and the government has put the state of emergency as part of that plan. Part of that state of emergency will come up with these regulations and how to implement them.

Honourable Speaker, it is one thing to put into law or to make law but it is another thing to implement the law. Since we are not sure 100% as to what this whole thing entails, what is going to be the fate of the vulnerable people, nothing is completely clear. We think that it is necessary to put in a limited time so that we would be able to monitor the situation together with the Ministers to see how far we have gone; how best we are implementing the plan or the state of emergency, how we are taking care of the vulnerable people etc. Once we have done it very well, we go to a certain level where we discover that things are moving in the right direction and there is no new infection, we may be able to scale it down. If we see that things are in fact aggravating, then actually we also add the stringent measures. This is how we were thinking but to give you 90 days and the plan does not cover the retributive transfer payments to take care of the unemployed, to give assistance to the disable, the veterans, the old aged and pensioners, these are all vulnerable people. We thought that the plan will involve all these things but we have not seen on the ground exactly how this is going to be. We think that really since you ask for 90 days, reasonably we can make it half and monitor the situation to see how best it is being implemented and then we can make decisions later. The Executive has a right to revoke the proclamation we also can come up with a Resolution to revoke or to extend it. Really, we have all the leeway to deal with this. There is no need to scare

the population. The population was scared when they heard 3 months with all the misinformation.

In fact, it is the proclamation that has really scared the people. What is in the proclamation and what is in these regulations are different. We are told that people who are not selling essential commodities should close their shops but the regulation is not saying that. It is saying if you have a shop at the market or you are selling something at the market which is a non-essential commodity, you should not sell. If you are 100 meters from the market, you can sell and you should take care of the physical distance between people; not everybody coming in at once but people can come in one by one and they can do business with you. Those are very mild situations where we are starting but if the thing aggravates, then we will know that we come to another stage like other countries, lockdown, we can go for curfew. We are not in that, this state of emergency is not mentioning curfew. It is not mentioning lockdown. It is simply how people can leave distance so that they will not be able to spread the virus. That is what I want to clarify Honourable Speaker.

The other matter is that we have many suggestions and we are dealing with the regulations which are already in force through proclamation. But now what do we do with these recommendations? They are many and to my opinion they are very valid so it will be left to the Minister to see how they can incorporate some of these recommendations in the implementation or planning process for example the issue of rebate to the people who are losing. If somebody has a shop and renting at the market and the person is selling non-essential commodities but is closed because is at the market what do we do with such a person and his or her family? Those are issues that should be looked at and those are the recommendations that have been done.

Honourable Speaker, there are so many suggestions like e.g. monitoring of rent, to urge landlords to be lenient with the tenants, unit price should be captured, fares from Barra all the way to Passamaass have not been stipulated in the regulations, tourism workers hit hard they need support, testing equipment with health centres, those are questions, tax rebate, review prices again for fares to make it more acceptable because some of the fares are going down just like it is explained, the

number of people reduced and fares are reduced. These are some of the things that we recommended.

Point of Observation

HON. HALIFA SALLAH (SEREKUNDA): Well, the issue of the fares we should be very careful. If the regulation is more progressive, this National Assembly should not be recommending something that is retrogressive. We should be talking about compensation of the loser after proper computation in terms of cause benefit of the drivers but we should not say increase fares when the regulation says reduce fares. What we should be talking about is the reducing of price of petrol and things of that nature.

THE SPEAKER: If my memory can serve me well, the Honourable Member for Brikama talked about maintaining the price, not reducing or increasing but maintaining since the passengers have been reduced.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH (SEREKUNDA): Honourable Speaker my observation is that, the regulation has reduced and we should maintain the reduction and fine compensation in other ways. Because it is reducing the suffering of the people, this National Assembly should not be seen to be increasing the suffering of the people.

THE SPEAKER: Please don not get me wrong. What I am saying is, I did not get what he said but I got what you said and my mind just went back to what the Honourable Member for Brikama North said about the taxi fares.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY (WULI EAST): Thank you Honourable Speaker, what I am saying is that there is a recommendation for review. So how they are going to review is another matter but progressive review is what we are thinking.

To conclude Honourable Speaker, I want to say that we have learnt a lot from this exercise. All these recommendations and all the suggestions that are made have given us a lot of information which we can rely on to carry out a better plan and the Executive can use that to make a plan that will ensure that all these other issues are been addressed. Challenges like printing gazette are also another issue. The gazette is meant for the population to know that a particular law intended to come into been and is coming to National Assembly and therefore, newspapers and media will take

that gazette and publish it and broadcast it so that everybody knows and then people will be contacting the National Assembly and expressing their views etc before we come here so that we know the views of our constituencies things like that. But if gazettes come the last minute and then we start questioning whether they are in fact gazetted and so on all these things will not help us in our work.

The Honourable Majority Leader also made a suggestion for the women and Children's Ministry to be included in the Commodities Control Committee which I think is very valid if we can look at it.

I thank everybody for their contributions and suggestions made, I thank the Cabinet for being present throughout and I think all the other issues we will leave it to the Ministers to explain more.

Somebody was saying why should we ask the Ministers to come back to explain when we have already explained but the thing is, they are in a better position to do some of those explanations. That is why we have recommended for them to come.

Thank very much Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. At this point, I think I would like to invite the Honourable Ministers who are here especially Finance, Health and Trade. They have heard the interventions and concerns raised by Honourable Members so that they can respond to those issues before I call the Attorney General to finalise and wind up the debate. I am being reminded by my technical team to advise the Honourable Ministers to be very brief in their interventions.

HON. DR. AHMED LAMIN SAMATEH (MINISTER FOR HEALTH): Thank you very much Madam Speaker and distinguished Honourable Members, sincere greetings to you all and thank you very much for the elaborate debate.

We are honoured to stand here today to give you our opinion as to what is transpiring. This shows that Covid 19 is not an easy task. It is unprecedented, we have never seen it before, it is something that our generation has not seen before even the developed countries most of them had never seen this kind of phenomenon. Certainly for The Gambia, it is also new, it has an impact on the lives

of the people on the social fabric on humanity, on finances, and the way we leave and the way we interact so these have complex issue of Covid 19 is.

Madam Speaker, the pandemic of Covid 19 that is going around the world, we believe in The Gambia we should thank the Almighty Allah for giving us this period, this period that we consider as a grace period and we want to continue to pray that it continues like this forever. But I think this period should not be wasted, this period should not be missed, whatever we do we need to act very fast, very decisively to take the decisions that tomorrow we started making comments of what should have be done and were not done and I hope tomorrow we should not remember today as not have done what we should have been done.

We have had 4 positive cases so far: 1 person died, 2 recovered – we thank Almighty Allah for that and 1 is currently undergoing treatment and is stable at the government treatment centre at the Sanatorium. By way of statistic, we now have 88 people in quarantine, 162 completed quarantine, 310 individuals completed followed up, 233 contacts were traced, total number of tests conducted is 128, 4 of them were positive, 123 were negative and 1 inconclusive test that will have to be repeated soon.

Madam Speaker, distinguished Honourable Members, since the inception of the Covid 19, a lot has been done, since the pandemic, since the outbreak in China and up to the declaration of the pandemic we thank all of you for your support. We thank all of you for going into the communities to sensitize the people because to us that is phenomenal in the sense that when we speak to colleagues in other countries they had never done that. So that means even the way we responded to Covid 19 here is unique by the inclusion of the National Assembly Members and we commend you all. Because we keep on saying to them each National Assembly Member represents a constituency and when you put all the constituencies together you have The Gambia so that is a strategy that works and other people have started even thinking of learning that from The Gambia so a lot has been done.

We equally thank the National Assembly Select Committee on Health for all the hard work. It has not been easy but they have been with us throughout coordinating the things the Chairman and the other Members. We can see the Chairman is very apt

and he knows the details of what we do and he is able to say them as and when we do them, we thank him as well.

We want to use the opportunity to apologise for the logistic delays before you went. Unfortunately, these are unprecedented times that we want to get things done within a short period of time, but equally speaking the procurement rule must also be followed. I think that delayed us and somewhere along the line unfortunately certain things we dictated that I am going to elaborate on towards the end of my intervention. That also delayed it further, that warranted the delays, the inadequacies we did not know your numbers of villages, we wish we had been provided with that and that would have determined how many of the items you would have gotten.

I will go straight to comment on some of the comments and questions. The Member for Tumana did ask how many testing and isolation centres we have in the country. Currently we have one testing centre and that is at the MRC-Gambia. People have been commenting: how comes it is the MRC that is doing testing? The MRC is a well renowned and well established Research Centre. Even in developed countries, quite a lot of their tests, quite a lot of those types of activities are done in research centres because that is their work, that is what they do, they have improved on the systems, they have perfected the system or close to perfection. Even in the west, the Universities, big hospitals partner with research institutions, research institutions do a lot of work for governments and governments in fact sometimes give research institutions grants to develop items, to do some tests for them and so on, so I think that is in line. Without the MRC doing it, they would have been done in the pastoral institute in Senegal which is a regional reference lab and still some samples are sent there for quality control because when we do test here then we send a third or fifth test to Le Pasture institute for quality control to ascertain that the test that are been done here are up to standard and this is a normal thing and it is for our region. We were told that, that institute itself is not really for the Senegalese government itself and we have similar arrangements.

However, the Ministry has started to do assessment for our Kotu central Lab and that assessment team including some specialists from the MRC and other people

have started doing the assessments so that we are able to get them ready to do the test in our centre and even across the country. We have identified two to three other centres so that people do not have to come all the way from upcountry or samples do not have to be carried all the way down to be able to test them, so we are working on that.

There are 10 isolation centres, some of them are okay, some others are going to go under renovation very soon, the assessments are been done and we working on that.

The treatment centres are 2 for now. The Medical Research Council can take only 2, we have rooms for treatment at the Sanatorium which is the main treatment centre which can take 42 beds for treatment. But is that going to be enough? We pray that it is more than enough but we are not folding our arms and sitting down, we are working on having more treatment centres across the length and breadth of the country.

The World Bank, as part of their projects that we are going to talk about, are going to build a brand new state of the earth infectiousdisease treatment centre for us in The Gambia within this short period and they have started working on that.

The other treatment centres we are going to build for the time being they are going to be temporalstructures and as we go on, more permanent structures. Temporal structures because we have seen it happening elsewhere in the world because if there is an exponential growth in the number of cases in the country we have to be able to have them somewhere. So in collaboration with partners, the government, the Ministry of Health and Finance are working together with partners to put up some temporal, about 6 of them, across the length and breadth of the country. Various ideas came up initially, one of them was to use the existing structures and dedicate areas of those facilities for Covid 19 treatment but of course evidence also came that sometimes in the developed countries, some of the other patients got Covid 19 because the centres are shared and some of the staff who were not even involved in the management of Covid 19 also developed the disease. For that reason we said that was not the way to go. Now suggestions also came, why don't we take some facilities in some parts of the country and dedicate them as Covid 19 hospitals but we said again what happens to people with other ailments that are not Covid 19

who are in those villages or towns, where do they go to? So, we say that is not also a solution, so we agreed now to have temporary shelters as the permanent shelters are been constructed.

The Member for Tumana also mentioned that the funds should not be diverted into individual pockets. I guess the issue of the five hundred million, let me discuss that last because so many people spoke about it, so it will be very comprehensive, so I will skip that so that they all come together.

With regards to the duration of when do we have the state of emergency, I am sure my colleague the Hon. Minister for Justice will discuss a lot more about it, but I think what we also need to know is the epidemiology of the Covid-19 as to what is known for now because, as we speak, there are still quite a lot of things, probably even a lot, that is not known about this disease and this virus. Because as time goes on, a lot of new things come into place and they determine what is done next. So, the responses keep on changing and here and there you hear escalations and we need to escalate as we learn more and more things and we need to put on strategies that help us to deal with the situation as it evolves.

So, if we have had cases, and the issue of those cases that came, we have had 4 positive cases for now and the other issue of why didn't we close the borders and allow those cases to come in. Covid 19 is different from Ebola, their mode of transmissions are not the same mainly and Ebola was found in some 2 countries mainly 3 in West Africa confined there and those countries their neighbours were secluded. It is different from Covid 19 that is found worldwide and the mode of transmission, even the distance, becomes very important if we interact and now people are even talking more of asymptomatic patients infecting other people, they don't have symptoms but they infect other people.

The same question could have been why didn't everybody not seal China off then probably the disease would have stay in China it would not have gone out if China was blocked completely throughout the world, but how feasible was that in this modern and age. The other argument was now if you seal the country off, we are not even sure at that particular point in time whether people had left China and were elsewhere and that was the other argument people put forward. The time that

even travel was ban in China most people had left. But Gambia we had the same situation because as we speak now and we all heard people were agitating for lockdown, we have heard that for many weeks now and now the situation is because if things get bad we pray they don't, probably people then at that time will ask us why didn't the government and the National Assembly think of a lockdown today. If things get bad that is probably what they would put to us why didn't we think of a lockdown today, if we had lockdown then the disease would not have spread but now the balancing effect comes into play. We have to balance the consequences of the impact of the disease.

If you ask me alone as a Health Minister, I would say lockdown today because I believe a disease that is communicable and passes from one person to the other if we have a barrier between the infected and the non-infected most probably we will control the disease. So, as Health Minister, I would say lockdown but now we also have to be considerate of the other areas, we talked about the resources, do we have the resources to spread across? And these are where the considerations really to be fair to government, these where the considerations that went behind the scenes, do we have the resources, can we feed everybody if we say lockdown today? If we close the borders Gambia does not manufacture any of these items we use in our hospitals, if we close the borders at that time are we going to get imports, how are we going to get the items to take care of the other patients who are not Covid 19 patients. Most of what we used in The Gambia, Gambia is unique in the sense that we don not manufacture of most these things. Even Senegal, Senegal manufactures a lot of things. The ivy fluid we give to patients, Senegal manufactures them, sometimes the syringes and the needles they manufacture a whole lot of things like needles and other things, we do not. So when we are in such a situation, as a poor country like ours, closing the borders too fast has challenges of course medically that is what I would have recommended but the other people also said what about this, what about that.

When we had people coming from Europe, now we could not say to other countries, you cannot evacuate your citizens because we were advised that is against the international law, when they want to evacuate their citizens, when they think their citizens are under threat. Those people were coming to evacuate their citizens and

our Gambians were stranded at the airports of those countries, some of those Gambians don not have money anymore, they have nowhere to stay because they were supposed to come home now that was a difficult dilemma whether to allow them instead of those aircraft to come empty and evacuate the foreign citizens from here back home and our people are stranded at the airport. These were the difficult decisions the government had to take and certainly we thought we took the right decision by saying our people stranded at the airport should be brought in as well.

I must say here, I am happy that all of you thank the Health team for the efforts because I think they did very well. Covid-19, a disease that people are running away from, these people chase them, followed them into their homes, go to them, talk to them, sit with them, take samples from them and those are the fluids, the body fluids that we don't want to be in touch with but these people go and take those samples. Their lives are at risk, in fact some of our people now when they even go to interact with other people they know that they are people who went to take samples yesterday for that positive case the people try to stigmatize them. In fact, I was given some statement the last time and I thought to myself and it was on liveTv and later on the journalists were telling me you need to test yourself because even as Health Minister because I interact with them, I go to the places where the people are quarantined and I go to the Health facilities they said so. So this is how difficult it is for our people and believe me I am happy that you thank them and the message will get to them because some of them as we speak there is no Saturday or Sunday. I myself go to bed everyday 1am, 2am consistently but some of these people they don't even go home now, those at the treatment centres, their families don't see them because they don't want to go treatment centre, home, treatment centre home so they are living away from their families as we speak. This is the scarify that they are doing for the nation and this is like when there is war and the army is at the forefront trying to protect the country, this is what the health workers are doing and I am happy that you recognised that.

The idea of longer duration of scaling down and restriction of movement is to allow for containment because we have seen in many countries when they have seen the first few cases, there is a law, thereafter they get an explosion. So we are thinking, as a country, when we have a law, when the thing seems to be stable, let us take

the aggressive measures. Some think we have a few so I think this is an opportunity Allah has given us that you have a few, do all what you can do so that the few does not multiply because if it multiplies then we will say well we wish we had done it when we had only 4 for so many days, I think we need to act very fast.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry for the interruption, but time is not very much on our side and I am sure Honourable Members would love to hear from the Honourable Minister of Finance. I think we know all the health issues, so if you can just wind up and summarise. Thank you.

HON. DR. AHMED LAMIN SAMATEH (MINISTER FOR HEALTH): Thank you very much, I will now probably lump them together. I was jotting down the comments that are related to us from each Honourable Member. With regards to our committee, thank you very much someone mentioned we actually have a Cabinet Committee that meets almost on daily basis that looks at it at that level and is chaired by the Vice President. So it brings on board most of the ministers that are relevant like the Defence, and all the other institutions that we think are relevant. So, there is a very active Cabinet Committee that meets to discuss this every time.

We also talked about the financial aspects. When the Covid-19 issues came I must say Gambia we tried because we started very fast compare to most of our neighbours in West Africa. We came up and we put up, we constituted a National Health Emergency Committee that has people from the Ministry of Health, the Army, the Police, the National Disaster Management Agency, Red Cross, WHO, UN and so many partners and including our veteran health workers who have retired from international work who some of them are epidemiologists, some of them had taken part in controlling Ebola in democratic Republic of Congo, so we have a wealth of expertise within that committee and we have all been working together. The committee has 6 subcommittees, Coordination, Case management, Psychosocial therapy, Surveillance and so many activities. This committee was tasked to develop the Covid 19 plan and this plan was developed costed. So there is actually a costed plan and this costed plan was about 8.8 million US Dollars. Then there was no promise of any funding, this was put forward to the partners, to government and various partners, and some of the partners were in the meeting actually. The

partners, World Bank took it upon themselves and fortunately at that time we had the World Bank senior Health Expert in the country helping us, he is still here helping us develop our new funding cycle activities. So he happens to be here, he took it on board and spoke to them and he told us probably they can get some emergency funding for this Covid 19 activities and they have been working hard on that but this has components related to each of these activities, coordination, surveillance, case management and the case management provides the procurement of equipment and so on.

The activities, that costed plan will be share with you at some point, but the activities that we are looking at as a ministry in our response programme, the sensitization so those funds are supposed to be spent on sensitization – posters, billboards, communication materials, even using the local communicators----

THE SPEAKER: I must apologise again Honourable Minister for interrupting you---

HON. DR. AHMED SAMATEH (MINISTER FOR HEALTH):Ma they wanted to know the funds and this is very important, because this has been a big bond of contention, that one the Minister will not be able to say those details probably. I think it will be very crucial if I can elaborate on that, I appeal –

THE SPEAKER: You can provide the committee with that, the committee can call or you make a written statement because of the time constrain.

HON. DR. AHMED SAMATEH (MINISTER FOR HEALTH):Ma this was on TV and they need to hear it, I appeal

THE SPEAKER: Then let us compromise, you are given 5 minutes please.

HON. DR. AHMED SAMATEH (MINISTER FOR HEALTH):Okay, thank you. Follow up of these individuals now the front liners need to be paid allowances. You see health workers especially when they risking their lives no one can ever pay them enough but they need to be paid allowances, the front liners, even though that allowance system some people attempted at abusing it, unfortunately and that is not acceptable.

The other thing is renovation of these facilities but most importantly the procurement of equipment because we have had a very weak health system, we all know it, most of our facilities do not have the equipment. So, this is an opportunity as we respond to the Covid 19 to put in the facilities what we need so the ventilators, the X-ray machines that we do not have in Bansang and in Soma or Bansang has an old one but Soma and Basse all those are going to be equipped from this. Ambulances, there are 33 ambulances that are going to be procured for this Covid 19 and when it is over In Sha Allah it will be for the country. A host of things are on this, now protective equipment for the health workers are also part of this, the test kits and this is the World Bank fund, it is all costed and we will see it but we should also know that for Covid 19 this is one of the most dynamic situations we have ever seen in the world the plan keeps on changing based on what is happening, based on the reality on the ground. So, we should also bear that in mind. This was what the World Bank was to do and they have not released any money yet, in fact the plan the Minister is going to talk to you is just signed.

Now about the five hundred million, in fact when that was announced we said ah the problem has started, of course some eyes opened, some mouths opened, they thought that money was going to be like that but I assure you Honourable Members and I assure the people of this country, I think at the Ministry of Health it is a different thing all together now. When the head is correct, the places should be correct and I think the head is correct. One of these things that we have been seeing, when the five hundred million, for the information of the Honourable Members and the general public, the five hundred million is not handed over to the Ministry of Health. That is not the system, in fact as we speak, it is with Ministry of Finance. Nothing has been disbursed of that. What has happened now is, before the five hundred million issue came up we made a request of six million, Ministry of Finance gave 4 million then later they gave another eight million making it twelve million. It was the twelve million that was been used to buy some of these things like the sanitizers and other items but because it came in our normal budgetary allocation, it has to go through the same processes and that slowed down the processes and the Minister will tell you even out of that twelve million, it is only eleven million that has been spent so far. So, the five hundred million they are

talking about an account is opened called the special projects account where it is going to be transferred into.

Yes, certain activities, certain things that need to be procured for the smooth running of these activities some are ongoing and the Minister is going to elaborate, that will start taking part of that five hundred million. So, it is not even given to the Ministry of Health, we have not seen it physically yet but it is there and nothing has been spent so far, so I think this is important.

The other one finally, I would say recently there is something going on, some social media thing on and people are concerned on the allowances. Yes, we know we have people amongst us they would not change and they would not give up trying, they would keep on trying but will they succeed, that is the issue. So if people tried and their trial leaks, I don't think that is cause for alarm because what we did with this thing when I went to see the Minister of Finance I said this thing first we need expeditious and judicious use of these funds but because it is emergency, procurements needs to be done fast but under those circumstances people can abuse them. I suggested the formation of a Committee and he said to me I will support you and we have a committee, the committee is the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Health, and few senior members, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Finance, few senior members from there, the Accountant General, the Director of Internal Audit, the Director General of GPPA. They sit over every procurement issue so that they can decide and make sure there is transparency and accountability at that high level and they report to us and we see what they have decided on. So, this is how every request goes through them, the disbursements all goes to them.

I said to the people who are responsible, who are making list for these allowances, I said to them I the Minister of Health I don't want any allowance, I don't want any honorarium, I don't want any butut I am doing sacrifice for my country irrespective of the pandemic. Few days down the line,-----

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, I think that is a convenient point, that's a good point to stop. Hon. Minister we need to stop at 12:00 so please conclude.

HON. DR. AHMED SAMATEH (MINISTER FOR HEALTH): Okay Madam. Few days down the line, they put forward a long list, a long list of many names but that list did not get to me for vetting, it went straight to this Committee and this Committee detected that it was bogus and I was alerted and we withdrew it and I told them to withdraw it and we reprimanded them for that. So this is what is happening and we are observing all the processes, the Committee was setup by us for accountability and transparency from the high level so that everything Ministry of Health is doing Ministry of Finance knows, the Accountant General knows, the Director of Internal Audit knows and these are some measures that we are putting in place. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, I am sorry for the interruption but time is not on our side. Honourable Minister of Finance you can also take over to cover Trade.

HON. MAMBURRY NJIE (MINISTER FOR FINANCE & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS): Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I think the million-dollar question is the five hundred million, it is available, this five hundred million dalasi is available and ready for disbursement. I think what is clear from the Minister's statement is that despite the emergency, despite the sentiments, we are still sensitive to make sure the fiscal discipline be adhered today more than ever. What is key is that, I don't want borrow, I don't want to come for supplementary so I thought that the National Assembly should applaud the Ministry of Finance because I don't want to burst the twenty-one billion that you gave me, we are still managing within that. So we thought that we don't want to expand, we want to make sure we contain the inflation, the fiscal deficit, otherwise when we come to you we cannot behave like America, all those Bills that they have passed through their Congress, no. This is small vulnerable economy and whatever we do we make sure that fiscal discipline is there, otherwise overnight, if we have any dislocation, everything will crumble.

If I come to you there is supplementary appropriation for another 21 billion can we pay it? In the mist of our revenue projection will go down. I came here and said that even our growth rate will go down by the projected 6.3% it might go down by 3%,

3.3 this morning. The revised figures we have is about 2.5%. Does that mean that we have to adjust more and tighten our belts? Yes.

As of now, I think Honourable Speaker just for one minute, just for clarification, the minutes that have been taken by the Committee I just want to be very specific, I was quoted by saying "the Minister informed the Committee that for the past 3 months, the fuel price has been dropped" is been going down, is true that it is been going down and if we look at the aggregate figure 1st of February, 1st of March, 1st of April, PMS has gone down by 3.2 dalasis. Diesel, that is ego 4.88 dalasis, kerosene 7.8 dalasis, that is what I meant by saying that we have already taken care of that. The quote saying but government is looking into the situation that I was quoting from a statistic that our committee gave us and that is in the event we need to give any package, compensation package to the vulnerable.

Out of the total Gambia household 280, 659 we said if we have to do everything rice, oil and D1000 for each household, it will cost us Eight Hundred Million Dalasis. If we do 50% of the household it will cost us Four Hundred Million Dalasis, if we do 40% it will be Three Hundred and Twenty Million Dalasis, if we do 30% is Two Hundred and Forty. So I will appeal that I be correctly quoted verbatim that is what I said during the committee meeting that we are not just looking, we are looking at statistic but we have to be very realistic, we have to think about sustainability, we have to think about tomorrow, the day after. If we spend everything that we have today, tomorrow we are empty. In fact, that is why we are focussing more on what is preventable now. The entire Five Hundred Million I said is for health and the committee will be looking at how we do the disbursement. It is demand driven, there is a below the line account right now, before the five hundred million we have disbursed as the Minister said twelve million in total, out of which they have spent eleven million and now there is a request in the ministry for sixty million and this includes the payment of hotels and some impresses for regional health teams that is hundred thousand each for all of them and then we are also making sure that all the procurement Internal Auditing verification everything is done so as at now, they have not even touch the five hundred million. That I think is a very clear signal and a message to everybody it is not a spending spree. We are been very careful, we are been very cautious, we would be coming later possibly for contingency funds bill

that it is at the right time but for the time been we are appealing that give us time, we are managing with the limited resources we have otherwise if there is any sign of dislocation the entire country will go down.

Madam Speaker, let me inform this august Assembly that, the ten million is been rumoured all along is five hundred and ninety million dalasis I have just signed it today and I think the Minister did explained the modus operandi of the process that they are going to take to assess this one. It is not coming to us, the World Bank will be working closely with the Health team to make sure all the procurements and everything that is agreed here is properly executed.

Honourable Speaker, I think we are rushing for time but I just wanted to make sure that again the five hundred million is available. The total committed funds is five and twelve million, twelve million is already been disbursed at the time of the immediate but up to day there is no single money coming from any donor. We do have access to facilities at the IMF but we are not using it now. The initial quarter we have is about twenty-one million dollars that they will give us for 5 years interest free and everything, that will help us at least cuisine the exogenous shocks. So, I think I have a responsibility to come back to the National Assembly to do the usual quarterly report according to the Standing Orders. All of these details, the information, the statistic we would make sure that is provided for.

Somebody also mentioned about the students that are outside, Higher Education and Foreign Affairs are working on those to identify where they are, at least be it whether you are government sponsored or not as long as you are a Gambian out there studying, we felt we are obliged to give you at least a stipend, reasonable enough to make sure you survive for the time being.

Madam Speaker I think basically you gave me 5 minutes, I have a lot to say but I will just rap up here to promise the august Assembly that I will come back for my quarterly report to make sure that the House is well briefed, well informed. Other than that, another additional information the ten million that the Bank gave us, we have a quarter system and according to the package they have, our quarter is about population, is about our GDP. So what we were eligible for is only five million dollars. When it was mentioned to me that the only thing that you are eligible is five million

dollars we have shop around innovative way. I went to the SOE (State-Owned Enterprises) Reform, I was able to take out of thirty-five million I was able to take another five million just to make sure that we meet the requirement for the health sector.

This is the status we are, and we hope that we will move forward. The funds are available and we are ready for disbursement at any time it is requested but my only channel of communication I made it very clear to everybody is the Minister of Health, he is the one who will come and tell me this is what we have please let us process and even as we are processing the cheques and balances are there. So we will make sure that every dalasi spent and every butut spent, we have a responsibility to account for everything that we are spending. If I miss anything is because I just have 5 minutes to make my intervention. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Minister I am sure Honourable Members will appreciate everything written in the form of a statement with all the details-----

HON. MAMBURRY NJIE (MINISTER FOR FINANCE & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS):You mean to write to you?

THE SPEAKER: Well, it is for everybody's consumption. It is going to help.

HON. MAMBURRY NJIE (MINISTER FOR FINANCE & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS):Okay no problem,I have a long statement that would have taken me another 15 minutes but we will summarise it and circulate it. I just want to confirm that the five hundred million is available and the total amount that we are spending we are willing to go up to five and twelve million in the event our revenue cannot sustain that or we are going boost the appropriated amount then we will come back to the National Assembly for adjustment and approval. Did I miss anything?

THE SPEAKER: Let me give floor to theHonourable Minister to respond and wind up, remember the conditions that Honourable Members raised.

HON. ABUBACARR M. TAMBADOU (ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE):Indeed, thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Let me try to be very quick and I think after this House has heard the Honourable Minister of Health about his preference, that he would have preferred a lock down, this is the

preference of the Chief Health Officer of our country. So what we are proposing is not a lockdown because we do understand the conflicting interest between the need to prevent this pandemic from taking root in this country and allowing the people of this country to leave with minimal disruptions to their lives. That is why we are calling for this state of emergency to be extended so that the government can put in place these restrictions in the form of regulations, restrictions that in our view, at the barest minimum, that the government can provide to protect the people of this country from getting the pandemic, it is the minimum. But we have also got safeguards, 3 of the four regulations that we presented to you for affirmation are to restrict movement to prevent infection. The other regulation, that is the one on essential commodities, is to protect the people of this country from opportunists who will hike the prices of the basic commodities that we will all need to survive at the minimum.

If you look at the list of basic commodities or essential commodities, they are 99.9% food stuff and the reason is because we want to protect that food, we have identified them as essential commodities so that they will be protected from hoarding, they will be protected from re-export and they will be protected from price hike and all of that is for the benefit of the people of this country.

Restrictions on public transport, yes we do understand the challenges, it is not going to be easy for all of us, it is going to hit all of us hard. Every sector, it will come in phases, perhaps this is the phase for commercial drivers, perhaps this is the phase for those who sell none food outlets in markets but it is on the way and is going to affect each and everyone of us in this economy. But at least we try to mitigate the situation for the ordinary people by putting a cap on the fares.

The objective as the Honourable Member for Banjul North said is to restrict movement, let people move for the most essential services. I do not need to get up to Honourable Member for Serekunda to say hello, not in these circumstances. Let us factor this in. these regulations are first of many that are going to come your way, these were done very quickly and we only provided the minimum that we will need in these regulations to be able to control or manage the spread of this virus for now. They will be amended, they will be revised but other regulations will also come to

regulate every other aspect of life in this country going forward but for now all we have Honourable Speaker and Members is that you extend this state of emergency. We have heard you, we have heard from the Standing Committee on Human Right and Constitutional Matters and they are proposing 45 days. We will leave with that because what we want is to buy time to be able to stop this spread and if 45 days is going to do it for us we will take, if it does not when we get there we will cross the bridge. But the idea about conditioning the extension of this period of emergency to the assistance that the government is to provide to the most vulnerable is really unfortunate because what happens if the government cannot afford that? Are we going to get rid of the restrictions and risk spreading the virus in our communities? We all have kids, we all have the aging in our homes. This is what I want you to reflect upon.

With that Honourable Speaker and Members, I beg to move that this House extends by 45 days if that is what you are going to give us, the state of emergency issued by His Excellency on the 26th March and to affirm the regulations that were made pursuant to the proclamation. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I will take it that the Honourable Attorney General has agreed with the report of the committee but I think the Assembly also needs to adopt the report. That is the compromise on the 45-day period of state of emergency.

Thank you very much Honourable Members, Honourable Ministers. I now put the question:

[Question Proposed, Put and agreed to]

[That this Honourable Assembly do adopt the Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters on the Motion for the Extension of a period of State of Public Emergency in the whole of The Gambia and the period of Public Emergency Regulations made in accordance with section 34[2] of the 1997 Constitution and section 5[2] of the Emergency Powers Act for a period of 90 days effective 3rd April 2020].

THE SPEAKER: If the report is adopted then it means 45 days but this is the title of the Motion, that is it.

Now, the motion, that is the body of the motion, it says the extension. The motion tabled by the Honourable Attorney General was for the extension of a period of State of Public Emergency in the whole of The Gambia and the period of the Public Emergency Regulation made in accordance with Section 34[2] of the 1997 Constitution and Section 5[2] of the Emergency Powers Act for a period of 90 days effective 3rd April 2020. That was the motion of the Honourable Attorney General.

That was the Motion of the Attorney General, now what we are adopting is, the report that the committee made on that substantive motion and in the report of the Committee, they agreed for 45 days. If it is finally adopted, we will then put a question that it is adopted as amended with 45 days instead of 90 days.

HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]: Honourable Speaker, not all of us are in support of the 45 days. What I am saying, the report of the committee, we are going to approve the report with amendment because the 45 days that is stated, others are not in for the 45 days, others are in for 30 days. So if you say it is going to be adopted with amendment -----

THE SPEAKER: Let me explain, we are adopting the report, there is a vote for the adoption of the report and on the motion, the motion indicated 90 days.

Let us put it in other way then:

[Question Proposed, Put and agreed to]

[That this Honourable Assembly do adopt the report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Matters for the extension of the State of Public Emergency in the whole of The Gambia and the period of the Public Emergency Regulations made in accordance with section 34[2] of the 1997 Constitution and Section 5[2] of the Emergency Powers Act for a period of 45 days effective 3rd of April 2020]

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, now questions on the Motion as was tabled by the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Justice.

[Question Proposed, Put and agreed to]

[That this Honourable Assembly do approve the Motion for the Extension of a period of State of Public Emergency in the whole of The Gambia and the period of the Public Emergency Regulations made in accordance with section 34[2] of the 1997 Constitution and Section 5 [2] of the Emergency Powers Act for a period of 45 days effective 3rd April 2020].

THE SPEAKER: Please, can we proceed? We have the powers and we can always come back. I now put the question:

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That this August Assembly do stand adjourned until Monday 6th May 2020 at 10:00am]

ADJOURNMENT