



# HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY



The Gambia Assembly



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National Assembly of The Gambia



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# Introduction

The National Assembly of The Gambia is the unicameral legislature of the Gambia. The authorisation for the National Assembly lies in Chapter VII of the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia. It is composed of 58 Members who serve a five-year term. 53 Members are directly elected while the remaining five are appointed by the President. Members are elected in single-member constituencies using the simple majority, or first-past-the-post system.



# Genesis

Representative politics in The Gambia began in the 1840s. The first official representative called the Legislative Council was established in 1843 with three European Members, all of whom were nominated by the Governor. In the 1880s Mr. Richards was nominated as the first Gambian member in the then Council.

In 1942 however, the provision of having representatives from both the Muslim and Christian communities in Bathurst (Banjul) was created.

It was not until 1947 that the first elections of the Legislative Council were held. The 1947 Constitution, provided for elections for Bathurst and Kombo's only and Edward Francis Small became the first Gambian to be elected Member of the Legislative Council.

The idea of Representation in Parliament was first fought by Edward Francis Small with the Slogan "No Taxation without Representation". The development of the Legislature and the Constitution started during this period. In 1951 Political Parties were allowed and in 1954 Ministers were appointment. In the same year the positions of the Speaker and the Clerk to the Legislative Council were created.

The name Legislative Council was changed in 1962 to the House of Representatives and in 1970 the name changed to Parliament. the name National Assembly and National Assembly Members was used in 1997. The change of name was due to Constitutional developments of the country.



# CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Legislative representation based on universal adult suffrage in the Gambia began in May 1962, when elections were held for a 32-seat House of Representatives. These elections were won by the People's Progressive Party (PPP), which was led by Dawda Jawara. After independence in 1965, the PPP continued to dominate the House of Representatives by winning a series of free, democratic elections in 1966, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, and 1992.

While opposition parties were continuously present in the House, they were never able to successfully wrest power from the PPP. Jawara's government was overthrown in a July 1994 military coup led by Yahya Jammeh. The constitution and all elected institutions, including the House of Representatives, were dissolved. After the coup, political party activities were banned. The ban was lifted in August 1996 following the approval of a new constitution, but three Jawara-era parties – the PPP, Gambian People's Party (GPP), and the National Convention Party (NCP) remained proscribed.

## The Birth of the National Assembly

Following the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1994 military takeover, the AFPRC government set-up a National Consultative Committee to draft a new Constitution for the Second Republic. The Constitution was approved in a referendum in August, 1996 and came into force on January, 16<sup>th</sup>, 1997. Thus, the current name "National Assembly" came into being.



# The Assemblies of the Second Republic of The Gambia

**First Assembly**

**1997 - 2002**

**Second Assembly**

**2002 - 2007**

**Third Assembly**

**2007 - 2012**

**Fourth Assembly**

**2012 - 2017**

**Fifth Assembly**

**2017 - 2022**

**Sixth Assembly**

**2022 - 2027**

# Life and Operations of the National Assembly



The term of a member of the National Assembly is five (5) years from the first day of sitting after general election of Members of the National Assembly to the date immediately preceding the day appointed as the first session.

The National Assembly is the supreme law-making body and the apex oversight and representative body of the people of The Gambia.

One of the most significant features of the National Assembly is that Cabinet Ministers are strictly separated from the National Assembly. The Assembly also is administratively autonomous from the mainstream civil service; and it is supervised by the National Assembly Authority.

Currently, the National Assembly comprises of fifty-eight Members – fifty-three (53) elected members and five nominated members.

The 1997 Constitution made it a requirement for the establishment of a National Assembly, which shall come into existence following a general election four months after the date of election of President.

Sittings of the National Assembly are held quarterly every year:

March – First Ordinary Session

June – Second Ordinary Session

September – Third Ordinary Session

November – Fourth Ordinary Session

However, there is provision for extra-ordinary sitting when requested by the President or when requested by one-quarter of all members of the National Assembly.

Unless the National Assembly otherwise directs for good cause, the sittings of the National Assembly are open to the public.

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in the English language, or any other language prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly.

# Presidential appearance in the National Assembly



Section 77 (1) of the 1997 Constitution requires the President of the Republic to attend a Sitting of the National Assembly at least once a year and address a session on the condition of The Gambia, the policies of the Government and the administration of the State. This appearance is referred to as the State of The Nation Address (SoNA).

## The National Assembly Authority

National Assembly Authority is the body mandated to supervise the National Assembly Service. The authority shall consist of –

- a) The Speaker as Chairperson;
- b) Four other members of the National Assembly appointed by the Speaker acting in accordance with the advice of a Committee of the National assembly; and;
- c) The Clerk of the National Assembly as member and secretary.



# OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

The Speaker is the first officer of the Assembly. He or she is one of the three highest officers of the State, ranking third in the official order of precedence after the President and the Vice President.

The position of Speaker of the Legislative Council was created in 1954. The first Speaker was nominated; at a time, there were only Seven (7) Parliamentarians of whom 5 were elected and 2 nominated.

In the beginning, for the nomination of Speaker, National Assembly Members (NAMs) send the name of the person nominated as Speaker to the Governor. The Speaker does not belong to any political party and should be a retired Government worker. The 1962 Constitution provided that the Speaker should come from the Majority party, who should be nominated. Meaning he/she should come from the President's nominated (NAMs). This practice is maintained in the 1997 Constitution.

The Constitution prescribed that the Speaker shall preside in the Assembly at sittings or in his or her absence the Deputy Speaker or in their absence a member elected by the Assembly for that purpose.

He or she has the responsibility to interpret the Standing Order of the National Assembly in the Assembly. He or she is expected to be impartial and does not take part in the debate on the floor of the Assembly. In addition, he or she is the Chairperson of the National Assembly Authority.





Below is the list of Speakers of Parliament from inception:

- i. Hon. Sir John Mahoney – 1954 - 1962
- ii. Hon. Sir Alieu Suleiman Jack – 1962 - 1972
- iii. Hon. SHO Jones – 1972 - 1983
- iv. Hon. Alhagie Momodou Babacarr Njie (BP) – 1983 - 1994
- v. Hon. Muastapha Wadda – 1994 - 2001
- vi. Hon. Sheriif M Dibba – 2002 - 2006
- vii. Hon. Mrs. Belinda G. Bidwell – 2006 - 2007
- viii. Hon. Mrs. Fatoumatta Jahumphah Ceesay – 2007 - 2009
- ix. Hon. Mrs. Elizabeth Renner – 2009 - 2010
- x. Hon. Aboulie Bojang – 2010 - 2017
- xi. Hon. Mariama Jack Denton – 2017 - 2021
- xii. Hon. Fabakary Tombong Jatta – 2021 - Date





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**Deputy Speaker** - The Speaker is assisted by the Deputy Speaker who is elected by the National Assembly during its first sittings. The Deputy Speaker like the speaker is part of the Five nominated members of the President.

In the 1970 Constitution, the Vice President was the leader of Government business. He/she performed the roles of the Majority Leader and attends every Parliamentary session to defend Government business.

The portfolio of Majority and Minority Leaders was created by the 1997 Constitution and since the National Assembly is separated from the Executive branch of government, the Majority and Minority Leaders are exclusive Members of the National Assembly and hold no cabinet position.

**Majority Leader** - The Majority Leader is elected from the party that has the highest number of seats in the Assembly. He or she is the leader of the Minority group/caucus in the Assembly. He or she, by convention, is a member of the National Assembly Authority.

**Minority Leader** - The Minority Leader is elected from the party that has the second largest number of seats in the Assembly. He or she is the leader of the Minority group/caucus in the Assembly. He or she, by convention, is a member of the National Assembly Authority.





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# OFFICE OF THE CLERK

The National Assembly appoints the Clerk. He is the principal adviser to the Speaker and Members of the National Assembly on matters of procedure and practice. He is also the Head of the National Assembly Service and the principal accounting officer.

## Clerks of the National Assembly to date

- • Mr. OC Njie - 1959 – 1961
- • Mr. Asn Davies - 1961 – 1963
- • Mr. HR Monday JN - 1963 – 1964
- • Mr. Hatib Semega Janneh - 1964 – 1966
- • Mr. Saihou Sissoho - 1966
- • Mr. Francis AJ Savage - 1966 – 1967
- • Mr. Saihou Njie - 1967 – 1968
- • Mr. Abdoulie Sallah - 1968 – 1978
- • Mr. Papa Jeng - 1979 – 1980
- • Mr. Tamsir Mbye - 1980 – 1981
- • Mr. Edi Bright - 1981 – 1986
- • Mr. Rudolph Sowe - 1986 – 1993
- • Mr. Dodou S Njie - 1993 – 1994
- • Mr. Saihou M Jobe - 1998 – 2000
- • Mr. Momodou Sellu Jallow - 2001 – 2005
- • Mr. Dodou CM Kebbeh - 2005 – 2018
- • Mr. Momodou A. Sise - 2018 – 2024
- • Mr. Kalipha MM Mbye - 2024 – to - date



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The Clerk authenticates Bills passed by the Assembly for Presidential assent. In the discharge of his duties, the Clerk demonstrates non-partisanship and impartiality. He / She is assisted by three Deputy Clerks;

- Deputy Clerk, Legislative Business and Programmes
- Deputy Clerk, Finance and Admin
- Deputy Clerk, Legal and Procedural Matters

National Assembly Service exist to provide services and support for the National Assembly. The National Assembly Authority appoints staff of the National Assembly Service after consultation with the Public Service Commission.

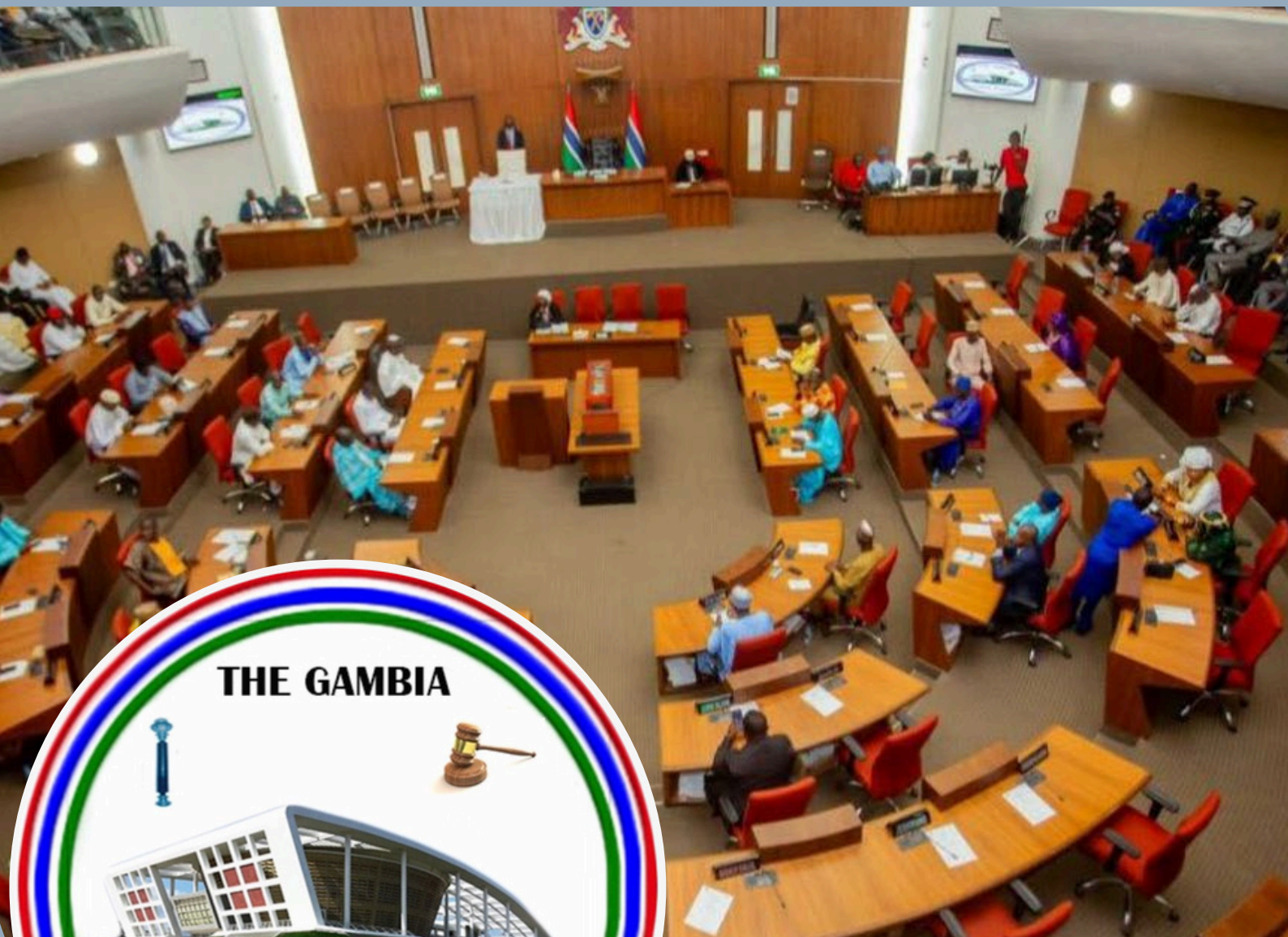
The Clerk of the National Assembly is the administrative head of the National Assembly Service and the Principal adviser to the Assembly.

#### Departments and Units of the National Assembly Service

1. Hansard
2. Table Office
3. Committee Secretariat
4. Library and Research
5. Communications, ICT & Protocol
6. Maintenance and Technical Services
7. Finance & Procurement
8. Administration and HR
9. Legal Affairs
10. Printing
11. Records Office
12. Budget
13. Internal Audit



# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE GAMBIA



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