



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

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

VOLUME: III

NUMBER: 2

Third Meeting of the Second Session of the Fifth Assembly
of the Second Republic of The Gambia.

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House
Held on Friday, 29th September, 2017.

Contents

- 1. Prayers**
- 2. Communication from the Chair**
- 3. A Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 27th September, 2017**
- 4. Questions for Oral Answers**
 - i. Office of the President [Represented by Her Excellency, the Vice President & Minister for Women's Affairs]**
 - ii. Hon. Minister for Defence [Represented by Her Excellency, the Vice President & Minister for Women's Affairs]**
 - iii. Hon. Attorney General & Minister for Justice**
 - iv. Hon. Minister for Trade, Regional Integration and Employment**

Afternoon Session @ 3pm

- v. Hon. Minister for Basic and Secondary Education**



THE CHAMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE GAMBIA

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE

SECOND SESSION – THIRD MEETING OF THE FIFTH ASSEMBLY IN THE SECOND REPUBLIC

FRIDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER, 2017

1. PRAYERS:

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

[The House met at 10:30 a.m. in the New Assembly Building, Reverend Pye Lane, Banjul]

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

The House was called to Order

2. COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members may I take this opportunity to welcome everybody back to the Assembly for the third Ordinary Session in the 2017 Legislative Year. As per the Order Paper for today, the Assembly shall consider and

adopt the Record of Proceedings and Votes of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 27th September 2017. And thereafter shall proceed with the question and answer sessions for which due notices were given to the Honourable Ministers concerned for Oral reply.

Her Excellency the Vice President and Minister for Women's Affairs shall ably represent and answer questions for the President and also for the Honourable Minister of Defence.

May I on behalf of both sides of the Assembly and indeed on my own behalf welcome and congratulate Her Excellency the Vice President on her first Parliamentary engagement since her appointment as Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia. Congratulations and you are welcome Ma.

On the substantive issue, we shall be required during the course of the proceedings to move a motion that Standing Order 19 [2] of our Rules of Procedure be suspended to enable us accommodate more than 20 questions per daily sitting.

Honourable Members, you may be aware that the Table Office has received more than **50** new questions for this session alone; in addition to some **60** pending questions from the last Sitting - the Second Ordinary Session. So, before I call on the Clerk to move unto the next item on the Order Paper, may I once more remind all Honourable Members that we are as usual required to abide by the Standing Orders of the National Assembly as far as the business of the Assembly is concerned?

I will therefore urge and appeal to all Honourable Members to kindly once more peruse through the rules of the various provisions of the Standing Orders and observe them accordingly at all times.

I thank you all for all your attention.

Thank you.

3. Correction of Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 27th September, 2017

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 27th September 2017 is before us for consideration and adoption. Can somebody please move that the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of 27th September, 2017 be considered and adopted?

HON BABA GALLEH JALLOW [SANIMENTRENG]: I so move, Madam Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, any seconder?

HON. DEMBA SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: I so second, Madam Speaker.

THE SPEAKER:

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed To]

Any issues or observations from Members? Also may I remind you that let us restrict themselves to substantive issues. Typographical errors can be channelled through the Table Office and it will be incorporated.

HON. SUNKARY BADJIE [FONI BREFET]: Page 9, third paragraph please, 'Minute of Silence, at this moment the Honourable Speaker officially informed the Assembly about the demise of the Honourable Speaker of Burkina Faso, Dr. Salifu Jallow a few months ago'. I think it should be few weeks ago instead of months ago.

THE SPEAKER: You want to confirm whether he died weeks ago or months ago.

HON SUNKARY BADIJIE: Here it is stated few months ago.

THE SPEAKER: We will check it and get the correct date and rectify it accordingly. Any more corrections or issues?

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Page 4 Madam Speaker third paragraph, sentence beginning with 'Finally, Madam Speaker reminded Honourable Members to abide by the Standing Orders of the National Assembly as far as the business of the Assembly is concerned...' The rest is extra-essential; if it stays there it makes the sentence...- [interruption]

THE SPEAKER: Sorry Honourable Member I think something is wrong with our microphone may be the gentleman can help us to –

HON. SIDIA JATTA: Can you hear me? I am saying that, the phrase ‘... in the deliberations ...’ is unnecessary ... ‘as far as the business of the National Assembly is concerned’ is enough. The rest if it remains makes it cumbersome. It does not add anything to it other than meaninglessness.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry, in fact this is what I am saying, we need a true reflection of what was said in the House. I would retain it.

Thank you.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[The Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 27th September, 2017 adopted with amendments]

Thank you Honourable Members and as we move closer to the next item which is question and answer session, I am cognisant of the provisions of clause 19 [2] of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly which reads:

“Not more than 20 questions shall be set down on the Order Paper for any one sitting.” As a matter of fact, we have received more than the upper limit of 20 questions for today’s sitting alone as provided for under 19 [2]. This is due to the fact that the number of questions in our last Ordinary Session that was the Second Session could not be considered due to the busy schedule of this Assembly.

Therefore, in accordance with 92 [1] of the Standing Orders I will call on any Honourable Member to move a motion for the suspension of clause 19 [2] of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly for this Session only to enable us consider more than 20 questions per session so that we can exhaust our questions.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I stand to move the Motion that clause 19 [2] which states, “Not more than 20 questions shall be set down on the Order Paper for any one sitting” be suspended for today’s sitting only.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you any seconder?

HON. SAINÉY TOURAY: [JARRA EAST]: I so second, Madam Speaker..

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed To]

Clause 19 [2] of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly has been suspended for this Third Ordinary Session.

4. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWERS

i. [OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, REPRESENTED BY HER EXCELLENCY, THE VICE PRESIDENT AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS]

THE SPEAKER: Questions for which due notices were given to Her Excellency the Vice President and Minister for Women's Affairs for the Office of President by Honourable Members for Oral reply.

QUESTION NO. 165 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR BRIKAMA SOUTH]

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker, and special greetings to you and to Her Excellency.

Madam Speaker, obtaining Travel Clearance from the Office of the President has sometimes impacted negatively on such travels. Could the Honourable Minister responsible for the Civil Service explain to this august Assembly, what mechanisms are in place to solve this problem?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, Honourable Members of the Assembly, Colleagues Cabinet Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and all other Protocols duly observed.

This is a very pertinent question, it is also of utmost priority to the Government of the New Democratic dispensation. When we took over as a government – we decided to undertake several reforms including the scholarships and overseas

travels. What we found is that, there was a system but the system we realised needed some substantive improvements. Some of the difficulties, the challenges while reading the files were that sometimes:

1. Applicants apply very late
2. That the training which they apply for was sometimes irrelevant to both their capacity as professional and to institutional development
3. The fact that there were limited resources to really accommodate the huge demand for scholarships and overseas travel.

As part of the way forward, we instituted a Committee on Overseas Travel [SCOT], which would meet three times in a week and also on exceptional basis to review the demands, the applicants and applications for various institutions. The priority focus is to look at the relevance of the training, to also look at the resources that are available for scholarships and for overseas travel.

THE SPEAKER: Your Excellency Madam Vice President, we would like you to go by the answers on the answer paper. The procedure is that you answer and then the explanations will come later. Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, we are learning every day.

Madam speaker, the issue of travel clearance has been a serious concern in the past as the approval process has been confronted with challenges such as delay and sometimes disapproval of genuine requests.

However, in a bid to rationalize and properly coordinate official travels, the new dispensation has not only decentralised, but, also empowered the Special Committee on Travels.

Under the new arrangement, travel clearance is processed at different levels depending on the category of staff. Requests from honourable ministers are processed at the level of the Secretary General. The rest of the applications are

processed at the level of the Special Committee on Overseas Travels (SCOT) which has been revitalised and strengthened with a renewed mandate.

This Committee is chaired by the Permanent Secretary, Office of the Vice President and other members are representatives of the Secretary General, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Permanent Secretary, Personnel Management Office. The Committee sits three times a week and has developed a guideline to prioritise travels in accordance with the budget.

This august Body may wish to note that, with the above mechanisms in place, the level of efficiency has improved significantly.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Your Excellency.

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION [S]]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, I would like to know whether there is a linkage between travel clearance and the security apparatus at the airport. By way of clarification, I was travelling and when I arrived at the airport I was asked whether I have travel clearance. Is this an internal mechanism handing the issue of cabinet and the public servants or is there a standing protocol at the Office of the President instructing officers at the airport not to allow anybody to travel unless they have travel clearance? Would you clarify Honourable Vice President?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: Thank you Honourable Member for Serrekunda, there is a protocol about clearance and it is linked to national security. The fact is that when people travel, the government needs to know particularly in case of a mishap occurring to the individual or individuals travelling. This is a way of accountability from government towards its citizens and it is directly linked to the mandate of SCOT, which is the Special Committee on Scholarships and Overseas Travel.

Thank you.

HON. HALIFA SLLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Is this peculiar to Cabinet Ministers and public servants or does this extend to the larger body - an independent organ like

the National Assembly. I hope in the answer one take cognisance of section 25 of the Constitution.

Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: It is applicable to public servants and just as I rightly said, it is a protocol that exists and perhaps which needs to be popularised so that everybody knows about it and complies with it. Thank you.

HON. SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU & MINORITY]: Thank you Madam. I have a supplementary question. This travel clearance is it affecting only people who hold diplomatic passports or both diplomatic and ordinary passport holders especially at the level of the airport when travelling?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: The protocol covers people working in the Civil Service, and public servants. There are some who have diplomatic passports and others who don't have diplomatic passports. What it means is just covering all those who are within the framework handling the service of the Government of The Gambia.

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you once again Madam, I just want to enquire. Sometimes there are official travels and unofficial travels like where the Member for Serrekunda is coming from; there are instances where you might be going for unofficial travels probably to our sister Republic of Senegal which is not very much far which might be for instance a day's travel, but, at the border you will be asked by the security officers whether you have clearance or not. Is this definitely put into consideration?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: People who are on personal missions and who are confronted with questions at the border or at any security point need to bring that to the attention of the government because that is a private visit. It is only people who are sponsored, working in the public service and more so those who are travelling on scholarships and travelling for conferences representing Government and the People of The Gambia.

THE SPEAKER: I am going to limit the supplementary questions otherwise we would not move.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you Madam Speaker. Would your office be kind enough to review the process since it has been acknowledged that it is confronted with challenges and even genuine request are being refused sometimes. Would you be able to review the process?

Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: The process is dynamic. We review the process or processes as we encounter challenges. So on a weekly bases we look at what the challenges are, we also look critically at the shortcomings of SCOT because no institution is perfect. But for the issue of genuine requests, it is important to clarify that they might be genuine yet we don't have resources for it. Sometimes people request for genuine travels without consulting their institutional budget to see whether or not there is adequate resources to sponsor them and this is where we have difficulties.

HON. NDEY YASSIN SECKA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much Honourable Vice President. I would like to know since you emphasised that people need to be aware of this Clearance. Are there any mechanisms put in place, if not do you intend to? Because it seems people are not aware of this. So, what are the mechanisms in place so that people will know that these are the issues that should be addressed?

Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: That is a fundamental question, what we intend to do - because this is the first time we are learning about that - we will consult with the Minister of the Interior, bring it to his attention and sit with him to revise an appropriate mechanism to avoid such occurrence.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Madam Vice President, considering the challenges that have been highlighted, could you consider diverting that responsibility to the National Assembly given its independent nature. That the National Assembly be responsible for travelling clearance for its Members since it is an independent institution?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: We will take the question back home and work it out with all the stakeholders including the National Assembly and at some point we will come up with the most appropriate answer.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Your Excellency you can sit down for a while.

Q. NO. 166/2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR LOWER NUIMI]

HON. MAHTARR M. JENG [LOWER NUIMI]: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the floor. As the Vice President is representing the Minister, I wish to express my congratulations to her on her new appointment [as you did earlier].

Madam Speaker, a large number of civil servants who worked for many years with dedication have had their services summarily terminated, could the Hon. Minister responsible for the Civil Service explain to this august Assembly, how many have been reinstated, compensated or retired?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: Madam Speaker, it may please this august Body to note that a Taskforce headed by the Secretary General was established by His Excellency the President in February, 2017 to review the cases of all public servants who were between September, 1997, to December 2016 summarily dismissed or terminated.

The Taskforce has since reviewed all the cases received. As I speak, over one hundred (100) officials have so far been reinstated in the public service. The Taskforce has concluded its work and a comprehensive report with recommendations has been submitted to the Office of the President. The affected

personnel will either be reinstated or retired and paid a severance package in accordance with the law.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, any supplementary question?

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION (S)]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SEREKUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, would the Vice President indicate to this august Body what mechanism is in place for those who are still disadvantaged in the process to appeal for consideration. Is there a mechanism [still] in place because there are still outstanding complains?

Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: As a process, this was widely publicized that people who were either dismissed or terminated be given the opportunity to make a recourse through the Office of the President and many have done so. Exceptionally, in any situation not everybody would get the information or may be not everybody would be aware of the existence of such a mechanism. So, we did not think about those but we have taken note of it and we shall confirm with the different stakeholders under the leadership of the Office of the President, and, shall provide this National Assembly with the appropriate answer.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you Madam Speaker and thank you Madam Vice President for the privilege to answer questions on behalf of the President.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member can you speak louder so that everybody can hear you.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: My concern is that, you specifically mentioned September 1997 to December 2016. What has happened to those that were dismissed from July 1994 to September 1997 -which is 3 years 2 months to be exact? What would happen to those or would they just be ignored?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: Thank you Honourable Member, we had a cut-off date of September given the circumstances we took over. It is a pertinent question which we will consult with all the stakeholders and see. Because, if the government considers it as fundamental rights across the board; if we can look at it from September there is a reason for us to look at the others but then this answer will be provided after consultations on the matter.

HON. DEMBA SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. A large number of civil servants were missing with some confirmed dead. Could the Honourable Minister responsible for the Civil Service tell us whether there is any mechanism to compensate those families?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: Thank you, the Government has instituted a Commission. Initially it was a consultative Body under the Honourable Minister of Justice which will look into truth, reconciliation and reparation and what you are now saying is prudent. It will be within the mandate of the Commission to identify by calling upon all the stakeholders who have lost their loved ones to tell us the details of the lost ones - if they are working in the civil service or even if they were private citizens. And based on the list that will be provided to the Commission the Commission will subsequently refer it to the Government to take appropriate actions.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Madam Speaker, could the Honourable Vice President look into complaints of some civil servants who have been reinstated but claiming that they are downgraded. They are reinstated to positions lower than the positions they occupied previously.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: The Government is very open to people who have been downgraded to listen to their complaints, to see to what extent the decision was made and then it will take appropriate action. What I want to add is that this government is a government of accountability, not only by rhetoric but to the letter and spirit of accountability so whatever issues you raise in this august Body will be

taken up seriously and at some point we will formally update this National Assembly on the outcome of those issues.

Thank you.

HON. SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU & MINORITY LEADER]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor again. Your Excellency the Vice President in your answer you mentioned that, there is a taskforce established and it is headed by the Secretary General. My concern is that during the termination of these civil servants, the present Secretary General was the Head of the Personnel Management Office. Don't you think it was better to look for a neutral person to head that taskforce?

THE SPEAKER: Sorry Your Excellency, with all due respect Honourable, if I get you rightly, it appears as if you are asking for a personal opinion. I would rather the supplementary question be directed to the main issues and be substantive rather than asking for opinions.

HON. SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU & MINORITY LEADER]: I don't think it is an opinion. The response reads "Madam Speaker it may please this august Body to note that a Taskforce is headed by the Secretary General". And my concern here is, what I am trying to put forward is that during the termination of most of these civil servants the present Secretary General was in place, I think to do justice to those who were dismissed it is better for a neutral person to head that Taskforce. That is what I am saying.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much but I would still rule that it is a matter of opinion, and I have overruled the question.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Thank you very much Madam for giving me the opportunity once again I welcome the Vice President and congratulate her on her appointment as the Vice President.

For reasons of accountability and transparency as highlighted, from 1997 to 2016 is about 19 years; and we have also acknowledged the efforts you have done in trying to reinstate them and also try to compensate them. I am concerned about the

monetary aspect, has these things been budgeted for or which budget line did you source funding to compensate them or what are the measures you have done to source these funding to pay these people who have been wrongly terminated wrongfully.

Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: This is what we call in financial accounting unexpected expenditure. Hence what we did was to critically look at the budget and see where you had under expenditure in some budget lines; we had to redeploy those funds to meet the needs of the people who were terminated. Because in terms of priority you cannot terminate somebody, it is not really human rights to terminate somebody's service and ask the person or individual to wait. Once you terminate you should be ready to work out the modalities to settle the payments so that the person can move forward with his or her life.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Madam Vice President, the last supplementary question.

HON. YA KUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much, Your Excellency, during the period February 2007 there were civil servants that were still in prison that were charged with bogus economic crime...- [interruption].

THE SPEAKER: Please can you use your mic so that people are at the extreme corners of the building can hear you.

HON. YA KUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED]: During February 2017 when the Commission to review the cases of public servants was set up, there were certain civil servants that were still in Mile 2 during this period and did not have the chance to put their cases forward. They were charged through the courts and sentenced through the courts on bogus cases. Will these individuals have the chance to present their cases and have them dealt with?

Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT]: This is a very important question, we are not aware of public servants who were still incarcerated before and after the setting up of this Commission. But it is an element that needs to be looked into and we shall definitely look into it and come back to the National Assembly with an appropriate answer.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Your Excellency. That would be the end of the supplementary questions for this particular question. May I now proceed to the next question?

Q. NUMBER 167 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR NIAMINA EAST]

I am not sure whether the Honourable Member in view of the present circumstances would still want to continue with the question or will want to withdraw the question.

HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]: Thank you so much Madam Speaker. You will agree with me that this question was submitted well before the appointment of the Vice President, as a result [of that] I rise to withdraw the question as the Vice President is appointed. On that note I would like to felicitate her on her new appointment. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Your Excellency the Vice President and Minister for Women's Affairs for stepping in for the President to answer questions.

Clerk can we proceed with the next set of questions for the Honourable Minister of Defence?

THE CLERK:

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWERS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR DEFENCE REPRESENTED BY HER EXCELLENCY THE VICE PRESIDENT AND MINISTER OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Questions for which due notice were given to the Honourable Minister for Defence by Honourable Members for Oral Reply.

QUESTION NUMBER 164 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR BRIKAMA NORTH]

HON. ALHAGIE S. DARBOE [BRIKAMA NORTH]: Madam Speaker, could the Minister for Defence consider relocating Lance Corporal Lamin Bojang firing range in Brikama Jamisa to another safe place since the place is virtually surrounded by settlements, schools and is proposed site for a stadium; posing serious threat to unavoidable human activities?

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR MINISTER OF DEFENCE]: Madam Speaker, training in the Armed Forces is a continuous process and is the key to success in the execution of their constitutional mandate both at home and abroad.

Thus, the close proximity of the range to major military installations most particular training facilities in the Greater Banjul Area saves the Armed Forces a huge cost. Given the ever-changing geopolitical situation visa-à-vis the complex nature of contemporary threats to the world peace, would certainly require The Gambia Armed Force to engage in training and retraining programmes and activities that adequately address and or militates against these known and unknown threats. It is against this background that the use of the range is definitely invaluable during all their training activities; relocating it in any possible location will require substantial resources.

The Gambia Armed Forces [GAF] High Command has over the years engaged officials and elders of Brikama in a constructive dialogue regarding the alarming state of encroachment at the Brikama range. The primary objective of such an approach on the part of The Gambia Armed Forces is to come up with an all-inclusive and balanced conclusion to this issue which will serve the best interest of not only GAF and the community but Brikama Jamisa as a population.

The use of modern technology and the continuous development of it will always add value to the safety measures that are put in place by The Gambia Armed Forces during range activities. It is high on the agenda of the new command of The Gambia

Armed Forces to renovate the range by revamping and solidifying the area with the use of modern state-of-the art equipment to improve the safety measures.

The Gambia Armed Forces shares, with heartfelt sympathy, the concerns of the residents of the area about their safety. The range has been in use for years without any single incident or accident and the range is clearly demarcated. The range is only used to fire small arms and does not pose any hazard to the community. The Gambia Armed Forces highly solicits the understanding of the general public by allowing the range to remain where it is.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Your Excellency.

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION /S]

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. As a matter of fact, the range is situated in an area where most of the schools in Brikama are situated. The schools are not only there to provide academic discipline during daytime; even at night the place is used for study classes by the dwellers. And what they are saying is that there are lots of coincidental incidents. Because they use live ammunition sometimes there were instances where we had cases of death. The area technically is surrounded and is facing a stadium.

The GFA intended project is going to be constructed in that particular area, so, we want to appeal to Her Excellency to reconsider relocating that particular range because it is not conducive anymore. Thank you.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR MINISTER OF DEFENCE]: Subsequent to the submission of the answers provided this morning we have been consulting amongst us; that is The Gambia Armed Forces, the Ministry of Defence and other stakeholders including the community to seek or to arrive at the best solution. Of course safety, human security takes precedence over training and because of that and based on the premise we are still consulting including with the Ministry of Lands and Local Government to see what is the best way forward. And of course taking into consideration the safety of our

people in Brikama Jamisa and also people who will be frequenting the football field at the appropriate time this august Assembly will have an update on this matter.

HON. ALHAGIE S. DARBOE [BRIKAMA NORTH]: Madam Speaker, the Vice President did mention in her response that over the years the community of Brikama were engaged through The Gambia Armed Forces over the issue and an all-inclusive and balanced conclusion was reached. I wonder when this engagement took place. If it is not of recent I would urge the Ministry of Defence through the Armed Forces to once more engage the community of Brikama to have an all-inclusive position on this; because as it stands the community is requesting for a relocation. I will also urge the Ministry not to look at the cost aspect of the relocation but rather the protection of the people. To conclude, prevention is always better than cure we should not wait until incidents are reported and then take action.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT FOR MINISTER OF DEFENCE]: It is important to inform this National Assembly that this is a range that was inherited from the former regime. A critical analysis and a review of recent ... of having the range there tells us that it was politicized, but, this is a matter for Government to address and we will address it.

Secondly, when it was instituted the people were well informed that this is a range and that they need to leave certain distance between the range and settlements. The community did substantial encroachment, they are almost at the fence of the range but regardless of what the communities did, we as a Government are accountable to our people and we are putting the safety of our people at the centre of everything.

This is the reason why we are looking inward critically with all the stakeholders including of course the community and the Honourable Members of the Assembly in that area to come up with an alternative solution.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Well Madam Speaker, I would withdraw my question. That is what I wanted to ask, whether they will not be willing to rethink the decision that is expressed here so that at least we find a solution and she has expressed that is what is going to be done.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Any more supplementary questions? Thank you very much Your Excellency for providing all the answers for and on behalf of the President. We appreciate all your responses and the clarifications and I am sure Honourable Members are quite satisfied with the responses provided to the various questions that had been posed.

On behalf of the both sides of the House and indeed on my own behalf I say thank you and congratulations once more.

MADAM FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG [VICE PRESIDENT AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS]: Thank you so much Madam Speaker, and the Members of the Assembly. I really want to reiterate my gratitude for all the hard work you have done in having me appointed as the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia. I should have said it first but forgive me for my inadequacy as a human being. I take this opportunity to reciprocate and continue to pray for you for God to bless you and for God to bless our nation under the leadership of His Excellency President Adama Barrow.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

THE CLERK:

**QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWERS [BY THE HONOURABLE ATTORNEY
GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]**

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Questions for which due notice were given to the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Justice for Oral Reply.

**QUESTION NUMBER 120 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
KOMBO EAST]**

HON. LAMIN F.M. CONTA [KOMBO EAST]: Thank you Madam Speaker, could the Honourable Minister of Justice tell this august Assembly the limitation (s) of Freedom of expression in The Gambia?

Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this august Assembly. I thank the Honourable Member for Kombo East for his question and my response is this:

Madam Speaker, Freedom of Speech is explicitly recognized as a fundamental human right under section 25 subsection (1) of the 1997 Constitution. However, allow me to add that the exercise of this right is not absolute, it is subject to such reasonable restriction as may be provided by law in the public interest. In the case of The Gambia, these interests are identified under section 25, subsection (4) of the 1997 Constitution and they are for the preservation of national security, maintenance of public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court. Any restriction therefore on the exercise of the right to freedom of speech must be first provided by law and it must be justified through a legitimate aim under section 25 subsection (4) of the Constitution, and it must also be necessary and reasonable in a democratic society.

I wish to add that a matter on the exercise of this fundamental human right is presently being litigated Madam Speaker, before the Supreme Court of The Gambia. Hopefully a decision by the Supreme Court will delineate more clearly the delicate balance that needs to be struck between the exercise of this constitutional right on one hand and the limitations on the other within the context of the 1997 Constitution.

Thank you.

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION (S)]

HON. LAMIN F.M CONTA [KOMBO EAST]: Thank you Madam Speaker and thank you Honourable Minister. What are the mechanisms in place for such expressions which could be subversive to the national security of The Gambia?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE]: Thank you Honourable Member for Kombo East. I am not sure I understood your question properly, but what are the mechanisms in place for what - if you do not mind.

HON. LAMIN F M CONTA [KOMBO EAST]: For such expressions which could be subversive to the national security of The Gambia.

HON. ABOUBACAR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE]: Well, there are laws certainly in place which we could reasonably interpret as a restriction on the right to freedom of speech, but as I said the restrictions have to be justified, they have to be reasonable and necessary in a democratic society. It is difficult for me to answer your question in the abstract because it depends on the content of the speech visa-à-vis the provisions of the Constitution and the law that it affects. So, unless I have a clearer and substantive example I can't really give you an abstract answer I am afraid.

Thank you.

HON. MAHTARR JENG [LOWER NIUMI]: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. Honourable Minister, the atmosphere being enjoyed by many Gambians is giving the view that one can say anything or can express himself in anyway because it is democracy. What are the limitations?

HON. ABOUBACAR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Lower Nuimi for his question. Again, if at the risk of repeating myself I could restate that the right to freedom of speech and expression is a right guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution. However, it is not an absolute right so whatever we say in public has to be measured against the limitations placed on the exercise of this right. If I may reduce it to the very minimum, it does not mean that we are all free to say whatever we want, whenever we want about whoever we want. We have to be responsible in our utterances. What we say has to be in accordance with the law. That will be the response I will give:

Thank you.

HON. ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: Thank you so much Madam Speaker. I just wanted to ask this question, it could be noted that social media has been used by many people to express probably their constitutional right of freedom of

expression, but many of them also abuse social media. Do you have any mechanism in place to stop people using social media in expressing their views in such ways?

Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACAR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Old Yundum for his question - a very important one. While there are no mechanisms to control I do not think we want to control what people say. I think what we ought to do is to help guide the debate but I am certainly as concerned as the Honourable Member for Old Yundum. That is why the case presently before the Supreme Court is exactly on the point. It is on the point of publication of false news.

While the Government has conceded to some of the claims made by petitioners before the Supreme Court on the exercise of some of these rights, including if I may say, the right to Freedom of Assembly without seeking permit for use of public address systems, I think we have conceded that the requirement to request for permit to use a public address system is not in accordance with the Constitution either in letter or in spirit and we conceded these points before the Supreme Court.

But the point that we have not conceded is the challenge on the publication of false news and the reason why we are challenging the unconstitutionality or the alleged unconstitutionality of the publication of false news law is exactly for these reasons. That having access to social media does not give anybody the right to slander or defame or to make false news without making due diligent effort to first verify the news.

Imagine if we have a society where people are free, they are unrestricted, they can say anything about anyone, anytime without consequence, it will be a challenge to manage those debates and that is why the Supreme Court will be hearing substantive applications on exactly that point. We again hope that the Supreme Court will provide further guidance in this regard.

Thank you.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Madam Speaker, would the Minister not concur with the view that freedom of expression ought to be protected. Demarcation of the freedom of others need to be sanctioned in order to create a society where people will be free to express themselves but will be guided not to violate the right of others.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for Serrekunda and without mincing my words I concur fully with his statement that the right to freedom of expression must be protected. That is why we are engaged at the level of the Ministry in a review of our media laws to ensure that we strengthen the right to freedom of expression, but, we also want to make sure that this right is exercised in a responsible manner by citizens of this country.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Member for Lower Nuimi and that is the last supplementary question.

HON. MAHTARR M. JENG [LOWER NUIMI]: Honourable Minister, would it not help [as The Gambia is virtually **60%** or so illiterate] to mount an education programme on the Radio and Television having very prominent people taking about this. Thank you very much.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Once again Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for Lower Nuimi for his question. I agree with him fully that we need to engage the people in discussions and debates about not just the right of freedom of expression, but, about all fundamental human rights. But I think it is a process as well we are evolving. We are still a newly born democracy; it's been less than a year and in more advanced democracies they have had the benefit of 100 years of practicing democracy and they are still not perfect because democracy is continuous, it never stops.

We are just starting and of course we need to engage the public, we need to engage in the discussions but I think this is where the different stakeholders can all help. It

should not just be the responsibility of Government to sensitize and educate people. I think civil society has a role to play, I think the press itself has a role to play, I think we all have a role to play in ensuring that we educate and sensitize our people about their fundamental human rights.

I agree with you, we hopefully will be engaging in this at the appropriate time. Right now we lack the human resource capacity and the financial strength to engage in this kind of activity. The Ministry is overwhelmed if I may say, but it should not be seen as the responsibility or the exclusive preserve of the Ministry of Justice. It should be our responsibility all of us especially the civil society organizations and the media.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister.

**QUESTION NUMBER 121 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
ILLIASSA]**

HON. DEMBO K. M CAMARA [ILLIASSA]: Madam Speaker, properties belonging to individuals have been illegally confiscated by the former government or the former regime. Could the Attorney General inform this august Assembly whether the present regime has taken steps to return such properties to their rightful owners?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for Illiassa for his question. The Ministry of Justice intends to deal with all claims of illegal confiscation of properties and land. As you must all be aware a Commission of Inquiry into the Financial Activities of Public Enterprises and Bodies as regard their dealings with former President Jammeh, his family members, and, close associates has now commenced public hearing. This Commission will also enquire into some of the assets acquired by the former president including landed properties.

The intention Honourable Members is to establish another Presidential Commission of Inquiry specifically into landed properties allegedly unlawfully confiscated by the former Government. We are hopeful that these two Commissions will provide a

thorough fact finding exercise and make detailed recommendations on how to deal with these matters in a comprehensive manner.

I am sure [if I may add] the Honourable Member appreciates that we need to engage in a process first of identifying, but, even before that we need to receive complaints. We have received complaints and I think it is the amount of complaints or petitions that we have received which have really informed our desire to establish a Commission that will look into exactly this matter of alleged unlawful confiscation of properties. We hope to be able to do so soonest.

But again as I said, we are dealing with competing priorities here simply because we lack either the financial resources to engage in all activities, we want to engage in at the same time, or we lack the human capacity because we lack the expertise in certain areas. Otherwise the desire is there we are working on it, hopefully there will be a commission to look into exactly just this matter.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister. We appreciate your explanations but in accordance with our rules of procedure especially with regards to keeping of proper records [within the Assembly] we would rather you read the answer so that it can be captured on record.

Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I do certainly note the difference in the written responses and our oral responses. I can only assure the Honourable Speaker and Members of this Honourable Body that we are learning and that we will take this into account. In future we will endeavour to ensure that everything we intend to say is captured in our written responses as well.

THE SPEAKER: No, we are not adverse to further explanations, they are quite in order, and it may even help to limit supplementary questions. What I am trying to say is if you can just read the answers as provided. The explanations, which we are

quite happy with can come after that, because as I said it could minimize or limit the supplementary questions.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I take note Madam Speaker, thank you for that guidance.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, if you can just go through your answer as per the sheet...

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Madam Speaker, I think I concluded my responses on that point or you want me to take it from top again.

THE SPEAKER: No, no, just from where you said the Ministry of Justice intends to deal with all claims, I don't think you read the whole thing.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Thank you Madam Speaker, I will do as you advice.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Justice intends to deal with all claims of illegal confiscation of properties and land. Accordingly plans are at an advanced stage to set up a Commission of Inquiry into the financial activities...

There is a problem Madam Speaker, because at the time we were sending the responses the Commission had not been established but now it is established.

THE SPEAKER: *Oh!* It has been overtaken by events. I see!

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: It has been overtaken by events that is why I modified my statement but I will take it up from where it says...

The Ministry also intends to establish another Commission of Inquiry specifically into land and other properties confiscated by the former Government. It is hoped that these two Commissions of Inquiry will provide a thorough study and make detailed recommendations on how to deal with these matters in a comprehensive manner.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Appreciated we want to make sure that our institutional memory is correctly kept; that is the purpose.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister for Justice inform this Assembly whether those victims whose properties have been demolished would be part of the ... and how soon is this Commission coming up because people really need justice. How soon is this Commission going to be established to look into their claims?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Banjul North for his questions.

The first part of the question is whether people whose properties have been demolished... I believe we are still thinking about the terms of reference of this Commission, we will take on board people affected in that category and I would think they should be covered by the mandate of the commission that will be established on this issue.

In terms of timing, again, as I said, in as much as we want to do as many things as quickly as possible, we also have [our own] constraints. We have financial constraints and we are doing our best to make sure that we quickly engage in all the activities that we want to engage in. We have to also remember that the 2017 budget did not anticipate many of these activities so it is a challenge. I think next year will be a busy year for all of us especially at the Ministry of Justice simply because we are factoring a lot more activities in the 2018 budget.

But we are hoping that this Commission will be setup as soon as is reasonably practicable. I am afraid that is the best answer I can give under the circumstances. I hope the Honourable Member will understand the difficult constraints that we are faced with.

Thank you.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: I thank you very much Madam Speaker, and thank you Honourable Minister for Justice.

The Honourable Member for Banjul North has asked the first part of my question but the second part is; is the Ministry aware that some properties are still being occupied. Some properties that were confiscated are still being occupied by family members of the former President; if so, what is the Ministry doing knowing they have been confiscated illegally.

HON. ABOUBACAR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Banjul south for her question. The Ministry is indeed aware. It has been brought to our attention that some of the properties that were the subject of freezing order are still occupied, now we are working gradually on these properties legally because some of them we understand are leased. We are trying to establish the facts first before we engage in eviction.

So, at this point we are not engaging in wholesale evictions, we are establishing facts and ensuring that those that were victims should be evicted. We are dealing with almost two hundred [200] properties and we have assigned a trustee or receiver to handle some of these properties and they also have capacity constraints. They can't deal with all these properties at once but we are doing our best to do so incrementally. I am not sure if that suffices but unfortunately that is the state of affairs.

Thank you.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Honourable Minister apparently there is already a Lands Commission Act; what is holding the implementation of the provisions of that Act to address some of these issues that you have raised in your answer?

Also, is the State properly taking care of these properties like the hospital in Bakau etc. to ensure that you do not get into a problem of dilapidation of these properties after freezing.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Thank you Honourable Member for Serrekunda. I will start with your last question and then come back to the first one.

The State is doing its best to take care of these properties both moveable and unmovable. That is why at the level of Cabinet we have decided that with respect to the cattle that were the subject of freezing orders - we can't of course prevent cattle from moving despite the freezing order. We are looking at ways of ensuring that they do not perish because they are perishable. Some of them we understand are dying and some of them we understand are allegedly being stolen and we are working very fast to ensure that we find mechanisms of preserving.

We are looking at different methods; the possibility of selling off the cattle to put the money into an account [just basically], to prevent again as the Honourable Member for Serrekunda said dilapidation or perishing of some of the properties but the state is doing all it can. You can imagine the challenges of dealing with all these properties moveable and unmovable when really the State wasn't prepared for these.

Unfortunately the State may not be as rich as the former president was, he was able to keep all these properties intact we do not have the ability or the freedom that he had.

In terms of the first question on whether the Land Commission couldn't take care of these, well the Land Commission is a constitutional requirement it has specific mandate. We can certainly look at the possibility of extending its mandate to deal with claims of alleged or unlawful confiscation of properties. This is something that we will have to review and see whether it is viable.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister. Honourable Member for Serrekunda, if my memory serves me right I think the issue is about whether a Land Commission has been established. It appears to be cropping up every time.

May I suggest that you liaise with the Honourable Attorney General so that issues can be trashed with the drafting division, your input probably would help to standardize things. May I suggest you fix an appointment and talk to them because the issue keeps coming up every time in Parliament?

Thank you very much.

HON. BABA GALLEH JALLOW [SANIMENTERENG]: Thank you Madam Speaker. Some of the land in Kombo were forcefully taken from their owners after they have been erected. They were demolished and now being built as estates. Could the Minister tell us whether those land would be returned to the owners or they will be compensated?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Sanimentereng for his question. At this point I do not have all the facts before me. You have just alluded to buildings that have been demolished and whether they will be returned to their owners. I can't give a straight answer, I need all the facts we need to access. We need to look at circumstances and then come up with an advice. I am afraid the law is not a...that is the best answer I can give today.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: If the Honourable Member is not very satisfied, the doors at the Ministry of Justice are always open you can seek for further clarification.

Thank you very much.

HON. YA KUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED]: Honourable Minister, given the fact that one of the Commissions of Inquiry has already been established [just for Members of the House and the general public to understand] we are watching the proceedings of this Commission live, what would be the legal effect of the report of the Commission if acted upon, if not acted upon how does it go from there. Just give us a brief explanation on what happens after the recommendations.

Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Nominated Member. Well the Commission is conducting it hearings. We are hoping that at the end of the exercise they will submit their recommendations to His Excellency the President. The President will then hopefully table those recommendations to Cabinet for discussion.

A white paper will be issued and hopefully the Government will act upon the recommendations of the Commission. I think in brief those are the procedural steps.

Now we look forward to the recommendations of the Commission. Not only are we all shocked and disappointed at the same time by the revelations, but we are hoping that useful lessons are being learnt by everyone in Government that the benefit of high office comes with the burden of responsibility and we must always act within that responsibility.

Thank you.

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NUIMI]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. Honourable Minister, what of those who sold their property or properties to the former President with consent and they did not receive full payment for the property or properties.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I am sorry Honourable Member for Upper Nuimi, I do not want to misinterpret your question; I did not hear it very clearly.

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: In short what I am asking is, there are/were people who sold their properties to the former President but did not receive full payment or payment for their properties? What is the Commission going to do with those properties?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Upper Nuimi for his question. What I can say at this point is that, we are looking at the possible terms of reference of this Commission and its mandate. But allow me to add that if you engage in a private business transaction with the former President and you sold your property to him and he did not pay the full value, well you have the responsibility to request by any legal means. You could have approached the courts, you could have sued him. I am not sure whether the State should take the burden of the responsibility of private transactions between individuals and the President. But what I am saying is without prejudice to whatever term of reference we may end up with this commission.

Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER: QUESTION NUMBER 122 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER
FOR BANJUL NORTH]**

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you Madam Speaker. Could the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Justice inform this august Assembly, how soon is the Government of The Gambia committed to causing a review of the Constitution of the Republic?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [MINISTER FOR JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY GENERAL]: I thank the Honourable Member for Banjul North for his question. Madam Speaker, the review of the 1997 Constitution is one of the major projects that will be undertaken soon by the Ministry of Justice. In this regard, there will be a consultative process to engage Gambians both at home and abroad, to seek their views on this review. Based on the recommendations of the participants at the National Stakeholders Conference on Justice and Human Rights, organized by the Ministries with over 500 participants from a cross section of religious, professional, youth and political groups, including Members of this Assembly; the consensuses appear to be that a new Republican Constitution will be drafted, which will usher in a Third Republic.

With the permission of the Honourable Speaker, I would like to supplement this remark.

Honourable Member for Banjul North, the concept note and the draft terms of reference for the constitutional review process, have now been finalized. Consistent of course with our policy of inclusiveness, we intend to establish a Constitutional Reviewed Commission by an Act of this National Assembly. We believe that this approach will allow Honourable Members of this Assembly to have a say in the constitutional review process right from the start and it will also engender greater legitimacy, transparency and accountability to the process. We hope to present the Bill in the next session of this Assembly. We expect the whole constitutional review process to last between **18 Months** and **2** years of enactment of the Bill establishing the Constitutional Review Commission.

This Commission, when established shall hold public consultations with all Gambians in and outside the country, to receive their opinion on the proposed new Constitution. It will be the new constitution that reflects faithfully and accurately, the views of all Gambians both at home and abroad and from the cross section of religious, political, civil society, professional and other Gambian communities. We want to give the people of this country the ultimate say on how they wish to be governed in our new Constitution and that is key. We want to do so directly with the people through the Constitutional Review Commission and indirectly through you the representatives by bringing the Act establishing the Commission for debate and discussions here. That is our aim and we hope to be able to do so in the next session of this Honourable Assembly.

I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister, I am not sure whether we have any Supplementary Question [s].

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION (S)]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, would the Minister indicate whether the timeline will actually be within the span of 3 years before we have a Constitution of the Third Republic?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Serrekunda, we hope that the entire process, leading up to the adoption of the Constitution which will usher in the Third Republic will occur between **18 months** and **2 years**, from the moment that the Bill is enacted into law. We intend to place the Bill before the National Assembly at the next Session, we are hoping that it will be done at the early part of the next session, so that when it is enacted into law, the process will officially start and we hope to achieve our objective within **18 months** if not by at least a maximum period of **2 years** from that time.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Honourable Minister, is the Second Republican Constitution so bad that it needs

complete overhaul and not amendments; considering the time and resources you have highlighted here?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Again I thank the Hon. Member for Banjul North for his question. The state of the present Constitution was reviewed at the National Stakeholders Conference back in May. I believe many or some Members of this National Assembly participated in that Conference. I think a thorough discussion was held in the working groups. A sub-committee was created after the discussions and the recommendations that came from both the generality of the discussions and the working group was that; in view of the fact that the amendments are too numerous, and the fact that the Constitution had been amended over time either to meet the particular needs of a particular person or section of the community or to deprive or exclude another category of persons, it is better to have an overhaul, since it is a constitution it should constitute wholeness rather than a part.

We risk having inconsistent provisions and interpretations in the Constitution if we engage in a piecemeal amendment. That is why the objective is to draft a new constitution that will reflect accurately and faithfully, the wishes of the Gambian people. We believe at the end the present Constitution while it has lauded the aspirations, it really did not acutely reflect the [true] genuine aspirations of the people of this country. Hence the reason why we are going for a new constitution. It is a new democracy, we are starting with a clean slate.

HON. YA KUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED MEMBER]: Thank you Ma, I think he has just answered my question. I would just make one suggestion, because everyone is eager, as a country to see this new constitution come in to being. I would just like to know if you have any needs in terms of resources. Would you just take the opportunity to advocate for it so we can make it a priority and not go beyond the **18 months**?

Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Nominated Member. I believe

that is exactly what we have done. We have reached out and requested for resources to embark on this exercise. Unfortunately, when we request for resources, we have no control over the pace at which that support is given. Typical example, we made a request for computers for staff at the Ministry, because to my dismay and disappointment I walked into a Ministry where half of the staff did not have a computer to work with, the half who did have computers did not have internet connections to be able to conduct online researches. And in our case, to close the gap, in terms of the quality of aims, we wanted to equip our staff with the tools to be able to at least close the gap between the private bar and the public bar.

We requested for computers back in March, we only got them I think at the beginning of this year. So again just to demonstrate that we are doing what we can to request for support. We have no control over how fast or how slow that assistance comes in; but, constitutional reforms is an absolute priority if I may assure the Honourable Nominated Member.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. My question is, right now you have urgent amendments that are required to make certain things to be in line with the democratic process. I give an example; there are communities that are not interested in removing their alkalolu, just removing them and replacing them anyhow, they want to take part in putting in their own leaders. But as it stands now, it is the government that is having the power to remove and replace alkalolu.

Could the Ministry work with, for example the Ministry of Regional Government to come up with quick amendments so that the appointment of alkalolu and chiefs can be democratic instead of just removing them and putting other people?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Wuli East, what I can say at this point is that, there are lots of priority areas in the Constitution that needs immediate attention and addressing. We are at this point adopting a very pragmatic approach to those amendments. The preference is to have a wholesale but it does not mean that when there are urgent actions to be taken, we will not endeavour to change them. We do not want our hands to be tied really by the

present Constitution. So that is why on a case by case basis, where there is real need and an urgency we will engage in the piecemeal amendments.

For instance, there are plans in view of the forth coming Local Government Elections - we have already published the first gazette notice in that regard to allow people outside the municipalities to directly elect the Chairperson of the Councils rather than have the chairperson selected from among the elected councillors.

We believe that there should not be unequal treatment between the people who leave in the municipality and those who leave outside. I think we are all Gambians, we have the right to select our leaders and there are proposals - not even proposals there are steps now being taken to remedy that before the Local Government Elections so that the Chairperson of the Councils will be elected through universal adult suffrage.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I think I have indicated that Wuli East was the last supplementary question, so I would want us to move on to the next question.

**QUESTION NUMBER 123 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
NIAMINA WEST]**

HON. DEMBA SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Thank you Madam Speaker, I wish to apply to ...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member with all due respect, do you want to proceed with your question, in view of present circumstances?

HON. DEMBA SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: I wish to withdraw my question because it has already been answered. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER:

**QUESTION NUMBER 124 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
JESHWANG]**

HON. ALHAGIE DRAMMEH [JESHWANG]: Good morning Madam Speaker, the Albino Society of The Gambia are enquiring about the Disability Bill. Could the Honourable Minister for Justice tell this august Assembly the status of the Bill?

Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Honourable Member for Jeshwang for his question. Madam Speaker, the Disability Bill is at the final stages of its drafting. The Bill has been sent to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare from the Ministry of Justice for its final comments before its tabling before this National Assembly.

In fact, if I may supplement my comments, my answers Madam Speaker; during the General Assembly Meeting in New York, His Excellency the President and myself and other Cabinet colleagues met with a Gambian born campaigner for disability rights and we assured her that we hope by the next session, we would have completed the review of the Disability Bill, subject of course to receiving the comments from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. The intention is to present the Bill before the National Assembly by the end of the next session so that we will have a Disability Act in The Gambia, which will recognize the rights of all challenged Gambians and put them in the same basket as all able bodied Gambians.

I think we should not only discourage discrimination against the physically or mentally challenged but we should actively encourage their inclusion into society and give them equal opportunities as all Gambians are entitled to. That is the aim, we hope to be able to do so by the end of the next session of this Assembly

I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Any more questions? Then we move over to

QUESTION NUMBER 125 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR BANJUL SOUTH]

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I think the Honourable Minister has answered my question during response

to supplementary questions on Question Number 122 so I think I will just withdraw that question Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Madam Speaker, with your permission I would just like to reiterate my earlier comments that we take note of the shortfalls within responses because of our ignorance of Parliamentary procedure, but as we are all learning our routine responses will be more in-depth and comprehensive next time.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker. Could the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Justice tell this august Assembly what plans the Ministry has as part of international best practises to formulate legal instruments that will require all Executive appointments and other key public appointments, as well as declaration of assets and award of contracts of national interest like that of NAWEC and GAMTEL *etc.* to be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. Thank you.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for Banjul South for her question. I think these are very important and useful issues that needs to be discussed. As part of the Constitutional review process Madam Speaker, opportunity will be given to all Gambians as I indicated earlier to suggest improvements on the governance and accountability provisions of the Constitution. The Honourable Member for Banjul South will have the opportunity to suggest these ideas to the Constitutional Review Commission at the appropriate time.

I am hopeful that the Constitutional Review Commission will be able to take on board the very vital proposals, even though they are framed in the form of a question. But I think they are useful and that they can strengthen the accountability processes in Government. Thank you.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, with all due respect, I respect the Honourable Minister's suggestion that we will be given time for suggestions. However, Honourable Speaker, we sit here as MPs - as Members of Parliament, so we are not any other Gambian. We have been given the powers under Section **74** of the Constitution, which if you may give me the opportunity to read; states "*...The Vice-President and Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the National Assembly for any advice given to the President in Cabinet, and the Vice-President and each Minister shall be accountable to the President and the National Assembly for the administration of departments and other business of Government committed to his or her charge...*"

In that respect Madam Speaker, I would expect the Honourable Minister to duly answer this question. And also Honourable Speaker, he said that 'the Honourable Member will have the opportunity to suggest these ideas at the appropriate time' and I don't see any appropriate time for a Member of Parliament than his or her time in Parliament.

Thank you very much.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL & MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: If I may Madam Speaker, briefly respond to the Honourable Member for Banjul South, that while I agree completely with her reading of section **74** of the Constitution. The Act of re-drafting a new Constitution is not *per se* committed to the charge of the Ministry of Justice as such. The Minister of Justice is only facilitating the process in this instance. What we are doing here is actually to give to the Gambian People including Members of this Assembly, who represent them to give them a say. I cannot unfortunately Madam Speaker, respond to the Honourable Member for Banjul South, that the Government plans to have this in the Constitution or not. We want the Constitution to reflect what Gambians want and not what the Government wants exclusively, so, I do not want to pre-empt whatever will be decided by the people of The Gambia including you here.

As I said, the idea of tabling the Bill here to establish the Constitutional Review Commission is to give you a say in this process right from the start. So you will have an opportunity to even discuss the terms of reference of this Constitutional Review

Commission before they start their work. It is up to you to at any point in time request me or any Member of this Commission to come before you and tell us what you want to see in the Constitution. Nothing prevents you from doing so. So I will urge the Honourable Member for Banjul South to perhaps postpone her question on this matter and to understand my position, visa-à-vis responsibility for the drafting of the Constitution. It will not be the Minister of Justice that will be drafting the Constitution.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Minister and also Honourable Member for Banjul South, for the information of all Honourable Members, the National Assembly [itself] is in the process of selecting a committee that will look at the Constitutional Review, Human Rights and other Related Matters. And when that is established we can summon the Ministry of Justice to come and clarify certain issues. And I would on that note want to call on Ya Kumba. Give others a chance so that they may have a say in the debate please.

HON. YAKUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED MEMBER]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. On the issue of Public Appointments coming for approval to the National Assembly before it is done, I just wanted to refer to Section **109** of the Constitution; which gives the National Assembly the power to establish a Public Appointment Standing Committee. And one of the duties of the Committee is to make legislative proposal. If we feel that it is necessary for public appointments to be confirmed by the National Assembly, then we can make that legislative proposal so they can come to us. I do not think we have to wait for the Constitution to be reviewed before this happens.

Secondly, the issue of contracts for NAWEC and GAMTEL, contracts of National interest. I totally agree that they should come to the National Assembly. But again, if the Public Enterprise Committee (PEC) decides that there is need for them to defend which contract is to be awarded in front of the National Assembly and seek our approval before it is awarded, I think the PEC can make legislative proposal and we can take it from there. We do not have to wait for the Ministry to do so. Thank you.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: I have a point of correction Ma!

THE SPEAKER: Sorry! All Honourable Members, can we just get matters straight. This is a question and answer session, it is not a debate. You will all have an opportunity at the adjournment debate to give your views, comments and opinions. So let it be restricted to asking questions that the Honourable Ministers can answer.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, is the Honourable Minister confirming that there are two faces to this Constitutional Review. The comprehensive review and piecemeal review as per the urgency for the review? In that light, would they be taking on board just as we did on Section 65, taking on board those urgent changes that needs to be made?

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: I thank the Member for Serrekunda and I confirm the twine tract approach that we are taking with respect to the Constitution. Our preference, again I will reiterate, is to redraft a new constitution but when we are confronted with challenges that prevent us from effectively carrying out matters of government; when we are faced with constitutional obstacles that prevents government from realizing its objective in terms of empowering the people of this country and also to be efficient, we will adopt an amendment of those Constitutional provisions until such time that we will have a new constitution of The Gambia. So yes there will be a twine tract approach based on urgency and need as well. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. If I were to ask a supplementary question to the question posed by the Honourable Member for Banjul South, I would rather ask why the provisions of the 1997 Constitution with regards to appointment or confirmation of appointments by the National Assembly has not been done. You may reframe your question that way, if you reframe it that way, then I will allow the Honourable Minister to answer it, but not to open a debate and give or ask for opinions and views. Thank you.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much. What I am saying, I think the supplementary questions are not really directed, because what I asked was formulating a legal framework. I am not asking for a Constitutional reform; I think that should be noted here. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I think we will all take note and the Honourable Minister will take note of the concerns raised by Honourable Members. At this point in time I thank the Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Justice for the answers provided and I am sure if they are not exhausted, the Honourable Member can always knock at your doors and seek for further clarification, thank you very much. On that note I will call on the Clerk to proceed. Thank you very much.

HON. ABOUBACARR BAA TAMBEDOU [ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE]: Thank you Madam Speaker and thank you Honourable Members.

IV. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWERS [BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR TRADE, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT]

THE SPEAKER: Questions for which due notices were given to the Honourable Minister for Trade, Regional Integration and Employment by Honourable Members for oral reply.

QUESTION NUMBER 50 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE FOR SERREKUNDA]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister for Trade, Industry and Regional Integration & Employment inform this August Assembly whether the Ministry is aware of the number of Gambian youth who are being deported? If so, is the Ministry prepared to collaborate with the Minister of Youth and Sports to put into effective operation the labour exchange programme mandated in section **44** of the Labour Act and introduce a viable project to ensure that deportees in particular and youth in general have access to viable income?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION & EMPLOYMENT]: Thank you very much National Assembly Member for Serrekunda.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment has not received any official communication on the issue of deportees

but have learnt through public media [a press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Corporation and Gambians Abroad] about the matter. Additionally, the Ministry is also aware and involved in the voluntary return of migrants en route to Europe stranded at one of the transit countries (Niger and Libya). The Ministry communicated to the Ministry of Interior (the institution responsible for immigration matters) to provide us with data on the number of voluntarily returned migrants from 2017 to date. This request is just been responded to and the ministry is currently working on the data to ascertain the total number of Gambians involved, gender distribution and geographical distribution of the returnees as well as their capacities/capabilities. **MOTIE** and **MOYS** as coordinating ministries of the Youth Empowerment Project **[YEP]** is working on creating a reintegration scheme for these voluntary returnees. As you may be aware the main objective of the project is to control irregular immigration by creating economic opportunities for youth in the country.

In section **44 (1)** of the Labour Act **2007**, *"The Commissioner shall establish and maintain an employment service designed to bring together persons offering and seeking employment, including, at minimum maintaining a register in Banjul of persons seeking employment."* This is different from a labour exchange programme quoted by the Honourable Member as can be seen from the above section of the Labour Act **2017**.

The Department of Labour has established Public Employment Service Unit in accordance with the Section **44 (1)** of the Labour Act **2007**. However, this Unit remains inactive as job seekers are not finding it relevant to seek for employment. This is because employers are not registering with Public Employment Service Unit to file their vacancies as it is not mandatory under the current Labour Act **2007** to do so. In the previous Labour Act of **1990**, it was made mandatory for employers to notify the Department of Labour of their vacancies.

Furthermore, with the increased interest of the private sector in the Job centres, the Government has not seen the need to continue to operate the Employment Service Centre Unit on a large scale but rather support the private sector to provide the service. In view of this, GAMJOBS supported the setting up of AMRA as a private Job

Centre. Recently, we have three Job Centres (AMRA, YMCA and EASE) operating in the country.

The Government of The Gambia through MoTIE had signed Labour Exchange Programme with the Government of Qatar for the recruitment of skilled Gambians to work in Qatar. However, the list of Gambian job seekers who registered with MoTIE was sent to the Gambia Embassy in Qatar for onward transmission to the relevant authorities in Qatar. Despite numerous follow ups, the MoTIE never got response from the Qataris side. With the new dispensation, the new Government would review the initiative and engage the Government of Qatar and other countries for possible collaboration in the Labour Exchange Programme to ease unemployment pressure currently being experienced.

MOTIE has been collaborating with the MOYS in the area of youth employment over the years. This is evidenced in the implementation of the GAMJOBS project which main focus was youth and women employment, The Gambia Growth and Competitiveness Project (GCP), The Gambia Songhai Initiative and the current YEP, that is the Youth Empowerment Project.

The Ministries of Interior, Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment and Youth and Sports are working on a **3.9** million EUR project with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). On "*Strengthening the Management and Governance of Migration and the Sustainable Reintegration of returning Migrants in The Gambia.*" The aim of the project is to address irregular migration from The Gambia through promoting and strengthening migration governance, improved migrant's protection and sustainable reintegration of returnees. Whereas the objective of the project are to prevent irregular migration and forced displacement, facilitate a better migration management.

THE SPEAKER: [SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION [S]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, would the Minister explain the real concept of the Labour Exchange Programme. The understanding [that is in the Act] is that the Department of Labour should establish a unit that will take record of those who are seeking employment and should also be in consultation

with those who are providing employment so as to match job seekers to employment. This is precisely what this question is all about. That in addressing the problem of youths;

1. It is asking whether the Ministry is actually coordinating with the Youth Ministry to deal specifically and the answer we have received is that they have got the data now and they are working on it.
2. And the next issue about the youth in general, do you have this program where those seeking jobs are quantified especially the youth and those who are applying for jobs are also being quantified so as to match job seekers to job that is available in the market.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER FOR TRADE...]: Thank you very much Honourable Member from Serrekunda. I just want to tell you that the data that is been generated is still ongoing, is a process. We are collecting the information, it is being processed and as we progress it will determine how we go ahead in matching, but that is the ultimate goal that we are working towards. We must get the facts right, we must get the voices of those that are affected. We do not want to come with the prescription, we want them to engage. So, what we are doing currently is working with those that are available and also working with the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Youth and working also on the data that is before us at the moment. And as I am talking to you now, that process is ongoing with the young people those that we have access to, in order to get the right information to be able to create the job opportunities that are needed and also to match them with the jobs *etc.*

With regard to the Ministry of Labour, we have had a meeting not long ago, about a week ago and what we have decided is that data has to be ready for us to start the process of engaging with them constructively. And also the YEP has started and we are now dealing with the process of engaging youth that have already given their business plans and those that we have captured to continue guiding.

HON. MAHTARR JENG [LOWER NIUMI]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. Madam is the Minister aware of the low payment rate, threats and harassment of Gambians working in the Private Sector?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER FOR TRADE...]: Thank you very much. I can say we are not aware because there is no communication to that effect. We will need a formal request or a formal information coming from them to the Ministry for us to be able to act on them. We need the information to act on it but we are not aware.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Madam Speaker, is it true that European Union has given a certain grant to cater to the needs of the returnees?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER FOR TRADE...]: Yes! They have. There is a pledge and also we have the Youth Empowerment Project that is in place; that is about **11** Million Euros to respond to those returnees as well as those youths that are unemployed and need support within the country. Yes! There is and the programme is currently ongoing.

HON. ALHAGIE JAWARA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Thank you Madam Speaker. Some part of my question has already been asked by Honourable Jatta. I would ask the Honourable Minister, she said that the aim of the project is to address irregular migration from The Gambia through promoting and strengthening migration governance. Is there any mechanism [other than this] that her Ministry can put in place in order to retain youths here? Because if we could all observe, youth of this country have no sense of direction in the sense that they are desperate because some of the money that has been given in the name of the youth are not been utilized effectively as expected. So what is your Ministry's plan to make sure that this grant or loan has an effect on the life of the youth?

Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER FOR TRADE...]: Thank you very much. The funds that are given to address migration and create employment or address unemployment for youth is based on coherence systematic time bound project that addresses the needs of youths based on the activities that are expected to be carried out. And for youths to benefit, they have to go through the due diligent process. You have to understand the nature of the youth that are migrating and those that are unemployed. Majority of them have very low skills, majority of them

are uneducated and those who have the skills to look for certain categories of jobs. So the package that we have under this project has identified strategies on how we capture them and they must go through that due diligent process.

Under the YEP project, you have to be trained, you also have to identify what type of activity you want to do, what are your aspirations and after the project what do you plan to do. Then we take you through an entrepreneurship development program that will be your own idea for the purpose of sustainability and ownership. So to say that it has not been properly spent, I don't think that is accurate. I am aware of the fact that...

It is following a systematic approach and because it is the due diligent process that we have to follow, may be the expectations of some of the youth that things should happen magically may not be possible. But we are responding, we are aware of the high expectations, the Government is also responding, as a result we are trying to follow a very systematic approach in handling the issue and it is progressing.

HON. MAJANKO SAMUSA [NOMINATED] Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Honourable Minister, I will like you to clarify the **3,000,000 Euro [three million]** that has been given to the Ministry of Interior to look into the affairs of the returnees can you throw light on this, because we know the affairs of the returnees are under the Ministry of Trade and Integration. Also, this august House understands that **3,000,000 Euro [three million]** is between Trade and Ministry of Interior, and if you are aware can you throw light on this?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...] Thank you Nominated Member of the Assembly. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Regional Integration is aware that there is a **3.9, 000,000 Euro [three million Nine Hundred Thousand Euros]** project with the International Organization for Migration and the purpose is to strengthen the management and governance of migration and the sustainable integration of returning migrants in The Gambia.

The aim of the project is to address irregular migration from The Gambia promoting and strengthen migration governance - improve migrants' protection and sustainable reintegration of returnees. Like I told you, we have received quite a number of

rerunning migrants. We cannot just let them arrive and give them some amount of dalasis that is not sustainable. It has to be based on sound information, based on their voices and their aspirations and is a process.

Currently, like I said, data is been put together, you have the Ministry of Interior, Foreign Affairs as well as my Ministry that are working in a tripartite and meeting together to see how we can actually mitigate those issues. It is a process and very soon you will get the information because we are going to share the information with you. We are going to share with you what are in place and they themselves will speak to you if you want. That is what we are doing...

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Can we follow procedure we are approaching 1:00 p.m. Can someone move that we sit beyond 1:00 p.m. and suspend at 1.30 p.m. for break?

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I rise to move that we sit beyond 1:00 p.m.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: I so second. Thank you!

THE SPEAKER:

[QUESTION PROPOSED, PUT AND AGREED TO]

[That the House sits beyond 1 O'clock]

HON. MAJANKO SAMUSA [NOMINATED]: Honourable Minister, this august House has been informed by a member of your Ministry that the **3,000,000 Euro [three million]** you are talking about, which is meant for the project has not yet been utilized and the Ministry of Interior is not cooperating with the Ministry of Trade. So, I am surprised you are telling this august House that the project or exercise is going on.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Nominated Member. You have to understand that funds are not only to be brought to be utilized immediately, they are contrary to what used to happen.

When funds are there, we are aware and I want to put that on record, we have been consulting and a lot of processes are taking place towards that. This is a due diligence process that we are taking and following and we will come out with results as we move on. So, to have been told that Interior and Trade are having a problem I am not aware. As far as I am concerned we are meeting, we are aware that we all have a role to play with other actors that are out there and we want to follow professional and procedural matters in order to fulfil the objectives of this money.

The **3.9 000,000 Euro [three point nine million]** has been announced and it is well known. It is actually under the purview of the Ministry of Interior and Interior is working with the relevant institutions to make sure that we consult, plan and work together, to make sure that the beneficiaries actually get what they want and to get what they want requires proper planning, following procedures and systems to be able to come out with sustainable results not only to say, they have given us the money and we have given it to them. What next?

Besides, remember migration has the underlining effect of poverty and lack of opportunities for the people that is why they left. So, we have to work with them closely to ensure that we put things in place that will be sustainable for them to own and call theirs to mitigate that.

HON. NDEY YASSIN SECKA [NOMINATED]: Thank you Madam Speaker. I think part of my question has been mentioned by the Honourable Minister that is when she said 'work with them closely'.

So, how do you work with them closely because you listen to radios stations and you hear them raising their concerns and what are the priorities that are given to them so that they will know that, their concerns are known by the Government? Thank you!

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Nominated Member. That is a very good question for the fact that if you want to give out information to people who are expecting a lot, you have to come out with basic information at the right time to tell them this is what is happening.

When the money was given, it was announced and acknowledged but we are going through a process for the people to be able to enjoy it.

1. We are working with a batch of migrants who came back.
2. We are working on a data [that is been unified] and trying to put things together.
3. We are also trying to look at their priorities and work closely with them.

So, what we intend to do is to communicate the information to them. I can understand the high expectations. In social media we have a lot of people coming with a lot of ideas sometimes which is very genuine but sometimes also because of the level of expectations you can understand; and with the freedom that people have they can say anything. But that should not distract us from doing the right thing. We will communicate, we will bring it out and it will be shared as soon as the results are out.

As I said, it is not a one off thing but a process and a procedure that is going on; and one of the best ways of communicating to them is using the radio, newspapers and also bringing out the young people who are benefiting from this to speak their voices and share their plans.

These are strategies that ... they are empowering processes but you need to work very hard to make that happen for others to learn from you.

HON. MUHAMMED MAHANERA [SANDU]: Thank you Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. The Honourable Minister for Trade and employment said that Government supports the private sector to employ the youth. Do you have any plans of protecting these youth in the job market? What plans do you have to properly monitor these youth in the job market so as to have their social security numbers?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Sandu. As I said earlier, you have a project and in that project there are processes that we follow and following those processes, part of what you are asking is included. It is not just come and give them. You have to build their capacities, you have to work with them and let them understand the

needs. It is not because they left and went to look for money or opportunities and came back - giving them money is empowering them.

We must learn from the past and understand the causal factors as to why they had to leave and even if they come no matter what the expectations are, it is our duty and responsibility as a Government to come up with a focus on empowering the people and allowing them to be able to live a life of dignity by taking them through the process. It is not like about dishing out money, it is about giving them the money for value, for them to understand that this is what determines their lives, their future and The Gambia can provide it through the support. It is a life opening opportunity for them to graduate from the position they are to a higher position. We are putting all those things and these are part of the plans.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the opportunity. We understand that the Ministry is really facing challenges and when there is money involved, temptations are very high particularly on the issue of rushing to get the money from the relevant Ministry. It is very important when we receive migrants, we also try to understand that some of them actually faced trauma.

Is the relevant Ministry actually taking into cognizance issue of rehabilitation in collaboration with the Ministry of Health before integrating them back into society?

Secondly will the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment also develop a data based system, trying to bring in new policies or mechanisms in terms of ICT to have records of people seeking jobs and also bring up policies that facilitate compliances in terms of job termination and employment as well? Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Kantora. The third pillar of the YEP project is all about ICT capacity building and you cannot talk about creating jobs without thinking of E-commerce-that is one. Building their capacity to research into the ... space to see what are the options. We are now saying that we have to make good use of the technology to advance and to create jobs and the youth are very savvy in that. Currently part of the package of the capacity building that we are having under the

youth project has that element. We are also encouraging what you talked about - the trauma healing of these returnees.

There are different ministries that are involved as soon as they arrive before we get access to them, they have had access to those relevant ministries already. So, that holistic approach is there. From arrival until they come to us are all processes that are very key in dealing with this phenomenon of migration; and I want to tell you that part of the curriculum of the YEP project is about entrepreneurship development. People coming out with their own business plans and we help them to search for opportunities that they want. It is based on their choices after they have been empowered.

I know the expectations are high but we also have to understand that to come with the right answers and the right responses, we have to go through processes and procedures and that was what was lacking and that was why the youth left. But now we have seen youth coming back voluntarily because they have something to fall back on, they have something to respond to and people are there to give their hands and we are doing our best. Also, we inherited a very difficult situation and one has to understand that situation too.

HON. FATOUMATTA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. We all know the reasons for this illegal migration and we all know that it is due to the high youth unemployment rate and the Honourable Minister said in her response that the unit they created remained inactive as job seekers were not finding it relevant to seek for employment.

Madam Speaker, what I want the Honourable Minister to tell us is how and why they thought that the youth find it irrelevant to seek for employment. Is it because of the employment they are giving them are not appealing or is it because it will be a waste of their time because of the pay or whatever - I will want the Honourable Minister to look into it; because the reasons - we all know. These youth are going into this venture because of not being employed. So, why will they find it irrelevant to seek employment if there is employment? Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you very much Honourable Member from Banjul South. Now let me explain the process for people to understand.

What that policy sought to do was to create an opportunity where job seekers are registered in finding jobs. Now, in the first place that is not respected. That policy was not implemented because there was no enforcement. There are no enforcement of people who have jobs to create them, who have the jobs and report back to the relevant institutions to say I am having 5 or 50 positions and these are the types of people I need because it is a systems approach. The policy in itself is not a problem but the response and lack of response to application of that section of the policy that was problematic.

If the data is not there, the Ministry cannot do anything and people were under no obligation to go and report. Because it was like a caring house where you say to the unit in my Ministry or in my enterprise, I have these number of vacancies available and here they are, then we start matching but that did not happen. As a result the employers were not registering with the Public Employment Service Unit. They were not doing it. Now what we are trying to do is to look at that policy very closely.

Also, we have to change our work ethics, we have to develop a professional approach to whatever things we put in place. That every tool that we put in is to facilitate effective use and utilization, and to make it useful to the people but that was not happening. I believe with this new dispensation, we are going to ensure that people develop the right work ethics so that they know what is there, where, how and when to access it. ICT is going to help us and also conducting sensitization on the radio. We have looked at that lacuna and that is why it is supported here.

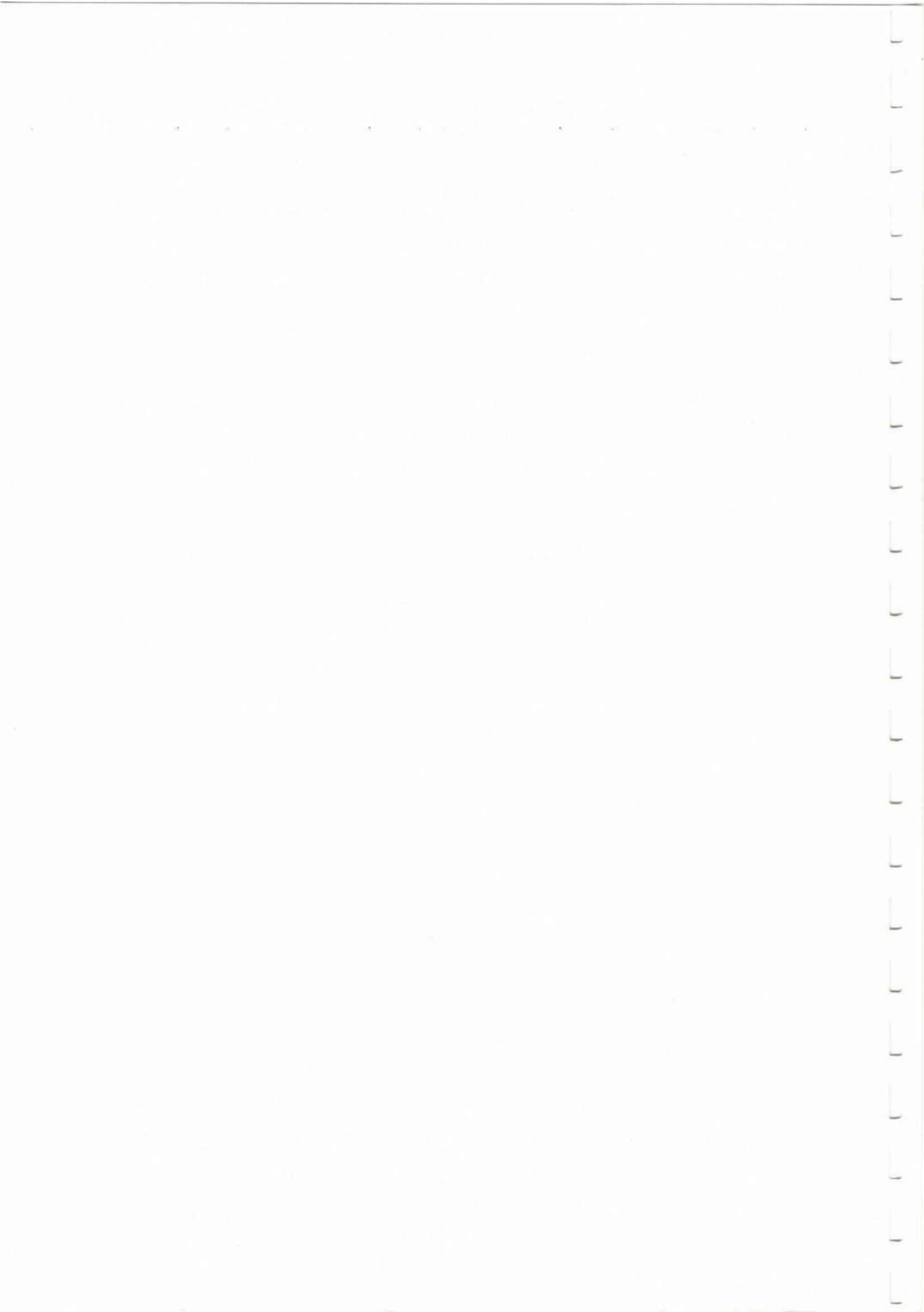
Why was it that people are not seeking it, why is it that the young people are going? Because they did not find the information and probably they did not know what jobs are/were there and which are/were not there. Even in our school systems when school leavers are leaving we do give them orientation? So, it was a problematic situation. What we are doing now is working on the policy, looking at it again. We have also developed some other policies which will be brought here for you to see so

that we change the ethics of work and approach to our engagement at the official level.

Sometimes it is not the policy that is bad but it is the attitude towards how we respond to policy issues in our country that has created these crisis of unemployment. The crisis of poor work ethics and the crisis of not engaging constructively with what is our limit, so, it means it is a whole systems approach that is failing and that is what we are trying to rectify.

HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you Madam Speaker and I also thank the Honourable Minister. We know they inherited a bad situation but we are hopeful that they will make it 'in shaa Allah' [God willing]. I have some questions that I want to put to the Honourable Minister.

1. Talking about the **3.9, 000,000** Euro [three point nine million], I want to ask hope it was not a misallocation of the funds from one ministry to the other?
2. I do not know whether you are aware of the International Organisation of Migration [IOM], the organization responsible for migration because I was at one time confronted by some of the returnees in my constituency. That they were registered with this organization and they were promised that they will be given some support with their intended projects. I went with them to this organization and what they told me was that they don't have any money on the ground but they were dealing with an organization from outside to get some money and give it to the people in the country.
3. So if there is **3.9, 000,000** Euro [three point nine million], in the country for these returnees, I want to know whether the returnees are aware of the process at her Ministry and what her ministry is doing because all their problems are been directed to this organization - IOM?
4. I also want to ask whether there is inter-Ministerial collaboration between her ministry and the Ministry of Interior on the issuing of passports because people in the diaspora need passport and cannot get it unless they come to the country which sometimes poses problems. So I want to know whether there is any inter-ministerial collaboration between her ministry and the



ministry of the Interior on the issuing of passports to Gambians in the diaspora.

Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Member for Busumbala. I just want to tell you that the issue of passport is not under the portfolio of the Minister of Trade, Integration and Employment.

With regards to the IOM, that is the [International Organization for Migration], the most relevant first stop is the Ministry of Integration that is responsible for looking at the issue with them; and to say that there is collaboration between the relevant Ministries not only with Trade but other Ministries that have some hands in it which are the Ministry of Youth, Trade, Foreign Affairs and Interior; indeed there is.

We have a Committee that sits to look at coming issues, and I want to tell you that [I said it earlier], may be just to reemphasize that it is not business as usual. What used to happen is to let the money come and you dish it out. We are dealing with serious development issues and crisis. The youth unemployment is a bombshell and if we are going to address it strategically and sustainably we have to put our plans and hearts together. We were not given that money to just dish out, it has to follow the due process.

Yes! There is a plan to support those migrants that are returning but like I said it has to be based on sound policy guidance and information so that when they get these monies, we can help.

I know there are quick fixes but that is not under my Ministry, the Ministry for Interior may be will be able to answer but I know we are working systematically with the data which we have been given. We are now implementing a questionnaire with most of them and I am very happy with the progress. The team that is responsible is a combination of all these relevant Ministries that have to know what their aspirations are and what needs to be done so that when we can implement.

We have the YEP project which is under the Ministry of Trade with the International Trade Centre as implementing partners and we have clearly spelt out business packages and capacity building programs that are focusing on those youths.

We have found out that majority of the young people who are returning are not educated, that is the saddest thing and that is a time bomb. If they are not educated and do not even have skills, we need to find out what are their aspirations, what do they need and how do they want it and that require resources.

Now they are grown up, they have gone out and they ventured, we know that it was as a result of the authoritarian regime that we had. They had no development plans and did not respect policies and programs that were in place to respond to the needs of the population. So, we want to avoid that by taking a systematic approach to issues and I can assure you that you don't have to come with them. This is about development politics not partisan politics.

It is about helping Gambians who are faced with a situation that resulted them going on perilous journeys to the outside world that has created this dire situation that we have to address honestly as a government. And this government, I can assure is committed to that and that alone and we are going to do whatever we can to make sure that they benefit but you have to understand the characteristics of the returnees in order to be able address the recourse of migration.

HON. MAHTARR M JENG [LOWER NIUMI]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Honourable Minister, will you understand that the youth coming from Libya, Niger and Italy are frustrated. They do not have the time to wait - we want to study, we want to make amendments, you feeding the frustration of these people and the more frustrated these people are the more they become restless and disheartened.

Could you please speed up your approach in addressing the situation of these people otherwise you will be responsible for anything that is said to this Government and your Ministry should at least take one week or at most a week plus to put all these forces in place. See the situations of these people, see how best and how quickly you can address issues but waiting for qualifications, examinations etc. is feeding

the frustrations of these people. Since we heard about this money, when did the money come? We have been waiting since the time it came up till now feasibility study. It is frustrating. *[Applause]*

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Lower Nuimi. I think you have made a really apt analysis of what used to be in terms of not following the due process; we have had failed institutions.

We have not been able to do anything that is right because of the lack of following procedures and processes and because of those failed institutions. We want to give quick fixes because we want to please a particular category of people and therefore, once those ones get it and they do not have the capacity, they do not have the technical competence or they do not have the skills to do it, it finishes and then you leave them back to square one that is the scenario that we were used to.

Now what we are trying to do is with due diligence and speed. We are aware [as I told you earlier] we are on a time bomb but we have to address issues strategically if we want to sustain a better Gambia; and how do we do that? It is not like those days, money comes one individual spends it and nothing happens. We are trying to learn from the past, we are trying to make sure that these youth that are coming are empowered to be able to spend whatever dime they receive from this project or whatever capacity building processes they have for them to live a long life. Do not give fish to a person, teach a person how to fish ... him/her a long life to live on.

This is what this Government is trying to do and we are going to do it without delay we are working on it. You see all these questions and issues you have raised, we have gone past that. The questions have been developed and tested, we have done all these things and now the data collection processes is almost coming to an end the analysis is coming in. Now that analysis is what is going to give us the critical key information that will help us to make the right policy options and decisions to help those people. So, it is worth the time, it is important to ensure that we empower the people to learn to be patient a little bit in order for us to fix this problem we have inherited.

It is herculean task but we are up to it, we are going to do it and have to do business differently because we were all here and we saw what happened. Institutions have failed, there was no respect for expertise, there was no respect for accountability or transparency but here we are saying you have been given **3.9, 000,000 Euro** [three point nine million euro], **GMD 11,000,000** [eleven million dalasis], this is what is planned and this is what is going on and you have all the records what stops you from coming to our offices and let us just open the books for you to see, we will do that. *[Applause]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister and Honourable Members. I understand and appreciate the interest that this debate has generated and in view of that I would allow two or three-at the maximum supplementary questions.

May be if you can avoid the long preambles just ask direct supplementary questions that will save time.

HON. SAIKOU MARONG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. Honourable Minister, does your Ministry have any other mechanism to cater for the youth, for instance in a worst case scenario - in a case where the EU or any other donor did not give you **GMD 11, 000,000** [eleven million dalasi] or **3 .9, 000,000 Euro** [three point nine million] to cater for the youth on unemployment? Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Excellent question. What we are getting as aid or grant is to utilize it effectively, to build the capacity of our youth so that when the projects come to an end they can run their businesses or enterprises the way they want it and do not have to rely on aid. That is why we are trying to make use of the resources that are given efficiently based on the plans that we have to work with the people and empower them to be able to stand on their own because we know that aids or grants do not last forever. Therefore, we must build the capacity of our young people who are presently the leaders of today and tomorrow to be able to stand up and change the culture by making use of what has been made available to work sustainably towards that. That is what we are doing and we are working towards that and that is what [even] the EMPRETEC project is all about.

HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you Madam Speaker. My question to the Honourable Minister is with regards to access to viable income by our youth. If you look at illegal migration, a chunk of them also come from the rural areas, but then when we talk about job centres like AMRA, YMCA, EASE etc. they are located in the urban areas, does her Ministry have any plans for those in the rural areas because they are also part of this illegal migration and most of them are uneducated? Do you have any plans for them?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Indeed you have to understand that the YEP is not only urban but it is countrywide. YMCA is also the same if you look at the nature of their work and what they are doing. So, it captures all the aspects for administrative purposes. Now we are talking about a broader context of everything being centred in the capital, so the headquarters are bound to be centered in the capital. What we are trying to do here is that, we are focusing on every youth and let me tell you one thing, what the preliminary data is revealing is that about 80% of the migrants are coming from up country but 90% of them live in the urban areas. You can see what the data is picking.

It is not that they were born in the urban areas but because of certain factors and that is giving us some policy issues that we have to address. Improving the infrastructure provides the opportunities and you think about economic free zones, these are all plans that we have [in our minds] in order to keep them where they are and also provide all the other infrastructure. So, these are all things we can only get by following a diligent process to inform our analysis and the policy direction that this country has to take to sustain the youth in the country and give them a living that is meaningful.

HON. MOMODOU S. CEESAY [JANJANGBUREH]: Madam Speaker, my question has already been asked by Honourable Alhagie Mbowe. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Honourable Minister, you stated in your response that section 44 subsection 1 of the Labour Act established the Public Employment Service Unit but

that this unit is inactive as job seekers are not finding it relevant to seek employment. They are not going there and as you stated it is meant to serve as a clearing house but you also stated that they are not going there because the employers are not registering with the unit and not filing their vacancies there which also renders it inactive.

Since it is a legislation that established this, are you not considering coming up with legislation to amend this because you have cited that the previous Labour Act made it mandatory. Are you not considering revisiting this and then making it mandatory so that employers will be filing their vacancies with this unit to make it active and effective?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Member for Banjul North, you are right. What we need to understand is attitude towards policy. We need to because we had something like that in 1990 and when we made a comparative analysis building upon 1990, it was supposed to calibrate to respond to some of those things and if you take that policy and look at it closely, it calls on everybody to come in.

1. We are now thinking of reviewing - which is important because we want to look at where the lacuna lay in different aspects.
2. At the same time also try to work on the attitude of the people and that is where public advocacy and communication comes in. People have to change their attitudes to be able to move on. So, it is attitudinal but also we will review. We are just coming in and we want to have a clean slate to build on some of the best practices and look at where the lacuna is and improve on it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister. *[Undertone...]* contributions and supplementary questions. I think Honourable Members will agree with me that we all have a broad understanding of all the issues raised. And as we are approaching 1.30pm, may I call on the Honourable Member for Kombo East for question Number 51 before we go for break at 1.30pm.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 51 OF 2017 [BY THE HON. MEMBER FOR KOMBO EAST]

HON. LAMIN F. M. CONTA [KMOBO EAST]: Madam Speaker, could the Minister for Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment inform this august Assembly whether there are plans to reduce the price of basic commodities such as rice, sugar and oil?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Member for Kombo East. Madam Speaker, it is important to note that The Gambia operates a free market economy, and, a liberal trading environment where prices of goods and services are determined by the forces of demand and supply.

However, Government has the overarching obligation of ensuring fair competition as well as protecting consumers from unfair trade practices. In cognizant of this, MoTIE established The Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Commission to ensure that commodities, especially essential commodities are traded fairly and competitively in the domestic markets.

However, the Government continued to show concerns about the prices of essential commodities such as rice, sugar, edible oil, tomato paste, milk, onions, potatoes, chicken legs, whole chicken and cement. This is the reason why MOTIE has a policy of engagement with the major importers and retailers to keep the prices and stock levels stable. My Ministry as part of its mandate continues to monitor the prices of essential commodities on a weekly basis. The objective of the monitoring exercise is to ensure price stability and stock availability.

The Gambia being a net importer of rice, sugar and edible oil has no ability to influence the prices of these commodities in the international markets and thus remain a price taker. Analysis of the international prices of the said commodities (World Bank Index Mundi) over the last 6 months indicates an increase of about **4.5%** for rice from April to date and **5.1%** for edible oil from April to date. However, for sugar the analysis does indicate a fall in the international price from February to date. Except sugar, the trend analyses of the prices of the two

commodities are on the increase and thus the increase in the domestic prices of the said commodities.

In addition, one of the determinant of prices of imported commodities is the exchange rate and therefore appreciation in foreign exchange influence the prices of the essential commodities upward, while the depreciation allow the downward movement of prices. In view of this reality, MoTIE occasionally engage the Central Bank to ensure the availability of foreign currency to facilitate the importation of essential commodities at affordable prices. However, it is important to note that the exchange rate regime of The Gambia is a managed float and it is determined by forces of demand and supply in the market.

As you may recall, Government has already taken the decision to lift all restrictions and moratorium that were imposed on the importation of essential commodities during the previous regime. The aim of these [government] measures were in fact to ensure that prices of essential commodities start to come down. Government also kept Value Added Tax [VAT] on essential commodities at zero rate and some of them have either lower or zero duty. All these are attempts to influence the prices of commodities downward.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. LAMIN F. M. CONTA [KMOBO EAST]: Thank you Honourable Minister and thank you Madam Speaker. With all the underlining factors created by the Ministry ranging from the establishment of the Consumer Protection Commission, we are still experiencing high prices of certain essential commodities. What contingency plans or alternatives does her Ministry has in order to combat this? Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Member. We have inherited a very difficult situation [we all know that economically without me telling any of you - and you know what is happening given the revelations coming from the Commissions]; but as a new government, what we are

trying to do is to look at the policies and if we can remove all the taxes - most of them have been removed - strategically because there were certain taxes put on certain commodities that were not supposed to be. So, in an authoritarian regime where things happen without taking the due process of policy or sound policy advice from the technical people anything could happen.

We are trying to fix the economy and we are also responding to these needs and I cannot respond to facts of, what are we putting in place but the Ministry of Finance may be a very relevant body that could tell us where we are going with this. But there is the political will and also efforts are been made to make things affordable.

If you look at what happened before the '*Tobaski*', there was an announcement with regards to the reduction of prices and an appeal from the private sector-those who are importing - to please consider reducing taxes so that these reduction in taxes can be felt by the end users for us to move on. And we are gradually responding to that. This is democracy, we are not forcing people but we are appealing to their conscience and their goodwill to respond to the needs of the people and help the poor people.

Thank you.

HON. ALHAGIE JAWARA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Thank you Madam Speaker. Honourable Minister, is your Ministry aware that Gambians are not given priority to get licenses to import certain commodities such as sugar, oil, onion and rice? This has created a monopoly of importers in this country because of the 'underground commission' that they give to higher ranked officers that have access to some of these documents.

Also when you go to Ports, there is something they call 'harbour juice', these are some of the issues that contributed to high price of goods. I don't know whether your Ministry is aware of this because some people are denied licenses to import certain commodities in this country and also 'harbour juice' is the main problem there. I don't know whether your Ministry is aware. Thank you.

HON. DR. ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER TRADE...]: If I get it right, the question is very good. In our Ministry we don't deny anybody the right to import but

you have to follow a particular criteria and if you qualify you get it, if you are not we advise you and give you support. That is why you have The Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency [GIEPA] to support and our policy is to support Gambians because when you talk about sustainability you are thinking about the people who will remain. But also remember we have a liberal market and people who have the economy and want to come and invest and create jobs are given the opportunity. You will find that there are certain enterprises that do not need even a license as a Gambian but how many of you know about that. It is only when this dispensation came into office that we are now looking at what were the dos and don'ts and we are going to have programs on that for you to know your rights, for you to be able to do what you think is within your purview based on sound policy advice.

People are being abused because they don't know their rights, if they know their rights that will not happen. So, I want to tell you that it is reminisce of the past regime that may be manifested and we cannot know all. It is good that I get to hear about it but we are going to make everything public, everything known, we are doing a lot of checking the institutions and so on and we will have the right technical people to sit in front of you, over the radio and on the newspapers to tell you what you need as an entrepreneur.

At the Ports remember you have an authority but as far as Trade is concerned we make everything clear through GIEPA and the Ministry of Trade is there to help to clarify issues and I have an open door policy since I came in. My doors are open and when they come to talk about these issues I refer them to the right units in my institution. I am there to guide and facilitate and to ensure that the spirit of democracy and respect for the fundamental rights of the people are observed.

Thank you.

HON. DAWDA KAWSU JAWARA [UPPER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you Madam Speaker. I agree with you on your responses about the lack of influence in the prices of certain commodities especially rice. My take is that The Gambia needs to adopt the growing of rice locally. That approach might be able to give us a situation where we can negotiate better price in the international market. So, is your Ministry in any collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the other various institutions to

bring about this agenda, attracting investors in these key areas where we can produce these items locally?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Member for Upper Fulladu West. Yes indeed, we have quite a lot of investors that are actually expressing interest in that and the Ministry of Agriculture will be in a better position to answer that. But we are encouraging them because we are the clearing house. You have to understand how we work. We have the Ministry of Trade and Investment as the clearing house where you go through a diligent process and GIEPA is the gateway. From there when we make our recommendations we get to a point where we refer them to the relevant technical ministry that is supposed to take responsibility and we have done quite a good number of that. I know that is a priority for the Ministry of Agriculture in our drive to attain food self-sufficiency.

You have heard the President, His Excellency, talked about it and we are working on that. Like I said it is a process and Gambians will have to start to learn that we go through processes and not directives.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SEREKUNDA]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. We are talking about prices and we are also talking about empowerment of the youth and we have 11 million, 3.9 million. Is this not the opportunity now to empower the young people with small, medium size enterprises so that they can control the retail trade and hopefully cooperate more in terms of management of prices?

In addition to that, we talked about the tax rate, it seems that the government did take a firm stand on that in reducing the fares so what is the difference here?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Member for Serrekunda. With regards to the prices, the difference between the prices and empowerment of youth is that when you talk about empowerment you have to understand the methodological approach that is needed to empower them. You don't tell them what you want, you allow them to unleash their potentials by

building their capacities, by providing the environment that they need to engage and allowing them to make their choices.

Small medium enterprises are part of the YEP project but we have to ask them what they want to do, if you say retail trade we take you through a business package. If you want to talk about tailoring or you say you want a salon or you want to do taxi, it is going to be your choice and then from there we build up your package.

Remember, the issue is empowerment, and, sustainable empowerment and it is about the choices that they make through that process of capacity building, creating their consciousness and awareness as to what they want so that when you choose what you love to do nothing stops you from doing it. Even if the money is there or not that is what you have to understand and this is what Gambian young people have missed. This government is coming out with a methodological approach, with a philosophical approach that is grounded like my colleague has just said "in what their choices are and not what our choice is". That is what we are going to do and if they choose to do retail trade we will give them retail trade.

If you talk about tax rates, remember there were two occasions when the cost of fuel was reduced. If the cost of fuel is reduced there should be a rippling effect of that on the population. So where is the difference? The difference is people want to make profit and put everything in their pockets. But there seems to be improvement now the price of flour has gone down but the price of bread has not gone down. The importers have brought in flour; we have talked to them it was a very constructive engagement that those selling bread have not reduced the price of bread and even when they say we have reduced it, may be the size of the bread they have but money wise no.

These are some of the factors, I think the issue is about attitude, we have to change our attitudes and understand that things have to follow a chain reaction if we want to really move this country further. You cannot allow manufacturers to reduce the price of flour and the retailers maintaining the same price when they are getting it almost at 30 or 40% less – that is not fair. These are the issues that the population have to understand, to understand that even whereas the government is doing

everything the people also have to change their attitudes to help the government achieve the objectives of sustainable growth.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 52 OF 2017 [BY THE HON. MEMBER FOR NIAMINA EAST].

HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister for Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment inform this august Assembly the measures in place to increase the rate of employment opportunities?

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Madam Speaker, as a ministry, employment creation is one of our main focus. There are various initiatives currently rolling on and also in the pipeline geared towards job creation. We are following a due diligence process to make it happen.

The Ministry through The Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GIEPA) rolled out the Empretec project which is geared towards training of youth in entrepreneurship and enterprise development to enhance employability, particularly self-employment. The formulation of the GIEPA Act also creates the enabling environment for micro, small and medium scale enterprises to thrive with special support package in the Act. It has also encouraged investment in the domestic economy to create more employment opportunities.

In February, 2017 MoTIE and MoYS signed an 11million Euro Youth Empowerment Project with the European Union through the International Trade Centre (ITC) as the implementing agency. The project aims to support the economic development of The Gambia and improve the livelihoods of its people. Specifically, the Youth Empowerment Project is here to enhance the employability and self-employment opportunities for youths, with a focus on vocational training and the creation of micro, and small-sized enterprises. It also focus on creating and improving employment opportunities in selected sectors through value addition and internationalization.

The YEP project takes a market-driven approach and focuses on building specific skills among youth in a number of traditional sectors such as agriculture and tourism. The project will also help diversify the Gambian economy by supporting 'new' sectors, including the creative and digital service industries. YEP is expected to reduce migration pressure on Gambian youths by improving the employability of potential and/or returning migrants

Under the Country Program and Action Plan (CPAP), the Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Agriculture and the United Nations Development Program is piloting a youth agricultural training centre in Chamen village in the North Bank Region called The Gambia Songhai Initiative. Since its establishment, the Centre trained over 200 youths in agricultural practices and techniques, most of whom **[90%]** are employed or self-employed. The initiative is expected to be replicated in other regions to revitalise the mixed farming centres. MoTIE and the International Labour Organisation [ILO] are working on a Labour Intensive Project geared towards training and absorbing youths in sustainable employment or self-employment ventures.

The recently concluded Gambia Growth and Competitiveness Project (GGCP) had provided support for employment creation through entrepreneurship and enterprise development as well as out-growers scheme to support the farming community, which has registered a significant success in mango export.

The Ministry has adopted two main strategies: development of technical and vocational skills and entrepreneurship and enterprise development to promote employment.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER:

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION [S]

HON. SAINÉY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: Thank you. Madam Speaker the Honourable Minister of Trade and Integration will agree that the private sector is

widely believed to be the engine of growth, are there any plans to restore investor confidence taking into account the previous dispensation was anti investment.

Thank you

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Jarra East. In actual fact The Gambia Import and Export Promotion Agency is the gateway to attract investors nationally and internationally. We have everything it takes to make The Gambia a business friendly place but it was the nature of the authoritarian regime that we had. GIEPA been the gateway has all the principles that will attract people to invest but there being no respect for institutions, no respect for policy and no respect for technical guidance it was like a peril state.

I want to make it known to all and sundry that The Gambia is a business friendly society and coming out [now] from an authoritarian regime. The Gambia has restored democracy that has open its doors because it is a liberal market and we are also encouraging our people to engage, we are not discriminating because we are talking about liberalisation, we are talking about opening the doors for people to invest and that is what we need.

At one time The Gambia was out of the map for investment; I guess if you go to the website and look at the indicators they are now changing. Everything was under red but now things are changing so everything is in place about investment for any investor who is interested to come to The Gambia but you must follow the due process because we are a State that respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people but institutions are key in what we do.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. My concern is in the area of sensitisation which you talked about but I believe it is not enough. We still need a lot of that because as we speak young people who are returning from Libya do not see anything in place to take care of them.

The other area is that when NEDI came here, we had discussions with them and they acknowledged that in the past regime - not this one - there was a lot of political

interference in the selection of youths that needed to be involved in the enterprise development. Some were even older like 60 years or so but they could not do anything about it. Could your Ministry in this case be very careful to build a data that would not include people who are out of the age bracket of 35?

Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...] Thank you very much Honourable Member of Wuli East. We are aware of these issues and it is no secret. There was no youth, there was no adult, it was like targeting people who you want to castigate, who you want to pull down. It was a sort of targeted approach to silencing people who had voice.

There was nothing like a project honestly because when you look at.... when I did an evaluation of my Ministry, looking at some of the issues and so on it was like the technocrats are there, they are very qualified but nobody makes a decision - it was by directives. So, now it is not about directives, we are going to follow the principles if the youth policy says youth between this age and this age [age bracket] we can, we can also conduct what we call special needs response where unemployment is not only unique but because youth form almost 65% of the population and it affected them differently.

This is the primary focus but we also have to look at other categories like women and other vulnerable groups in the rural areas, looking at them at different levels. That is why this data we are bringing together is going to help us take care of what you have said and I can assure you this is a democracy, we will do things as much as we can and you are here to call us to attention and that is the beautiful thing about it. Allowing you to unleash your potential, moving beyond your partisan political orientation but rather the best interest of the country. It is noted and I can assure you that it will not happen *'in shaa Allah'* [God willing].

HON. MOMODOU LAMIN SANNEH [DEPUTY SPEAKER/NOMINATED]: Thank you Madam Speaker for giving me the floor. Honourable Minister, GIEPA is an institution under your ministry and with this new Gambia there are lots of investors

coming into this country, could I be informed or could this House be informed whether these investors are passing through GIEPA.

Thank you

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE...]: Thank you Honourable Deputy Speaker. I want to tell you that by an Act of Parliament GIEPA was created and under the portfolio of the Ministry of Trade, Regional Integration and Employment and it has a clear mandate as to dealing with investment. It is the gateway for the government to attract investors, to give the criteria and to guide the process of investment.

Since I came to the ministry, most of the projects that have already been approved have passed through GIEPA and through that due diligence it will come to you very soon. We may not disregard the fact that some people are used to doing business the old way and may not come but at the end of the day they are asked to go to the Ministry.

Even the President tells people go to the Ministry of Trade because that is the institution responsible and if we want to work on sustainability and not repeat the style of governance that has affected us we must build the institution, respect the institution and give the institution the opportunity. You cannot stop people from doing what they want but at the end of the day they must come to the institution and that is why the institutions are there and this dispensation is doing whatever it can to ensure that people change their attitude.

Sometimes you don't tell them to come, they come to you because they don't know so our duty is to educate, to give them information and to also sensitize them which links up with what is existing, what are the dos and dons, and what are the procedures. GIEPA is there, they go from one flitter to another for them to be able to do that, so it is a question of changing attitudes. We are addressing the issues we are going to have what we called communication for civic education very soon in my Ministry. We have worked on the concept document, and we are going to communicate with the Minister for Information because I am trying to bring in some

creativity and some sort of development activism into the whole process to move the agenda forward.

Thank you

HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]: Thank you so much once again Honourable Minister. What I am trying to say is to avoid conflict of hierarchy or responsibility because we are talking about youth and for the country to move, I think the youth play a very important role. Here I am suggesting would it be helpful if the area of employment is moved from your ministry to the Ministry of Youth and Sports. As long as we are talking about the youth here, don't you think it will be helpful in such a manner so as to ease the work and to help the youth at a fast rate?

Thank you.

HON. DR ISATOU TOURAY [MINISTER OF TRADE]: Thank you Honourable Member for Niamina East. I think we are under estimating the portfolios to only youth. Youth is one category of Gambians who are very key but they are not the answer to everything and you have to understand that it is not only youth that needs to get employment. Everybody has to get employment, it is a right either directly or indirectly, either under the government or not under the government. It is a portfolio that is not supposed to only focus on one. It is a critical group that is suffering a particular phenomenon of unemployment but as they grow and complete their education they want to make sure that they become adults and engage. So when they pass that stage where are they going? It is not a question of removing employment from the Ministry of Trade to the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Employment has to do with investment also. When you bring in industries, you are employing hundreds or thousands that is the best employer. When you train entrepreneurs they are going to employ more people. So, youths are given a special focus because of their circumstance and situation. And giving the particular arrangement that we have now, I don't think it is prudent to think about moving it because you are thinking of youth alone. If that happens then we will not do justice to the rest of the population. However, we are very sensitive, we are very aware and know that youth are a critical mass that needs to be helped and we are doing

everything we can. I think this is the approach we have to take, we should be inclusive leaving no one behind but giving people who have the vulnerabilities that are very key to be given special attention and that is what we are doing as a government.

THE SPEAKER:

**QUESTION NUMBER 53 OF 2017 [BY THE HON. MEMBER FOR BANJUL
CENTRAL]**

HON. MUHAMED NDOW [BANJUL CENTRAL]: Thank you very much Madam Speaker, my question has already been answered, it was asked by the Honourable Member for Wuli West. So I have withdrawn the question.

THE SPEAKER: You have withdrawn your question, thank you very much. Thank you Honourable Minister for addressing all the issues raised by Honourable Members and I also thank all Honourable Members for their interventions.

SUSPENDED

[THE HOUSE NOW STANDS SUSPENDED UNTIL 3:00 P.M.]

HOUSE RESUMES

THE CLERK:

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWERS

V. [HON. MINISTER FOR BASIC AND SECONDARY EDUCATION]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Questions for which due notice were given to the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education by the Honourable Members for oral reply.

THE SPEAKER:

**QUESTION NUMBER 32 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
BASSE]**

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education inform this august Assembly the status of implementation of the Reading Programme and more specifically the use of National Languages in The Gambia Read programme?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker of the House, the Reading Programme was introduced as a pilot targeting one hundred schools in 2011. Five National Languages [Jola, Pularr, Mandinka, Sarahuli and Wolof] were selected. Each language had 125 classes and each class had 25 pupils.

In 2012, the pilot was expanded with the same schools. The class size increased from 25 to 50 pupils.

In 2014, an impact assessment was conducted and based on the result, the Ministry decided to roll-out the programme to public Lower Basic Schools.

Up till now, National Language has been introduced to all public Lower Basic Schools as a basis for the Reading Programme from ECD to grade 3 and grade 4 will be used as transition point for the language.

[POINT OF CLARIFICATION]

HON. MANJANKO SAMUSA [NOMINATED]: Can the Honourable Minister clarify what ECD stands for?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: ECD stands for Early Childhood Development *[Undertone]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Nominated Member, please seek permission from the Chair to be given the floor before you proceed with your question.

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister inform this august Assembly how far they are with this transition?

As captured in the policy documents national languages will be used as a medium of communication from grade 1 to grade 3 and from grade 3 it will become a subject. So at this point in time how far are we in that pronouncement?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Actually, we have just embarked on the actual implementation of the policy. Up till now we are [still] using it as a period on the timetable to teach the language as a subject at the moment, but we are yet to fully implement what is in the policy.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Since the Policy aims to enable every child to be taught in the language the person is actually acquainted to, is this policy implementable in all the schools? Meaning if the dominant language in one school is Mandinka, if there are others speaking Fula or Jola do they have access to be taught in their own languages, or do those children have to learn in the dominant language?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well, we have area languages and at the moment it is the area languages that we are using to implement this very important aspect of the policy. We are still training teachers to be able to really handle the languages in the different areas. Of course, as you know we have problems with teachers' movement. We train teachers and by the time you know what is happening, the following year they have moved either for further studies to The Gambia College or to the University or they have moved from one area to another.

All these are the teaching problems that we have with the teaching of the languages. Nonetheless, we will continue to train and to retrain the teachers and as soon as we have enough teachers or the number of teachers that we need in a particular school to be able to really handle the language then we will go full scale.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Honourable Speaker, isn't there a need to rethink the implementation of this particular policy given the type of question the Honourable Member asked. If my child finds him or herself in Serrekunda Lower Basic were one would expect Wolof to be a dominant language and if you go by a UNESCO Declaration of the Right of every child to begin formal education in the

mother tongue, how would my child begin learning in his or her mother tongue in that situation? Isn't there need to rethink the implementation of the policy so that in every school there would be an inventory of languages spoken in that particular school. Once that is established you establish classes according to that so that in spite of the many languages there may be in a school, you will have a class for Wolof if there are Wolof speakers, a class for Mandinka, a class for Fula and Jola if that is the case. I don't know whether you understand my question?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: I do understand what you mean Sir. But like I said, to have the children in groups in classes may not be difficult but to have the teachers to handle the different languages in a school may be a bit difficult. In a school like Serrekunda we take it that the area language maybe Wolof, Jola, Mandinka or whatever it is, but to have the teachers who are supposed to handle these different languages in a particular school is the problem and that is the problem we are looking into.

I went monitoring to a particular school and to have a teacher to teach Sarahuli in that school was difficult, instated I found a Fula speaker trying to teach the Sarahuli language and she was able to manage because she got some training. That is why I said earlier that we are continuing to train the teachers and as soon as we are done with that and we have the number of teachers that we need in a particular school to handle the different languages then that is the time we hope to go full scale.

Right now we have undergone an evaluation of the programme and we are looking at the evaluation report and trying to see how best we could implement or to modify whatever needs modifying so that we would be able to have the desired results that we yearn for.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA (WULI WEST): I agree, but when I say "rethink" it is not just about implementing the teaching of the language alone but the whole package. Now you are talking about training, we were in the college some time ago and my investigation is that national languages are part of the curriculum of the Teachers Training College in Brikama.

So it means if that is the case, by the time teachers leave the College some would have learnt how to teach Wolof, Mandinka, Sarahuli and so on and so forth. Of course, what you have said is true I have seen that too, because of the difficulty of getting a native speaker to teach Sarahuli you choose somebody who seemingly speaks the language but is not qualified to teach the language because it is not enough to speak a language to be able to teach it.

Sorry, but I would say almost **80%** of the Members in this Assembly are all illiterate in their own languages, that is the fact. To speak it does not make you literate. You have to learn your language to have a conscious knowledge of it to be able to teach it. So, it means that your programme can only be effectively implemented if you also train people to implement it.

I was once contracted to train teachers years ago but this should be an ongoing process because now that the programme has been scaled up to cover all the schools in The Gambia, it means that teachers will be provided otherwise the programme cannot be successful. So what are you doing about the need to train teachers to teach national languages?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Member for Wuli West, you have already said it, you have already given the answer to the question that you are asking. You mention earlier that teachers are now trained at The Gambia College and I think this is as a result of the evaluation that was conducted that we had to take that step. But the training of teachers in the national languages have just begun and unless the teachers that are being trained now graduate from the College, the number of teachers to handle the languages in the system will not increase. We can only have the number of teachers increasing to be able to teach the languages in the schools as the teachers graduate out of the College.

We are still training and apart from the teacher training at The Gambia College, we have in service capacity building in the teaching of the languages. We are definitely doing our best and by the grace of God we want to believe that in the not too distance future we will be able to attain our objective of teaching national languages in our schools.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 33 OF 2017 [BY THE HON. MEMBER FOR BASSE]:

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker, could the Hon. Minister for Basic and Secondary Education share with this august Assembly any feedback on the improvement of the National Languages programme and the reading abilities of children at Lower Basic Level?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker, the results for the 2014 impact assessment of the National Language programme indicate the following:

- a. Pupils in Grade 1 were able to read between 6 and 20 words in the texts of 53-62 words;
- b. Pupils in grade 3 were reading on average 35 words per minute;
- c. On syllable reading, the assessment indicates that students were able to read about **60%** of the syllables given at Grade 1 and by the time they are at Grade 3, they were able to read **80%** of the given items. This is coming from [Year III Study: Pupil achievement, teacher capacity and programme implementation of September, 2014 by Jenny Hsieh World Bank Assessment Consultant].

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: My question is: how do you handle this Reading Programme at the ECD level since majority of schools in the Early Childhood Development are privately owned. How do you handle the teaching of local languages in those schools?

Thank you?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

My previous answer was that we are rolling out to public schools, we are not

intervening in private schools, it is in the public schools that we are intervening and we have a new policy of attaching ECD to our lower Basic public schools. If you go to many of our lower basic schools whether here in the Kombos up to region 6 Basse, you will find ECD classes attached to the lower basic schools. So it is in those public lower basic schools that the ECD's are benefitting from the teaching of the local languages.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, is the assessment simply restricted to reading or are there other elements tested?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Well as I indicated, they read, they identify syllables, they identify sounds and so on and so forth. So it is not only to read, we know that most of the time students will be able to read but perhaps it is worth learning and they are not actually recognising the syllables and the sounds and the words that they are reading. They read off-the-cuff and you think oh they are able to read but by the time you point to the word and ask them to sound the syllables, they cannot. But we are paying attention to all these and making sure it is not only reading but they actually understand what they are reading.

HON. MAHTARR M JENG [LOWER NIUMI]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Honourable Minister, how much motivation is attached to this? Because if it is the same teacher with the same salary subjected to teach other languages without any extra dividend that is not encouraging. Is there any incentive attached to this teaching of local languages? If not, why not consider such so as to also encourage the teachers to come up willingly. You have good regional incentives attached to postings and a good number of teachers are volunteering to go as far as possible. If that is a method or an idea that is succeeding, why don't you think of doing the same so as to encourage the...- *Interruption*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Lower Nuimi, go straight to your question, stop making statements.

HON. MAHTARR M. JENG [LOWER NIUMI]: How much incentive, if any attached to this?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well actually, we have not considered that yet but perhaps it is something that will be worth looking into. We know we have incentives for teachers, at the Upper Basic level, we have what we call Special Subject Incentive Allowance but in the Lower Basic where this programme is been implemented we have not thought of that yet. There is no incentive at the moment. It may be something worth considering now that you have brought it up. Perhaps we will go back to the drawing board and see what is possible.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Honourable Speaker, the whole idea of learning in the mother tongue is to ground and enhance the cognitive capacity of a child. Your assessment refers to only reading while the child is been taught in other subjects also in the mother tongue. How is the situation in other subject areas for example numeracy? Because they are also teaching other disciplines in the mother tongue, how are they in those basis learning, are they doing better compared to those learning in English only? You know your assessment talks about only reading but it is not only reading that they are teaching in the mother tongue. They are also teaching arithmetic and other things. What is the situation with those subjects; are they doing better, bad or worst?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

We have not conducted an assessment in that area yet and so I would not be able to say whether they are doing better in those other subjects or they are not.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 34 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR BASSE]

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker, being aware of the importance of a Government Policy on National Languages, which can serve as a reference framework for all sectors implementing various programmes that require use of National Languages, could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education share her plans with this august Assembly together with the relevant Stakeholders to come up with a National Language Policy?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker, considering the importance of a National Language Policy, the Ministry will engage with other stakeholders with a view to coming up with a Policy to guide the implementation of this programme in the not too distant future. We are considering that and we know it is important to come up with policy and when the policy is developed it will really guide the teaching of National Languages in our schools. The Policy is to guide implementation, so the Policy will take care of the several questions that have been asked in this House this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. SAINÉY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Honourable Minister for Education, I have no qualms when it comes to speaking ones native language, it is very important. My only concern is that will it not impact negatively on the official language given the fact that when it comes to speaking the English language in most schools it leaves much to be desired?

Thank you.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: I really don't think it will. If anything it will help to strengthen the understanding of the English language. Let us remember students come from homes where they don't hear a word of the English language spoken and when they get to the schools and you begin to teach them in English, it makes understanding very difficult. This is something that has been noted from studies that are conducted in other countries - that teaching children in the first year of education in their national language helps them to be able to understand learning in the [other] second language as we call it.

We have first and second languages and in the schools English is a second language. Teaching them in the first language helps to enhance understanding. And again I have seen that proven in our classrooms. During the last CCM in May or June, I went to a school in region 2 and I found a teacher teaching the national language but at that point I came to realise and to understand that these children were able to understand the second language as a result of the understanding that they have in

the first language. So for that reason we are pursuing the teaching of the local language to enhance understanding towards quality education.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the opportunity, and, thank you Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education. On the policy formulation, national language is very important because it is geared towards self-civilisation of one's culture or language. Don't you think it is very important to inculcate the practical aspect not only learning the literature part but to also expose them to our cultural civilisation's practical aspect for them to understand and be able to identify some of the things that belong to one's particular culture or language.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Member could you elaborate further I honestly don't understand what you mean by cultural civilization.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Kantora, I think you are making a statement. You should go straight to the question so that the Minister can understand.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA]: I am saying in policy formulation, don't you think it is also important to inculcate the practical aspect of learning in the national language?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Well, when we get to that point we may be able to bring your concerns on board. We have not got to the point of formulating the policy yet but we do employ experts in policy development and formulation to be able to come up with our policies. So when we get to developing the national language policy, we may be able to take your concern into consideration.

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker, I think the Honourable Minister should inform this National Assembly the reasons why she believes that students who have started learning in their mother tongue are performing better than others who have not started. What mechanisms have they used to come up with that result?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well, it is from studies from other counties. Before we started the implementation of local languages in our schools, we did study tours to other countries and the literature that were found on the teaching of national languages revealed ... so we cannot dispute what studies have proven.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 35 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR BASSE]

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education share strategies on implementing a functional adult literacy programme under her Ministry, if any?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry's strategy for the implementation of the Non-Formal Education Programme [NFE] will be through Public-Private Partnership Approach, where organisations with the requisite skills and competence will be supported to facilitate the delivery of the Non Formal Education to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, would the Honourable Minister consider the formulation of a policy in that regard?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

You mean the non-formal education policy. Yes, it could be considered. Right now we are working with partners. We have partners like Tostan in the rural areas and some other private organisation surrounding this end who we work with to deliver non-formal education. We also have a structure which is known as the Mothers' Club in schools and we go through the Mothers' Club to make sure we provide this important programme to the mothers of the children in our schools. So to develop a policy is in place and we will be looking into that.

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker, I want the Honourable Minister to agree with me that this answer is almost two years old. Because, I asked the same question to the then Permanent Secretary Mr Baboucarr Boye and it is the same answer that she has provided. The fact of the matter is that only one organisation is providing literacy programme and that is Tostan. All the other organisations, I know the list, are active in providing adult literacy programmes in this country. When I engaged him on this area this was the answer that he gave me. Have you identified them? If yes ...- *[Interruption]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member please go straight to your question.

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: My question is, the Honourable Minister in her answer said they will work with private organisations/partners with the requisite skills and competence to support and facilitate the provision of adult literacy programmes. How soon and how far are they in identifying those organisations?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Well, as you may be aware we have a whole non-formal adult literacy education unit within the Ministry and we hope to strengthen that unit. We will look at what we have in the new Education Policy 2016-2030. And like I said we just embarked on the implementation of that Policy and we will have to look at what is in there for non-formal education and strengthen the unit that we have within the Ministry to make sure that they are able to work with the other providers to be able to come up with what is needed in the area of non-formal education.

HON. SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. My question is almost similar to the previous one. I want you to elaborate a bit more on this public private partnership. If somebody comes up and said I want to establish a school just purely for non-formal education, are you willing to accommodate such people?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: If it is anything in our National Education Policy we may have to have a Memorandum of Understanding with such a person and we will chart the way forward as to how to go about it.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Wouldn't the Honourable Minister agree that non-formal education should be more than just adult literacy. In the light of the current dispensation of youth now been empowered, wouldn't there be a more competent body to prepare the training and skills element of that whole package of youth empowerment. That is why I am saying, is it not time to revisit the policy on non-formal education. What I am asking is wouldn't you concur that non-formal education is more than just adult literacy?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: I do agree. We have the skills acquisition area, the skills development area and we are even doing that with the Mothers' Club. In as much as we provide them with literacy skills we will also provide them with life skills. They do tie and dye, soap making and I think these are some of the life skills that you are talking about. Now when we work with the youth we will look at the needs for youth skills development. Perhaps we will look at the area of carpentry, welding and other areas to see how best we can work with them in those areas.

Definitely it is more than literacy and you have all the other areas of skills development that is added to non-formal education.

HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Honourable Minister, as you are aware Non-Formal Education has been offered to communities for free since its inception in the country. Now that you want to establish a Public Private Partnership in providing this service, I only hope that they will not be introducing charges that are exorbitant to the users giving that those who really need the services are the poor farmers and urban dwellers with no formal education?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Well, you will agree with me that Non-Formal Education is out of the formal education curtains. When we talk about free education, it is for the formal education in the conventional schools and perhaps in the madrasas that are under the ambit of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. For non-formal education like I said, we will have to look at it again and see what support the private entities will be able to get perhaps from government or from other donors so that they will consider, if

not [even] completely free, but whatever they are going to be asking for maybe minimal to be able to enhance the ability of people who will need these skills.

We are also looking at second chance education; and second chance education will cater for people in this group. Those who were not able to have education through the formal system have to use another route. As soon as we can get support for other programmes that we have [just] begun to look into, you never know what can happen.

THE SPEAKER:

**QUESTION NUMBER 36 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
BASSE]**

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education inform this august Assembly, the level of consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders in the implementation of programmes and the communication strategies for public awareness?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker, the Ministry has established mediums to reach out to our stakeholders with a view to raise awareness. The Education Forum is one strategy that comes on every Monday evening from 6:30 onwards. We also have Regional 'Bantabas' that we hold at the different regional levels and these are aired on GRTS and the MoBSE Newsletter and the Coordinating Committee Meeting [CCM]. The education sector has also recently developed a communication strategy to communicate the activities of the sector to the stakeholders and the general public.

THE SPEAKER:

**QUESTION NUMBER 37 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
CENTRAL BADDIBU]**

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education explain to this

august Assembly the reason for the late payment of the school improvement grant and what plans does the Ministry have to remedy the situation?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker, the payment of the School Improvement Grant which is known as the [SIG] is done termly on **30%** [15th September], **30%** [15th January] and **40%** which is the Third Term Payment. We pay termly - the First Term starts in September, the Second Term starts in January. And the 40% which is the Third Term payment is dependent on the NAT examinations as a measure to avoid absenteeism, which is a project condition for additional funds to government.

When we started, we were paying even the Third term grant at the beginning of the third term. But we realized that in some schools the absenteeism rate for the NAT was quite high and donors were very much concerned that the money that they are giving to us as support is somehow going down the drain because the NAT, which is the National Assessment Test is to test the attainment, the learning achievement target of the students before they transit to the next level.

And if they are not tested, it does not inform the system accordingly with regards to the quality of education that the students are receiving. So for that reason, we had to come up with a strategy and tied it up to the attendance of the NAT. We have realized that since we did that, the absenteeism rate for the NAT has gone down drastically.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you Honourable Minister for responding to my question. My other question is administrative. This strategy causes lots of delay in the implementation of programmes in the schools, how do you see that?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Can you come again please?

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: What I mean is the late payment of the SIG grant. Administratively it causes lots of delay in the implementation of school programmes when the funds are not paid into the account.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well actually, I guess planning is very important and if schools plan how to utilize the funds that they have, they should be able to make some provisions to take care of the spending for the third term until the third term grants are paid. Since they know that it is a condition, all they need to do is to plan efficiently, use their funds efficiently and if that is done it should not delay the implementation of the third term activities.

THE SPEAKER:

**QUESTION NUMBER 38 OF 2017 [BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR
BAKAU]**

HON. ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: Honourable Speaker, currently, there is only one Government funded Senior Secondary School in Bakau (Aji Sukai Ndateh) and it cannot cater for the ever increasing student population and high demand for access to Senior Secondary Education. Could the Minister for Basic and Secondary Education tell this august Assembly the plans in place to establish more Senior Secondary Schools in Bakau constituency in order to achieve the goals of equity and access to education, as enshrined in the Education Policy 20162030, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Thank you.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry has plans to establish a Senior Secondary School in all districts and constituencies. However, one of the challenges for establishing schools in the urban areas is the availability of land. Furthermore, since Senior Secondary School Education is based on the matter of choice, students' choice is determined by their intended area of study and schools performance. However, plans are underway to upgrade Bakau Upper basic School to cater for Senior Secondary Education in that area.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: Honourable Speaker, yes! Plans are underway to upgrade Bakau Upper Basic School to cater for Seniors Seconders Education but how soon?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well, one of the reasons that the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education use in respect of planning to establish Senior Secondary Schools is the demand. Because there is no public or government Senior Secondary School in Bakau does not mean or indicate that students in that area are not having access to a Senior Secondary School.

For instance, even the Upper Basic School in Bakau is under populated. The enrolment in that school leaves much to be desired and we know that Senior Secondary Education is not cheap. You cannot establish a senior secondary school just for the reason of establishing it - it has to be used. It is expensive, if you talk about a Senior Secondary School, you need the teachers to teach in the Senior Secondary School and there too you talk about subject teachers and you also talk about graduate teachers to ensure quality education.

You cannot take about 12 graduate teachers put them in a Senior Secondary School to teach only 45 or 90 students it is not cost effective. So we look at efficiency and cost effectiveness. We know that there are lots of senior secondary schools around the area and like I said, it depends on the area of study that the students may want to go into. If they want to do science many of them would find their way into Nusrat, if they want to do commerce or whatever other discipline then they will find their way into where those subjects or those disciplines are been provided. So we look at the enrolment, we look at the patronization of a school in an area to be able to say you need a senior secondary school there.

We have this year established a few Senior Secondary Schools where there were none. But we continue to watch the enrolment and the demand for school space in Bakau closely and whenever we are convinced that we will have the enrolment in

that area for a Senior School, we will definitely establish it there to make sure that we take care of the students' need in term of access and proximity to access Education.

[POINT OF ORDER]

HON. ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: Just to remind our Honourable colleagues that he is not Mr Speaker but Honourable Deputy Speaker. And all questions and supplementary questions should be address to the Honourable Deputy Speaker but we cannot call him Mr Speaker or Mr Deputy Speaker. *[Undertones]*

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: I said once the post of Speaker is occupied, the person occupying the seat is Speaker not Deputy Speaker.

HON. ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: No, I mean 'Mr,' they call him 'Mr Speaker.'

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Well 'Mr', 'Honourable Speaker', the person is the Speaker now not Deputy Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: *Okay* thank you for that correction Sir.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Thank you very much Sir, I am not acquainted with National Assembly procedures.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. I was just wondering, because the Honourable Minister for Education mentioned that it is expensive to run a school especially a Senior Secondary School and that they have challenges because Bakau Lower Basic School is not fully utilized.

Can the Honourable Minister consider a sort of cluster whereby they can have children going to certain schools in certain areas but provide transportation for the school? I think the challenge is not about where the school is, the challenge is always how to get to the school. Can they not provide transportation because I remember going to Gambia High School and I use to live in Half-die, we used to have a school bus where we only paid like a minimum. Can they not make that possible for the kids so that they can have access?

Thank you.

HON. OUSMAN TOURAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister for Education tell this August body whether her Ministry has plans for the building of extra class room blocks for some schools and the fencing of very important schools in some of the districts?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: I will begin with the latter. I think every school is important in this country. We do not have any school that is more important than the other. But I would say, where we have the need for classrooms we will rather invest in classrooms than invest in the school fence. The security of the school is very important and we know that and fencing add to the security of a school but before you build- if you have two options, you have children who are out there and they do not have a classroom and you have a school without a fence -where will you put your money? Obviously you will not build the fence at the expense of the children out in the open without a classroom space.

None-the-less, classroom construction is going on a lot in nearly most of our schools and just recently over a month or 2 ago, I embarked on inspection of the classrooms that have been constructed. We have a lot of classrooms constructed here in the Kombos, in Region 2, and in all the regions Classroom construction is going on. It is not like we are not taking account of that but we are looking at where we need it most and the places where we need classroom most that is where we put the classrooms.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 39 OF 2017 [MEMBER FOR OLD YUNDUM]

HON. ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: Madam Speaker, could the Minister for Basic and Secondary Education tell this august Assembly, how is the school improvement grant disbursed at schools and at what level does it support schools to ensure quality?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker, the disbursement of the funds is based on the availability of school improvement plans and the school improvement plan has different areas that

we called rubrics. We have **30%** allocated on rubrics - just a minute let me get this straight- **30, 30, 40**. We have a percentage that is attached to school improvement, we have another percentage that is attached to allowances that is paid to support staff in schools and we have another percent that is attached to the provision of teaching and learning materials for the assurance of quality. So we disburse on **30, 30 and 40%**. And this like I said, are done according to the school improvement plan that has three different areas that need support to ensure quality in our schools.

[POINT OF OBSERVATION]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: I have an observation Honourable Minister. I guess the procedure is just to read what is in the text and then explanations can accompany what is in the text.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Minister, the procedure is you read the answer and the explanations come after.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker, the disbursement for school improvement grant is done termly in sequence of 30%, 30% and 40%. It is allocated on rubric basis of which 70% is earmarked for ensuring quality. It must be noted that disbursement of funds is based on an approved School Improvement Plan (SIP).

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: Thank you so much Honourable Speaker. Could the Minister for Basic and Secondary Education inform this August Assembly at what level does the ministry engage in the process of monitoring the implementation of this fund at the school level?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Yes! We do monitor it. We have a whole unit responsible for the school improvement grant and they go out regularly to monitor the implementation of the funds, the utilisation of the funds. We also have the mechanism to look into all the

documentation that is provided at the school level as to how the funds are utilized. And we have an audit of how the funds are utilized and school are advised that they must do their purchases or whatever according to the set rules.

We also make sure that schools go by the GPPA Act or whatever you call it to be able to utilize the funds and are expected to keep all the invoices and receipts to make sure that they are available when the utilization of funds are to be audited.

HON. KAJALI FOFANA [JARRA WEST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. Honourable Minister, I just want to ask what is the role of the School Management Committee [SMC] in this school improvement grant?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well, they are there to guide the implementation of the funds and the treasurer of the School Management Committee has a very important role to play in the utilization and management of the funds. In fact, funds are not to be withdrawn without the notice of the SMC treasurer. He/she is responsible for the utilization or the management or mismanagement of the funds together with whoever is managing the funds.

HON. AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Thank you. My supplementary question has been addressed.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. I do not have a supplementary question but my previous question was totally ignored and I would rather have the Chair to either say whether it is going to be answered or not just mention that it is out of order.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 40 OF 2017 [BY TH HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR OLD YUNDUM].

HON. ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: Thank you Honourable Speaker.

Could the Minister for Basic and Secondary Education tell this august Assembly the

status of improvement for children in schools that sat to the National Assessment Test (NAT)?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Madam Speaker, National Assessment Test (NAT) Performance is improving over time in all the three subject areas both in mastery of the materials taught as well as reaching the NAT minimum requirement. The percentage of students achieving mastery as well as meeting the minimum requirement improved over time. In all the three subjects that students are tested, over half of Grade 3 students scored above the minimum requirement in 2016 compared to only about 24% percent in 2010.

THE SPEAKER: Any supplementary question? None.

QUESTION NUMBER 41 OF 2017 [BY THE MEMBER FOR JARRA CENTRAL].

HON. KEBBA JALLOW [JARRA CENTRAL]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Could the Minister for Basic and Secondary Education tell this august Assembly what is the Ministry doing on the shortage of core text books for Grades 1- 6?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker, the procurement of textbooks for Grades 1-9 is in progress. The books will be available in schools by this academic year.

THE SPEAKER: No supplementary question!

QUESTION NUMBER 42 OF 2017 [BY THE MEMBER FOR WULI WEST]

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Honourable Minister, the results of the last grade 12 examinations indicate clearly that there are many troubled areas in the education sector globally. Could the Hon. Minister for Basic and Secondary Education consider the need to establish a think-tank to address the issues for a way forward?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker, there is an established Advisory Council on Basic and Secondary Education as mandated by the Education Act and this Board serves

similar functions like the think-tank. Notwithstanding, the Ministry will consider the establishment of one.

THE SPEAKER: Any supplementary?

QUESTION NUMBER 43 OF 2017 [BY THE MEMBER FOR SAMI]

HON. ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education tell this august Assembly why private and mission schools performed better than government (public) schools?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker, the Ministry is aware of the performance difference based on school ownership which is mainly explained by school leadership and management. It is important to note that not all private or mission schools out-perform public schools. In fact, it is observed in some cases government schools out-perform some private or mission schools *e.g.* Keneba and Medina Sancha all of Lower River Region are classical examples.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister inform this august Assembly what steps the Ministry would take in order to close this difference.

THE SPEAKER: This is a new question that cannot be entertained please. We only allow supplementary questions. You have already asked and a reply was given to you.

HON. NDEY YASSIN SECKA [NOMINATED MEMBER]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Is the Honourable Minister not considering the former policy where you know that even those in primary 1 were able to speak English; that is the Common Entrance? And how does she see this policy, were people will go to school from grade 1 to grade 9 yet even to write a letter is their problem.

Thank you.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well I am afraid, in life we move forward rather than moving backwards. There is a new trend now in the education system worldwide and many countries are adopting the 6/3/3 type of the education. Going back to Common Entrance will mean we are going backwards rather than moving forward.

I think with all these strategies that we are putting in place to address quality education, it depends on the attitude of the people. And like I said before, the leadership and management of a school is very important, where we have strong leadership and good management those schools perform very well. Where the leadership is weak and the management is poor, it is difficult to have good performance.

Notwithstanding, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education realizing the importance of good leadership and management has over the years sent head teachers to do a management program at the University of The Gambia to enhance their management skills that will help them to be able to manage the schools properly. I am glad to report that we have seen the benefit of that management program for some teachers. We are also ensuring that we strengthen the monitoring in schools, monitoring what teachers are doing in schools and how they are doing it to ensure quality. I may not want to say that some children go through school and they are not able to speak English.

I think it is the encouragement in the schools and perhaps even at the home level that will help children to be able to handle a second language very well. Even at homes that are affluent, you find the children been communicated to in English even though English is not their mother tongue, it is not their first language but it is all in a bid to encourage and to enhance their ability in a second language. And we are doing our best by providing all the necessary support at the school level in terms of providing a library and equipping those libraries with supplementary books *etc.* to make sure that the children's learning is enhanced. We are doing our best and we ~~promise that we will continue to do all we can to improve the quality of education.~~

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. I want to ask the Honourable Minister whether we can say private schools are more motivated and well managed than government schools that is why they have high performance.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Central Baddibu can you please come again?

HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: My question is, can we say private schools are more motivated than government schools that is why they have high performance.

Thank you.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Really, it is not in all cases. Some of the government schools are also performing very well. So it depends, it is not that it is a hard and fast rule that privates schools perform better. There are some private schools that are not doing well at all, we know that. Some private schools are there and they are not doing better than our government schools, they are doing as poorly as some of our government schools. So it depends on a lot of things, leadership and management is one aspect and lot of other things that goes on in the school and in the child's life generally.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Honourable Speaker, I do not think bad performance in schools has to do uniquely with the management and leadership. It has to do with a host of factors such as availability and appropriate learning materials, the classroom furniture, the size of the classroom.

Honourable Speaker, in some schools you have 80 children in one class, even in the University you don't have classes like that. You don't have 80 students in a class in a University. Why would you have 80 students in a class in a high school? A science class for that matter and furniture is not enough for all those students in that particular class.

Therefore, the performance naturally will be bad and of course the quality and the qualification of teachers, all these are factors. Poor performance is happening not only in public schools but also in the mission schools or private schools.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

You may be right Sir! And like I said, we are providing space to make sure that we decongest the 80 in a classroom, we are also trying to make sure that we build the capacity of teachers to be able to ensure that they deliver appropriately. We are aware that there are lots of other factors and we are trying to address all these factors to enhance performance and provide quality education to our children.

HON. SAINÉY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Honourable Minister, private schools are rampant in this country, when it comes to their curricular or syllabus do you have any control over them or are they at liberty to fix their tuition fees. It is understood that when it comes to tuition fees, we all know that it is quite high.

Thank you

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well every private school that is giving permission to operate is expected to implement the national curriculum and any other subject that they wish to teach. So the national curriculum is a must for every private school that is giving permission to operate in this country.

HON. MUHAMED MAGASSY [BASSE]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, in addition to the factors responsible for this gap, I think the government itself is a factor. No comfortable civil servant sends their children to the public schools but rather to private schools. Even the head masters, they send their children to private school how do you see that.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Well it is a matter of choice, you send your child to where you want to send your child. We do not have control or I do not think anybody has control over anybody to say you must send your child here, you must send your child there. If civil servants

and teachers [as well] are sending their children to private schools it is their choice and I can't enforce anything.

HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. The Honourable Minister mentioned two schools Keneba and Medina Sancha but we have all seen the poor exam results. Can the Honourable Minister [probably not now] avail this august Assembly the results of those two schools so that we can have a look at them - we have an Education Committee - so that they can visit those schools and know what is making them different and then communicate back to the Education Ministry to see how we can replicate their success because the result are really poor and something needs to be done?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:
We will endeavour to do that.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 44 OF 2017 [BY THE MEMBER FOR KIANG EAST]

HON. YAYA GASSAMA [KIANG EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. In a bid to improve access, relevance and quality of education, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education attracts funding from donors. Could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education inform this august Assembly the extent to which donor funding has helped to address these issues [access, relevance and quality] and what are the challenges?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:
Honourable Speaker, over 85% of the national budget allocated to education is for payment of teachers' salaries. Notwithstanding, bulk of the classrooms and other educational facilities, teacher training, retention interventions, textbooks, teaching and learning materials and other interventions the Ministry is undertaking are provided with donor funds.

Honourable Speaker, the challenges are:

- a. The sector is donor orphan during the former government but with the new dispensation, there is hope that more donors will be coming forward to support the sector;
- b. Shortage of government contribution in terms of GDP. The Gambia has the lowest spending on education in terms of share of GDP in sub-Saharan Africa. [Public Expenditure Review 2017]. Currently, government is contributing **2%** against the international standard of **4%**. Most of what we are doing is through donor funding.

THE SPEAKER: No Supplementary Question.

QUESTION NUMBER 45 OF 2017 [BY THE MEMBER FOR KIANG EAST].

HON. YAYA GASSAMA [KIANG EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. One of the many challenges of the Ministry for Basic and Secondary Education is the retention of teachers. Could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education inform this august Assembly about the plans the ministry has to arrest or minimise teachers' attrition?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker, teacher attrition has improve greatly, it has ceased one may say, to be an issue and even some of those teachers who have left are returning back among which the Ministry has to select who comes backs and who may not be able to come back.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: Honourable Speaker, will the Honourable Minister undertake to do a study on the subject and present the findings to this National Assemble at her convenience.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Please come again.

HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]: In terms of teacher attrition.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Oh yes! The Ministry together with The Gambia Teacher's Union [GTU] conducted a study to be able to find what the reasons are and we are expecting to be able to get some of the insights into that report to be able to know how to address the issue.

HON. OUSMAN TOURAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education inform this august Body whether they have plans for salary increment and improvement of conditions of service of teachers?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Is that a supplementary?

HON. OUSMAN TOURAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Yes! I am asking whether the Honourable Minister has plans for salary increment for teachers and improving their condition of service which we relate to the teacher attrition.

THE SPEAKER: No! That supplementary is ruled out, it is a new question.
Applause!

HON. BILLAY G TUNKARA [KANTORA]: Still on the teacher's retention, did you lay hands on the Report to know the reasons why they are not staying there?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: I had said that we are yet to go through the Report to be able to get the reasons. Does that answer your question?

HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]: Honourable Speaker, I am very happy that the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education stated that teacher attrition is no more an issue, that those teachers that left are trying to come back, but I don't think I will ever go back ...-[interruption].

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member please go straight to the point.

HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]: Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister tell this august Body what best practice did the Ministry use to address the teacher attrition rate?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker we have instituted a teacher retention allowance and every qualified teacher based on his/her number of years of teaching receives an allowance or percentage of his/her salary to serve as a retention allowance to encourage teachers to stay in the system.

HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NUIMI]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, my question has been answered by the Honourable Minister.

Thank you.

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: This issue of teacher attrition is not limited to only schools. I think the same is at Brikama College where we are told some 10 lecturers went away some time ago and are not coming back. Is that not so?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:
You mean the lecturers at the Brikama College?

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Yes!

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: I may not know what is happening at that level. Sorry!

HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]: Don't you think you need to because you have problems in that College recently.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:
That is for the Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education to answer Sir.

THE SPEAKER:

QUESTION NUMBER 46 OF 2017 [BY THE MEMBER FOR FONI BREFET]

HON. SUNKARY BADJIE [FONI BREFET]: Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education inform this august Assembly if there are any plans for the construction of a Senior Secondary School in the Foni Brefet District?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable Speaker, there exists a Senior Secondary School at Somita and the mission school at Bullock has been upgraded to a Senior Secondary School in 2016. However, the construction of the school at Somita will be funded under the BADEA project which funding has been secured. Moreover, both schools are being funded by government.

THE SPEAKER:

[SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION/S]

HON. ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: Thank you so much Honourable Speaker. I also wanted to ask if the Honourable Minister can tell this august Assembly whether her Ministry has any plans to establish a Senior Secondary School in Old Yundum Constituency.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Honourable speaker what I can say at this moment is actually we will do a school mapping and where we think there is need for a senior secondary school it will be our pleasure to put one there.

HON. SUNKARY BADJIE [FONI BREFET]: Honourable Speaker, could the Honourable Minister inform this august gathering, since according to her response funding has since been secured, how soon will her Ministry undertake the construction of the said high school?

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Of course you know project funds are launched with the PCU of my Ministry and I will need to consult with the project manager to be able to know how soon they are planning to embark on this construction.

HON. SAINY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: Honourable Minister, you will agree with me that resources are always scarce, what plans the Minister has to deal with ghost teachers that are in the payroll.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]:

Can you please come again I did not get that clearly.

HON. SAINÉY TOURAY [JARRA EAST]: I said, you will agree with me that resources are always scarce, what plans have you to deal with ghost teachers in your payroll.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Well, an audit was conducted by the Personnel Management Office [PMO] not too long ago and I guess they have cleaned the payroll of the teachers in the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. So if any of them were ghost teachers, those salaries that were being paid to those ghost teachers will not be paid to them anymore because the payroll has been cleaned. So those monies will now be diverted to other use in the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Minister for Basic and Secondary Education for providing answers to all the parliamentary questions put before your Ministry. We are most grateful to you and we thank you once more together with your staff. Thank you very much.

HON. CLAUDIANA COLE [MINISTER BASIC & SECONDARY EDUCATION]: Honourable Speaker, thank you very much. I also thank this august Body for having me here. I hope I have shed light on the areas over which you had concerns.

Thank you so much. *[Applause]*.

THE SPEAKER: Now that we have concluded today's business, I thank everyone for their deliberations and wish you all a happy weekend.

Finally, please be informed that on Monday 2nd October 2017, we will continue with Questions and Answers from the Honourable Minister indicated on the Order Paper. On the same day, the Assembly will also consider two Conventions and Ratifications to be tabled by the Honourable Minister of Transport, Works and Infrastructure.

On that mote, I would now put the question:

[Question Proposed, Put, and Agreed To]

[For the House to adjourn until Monday, the 2nd October, 2017 at 10:00 a.m. sharp]

[ADJOURNMENT]