



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

[OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT]

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

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BILLS & MOTIONS

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Be it resolved that this august Assembly do consider and ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, Paris, 2001 [By: Hon. Minister for Tourism and Culture]

1. PRAYERS

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

[The Assembly met at @10:00am in the New National Assembly Building, Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul]

[The Speaker, HON Fabakary Tombong Jatta, in the Chair]

The Assembly was called to Order.

2. Correction and Approval of Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting on Wednesday 21st September 2022.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Record of Votes, and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 21st September 2022, is before us for correction and approval. Can any Honourable Member please move that the said Record of Votes and Proceedings be considered and approved? Yes, Honourable Member for Upper Fulladu West.

HON BAKARY KORA [UPPER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you so much Honourable Speaker. I rise to move a motion for the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 21st September 2022 for correction and approval.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder Honourable Members?

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

[Question Proposed]

Any observation Honourable Members? You all have a copy of the said record, and as usual, we do it page by page beginning from page 1.

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Honourable Speaker, regarding the Questions for Oral Answers, Standing Order 36 to 41 to the following Ministries or Ministers. Would it not be proper to indicate the Ministers who were absent as I understood that not all of them attend to their questions, so the ones that did not answer their questions should be indicated. I think it is important to know that so and so minister was not available.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, these are the ones that we were supposed to meet. So, it is just as it is in the Order Paper.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I have not followed you.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: I am saying that the Ministers or the portfolios appear on the Record of Votes and Proceedings as they are on the Order Paper. So, I think it is quite right we maintain it that way.

THE SPEAKER: Any more comments on Page 1? We can now move to Page 2, no comments. Any comments on Pages 3 and 4?

HON ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: Honourable Speaker Page 3 where you have Members who were absent with permission, Honourable Samba Jallow was in attendance yesterday and he is marked absent.

THE SPEAKER: Is it page 3? Ok, No.58, the following Members were absent without permission, Honourable Samba Jallow is one of them, he was in attendance. Is Honourable Samba Jallow around?

HON SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU]: I was in attendance yesterday, though I left earlier.

THE SPEAKER: You were here?

HON SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU]: Yes, I was here.

THE SPEAKER: Ok. Honourable Member, I am informed by the Table Office that this list is prepared from the entry records of the electronic machine. You must register [through the electronic machine] to show your presence and [Table Office] will confirm the attendance physically to help them prepare the minutes. So, we urge Members who are in attendance to ensure that they register with the electronic machine. Honourable Samba Jallow's name on Number 58 should be omitted and be added to those present.

HON GIBBI MBALLOW [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Honourable Speaker, I was absent, but my name on Number 39 appeared under those present to be precise.

THE SPEAKER, Honourable Gibbi Mballow on Page 2, Number 39 is said to be absent.

HON GIBBI MBALLOW [LOWER FULLADU WEST]: Honourable Speaker, I was absent with permission.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Mballow, the Table Office is telling me that you are not part of those registered as absentees with permission. So,

we will add Honourable Gibbi Mballow's name to those absent. I now call on Honourable Member for Foni Kansala.

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Honourable Amie Colley's Constituency [Foni Brefet] on Page 2 Number 15, The **Brefet** is wrongly spelt.

THE SPEAKER: How do you spelt Brefet?

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: It is spelt Berefet

THE SPEAKER: I have seen people spelling it as "Brefet"

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: No, it is "Berefet" according to records please.

THE SPEAKER: 'Berefet'

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: What is on the tag?

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: What is on the tag is correct.

THE SPEAKER: I think the tag is correct.

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Yes

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I have seen lot of people writing Berefet for "Brefet".

HON ALHAHIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Honourable Speaker that is exactly what is on the tag "Brefet" not "Berefet"

THE SPEAKER: Ok, then we leave it as it is on the tag. Honourable Members, we were on Page 4. Yes, Honourable Member for Brikama South the floor is yours.

HON LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. On Page 4, the following questions were asked and answered by His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia and the Ministers as indicated on the Order Paper. So, if you come down to Page 3, the following Ministers are listed but the Interior Minister was not around, and the questions were not administered.

THE SPEAKER: You are referring to Page 3, the attendees of the Ministers? Yes, I think Honourable Member for Wuli West made it clear that it is the Standing Orders that is captured on page 3.

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: No that is the first one but on page 4, the following questions were asked and answered by His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia and the Ministers as place on the Order Paper. So, the Interior Minister was not around, and the questions were not administered.

THE SPEAKER: One thing you should know is that the Order Paper was prepared, and the Honourable Minister of Interior consulted the Office of the Clerk and my office and then we granted him permission to leave. I do not know your concern.

HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: It is ok now as it is corrected on Page 5.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, anymore on Page 4? Honourable Member for Wuli East, the floor is yours.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. The second line on the first paragraph, the phrase 'as place' the letter "d" should be added to the word place to read as "placed". On Page Number 3 under Honourable Minister for Agriculture, there are differences in expression because the first statement says, 'the question numbers that are raised' but at the last sentence it states, "were asked and answered as well as generated supplementary questions". So, our trend of doing things should be consistent.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I think it is right for us to capture the number of supplementary questions against each Minister's substantive questions. I think Table Office will note that and hence forth they will make sure that it is captured.

Any issue on Pages 5 and 6? Yes, Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Page 5 where you mentioned the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sport, I think officially it should be "sports", youth and "sports" that is the official name of the Ministry.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable "Minister for Youth and Sports". Thank you.

[Honourable Members it has been moved and seconded that the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 21st September 2022, be Approved with Amendments].

[Question Proposed, Put, and Agreed to]

[The Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Wednesday 21st September 2022, be Approved with Amendments]

THE SPEAKER: Clerk, Matters of the Day.

CLERK: Matters of the Day by the Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, my Office is in receipt of the request made by the Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji, seeking permission under Order 51 of the Standing Orders to make a statement to the Assembly on the Banjul Roads Rehabilitation Project. Honourable Members, having considered the request of the Honourable Member, under the relevant provisions of the Standing Orders and noting that the request has satisfied me and satisfied the criteria. I now grant the Honourable Member leave to make his statement to the Assembly.

However, Honourable Members, I wish to draw the attention of Honourable Members to Order 51[8] of the Standing Orders that the time allocated for each Member wishing to speak on the matter shall not exceed 3 minutes and the overall time for a matter of the day is 30 minutes.

Therefore, I also urge Honourable Members to observe Standing Order 51[9] for guidance, which reads, and I quote "No Member may intervene during a Member's statement under this Standing Order and

there shall be no questions and no vote shall be taken at the conclusion of the statement or statements”.

Honourable Members, I would now call on the Honourable Member to make his statement to the Assembly.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor and for granting...[**interruption**]

THE SPEAKER: Sorry! Honourable Members whoever wishes to make a statement can raise his/her tag and the Table Office will note your name.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor and I also thank you for granting my request to make a statement on the phenomenal infrastructural development accomplished by the Government. The Committee will continue to support the Government in all its locally funded projects, but we need to get this one right.

This project is a major infrastructural development project carried out by the Government and was locally funded from the taxpayers' money worth millions of dollars. This project was and is meant to improve the entire road and drainage systems in Banjul upon completion. The current situation of the project is not the least promising and thus the Gambian taxpayers are concerned about the project and many people especially the Banjulians, have complained and registered dissatisfaction about the project and demanded clarity on the entire project.

This project has been approved by this august Assembly in the last Legislature and therefore, the National Assembly through its Committee

on Monitoring the Implementation of Government Projects will continue to perform oversight functions of monitoring the implementation of all government projects.

Honourable Speaker, the Committee will consider opening public hearing with regards to the project and in particular make request for this and other relevant documents to be supplied.

- A. The Project Design, the original version and probably if there is any addendum.
- B. The Project Bill of Quantity, the cabinet approval, the GPPA approval if there is any, the Contract Award Letter with all its terms and conditions.
- C. The disbursement plans which should include all the initial disbursements already committed to this project, the original version and probably any addendum.
- D. The Project Management Structure both at the Ministry and probably at the level of the contractor.
- E. The Monthly Progress Report by the Ministry since the inception of the project.
- F. The Variation Orders that this project has attracted since its inception and the Project Concept Notes.

Honourable Speaker, these documents will give the Committee an informed decision. The taxpayers are concerned but I must equally comment government for this initiative of funding projects from local funds. Thus, the Committee's oversight function is only meant to complement the effort of government in nation building in an effective and efficient manner. We will endeavor to give support to the government in all feature development projects to ensure efficient,

effective, and judicious execution of government projects. I thank you all.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. I now invite the Honourable Member for Old Yundum.

HON ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: Thank you so much Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Member who raised the Matter of the day in the National Assembly is the Chairperson of the Select Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Government Projects.

It is worth noting that Order 101 of the Standing Orders has given the Committee liberty to act on matters that are within the remit of the committee. I believe that bringing Matters of the Day in the National Assembly while having the powers to summon the relevant Ministries to question and get information from them should have been the best way for the Member and his Committee than to bring a matter of the day at the National Assembly.

Honourable Speaker, Order 101 has given the Committee powers on Page 121 which reads, 'for the purpose of effectively performing its functions, each of the committees shall have all the powers, rights and privileges as are vested in the High Court at a trial in respect of-

[a] enforcing the attendance...

[POINT OF ORDER]

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Point of order Honourable Speaker.

HON ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: (a) Enforcing the attendance of witnesses and administering an oath/affirmation on them or otherwise, [b] compelling reproduction of documents and [c] the issues of a commission or request to examine witnesses abroad. Honourable Speaker, I think the issue of the Matter of the Day is unwarranted at this moment because the Member in question...
[INTERRUPTION]

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Honourable Speaker
[POINT OF ORDER]

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member let us hear the Point of Order.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: But Honourable Speaker, this man is already standing on a Point of Order, how can you raise a Point of Order on a Point of Order?

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member who is standing on a Point of Order?

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: The Honourable Member for Central Baddibu.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, I have given him the floor.

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Yes, but he is still standing.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, I am asking him to sit down. Honourable Members, please you do not have to address your colleagues, Honourable Member for Central Baddibu, address the Speaker please.

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Honourable Member for Old Yundum is saying that the Honourable Member for Latrikunda...
[INTERRUPTION]

THE SPEAKER: What is your authority?

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: The authority is Order 51[1] 'a Member may seek leave of the Speaker to make a statement to the Assembly on a matter which fulfills the criteria specified in paragraph 3,' which I believe the Speaker have granted the Member to do. So, you have no right to say a Member being a chair should not come up with this. I want you to withdraw that and make your contribution.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, how many times have each of you been telling others that you are not in agreement which many a time has not been withdrawn, even though it should be. Let us just accept it. Honourable Member, can you continue because you have just a minute to go.

HON ABDOULIE CEESAY [OLD YUNDUM]: Honourable Member thank you so much. Like I was saying under Order 101 that the matter of the day should have been the issue of the committee at their own level. They could have just called the Ministry to do all that they supposed to do and provide report for the National Assembly. Honourable Speaker, bringing the matter of the day to the National Assembly is just to create drama. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. I now give the floor to Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Honourable Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. I have observations with regards to the document. There are a lot of misspellings and incorrect

statements that I do not understand. I think the Honourable Member should have corrected those mistakes before tabling it. For instance, where it says, 'This project is a major infrastructural project carried out by the Government 'HAT...'', what is 'HAT'? I do not know. There are so many issues which need to be clarified. The Honourable Member should have properly looked at it before submission. I have difficulties trying to understand what the statement is about because of the misspellings and other errors. So, I am urging the Honourable Member to make the necessary corrections before we can debate on it.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Standing Orders has provisions for such issues, in fact, it is not a debate, you are only contributing. He is making a statement and you are contributing. Probably you have copies that may have errors, but we have listened to what he has said. So, we can comment on what we have heard.

HON ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I rise to make few comments on the matter of the day that is brought to us by the Member for Lartrikunda Sabiji. Honourable Speaker, I think this is an issue about the Banjul Rehabilitation Project, where he's actually saying that the current situation of the project is not the least expected and at the same time the Member in the middle of his submission said they are going to request for the project designs, the BOQs, the Project Bill of Quantities[BOQs], the disbursement plans, the monthly progress reports etc. meaning he doesn't even have an idea about what is supposed to be done at a particular stage of this project. So, I think he should have done more investigation about this project to know more.

Secondly, Honourable Speaker, the Member is saying, this project has been approved by this august Assembly that is incorrect. This National Assembly has never approved this project. That's not the way.

Honourable Speaker, may I say this for the second time, we must ensure that Members say the truth when they come to the Assembly. The dignity of the National Assembly must be respected. This is the second time, the revise budget he said, the last (Fifth) Legislature did not do anything about the pervious budget, that was also not true. Today also he is saying that the National Assembly approved this project, also incorrect. We must warn the Member to ensure that whatever he is going to do here or say here should be based on facts. It must be factual, it cannot be an opinion, here we deal with facts nothing else. So, the Member must be warned to do that.

To continue also Honourable Speaker, may I also say that the Auditor General has already given us an audit report even though it is not yet laid before us. If you go through it preliminary, you will realize that there are lot of queries that were done about this project. So, the best we could do, is for his committee and he as the chair to get the facts and go through them and come back to plenary with facts and tell us really what we need to know as far as recommendation is concern.

Honourable Speaker, the vice President yesterday less than 24 hours stood here and said, there were lots of queries on the Banjul Project and the Government has responded. We should be interested in those responses and as a responsible chairperson of a committee, I think that is where he should go.

On a final note, Honourable Speaker, I am not sure why the intent, and I do not want to predict, but one thing is for certain we will protect the dignity of this National Assembly at all costs. Honourable Speaker, if it is to satisfy the social media's jurisprudence, my friend this is not the place, here we deal with facts, we must deal with facts here. Thank you very much Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Upper Saloum. I now have the Honourable Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader.

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. The Speaker rightly says, the Honourable Member who moved the matter of the day really met the respective criteria that warranted the permission for laying the matter of the day. The Honourable Member indicated millions of Dalasi or dollars spent on the project and noted that the project was meant to improve the entire roads and drainage systems in Banjul. He noted that the current situation of the project is not the least expected or satisfactory and that the committee will investigate the matter diligently and may request for the respective documents for further scrutiny.

The Honourable Member noted the concern of the matter by the public. Based on this public concern, he decided to bring it as a matter of the day. If there are other issues to be followed, I would advise the Honourable Member to follow the due process at the committee level and ensure that what is expected of the committee is done. There is no compromise on that. I do not think people should be ringing the bell on that. As far as he is the Chair, he will be following the due process.

It is important to note that the Auditor General has his role to play as well as the Committee of the National Assembly, the auditor does what is expected at that level and the National Assembly also cannot oversight its role on the bases of the action of the auditor because that would not do justice to the Committee. I urge the Honourable Member to engage his committee and act diligently and accordingly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader. I now invite the Honourable Member for Niamina Dankunku.

HON SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU]: Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. The Honourable Member for Upper Saloum has already spoken my mind. However, considering the statement in paragraph two [2], it is misleading to indicate that the project was approved by this august Assembly.

Secondly, he is the Chair of the Committee and Standing Order 101, gives him the power to summon every Minister or any Member of the Executive. I think it would have been better for him as a chairperson to have his strategic plan to make sure the Committee does its job when it comes to the Banjul Project. Although, he succeeded a chairperson in the person of Honourable Sulayman Saho, the committee has the reports and some parts of the documents he is asking for.

In fact, there was an internal report on the Banjul Project. He could have consulted his predecessor to arrange all the relevant documents for him to bring them forward because I do not understand what he wanted to achieve by bringing the matter of the day. It could probably be for public attention.

both the Constitution and the Standing Orders give the Chairperson powers to call members of the committee and draw a strategic plan, perform work and report back to the Assembly. On that note Honourable Speaker, I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member for Niamina Dankunku.

[POINT OF ORDER]

HON MOHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Point of order?

THE SPEAKER: Can we hear the point of order?

HON MOHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]:52 Honourable Speaker, I think the Member for Lartrikunda Sabiji...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member 52 what?

HON MOHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Order 52 [1, 2, and 4] Honourable Speaker, the Member for Lartrikunda Sabiji did...

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member can you sit down please! Honourable Members, point of order will surely indicate a deviation contrary to our own Standing Orders. It should be something happening that is off the line which is breaking our own laws. That is a point of order. Order 52[1] states: 'Notice of a motion shall be given by being handed in writing to the Table Office not less than 5 clear days...' What has that got to do with what is there? I did say that considering Order 51[1], 'Matters of the Day' which reads: 'a Member may seek leave of the Speaker to make a statement to the Assembly on a matter which fulfils the criteria specified in Order 51[3] which reads: *'In deciding whether to grant leave to a Member who has made a formal request*

under paragraph [1], the Speaker shall take account of the following criteria:

(a) Whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which has occurred and has come to public attention since the Assembly last adjourned.

(b) Whether the proposed statement relates to a matter which is of exceptional public interest'.

Exceptional public interest is the criteria that guided me in giving this decision of course in consultation with the Clerk. However, to somebody else, it may not be of exceptional importance. I had some issues regarding the first criteria reason being that, previously, we do not entertain it. I was made to understand from the statement that some of the processes in the Banjul Rehabilitation Project were approved by the National Assembly during its last Sittings and that is why this provision is provided.

Honourable Member for Busumbala, when you want to make request, just make it but do not abuse the Standing Orders. Everybody wants to raise a point of order and you verily know that is not a point of order. In this statement you cannot intervene, and I have reminded you about the relevant provisions of the Standing Orders. Can you Please allow Honourable Members to continue making their statements.

HON MOHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, they can continue.

THE SPEAKER: I now call upon Honourable nominated Member Fatou K. Jawara.

HON FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Hence the debate will constitute only 3 minutes, I have two points to make but one has already been raised by Honourable Mbow. I just want to refer the Assembly to paragraph 3 relating to the matter of the day which states that the Committee shall consider opening a public hearing with regards to the Project.

Honourable Speaker, I believe it does not fall under the purview of the Project Monitoring Committee to conduct any public hearing on this matter rather it is the Public Petitions Committee. On that note Honourable Speaker, I submit.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable nominated Member Fatou K. Jawara. I now call upon the Honourable Member for Banjul North.

HON MODOU LAMIN B. BAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. It is often said that 'Who feels it knows it' and I believe it is very important for all of us, like I always say success will always happen when our dreams are bigger than our excuses, because some Members of the 5th Legislature cannot sit here and say that there was no single approval by the National Assembly for the implementation of such a magnitude project in Banjul. In that regard, I would want to seize this opportunity to say thank you very much Honourable Member for bringing this to our attention and I believe it is very important for us to look at it to make sure that there is a solution to whatever problem that the project is currently facing. Thank you very much Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Banjul North and Deputy Speaker, Honourable Seedy S.K. Njie.

HON SEEDY S.K. NJIE [NOMIANTED MEMBER & DEPUTY SPEAKER]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. As a member of the Committee on Monitoring Government Projects, the Honourable Member is expected to work with his colleagues as a shared responsibility. However, considering the matter of the day he brought forward, you can only deduce that it is based on personal information driven from Facebook, and "Bantabas" [Meeting Points].

Honourable Speaker, as the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum indicated, you cannot come and call yourself a Member of the National Assembly and mislead the august Assembly and the Gambian people. Honourable Speaker, it is the very Honourable Member and some of his colleagues that would want to prevail on Public Officials and Ministers to take oath. So, as a Member of the National Assembly and the Chairman of the Select Committee on Monitoring Government Projects, you cannot for whatever reason hide behind this august Assembly to mislead and ridicule people and the Government. This must stop. The Constitution and the Standing Orders have empowered us and of course in our individual private capacity to learn, to research, to read and to make consultation so that whatever you bring in this Assembly is factual and is in the interest of the country. This is merely on personal interest, and it will not be entertained by the Assembly.

Yesterday, the Vice President said that if the Honourable Member has done due diligence to the entire project, he would have known that the issues he wants to put forward are better raised at the level of his committee. The Vice President further said that the Government is

taking steps because the project has been audited. We all know this project is crucial, even though, it has not been approved by the Assembly and I beg to differ that the Matter of the Day is not an exceptional public interest because the citizen of the country and the people of Banjul are grateful to the project.

The Project has not caused any harm or damages, it is only a positive move, and it is in the best interest of the country. Therefore, in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Orders and the 1997 Constitution, we must admonish the Honourable Member. We must be ready to be truthful because this is not the first or second time, he is misinforming this august Assembly and it might not even be the last. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Deputy Speaker, Honourable S K Njie. I now invite the Honourable Member for Kantora and Majority Leader.

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. When I saw this document, I was really baffled as to whether the Member is indeed the Chairperson of the Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Government Projects. His action is driven either by social media commentators or really being misinformed. This is what he has manifested. He has also succeeded in exposing his level of knowledge about this project as chairperson. I want to ask him to expunge the statement he submitted trying to antagonize, mimic or blame the Assembly for approving the Project. If you do not know the history behind the project, it is important as new Member of the National Assembly to ask the old ones to guide you through the entire project implementation. Moreover, as the Chair of the Committee on

Project Monitoring, you should read and make references to acquaint yourself with the entire project to avoid a replication of such in the chambers.

Honourable Speaker, the Member has exposed his ignorance about the project and trying to blame the National Assembly as if we have not done a thorough process in terms of approving additional funding on the Supplementary Appropriation Bill. So, I will urge the Member to work hand in glove with his Committee Members not because 'I am' forcing the 'I' syndrome to be left out. Come as a committee and as a team, you cannot do it alone. Work with your members and do not only fight for credits to get commendation on social media. Here is a wrong place for such moves. *[Applause]*

Please go back, work with your committee members and do due diligence as the Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader has said. We are encouraging you as the new Chairperson of the Committee to believe in team spirit as opposed to 'ego-syndrome'. Thank you so much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Members, as you may know we have only a maximum of 30 minutes to deal with this issue and each Member has 3 minutes maximum. I have tried to ensure that the first names that were captured have spoken, we have exceeded the time but at least everybody who had shown interest to speak have spoken and that is where we broke off.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: I think I need to make the closing remarks because I brought the statement.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please sit down. I think we have the Standing Orders that govern us here. It is not what you want that happens, it is what we say that is guiding us. That is what the Standing Orders say. In this instance, you only make your statement and Members make their submissions. In fact, I do not even have to put a vote or to do any other thing that ends it. You made a statement and Members have expressed their opinions about it.

Honourable Members, I want to thank everybody from the Honourable Member who tabled the statement [Matter of the Day] to all those who have contributed. That is the beauty of democracy and that is why we should open and respect peoples' opinion. We may have different opinions which we have the right to agree or disagree, but we must respect divergent views. So, I want to thank everybody. I now call on the Clerk so that we can proceed.

3 [I]. Bill: Standing Order 65 - First Reading of the Animal Health Bill: 2022, [By the Honourable Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure stepping in for the Honourable Minister for Agriculture].

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Clerk. Honourable Members, in accordance with Order 65, only the First Reading of the Bill entitled Animal Health Bill 2020, will be done today. Therefore, I would now invite the Honourable Minister of Agriculture represented by the Honourable Minister for Works, Transport, and Infrastructure to handover a copy of the Bill to the Clerk of the National Assembly who will read aloud the short title where upon the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first time. I thank you.

[I]. The Animal Health Bill, 2022.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Bill have been read the first time, the next stage of the said Bill is appointed for Tuesday 27th September 2022 for the person in charge of the Bill to move a motion for the second reading in accordance with Standing Order 66 (2), which reads; *` At the conclusion of proceeding on the first reading or on any subsequent stage of a bill, the next stage may be taken either forthwith or upon a day to be named, providing that second reading shall be taken no sooner than one working day after the first reading ...* I thank you. Clerk can we proceed to the next one.

3 [II]. Bill: Standing Order 65 first reading of the Bill entitled The Gambia Public Buildings and Facilities Authority Bill 2022 [By the Honourable Minister for Works, Transport and Infrastructure].

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, in accordance with Oder 65, only the first reading of the said Bill entitled The Gambia Public Buildings and Facilities Authority Bill 2022, will be done today. Therefore, I would now invite the Honourable Minister to handover a copy of the Bill to the Clerk of the National Assembly who will read aloud the short title where upon the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first time, Honourable Minister.

[II]. The Gambia Public Buildings and Facilities Authority Bill, 2022.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Bill have been read the first time, the next stage of the said bill is appointed for Tuesday 27th September 2022 for the person in charge of the Bill to move a motion

for the second reading in accordance with Standing Order 66 (2), which reads; *'At the conclusion of proceedings on the first reading or any subsequent stage of a Bill, the next stage may be taken either forthwith or upon a day to be named, providing that second reading shall be taken no sooner than one working day after the first reading...'*I thank you Honourable Minister, Clerk you may now proceed.

4. Motion be it resolved that this august Assembly do consider and ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, Paris, 2021 [By the Honourable Minister for Tourism and culture]

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Minister.

HON HAMAT N.K. BAH [MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE]: Honourable Speaker, The Gambia joins the UNESCO in 1971 and has since then adhered to several UNESCO Conventions such as the Convention on the Protection of World Heritage, the Convention on the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Convention on the Protection of Cultural Diversity. In addition, the Stone Circles of The Gambia and Fort James Island and related sites were inscribed into the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2003 and 2006 respectively. Kankurang [Manding Masquerade] was also inscribed as a UNESCO intangible heritage masterpiece because we are signatory to the conventions. The heritage sector continues to benefit from UNESCO funding through the Participatory Program Funding.

With the support of the National Commission for UNESCO and UNESCO Dakar Office, the NCAC, on the 26th of February 2019 held a national sensitization meeting for a wide range of stakeholders associated with

the issues of Underwater Cultural Heritage Protection. Those who attended came from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, The Gambia Navy, The Gambia Ports Authority, The Gambia Maritime Authority, The Gambia Fisheries Department, Department of Water Resources, National Tourist Guide Association, the Press, the NCAC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Assembly Select Committee on Tourism. At this meeting, the stakeholders unanimously agreed that The Gambia should begin the process of ratification of the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage.

Further sensitization was done in August 2021 with the National Assembly Select Committee on Tourism and schools to further familiarize people with the Convention. Six Gambians from the NCAC and The Gambia Navy were trained in diving techniques at the Oceanium diving Center in Dakar, Senegal by UNESCO in 2020 to build their skills in underwater heritage exploration.

Underwater Cultural Heritage means all traces of human existence having a cultural historical or archeological character which have been partially or totally underwater periodically or continuously for at least 100 years according to the 2001 Convention.

Justification, The Gambia needs to ratify this Convention because of the following reasons:

i) The Gambia Atlantic Coastal line contains rich underwater heritage that attest to the ancient civilization of our people and its witnesses to historical relationship between The Gambia, Gambian society and outsiders including the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Spanish, the Dutch etc. Underwater Cultural Heritage can include ancient

shipwrecks in the River Gambia including slave ships to the new world. Also, the various wharfs along The Gambia River during the colonial rule such as the Karalwharf in Nianija, the Bintang in Foni , Pirai Tenda in Tumana, Kuntaur in Niani, Niani Maro in Nianija, Fatoto Tenda in Kantora, Fata Tenda in Wuli East,, MacCarthy Island, Kossemar in Jimara, Bambali in Sanjal, Belingo in Jarra West, Tankularr in Kiang West, Basse Tenda, form part of our underwater cultural heritage resources.

Upon ratification, The Gambia will work with UNESCO to develop these sites to improve the tourism product in the rural areas, create jobs and restore cultural identity.

ii) The ratification of the Convention by The Gambia will help to prevent looting and destruction of our underwater cultural heritage in the country because the Convention sets high standards for the protection of these heritages. UNESCO and The Gambia will partner with relevant institutions to ensure that underwater heritage is preserved and protected from looters and treasury hunters.

iii) The ratification will also prevent the commercial exploitation and disposal of underwater cultural heritages and preserved them for the future to support the tourism industry etc.

iv) It can ensure capacity building, Knowledge sharing in areas such as archeology, conservation, and museum studies for the Gambians especially those who work in the Arts and Culture Sector. For example, through the Convention, UNESCO can support universities in The Gambia to offer courses related to heritage and underwater heritage conservation.

v) Moreover, the Convention can help The Gambia develop a niche tourist market for diving tourist, scuba diving tourist etc who will be able to explore our underwater cultural heritage sites in the River Gambia or the Atlantic Coast.

vii) The Underwater Convention also will assist The Gambia Government to work with UNESCO to survey and locate all wells in old settlements which are fully protected by the Convention if they are 100 years old. Tenni jangu in Barra, Lower Nuimi is a good example, this well shall be site posted and explained to enrich our local history.

viii) The various shipwrecks along The Gambia territorial waters including the River Gambia shall be surveyed with support from UNESCO to preserve these sites so that River dredging and oil exportation does not disturb them.

Honourable Speaker, Ratification of the Convention will bring a lot of Opportunities to tender communities named above and help promote tourism and protect our heritage.

THE CONVENTION AND NATIONAL LAWS

The Gambia National Arts and Culture Policy and NCAC Act 2003, have fully domesticated the 2001 Convention. Honourable Speaker, the prayer, therefore, is for this august Assembly to approve the ratification of the said convention based on the objects and reasons given above. Thank you, I beg to move.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister for Tourism. Any seconder Honourable Members? Member for Central Baddibu.

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. I rise to second the Motion and I would want to take part in the debate. Thank you.

Honourable Speaker, the Motion before us which is the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage is very timely, and by looking at the benefits highlighted by the Honourable Minister, they are numerous, but the million-dollar question is to what extent is your Ministry ready to champion this course? Before this important motion, we believe your Ministry should start their homework in preparation of this giant crusade that you want to embark on.

Honourable Speaker, we need to be informed on the policies that you have in hand now that will be a breeding ground for this powerful international project that you are talking about.

Honourable Speaker, you talked of restoring cultural identity and now we are talking of the water. To some people, it will be a miracle as to how to explore some of these underground artefacts, but I believe with commitment and willingness, it is doable. It is time for Africa to look at some of these resources and how to tap them for the benefit of its citizenry because this should be part of Agenda 2063 of AU. It is time for Africa to promote cultural heritage and preserve them.

Honourable Speaker, we all know that slavery happened in this continent and Gambia was not an exception in the Atlantic Slave Trade. The Minister made mention of some of the underground ships or whatever materials that could be left behind. I believe this project is not going to be an easy project both in terms of commitment and resource mobilization as it is one thing to ratify but another thing to implement.

The expectations are high when you talk on the podium. We all feel at ease because we know that there is something that we can tap. Is The Gambia Government committed to provide fundings to make sure that these things carry weight? Since, we cannot entirely depend on outside donors for this kind of important projects. We need to have a roadmap of funding to make sure that the NCAC is well resourced. If you visit that office right now, the condition is disheartening, its location is poor, and the resources are not available. I doubt as to how they can perform under those circumstances. They need to be relocated hence the need to build a modern magnificent museum that can accommodate some of these artefacts when they are collected.

Honourable Speaker, it is our fervent belief that the project will not only stop in the Coastline but also go as far as Rural Gambia. According to researchers, studies have not been conducted on the River Gambia for a long time now, and I am sure the deposit of the sunk vessel - Lady Chilel is still lying down there. If proper research is not done on the River Gambia, it will not be easy for this important project to be carried out in the interior because movement will be a problem. We all know some of the big mangroves have fallen into the river and have not been collected. They are still there. So, navigation to the Rural Gambia is difficult and I believe whether it is part of the project or not, it should help us revamp our River Transportation System.

Honourable Speaker, the relationship between The Gambia and outside world should be mutually beneficial. As I always say, we need to benefit from these international agreements because we should not allow them to be used as a gateway for foreigners or partners by persuading us to sign and ratify important agreements which would only make us be at

their mercy. So, I believe your Ministry will be firm to protect the interest of The Gambia as stated in the agreement on Page 5 and must not be abused by outsiders.

Honourable Speaker, we talked about the wharfs which are important to our lives, but the conditions of the wharfs are unbearable, especially, Kanikunda, and Tendaba. These were important sites for our trade during colonial and pre-colonial days. I believe such a benevolent flagship project or agreement will revive The Gambia's trade in the Rural communities.

Honourable Speaker, the support to universities was also mentioned. The time has now come for us to invest into history and research. Research work is limited at the university due to funding. Although, students want to embark on research, they are limited by financial constraints. If the funding gap is not addressed, it will be very difficult for the country to tap her domestic expertise.

Honourable Speaker, we should now be thinking of restitution of the precious things that were taken from The Gambia during the colonial period. The Tourism Ministry should be more willing and proactive to make sure that they speak the language of Africa at the international level so that these precious materials that were taken away from us during slavery or before slavery should be brought back. It is high time we talk about this at international forums. Gambia has lot of rich culture, but we were one time rubbed by our colonizers, notably the European explorers. Those stolen items should be brought back because we need them.

If you look at the entire document, it talks about that, and I believe by ratifying it here, Gambia will be committed. Honourable Speaker, we have traditional wells which people have the common belief that there might be things thrown inside those wells and that is why this project is not going to be a low-cost and easy project because a lot needs to be done.

Moreover, we need the necessary tools to conduct research works to know certain traditional facts. For example, Touba Kolong, why do they call it "Touba Kolong"? Because it is believed that there was a well during the Atlantic slave trade or during the colonial period. We need to know it. In fact, there are some communities which are not identified and are not yet mentioned in our history books. Therefore, we should conduct research so that important facts can be established.

The river drainage as mentioned in your statement is not going to affect or cause any harm to our river drainage system if I understand you very well.

Honourable Speaker, I do not want to take the time of the Assembly, but I believe this direction is highly welcoming and there are more to be ratified as far as Heritage is concerned. I want to inform the Assembly that this is a step in the right direction, and I believe more will come because AU is pushing a lot of these kind of projects for the African Continent to be culturally and internationally recognized.

I thank everybody and I hope that Honourable Members will give their blessings to this important convention.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. I now put the question.

[Question Proposed]

Any Honourable Member who may wish to take the floor may do so, I begin with the Honourable Member for Brikama North.

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAM NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. At this juncture, I want to thank the Honourable Minister for Tourism and Culture for bringing this convention for ratification by the august Assembly.

I would take permission from the current Chairperson of the Select Committee on Tourism, Arts and Culture , Youths and Sports to take the lead on the debate on the motion that the Honourable Member is bringing before the august Assembly on the basis that we had an engagement with the Ministry and the officials of UNESCO on the matter in trying to get the support of the National Assembly for The Gambia to ratify this particular convention based on the objectives that are outlined in it. It was because of that engagement we gave our blessings and guided them to work with the Ministry so that it can act accordingly without delay It could be recalled that The Gambia joined the UNESCO in 1971 and convention of this nature like other conventions has been a matter of concerns as to why it has taken us so long to sign without ratification. Now that it is coming, I believe the august Assembly will give its blessings. It should not be a matter of which the Ministry or the Government would find it very difficult to domesticate since important issues are highlighted in the convention and if we ratify that, we should also take serious commitment towards the domestication of the convention.

Honourable Speaker, the preservation and protection of the Cultural Heritages especially the sea cultural heritage are very important. It could be recalled that, the Lady Chilel that was seen somewhere around Ballingo is one example of the sea cultural heritages that we can make good use of if we ratify this Convention. It can also attract tourist and generate income.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister, in his deliberation, mentioned the importance of ratifying this Convention because it can revive the lives of the river side villages that we used to call the 'Tendas'. I think this is important. Right now, if you go along the River Gambia, most of these Tendas that used to be very lively have all turned to ghost villages or towns. For example, the Kaur Wharf Town how it used to be compared with its status now, it is pathetic. It is the same story in Jimara and Kosemarr. If all these villages we talked about are revived, it will improve not only the livelihood of the people but also the people living in those areas. Revival of these villages alongside the River Transportation should be an utmost concern to the Government. According to Honourable Saho, you cannot revive the River Transportation, if those Tendas are not revived in the first place. If only the ratification of this Convention can bring that, it is certainly what we need most as far as promoting the lives and livelihood of the rural Gambia is concerned. Not all the villages can settle along the highway as it is the norm. We cannot abandon the Tendas and settle by the roadsides. We should now try to think differently. The places that are lively are usually the ones that are at the river sides, but this is an opposite thing in The Gambia because there is less infrastructure by the river sides, and we have more on the roadsides. So, if this project can

bring that, it would help us a lot to revive lives in our rural Gambia. You go to Njawara in Baddibu, it is pathetic because all that you see to recognize that there is life there is the old buildings similar to the one in Janjanbureh itself which is a provincial capital.

Honourable Minister and Honourable Members, at this juncture, I would like to crave your indulgence that, we as the Select Committee encouraged the Ministry to bring this Convention for ratification without delay, and they have acted accordingly to ensure it is ratified and I will call on every Member to give your blessings to it.

Honourable Speaker, I am a living witness when we went to Halifax, Canada, we were taken to a cemetery where the relics of a ship that was wrecked were deposited. Such historical development still sounds attractive to tourists. Hardly, people will go to Halifax without visiting those places which shows the importance of sea cultural heritage reservation. If we can do so, we have similar instances that occurred here, the Bateau le Joola plying from Ziguinchor, [the ship that was wrecked in 2002], most of the relics were deposited in The Gambia. With the signing of this convention on cultural heritage, the place where those people were buried would be considered as a cultural site. The fact that it happened somewhere here, and they were buried there, [may their souls rest in perfect peace], The Gambia would still benefit from that because anyone who visits those areas, will benefit The Gambia

On that note Honourable Speaker, I do not think this is an issue that should take the National Assembly time and energy to debate over because it is for the good of the rural Gambia. It is in our own good for

this convention to be ratified since we have been striving for the revival of our River Transportation as well as our coastal towns and villages.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Brikama North, and Minority Leader. I now invite the Honourable Member for Nianiya.

HON. AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIYA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I also wish to take part in this debate for the ratification of this treaty. Firstly, let me thank the Honourable Minister for adhering to the advice of the Select Committee.

Honourable Members, it may interest the National Assembly to know that in the previous Legislature that is the 5th Legislature, we engaged the Members of the Environment Committee during which we had a very fruitful discussion with the officials from the Ministry of Environment, members of the Committee on Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports as well as Ministry of Water Resources. I believe the other committee such as the Committee on Youth and Sports had also a similar one with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

Honourable Speaker, the Convention as highlighted by the mover, the Honourable Minister for Tourism and Culture, is a non-controversial one and it is geared towards protecting our very own underwater heritages because when the Minister was moving this motion, he mentioned the issue of Kaur Wharf and Niani Marrow, which are within Nianiya. I might be young then but anybody who hailed from our area will learn about the history and benefits attached to these areas. Anything that comes to this Assembly talking about those areas is an issue that we will support and will encourage any other Honourable Member to support it

because this will directly benefit the people we represent. Karolwharf and Nyanimaro are sacred places that we honour. I remember the former Speaker used to tell me whether I did know that she is from Nyaniya because her father used to work at Karolwharf. These are issues that when somebody residing in Serrekunda tells you touches our hearts because I just imagine how can somebody tell you stories back in your own Constituency just because of the activities that were happening there, is something interesting.

Honourable Speaker, considering the objectives and general principles of the Convention, I think it will interest Honourable Members to go through it carefully because the objects and reasons are all positive and they are all geared to towards protecting our underwater cultural heritages. What interest me more is the fact that the Honourable Minister mentioned that this treaty has already been domesticated, because if you look at the NCAC Act, and that of their policy, they are local instruments that we have within our laws. So, we are only seeking for the ratification. Sometimes, we say treaties are ratified but they are not domesticated but this one we know already that we have the local instruments in place. So, I believe we will support it and give it an easy ride.

Honourable Speaker, I just want to clarify one thing regarding the sites. The Honourable Minister mentioned number of sites across the length and breadth of the country, but it might interest us to also know that after ratifying this, I understand there are projects attached but some other areas might also be left behind because we cannot get everything on board at once. What next for those sites? I am not a historian or an expert in that area but once we identify these sites, it is possible to add

them as part of the ones already identified because I know somebody from Baddibu might claim we have a well that is already 100 years old, which should be added to this and so on and so forth. I think it is important for them to take it up and move forward. It should not stop to the ones already identified but let us move forward and I believe that they will do so. Honourable Minister, without taking much time of the Assembly as I said. It is not controversial and has no financial implication and so on. So, I want to crave the indulgence of the entire Honourable Members to give their blessings to this. Thank very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member for Nianija. I now invite the Honourable Member for Upper Fulladu West.

HON BAKARY KORA [UPPER FULLADU WEST]: Thank you so much Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister have highlighted everything. It will be a laudable initiative if the Assembly ratifies this Convention. If you go through the document, you will come to see that Africa has lost its cultural heritage and Gambia is no exception. To revive these cultural heritages, we must ratify this convention. When I was young, my people used to tell me certain things like the River Transportation which was highlighted by the Minority Leader and the Member for Brikama North. The River Transportation during those days was nice and it created lot of employment among the youth sectors and boosted the Tourism Sector. Ratifying this convention will also pave way for the River Transportation to take centre stage. The Honourable Minister also talked about the wharfs, that is the quay where big boats used to anchor, I can remember in Bansang, in those days immediately after school we normally go to the river side whereby tourists will come, Lady Chilel and other big ships will come and anchor on the quay. Right

now, as we speak, if you go there, you will feel something has happened here before but now it has died out. So, ratifying this convention will revive all those things and it will also boost the economy because lot of youths will be involved and it will also create employment.

He also talked about the Kaur Wharf and Nyanimaro. I can remember in those days in Janjanbureh, when you go to the slave house, you do not want to leave the place but now it is different. If we ratify this convention that will pave way for all those places to be revived such as the Pirai Tenda, the Wassu Stone Circle just to name a few.

Honourable Minister, my Honourable colleague mentioned one thing which is important. I think that would also be part of our recommendation to the Minister. Though we are going to give a blessing for the ratification of this Convention, he mentioned some of the areas which are not captured in the document like the names of a particular village or well. You might also take note so that the name of those villages can also be put into consideration.

The Honourable Member for Central Baddibu mentioned that Africa should not only promote our culture and heritage but also protect it. Our culture is something important. The Honourable Minister has highlighted that the importance attached to the ratification of this convention; enables capacity building for young Gambians to learn cultural heritage at our tertiary institutions that is our university. It will also promote tourism and protect our heritage. The Gambia in partnership with UNESCO is to work on the cultural heritage sites around the country. Government alone cannot do these. The ratification of this Convention

will pave way for UNESCO to step in which will at least boost our Tourism Sector.

For me as a Member of the National Assembly representing the people of Upper Fulladu. When I saw this, I said that this is a blessing in disguise because it is long overdue but thank God everything has come to light. I think we should all put our hands on deck to give a blessing to this convention. Honourable Minister, we thank you for taking this giant convention to the Assembly. We are very grateful and hope to work with your Ministry. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Upper Fulladu West, I now invite the Honourable Member for Niamina West.

HON BIROM J.S. SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Thank you so much Honourable Speaker. I feel elated to take part in this debate. I had worked with this Ministry before coming here. So, I have known many of the activities and development agendas of the Ministry. I have interacted with the Director of NCAC, and at times knocked his doors to remind him a lot pertaining to the cultural heritage issues in Niamina. He is here and at one time we talked about them in our rallies where the Honourable Minister reminded me to take my time and take it easy. They are coming up with a laudable initiative whenever they get there, I will be very happy. At this juncture, I take the opportunity to thank you Honourable Minister for bringing this ratification process. I say without hesitation on behalf of Niamina West and the people of Niamina West that I will give my blessings to the ratification of this Convention, and I am also urging all my colleagues to give their blessings to it.

Honourable Speaker, this is a good initiative, and it has numerous advantages and benefits as stated by my colleagues who spoke before me. Since the River Gambia is not well utilized, the coming of this project will give us advantages for navigation and pave way for the maximum use of The River Gambia. Some of the cultural heritages such as Seas and Lakes will be protected if this convention is ratified.

Other benefits that are attached to it are employment and obviously I know my Honourable Minister will not leave the youths behind, these will make the youth engaged. This will not only create employment, but it will also attract more tourists and diving activities which will help generate income [foreign income generation] boost our economy. As we know, large chunk of our economy comes from the Ministry of Tourism. So, this is a laudable initiative that I think all of us here will not hesitate to bless.

Honourable Speaker, one thing that also captivates my mind is the University Courses and University Education that is attached to this project as lamented by the Honourable Minister. UNESCO will be ready to bring in University Education as far as Underwater Cultural Heritage is concern. This can inform you that there is a lot in this package, such as educating our youths.

At this juncture, I want to join my Honourable colleagues to say that there are lot of other cultural heritages that are left behind as in Niamina West. We have Stone Circles that are not yet being identified or captured. The Mublumanoto in Dankunku is also a cultural heritage site which is of benefit to Niaminakas, and we want to share this with our fellow Gambians. There are many of such that can be scouted by the Ministry so that they will not be left behind. There are numerous

benefits attached to them which can be shared within our communities and bring benefits to their doorsteps. I know this project has lot of benefits because I was opportune to attend the seminar within the National Assembly last year and I have mentioned that I was working directly with the Ministry. Therefore, we will not want to miss these benefits.

In conclusion, I am pleading to all my colleague NAMs to give their blessings to the Convention. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Niamina West. I now invite the Honourable Member for Banjul North.

HON MODOU LAMIN B. BAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. Thank you very much Honourable Minister for Tourism and Culture. I would not do justice if I do not confess that this is the most important document that I have ever received since I was elected up to date, and as far as my parliamentary duty is concerned.
[Applause]

I can tell you that this is timely and indeed laudable. Looking at the most important side of the Minister's statement that talks about youth employment, I am indeed very interested in it as a youth advocate. I also want to see the development of young people in the country. I fully understand the importance of harnessing demographic dividend. The young people constitute much of the population of the country which is indeed a big concern. I believe this convention is very important for all Honourable Members to make due diligence and ratify this important document. In that regard, I implore every one of us to make sure that

we ratify this important convention and know that it is for the interest of The Gambia and Gambians. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Banjul North. I now invite the Honourable Deputy Speaker Honourable Seedy S.K Njie.

HON SEEDY S.K. NJIE [DEPUTY SPEAKER]: Thank you Honourable Speaker. I also want to join previous speakers to associate myself with this important convention.

As the Honourable Member for Nianija indicated that there are two places. The Honourable Minister mentioned Nianija, and as we speak if you go to Karol wharf you will see the remains and lyrics of old buildings. As we were informed that it used to be a business hub and a centre for the then Lady Raye, Lady Chilel and so on and so forth. It also used to be a trading point for the transportation of goods and services from Nianija or that part of the world including Upper Saloum. Nianija is still the breadbasket for Upper Saloum and of course, they come to Nianija for their education and health. The Honourable Minister, being someone who hailed from that area and having mastery of all these ports along the River Gambia up to Fatoto is very important. Honourable Speaker, when I was going through this Convention, it is only positive things I see, therefore, it is necessary for us to approve and ratify this Convention.

Equally, we will continue to call on the Honourable Minister for Tourism, who has vast experience in this area not only to stop at ratifying it but also to domesticate it and seriously look for funding to put up very good structures and facilities in those areas. We should yearn for the

restoration of River Transport and add new impetus to our trade and trading activities. Previously, River Transportation was very useful and when you go to Nianimaro and Karolwharf for example, you look at the vegetation and the land topography, it is just excellent. It could be a good tourist attraction site in The Gambia. In addition, it will help protect and lure tourist to often visit Rural Gambia. It is a common knowledge to all of us, when we were young, we used to see a lot of tourists into the hinterland, and they were interested in visiting some of these historical places in the country.

The Ministry of Tourism under the Honourable Minister's watch have done some improvement in Nianija where the Kerr Batch Stone Circles are located. I want to associate myself with this, but the Ministry should look seriously into getting funding to build not only these areas but to build some good ecolodge or hotels as it happens in other countries. Honourable Speaker, when you go to some countries, they have ecohotels and you can see some of these animals, trees when you get in there. The way they design the artificial topography attracts people. The Honourable Minister and his team talked about all year around tourism, even if not all year round, at least 6 months. If we have these facilities in the hinterland such as good hotel, good accommodation, good sites, it will encourage tourist to choose The Gambia as tourist destination.

Honourable Speaker, Page 3 of the Convention that is Article 2 Objectives and General principle; 2(1) states: "this Convention aims to ensure and strengthen the protection of the underwater cultural heritage". It is commendable, it is for our own interest. It is not only this clause but every clause in this Convention is an interest of every Gambian. All of us, whether some of these are within our constituencies

or not as the Minister indicated, but it is in the interest of the nation. Article 3 stated that “state parties, shall preserve underwater cultural heritage for the benefit of humanity in conformity with the provisions of this Convention”.

Honourable Speaker, likewise, Article 10, 21, the list goes on are all beneficial to us as Gambians. So, I want to thank the Honourable Minister as it is better late than never for bringing this to the Assembly and I also urge all of us to support it.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Deputy Speaker, I now invite the Honourable Member for Janjanbureh.

HON OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for granting me the permission. I want to thank the Honourable Minister for Tourism and Culture, and line departments that are also present here.

My submission highlights the importance of the consideration and ratification of this Convention. Looking at the importance of underwater heritage, to protect or preserve it is as important as anything. I just want to give a reference because I could recall sometime last year when some of our young people were denied participation in an activity overseas simply because The Gambia is not part of this Convention under UNESCO. Therefore, ratifying this document would mean opening new windows for our young people to be employed within the tourism and cultural industry.

On that note, I want to add my voice to urge the rest of the Members to consider ratifying this important document. Being a Member of the Tourism and Youth Select Committee, I would want to believe that the

Committee under the leadership of Honourable Bah would do justice by taking the leadership and ensuring this document is ratified. If you reflect on Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, you will realize that it targets new directions, and I think tourism could be a key accomplishment in creating that roadmap for The Gambia and boosting the industry.

The Minister did come up with some points more especially in justifying the ratification of this document. I think he did mention about some of the ancient ships that are in our waters and some of the species we have under our waters. For example, if you look at the tiger fish, it is an endangered species that would require the Government and Gambians to preserve and use it as a tourism product. If you also look at sport fishing along the River Gambia, you will agree with me that it has those potentials to create employment for our young people and as such preserving some of those species. I believe it will go a long way in boosting our local economy. He did talk about some of the wharfs or jetties...

THE SPEAKER: Is your microphone working now?

HON OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: Yes sir.

THE SPEAKER: Can you continue please?

HON OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. To continue from where I stopped, I still want to emphasise that this document is indeed very important and timely. We should give our blessings to it.

However, as the relevance of the document was justified by the Honourable Minister, he talked about preventing looting from our underwaters which is also a concern for every Gambian. Looking at

some of the fishing activities that have been happening in our waters, I think the convention will help us address some of those problems.

Honourable Speaker, some of us from the rural communities can attest that bringing back River Transport in the country will be of great importance. River Transport does not only boost our local economy but also helps in the restoration of our cultural heritage. For example, if you look across the coastal line where cruise ships were anchoring, you realize that almost every district or region has a product to sell out. For example, in Kaur or around the Saloum, there is a store built just behind the jetty that was used to keep peanuts when they were purchased from local farmers. I think these are some of the things that are failing for the simple reason that we have not been seeing those boats cruising our rivers to buy our local produce. So, if this document is ratified, it will bring back some of those agricultural activities and local communities to maximize income.

Also, we have been crying about the decline of tourists over the years, and I think ratifying this document will help target new market in the sense that we have what we called the Niche Market outlet. We are supposed to develop new products that will suit the needs and aspirations of those customers. I believe it will still bring the numbers high and that would also help the Ministry of Tourism and Culture in their diversification plans. We have been hearing tourism diversification, and I think to achieve those goals, it is only possible if new products and services are developed which cannot be better than developing new products along our rivers.

In one of my visits to the North Bank Region that took me to the community of Njawara, I could see that the heritage sites that seems to

make them proud and that they always talk about is the Queen's Well. I think these are some of the things we need not only preserve but also put into account and better interpret some of them in a form of positive story which will help educate the young ones. It seems most of us do not actually know what value some of these cultural heritages have on our lives. The Minister indicated that one product listed by UNESCO as an Intangible masterpiece is the "kankurang." Since we were born in the island community of Janjanbureh, not most of us understand the values, and importance attached to the "kankurang." I believe this Convention, will help address some of the issues. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Janjanbureh.

HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Thank you so much Honourable Speaker for giving me the opportunity to add my voice to the deliberation.

Honourable Speaker, let me first thank the Honourable Minister for bringing this important Convention on the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritages. These are some of the untapped resources of The Gambia yet to be explored. It is important for the Ministry to help the Government to explore and derive the benefits of these important heritages.

Honourable Speaker, it is important to survey, protect and preserve these heritages, especially, the important existing heritages within our constituencies such as James Island or Kunta Kinteh Island in Upper Niimi.

Honourable Speaker, people have been complaining negatively about this Island that it is eroding everyday making it difficult to access because the jetty is deteriorating every day. The Island needs to be preserved because as the Minister said during his presentation, this Convention is going to improve tourism and tourism products. These are some of the important tourism products we have within our midst which need to be protected and these are the reasons why we are giving our support and blessings to the Convention.

Honourable Speaker, the Minister did say during his presentation that the Convention is going to develop the skills of the people involved in carrying out this job and bring certain courses relating to the heritages in our university curriculum.

Honourable Speaker, I think with the reasons advanced by the Honourable Minister, Members will have no other choice except to give their blessings to this Convention. I, therefore, pledge my full support. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Upper Niuni. I now invite the Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. As stated by other Members that it is a laudable initiative, we, therefore, thank the Minister for bringing this very important motion before us.

Honourable Speaker, the Environment Committee had a very good engagement with the NCAC, and they have gone through the motion, and learned a lot from it. So, the objective was to bring it earlier, but I think because of the election activities it did not come.

Honourable Speaker, we all know that the country is rich in cultural heritages. We also know that a lot has been lost and as they said, a lot is likely to be in the rivers or waters which we may not have the ability to search for them and bring them to light. Therefore, this Convention will suffice to ensure that we are able to recover as many of them as possible.

Honourable Speaker, it will not only help us identify these heritages but also support in the protection and preservation of these sites. Those of us who were here for the last 5 years knew that the Honourable Minister of Tourism toured the country several times inviting Members to identify and give him some sites. We cannot give him all the sites, but I know that the search is ongoing. So, whether the name of your area is there or not, it is ongoing. I think if we inform them, they will list them and make further research on that and if it qualifies, it will automatically be part of the sites.

Honourable Speaker, I think some of the places are already mentioned, but I know that in sutukoba, there is a "Nema kolong" which is more than one hundred years (100). There is also a "kolong baa" but that one is now buried because it is old. There is also a cultural site which is not being used by people now unless they get angry, for example in the event of theft, victims will go there to solicit prayers for their stolen property to be returned. We also know that there is a Mungo Park resting place along the Karantaba River Sides in Sami. I think the Honourable Minister is aware that youths are very active in culture and are very much interested in developing and preserving it, so that they can use it for Eco- Tourism Camp. I know there is another site in Fata Tenda.

When it comes to the ships or vessels that were drowned in the sea, we know there is a Lady Denham and lady McBride, Lady Wright, I used to ride on that one when I was a kid, going and coming from school. Lady Chilel is a recent one which is not yet 100 years. We also know other sites like 'kene kene jamengho" which is in Gunjur and another one in Kartong. They are popular ones. In fact, I visited them twice and people are still going there. Just like the site in Sutukoba, when they get angry, or you trouble them they take you there.

Honourable Speaker, this Convention is dealing with one thing which is very important that is people who are dealing with our Artefacts, stealing and taking them away. We might not know because we do not have the capacity. It is sometimes difficult to deal with such situations if certain laws are not in place. You can see them doing it, but you will not take any action. That is why this Convention is very important. We may not also have the technology, but with this cooperation between other like-minded countries, the possibility of having the technological equipment to be able to unearth some of these artefacts is there.

Honourable Speaker, one thing that is good about this Convention is that it will help us not to allow anybody to commercialize the exploitation of these artefacts. You cannot just come, have access to it and sell it. That will not be accepted. If you go to European museums, almost half of their museums are filled up with African artefacts. They used to call us primitive people, but they have stolen all our artefacts and kept them in their museums for tourism. In fact, we should all fight so that they pay reparations for them.

Honourable Speaker, there is something I want the Honourable Minister to clarify, that is the coordinating State to which other countries are

linked to. What is that coordinating state? And which country is that coordinating state? Can you make that clarification?

Section [218] [Cultural Objectives] of the 1997 Constitution states: *"the State and all the people of The Gambia shall strive to protect, preserve and foster the languages, historic sites, cultural, natural and artistic heritage of The Gambia."* So, this is enforcing the Convention. Since we already have it in our Constitution, we must look for the means to do that. We must have that level of cooperation to do that.

Also, one clarification I want the Honourable Minister to make, but I could not see the section. I think it is 219 but I cannot remember. The National Assembly is not supposed to ratify any agreement which can derogate the sovereignty of The Gambia. So, just to convince us that we are not doing something wrong, you can also clarify that.

Apart from that, Honourable Speaker, this is a laudable motion or convention that will go a long way to reactivating so many things that were lying down. It will boost tourism as said by one member. It will also boost cultural activities and create many initiatives encouraging individuals to create smaller museums in the provincial areas and eco-tourism camps. So, this will aid all of them to revitalize their activities.

On that note, I just want to tell the Members that there is nothing sinister about it, only to make the country to grow more progressive. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Wuli East. I now invite the Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I thank the

Honourable Minister for Tourism. We all know River Gambia is the oldest trading route used by Europeans dating back to 1446, and that being the case, there will be incidents of wharves where ships also sink. So, my question will be whether your Ministry has already trained underground geologists who can be able to dive and see these underground cultural heritages, because that is very important. If you do not train our own divers, at the end of the day, we are at the mercy of the international divers as it is happening in our Petroleum Sector. We have petroleum engineers who are not trained, and drilling is progressing. We are at the mercy of international consultants to put our house in order.

Are villages with these cultural heritages engaged because they must take ownership by way of management and other stuff that might be related to these sites? So, we need to engage the villages that these cultural sites are found so that they take ownership of it for future intervention.

The Ministry of Education should also be involved so that they can change the curriculum because students need to understand what underground cultural heritages are for inculcation into the curriculums of basic and high school. Students need to appreciate the importance of underground curriculum heritage. So, for that being the case, I will end my intervention here and urge the Honourable Members to approve this because in my opinion, it is an important Convention. It will only add new product to our dying tourism industry. So, I urge my fellow National Assembly Members to kindly approve this Convention. Thank you very much!

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji. I now invite the Honourable Member for Tumana.

HON NFALLY M. KORA [TUMANA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I would like to register my appreciation to the consideration and ratification of the Convention on the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. This is important as far as I understand because our heritages are important in our present day, and we will have lot of resources and benefits out of them as Honourable Minister has rightly stated. I would thank the Ministry on behalf of my Constituency, Tumana, for coming up with this initiative. In fact, Senegal is overtaking us in some of these great initiatives. They are coming up with initiatives and more international focus is on Senegal.

Therefore, if the Ministry is coming up with this great initiative, that is going to neutralize that challenge is a welcome news. So, we thank NCAC under the leadership of Dr Ceesay for working with your line Ministry to come up with this initiative. There are lot of benefits attached to it.

Revival of our old river crossing points, which is the "Tendas" is also very important. I may be too young but in our early days, we sometimes go to our crossing points to catch a glimpse of the boats that are passing. So, the river was well used for transporting people and goods. This initiative will give us an opportunity to travel using our river again. The Tendas like Perai Tenda, Basse Tenda and Fata Tenda, these were very lively sites because there were lots of activities taking places during our early days or even well before we were born.

We should not waste any time in giving our blessings to this Convention. It will also improve our riverside infrastructure. We had lot of interesting structures along our river sides, but now they are getting old and dilapidated.

So, if this initiative is ratified, I believe those places will be revived and it is going to be in the best interest of the Gambian population. Therefore, as a Member of the Select Committee for Tourism and Culture under the leadership of Honourable Saikou Bah, I am going to task all of us to work hand in glove with the Ministry to see to it that things are fast tracked to make sure Gambians start seeing the benefits of the convention.

Research also is important as far as this Convention is concerned. As mentioned by some of my colleagues, there must be some sites that will be left out like the sea, river, and land heritages. Recently, the Minister and NCAC visited my community that is Tamba Sansang to visit our stone house. This was good and I believe if this one also comes up concentrating on the river heritages, I can say we are moving and we are moving on the right direction. We applaud the Ministry and the Government of The Gambia for coming up with this initiative, and we will be very ready to support them in making sure things work.

This convention also could serve as an attraction for tourist, as I stated earlier, we used to go to our river point just to see the boats, it was the "Toubabs", [white people] who were on the boats. There was something interesting that is why they come all the way to those areas. Therefore, it is important to us, and we will support the convention.

I also believe that this convention is going to create employment. Many people will be part of the initiative and that will provide employment for them. Honourable Speaker, at this juncture, I urge all my colleagues to support this Convention.

Honourable Speaker, I beg to take my seat. Thank you

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Tumana. I now invite the Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu.

HON KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker and Honourable Minister. I would not say anything that has not been said. Nonetheless, I would urge this august Assembly to give their blessings to this Convention, and I believe the august Assembly will do exactly that. To give our blessings to this convention will lead to the revival of our almost dead cultural sites across the country. When these cultural sites are revived, the tourism sector will also be revived. As you all know, tourism is one of the key sectors in which many families are depend on, but it is no more happening. Tourism is almost dead in this country.

I could remember when we were young, I attended Muhammedan Primary School. During that time, lot of tourists were coming to Banjul and lodged in Atlantic Hotel when the Hotel was at its peak. I believe when we give our blessings to this Convention, it will bring us what we have been yearning for in the country.

The Minister has highlighted so many important points that are attached to this Convention, key among them is the creation of jobs for Gambian youths. As we all know, there is high rate of unemployment in the

country but when we give our blessings to this Convention, the rate of unemployment will reduce significantly.

The points that have been highlighted by the Minister is enough for this august Assembly to give their blessings to the convention, and I will urge the Serahules and Kiangkas especially, to make sure that they give 100% blessings to this Convention.

I will not waste the time of the Assembly because I know we are all going to approve this Convention unanimously. Thank you so much Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Lower Badibbu. I now invite the Honourable Member for Kantora and Majority Leader.

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]:

Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. Before going further, I think it is appropriate to remind ourselves what is before us. It is not an agreement neither a bill where Members interchange words, it is a convention. The Member for Wuli East did mention an agreement but indeed it is a convention and the Member for Latrikunda Sabiji also urge Honourable Members to support the Bill.

Having said that, I want to agree with the Member for Latrikunda Sabiji that the River Gambia is one of the oldest rivers that were used by Europeans during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade dating back from 1446. If the Honourable Minister comes up with a Convention that will protect our Underwater Heritage and artefacts, it is really gratifying and worth supporting. Therefore, I want to use the opportunity to thank Honourable Minister and the NCAC for coming up with this initiative.

In addition, it is also gratifying for this august Assembly to know that The Gambia is blessed with this river, and up to the mid-1800, it was the busiest river. It also shows us that there were significant transactions or movements that occurred in the River Gambia. So, protecting and sharing our cultural heritage is a step in the right direction.

As the Member for Wuli East has alluded to, it is important for us to discourage people that visit Africa to steal our artefacts and market them. When we understand and protect our cultural artefacts, it gives us a historical background of who we are. It proves or provides our identity as people in Africa. Our culture has nexus and reflects our identity. So, in that preservation, we are trying to make sure that our cultural heritage demonstrates the very people we are as it gives us our unique identity as Africans in various regions. That is why if you see someone coming from East Africa, it is very easy for you to know and identify that this person is from East Africa. Why? The culture that is inherent in them, tells where they are coming from. So, we must attach great importance to culture as it is our identity.

Honourable Speaker, I am happy that the Convention talks about Peaceful settlement of dispute in Article 25(1) which states that "Any dispute between two or more state parties concerning the interpretation or application of this Convention shall be subject to negotiations in good faith or other peaceful means of settlement of their own choice." So, there is nothing like going to the courts, it gives us what we call an ADR [Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism], where we can sit as Africans, as people from the same continent to make sure that we iron out our difference rather than approaching the courts. It gives us that

latitude and avenue for us to make sure that we use the mechanism to trash out our differences.

On behalf of the majority side of the Assembly, I call on the entire Members of the Assembly to stamp our blessings on this Convention. I thank you so much for your indulgence.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Kantora and Majority Leader. Honourable Members, I thought that was going to be the last on my list, but I have just received another list of Members who want to participate. I now call upon the Honourable Member for Basse. He is out, thank God. I will now invite Honourable Member for Jarra Central.

HON KEBBA JALLOW [JARRA CENTRAL]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. My intervention will be the shortest if possible. Honourable Speaker, I want to add my voice to the previous speakers, in considering and ratifying the said convention under discussion.

Honourable Speaker, the Minister of Tourism is here today for us all to put our hands on deck to consider and ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, Paris 2001. Honourable Speaker, I was going through a document last night on this special Convention, and I came across two main objectives which enticed me to partake in the discussion on the ratification of the Convention.

Honourable Speaker, if you would allow me, I will go through the two main objectives as follows:

1. To ensure the protection of the endangered cultural and natural resources of our motherland.

2. The other objective which we are going to embrace as a country would be to enhance sustainable development primarily through tourism heritage.

Honourable Speaker, the two objectives are the main reasons why I add my voice to the ratification of this Convention. On that note Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank you and likewise the Honourable Minister for tabling this Convention.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Jarra Central. I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. The ratification of this Convention could not have come at a better time than now when the tourism industry is facing a lot of challenges. We applaud the Honourable Minister for coming up with this initiative, and I do not think we will turn our backs against it. If this Convention is ratified, it will create jobs, preserve, and protect our historical places. Culture is our identity, and without identity, it means you are nowhere. There are lot of problems, and confusions in this world because people want to be something that they are not. So, our culture is our norms and values that we must protect and preserve.

It is very unfortunate, let me give an example of myself, my brother, the late Malang Sanneh is a champion wrestler, but nobody knows about him because now it is about Barcelona, Liverpool and Manchester United. Wrestling was an activity that every old man was eager to attend during the weekend, but now it is about football, wrestling is disappearing. It was very unfortunate when I went to watch a wrestling match and I found a Fula champion. I should have been the one to win

that man, but it was not possible because I decided to turn my back from culture. So, having the initiative to bring back and preserve our culture, will help my family. There is a cotton tree in my family home, not everything has to be said here but because of people do not have the belief and are turning back against our culture and not preserving what we are but embracing something else that we are not. Today, every one of us wants to sit in the office, if one does certain things, people may attribute it to primitiveness, that is why there is too much confusion in this world.

Therefore, I do not need to waste much time because the chairperson is tired now and then I think I would once again say that thank you very much this is something that all of us are going to agree on so that if my family can come back to the wrestling arena, the Fulas will never become champions anymore, thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol. Honourable Members, we can be here until 9 pm if people do not excuse us from repetition. If you have ideas, you can come up. Honourable Member for Sanimentereng, the floor is yours.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I would also like to extend my thanks to the Honourable Minister of Tourism.

Honourable Speaker, with all due respect, I want to withdraw because the issue that I want to talk about has been taken care of by someone. Thank you very much but that will not stop me from joining my Honourable colleagues to ratify this convention thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Sanimentereng. I now invite the Honourable Member for Jimara.

HON ESSA CONTEH [JIMARA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I want to take the opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister for Tourism and Culture and the Honourable Members that are present here.

Honourable Speaker, the good thing about this convention, after going through the document is that it will promote or prevent looting of our underwater cultural heritage and our treasures because these are treasures that people can use to have or gain more wealth. It also indicates that it is going to build the capacity of the Gambians especially the youths who constitutes about 60 or 70% of the population. They are the current and future leaders of the country. It can also develop tourist market and promote domestic tourism which has really caught my eyes because in domestic tourism, culture and heritages stimulate national pride in one history. One Honourable Member had said it here that our culture is our identification, our culture is the way of our lives, so it is important for us to look at this thing because that is what we are all yearning for Gambia to be seen and heard. As we speak, we have National Assembly, we have our rules, our regulations, our national pledge, and our national identity, but at what level is Gambia being recognized worldwide? Through this convention, Gambia will be recognized, and it will promote international tourism which will be a source of national pride.

On that note Honourable Speaker, Members of the National Assembly, I also want to join my colleagues to give my consent in ratifying this convention. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Jimara. I now invite the Honourable Member for Bundungka Kunda.

HON SULAYMAN JAMMEH [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I want to use the opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister and his staff for bringing this convention to this august Assembly. As an individual who has served in the Tourism Sector for almost 10 years, I think this convention is timely for the simple fact that the country is trying to promote all year-round tourism and I think with this, it will expand the product especially in tourism attraction. I think it is high time people try to understand what community tourism is about. You know much of the developments that we are seeing in most of the local communities is through community tourism, so the convention will also enhance community tourism which will make communities have that sense of belonging. It will also help the Ministry to be able to at least engage local individuals and communities. It can create employment as well and that employment is going to directly affect the local individuals who are around those areas where we will have these artefacts. So, I think I will joint my Honourable Members in blessing this convention because this has something to do with the local people especially those very important people at the grass root level. On that note, I thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Bundungka Kunda. I now invite the Honourable Member for Sami.

HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I would also like to thank the Honourable Minister for tourism and his technical staff here present.

Honourable Speaker, we are here to ratify the convention on the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage Paris 2001. We all know the importance of these cultural sites particularly the cultural places and the historic sites that are along the river especially Mungo Park. Some of the cultural or historical sites are dormant especially Mungo Park, but this convention will protect these heritages and create employment for the people around as other speakers have rightly stated.

Honourable Speaker, this has reminded me of a famous well in my own village called "JAKA" which immensely benefited the population of the communities. That famous well call "Jaka" was founded by a Jaranka marabout man, that is why they call it "Jaka". In those days, people used to live in far places to come and collect that water because people have the belief that if a barren woman drinks the water from that well, she will give birth but now that well have now dried up. So, when I saw this convention, it has reminded me of that, and I think we should support it. That is why others are saying we have already talked but I said no, I must talk.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Sami. I think it is your right to speak. Honourable Members, we have now come to the end of the list. We have four Members who may want to take the floor. Honourable Members, if I call you, and you are not around, I will cancel your right to speak. So, if you come back, you must notify us that you want to speak. Honourable Member for Basse, do you want to say something? If so, please take the floor. Ok, Honourable Member for Basse.

HON SAIKOU BAH [BASSE]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, and sorry for that action. First of all, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister,

the Permanent Secretary and technical staff for doing a thorough assessment of this Convention and finally bringing it to the National Assembly for ratification. Also, I must thank some of my Committee Members as the Chair of the Select Committee on Tourism, Youth and Sports. As other Members have alluded to regarding the convention, there are so many important things which I observed, and I really want this august Assembly to ratify this document without wasting much time.

Looking at the convention, it identifies and revives the historic heritages and rebrand our cultural heritages because for the past 5 years, it is the same product we are selling as the industry. But coming up with this convention, it is rebranding all what we have been selling as a tourist industry.

The second important point is reviving these “wharfs” which were existing before. I can remember the Basse wharf when lady Chilel used to arrive there on Thursdays and depart on Fridays. So, I think that this Convention will help revive these wharfs which is a step in the right direction. The other point I also observed was the relationship between our convention and the convention of the United States. I think it will also help. The fourth point of the convention is to create job opportunities for the Youths, and I think it will also pay a big dividend on creating more job opportunities as it is often said that the idle mind is the home of the devil. If youths are engaged, I think they will be very supportive to the society. Moreover, the convention will give opportunity to recover hidden heritages and provide revenue to our national GDP.

Finally, I also want to pledge my support for this august Assembly to ratify this convention. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member for Basse and Chairperson of the Tourism Committee. Honourable Members, may I now call upon the mover of the motion, the Honourable Minister for Tourism to respond to the issues raised and to wind up the debate. Honourable Minister the floor is yours.

HON HAMAT N.K. BAH [MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE]: Thank you Honourable Speaker, let me say one thing before I respond to the various issues raised by Members of Parliament. Whenever I come before this august Assembly, I am always full of emotions, nostalgic feeling remembering how you and I have fought against each other before in this Chamber, also remembering the late Tamsir Jallow, Sheriff Dibba and others as to how we fought against each other before this Chamber to make sure we have a vibrant democracy in the country. That is why when I get to this Assembly, I have this feeling in me.

However, I have listened to the comments of Members of Parliament with keen interest, and I am overwhelmed by the support that parliamentarians have given to this Convention, and I believe it is done in the supreme interest of our dear country. I have heard some of the concerns raised by parliamentarians vis-a-vis the question of domesticating the Convention. As you are aware that many conventions signed by the Government of The Gambia since independence, most of them have not been domesticated, as a result they cannot be reinforced in our country. But fortunately for this one, the 2003 Act of the NCAC which we have passed has taken care of that one, and the NCAC policy, the cultural policy that we also found to have been outdated almost 15 years ago, and a new policy that we worked and passed and put into

effect in 2018 have all taken account of the issue of domestication. So, in this convention, a lot of issues have been raised, we cannot overemphasize the importance of this convention. Let me begin by saying one thing, we are not responsible of river transport, but we are responsible of making sure that the sites that were created during colonial time were restored. Whether you bring boats there, that is a different issue, our responsibility stopped at making sure that these sites are all rehabilitated. We will contact UNESCO for that, and we believe that the Government of The Gambia have been investing immensely since President Barrow took over power in this country. We have seen the complete restoration of Kerr Batch and Wassu. We have also seen contract being awarded for the construction of the Mungo-Park Site. That is why I was surprised when the Member for Sami Constituency could not recognize the promise, I gave you two years ago has been done. As we speak, the contract has been awarded to restore that site. And I also believe, this heritage sites were part of our history, and our variant system as a nation. Our identity, our being a nation can only be real when our history is used to build our future. We can only do this when we know the true value of our assets – how important they are to us. Unfortunately, this country has been left out for so long, not much has been done. As we speak now, I am thinking of how we can get a national troupe which have been disbanded. We are the only country without a national troupe. As we speak today, we are the only country in the subregion without a national theatre. However, this Government has allocated land for a national theatre at Brufut site. We believe, as time goes on, we should be able to raise the funds to build a national theatre that every Gambian will be proud of. The first step is to try and identify the land, and that has been done. We also have a project with the

Africell Group, and we believe very soon work will start in trying to re-phase, re-design our national museum to the level of a modern national museum which the country will be proud of. I think it is important not only for tourism, but for the historic past, and present of our society. The Member for Central Baddibu talked about the looted items that were taken away by colonialist and other foreign governments. I must tell you that, we are using a common approach with ECOWAS. I am sure some of you have been hearing that some have been returned. What I can tell you so far is that our investigation has shown that 86 items are found only in one country that belongs to The Gambia, that is in France alone. These are items that belongs to the Republic of The Gambia, and it is believed that it belongs to our country, and we will do whatever it takes. Since we do not have the muscles alone, these 86 objects, in France museums alone, talk less of Germany, UK, Netherlands and other countries, it means it is a huge task for us to do that. That is why we have a common approach with Economic Community of West African States as to how we can recover. The Member for Wuli East said that we do not have the capacity. He is right. We do not have the capacity, but we need to go and look for the capacity. And I think that is important for us. It is important to note that some of the sites have been given maximum consideration. The Member for Upper Nuimi speaks about James Island. We used to know it as James Island but now it is called "Kunta Kinteh" which is a UNESCO heritage site. I would tell you that the World Bank Project, one of my most important engagements was to make sure that we do not lose that island in the wilderness. We believe it was important to get that island back. The 68-million-dollar grant that the World Bank has given to the Tourism Ministry for the Diversity and Resilience Project, over 40 million dollars will go to James Island alone

to recover its glory and restore it back to normalcy so that in the next hundred years our grandchildren can find Kunta Kinteh right there. Just to show you how concerned we are when it comes to our national assets, particularly those dealing with national heritage sites, it is important that the Member for Wuli East said again, we have gone on a tour, but we cannot get to every site. But if you have sites of national importance, please send it through the Select Committee or any channel for us to receive it. We are more than willing to take up everything because we believe in our country. This has gone beyond party politics. It is about The Gambia and its interest. So, if you have a site that you believe is of importance that can advance not only tourism, but for the future benefit of the country and its people, please give it to us. I know of Gunjur Mosque that we are working on, and I know of the Sami Pachunkeh Mosque. These are unique mosques, and I am also told about Tubaa Wuli Mosque which I last saw in 2001. I do not know the shape for now, but I hope the mosque is intact. These three mosques and any other mosque of that nature, we are willing and ready to intervene. The wells you mentioned, we will seek funding from UNESCO and The Government of The Gambia will contribute for us to see how we can preserve those wells and try to rehabilitate some of them.

It is important and it is part of our history, and we must make sure we keep that history. I was told of a well in Kiang that lasted for almost 3 to 4 hundred years. Hopefully, the Member for that constituency will be able to help us because we are interested. The wells in Banjul and all other wells wherever they may be important. If we do not ratify this convention, when people come to loot what we have under sea, we will have no power to grab. Recently, as you are aware, you must have been

listening to news where a wrecked ship was recovered with hundreds and millions of dollars, lot of gold was found. In the event we have a situation like that in The Gambia and we have not ratified this convention, there is no way we can reinforce any law for that matter. That is why, ratifying this convention will give us a leverage and the power to protect and to harness these great assets that belong to this great country. We may be small, and somebody said that The Gambia is not recognized. I can assure you that the country is small, but we are very much recognized and regarded wherever we go not because of our size but our ability to make sure that we are noticed.

Somebody talked about the issue of wildlife which I clearly took note of. During my deliberation with the Speaker of the House of Commons on Tuesday which was centred on the issue of the Assembly, I have forwarded that to The Speaker through the Majority Leader, that is not for me to say, but I can tell you that he has given us a promise and we are trying to work out the meeting in November with the Chester Zoo Management Committee to see how best the Ministry of Environment can offer support to re-stock all our wild life parks. We cannot have it at once. There are ongoing negotiations with Zimbabwe and South Africa to support us, but I think this one would be faster and quicker because they have done it for Nepal and other countries, and I believe that they are ready to do it for The Gambia. We will work with the Ministry of Environment for that matter to pass the information to them and support them. As we speak, the High Commissioner is working on the appointment of November for us to be able to meet them and see how best we advance that interest.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the museum of Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, no doubt, it will be a source of attraction for tourist. It will be generating a lot of revenue for the Ministry and that is why we felt the best site to do it was here. When the question of where to bury Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara came, the Ministry was engaged and during our deliberation, we believe the best place to keep Sir Dawda was in the National Assembly Premises, because of the importance and the greatness of this institution. I am sure you will be getting a lot of tourists coming in. We will have museum in the graveyard complex and we also want to change the house where he was born in Barrajally into a museum to make sure that...

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Can I observe Honourable Minister?

THE SPEAKER: Time for Questions and you want to observe

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Yes!

THE SPEAKER: Allow him to complete and then you say something.

HON HAMAT N.K. BAH [MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE]: Mr. Speaker, we also want to build our heritage to make sure that the house where the former president Sir Dawda Jawara was born is turned into a museum. I know some of you are just arriving from the airport seemingly tired, but I would try to respond to your concerns and questions as much as possible. I believe that I have covered much of it for now. I have spoken about the jetties but there is a problem. We got investors who wanted to invest in river transport, but there is need to amend the laws governing our river, vis-a-vis GPA power and how private operators can operate in the country. I am sure, the Select

Committee in charge should be able to scrutinise this and give advice to the Assembly and the Executive appropriately as to which laws need to be amended to make it possible for private people or investors to come and invest in River Transportation in The Gambia. We need it because it is important. We are building the lodges as you said, we had some issues, but it has now been resolved. We hope that very soon work will start again and we want to expand this throughout the country. We have seen lot of Gambians also investing in this in various parts of the country, and we believe we can make a difference collectively.

Before I resume my seat Honourable Speaker, I want to react to what somebody said that tourism is dead. Tourism is not dead in The Gambia. Tourism suffered under Covid. Tourism suffered under the Ukraine War. But tourism is reviving, and lot of efforts have been invested to make sure that this sector comes back to glory. It is a tough fight, we do not have the financial muscles, but we have the expertise, the desire, the will, and the ultimate interest in making sure that we bring back tourism with the support of the Government at the highest level. We are making inroads as our first flight will be next month on the 14th October arriving from London. We believe so far, the statistics are not looking bad, but we need time to go back to where we came from, but it is not dead. I hope the Honourable Member will take note of that.

The Honourable Member for Janjanbureh talked about tourism diversification and what has been diversified. I will tell him that we started talking about tourism diversification before COVID because we believe that Gambians do not know about their country, they do not travel within their country and some people in the sub-region do not know about their country. So, we believe domestic and regional tourism

was key in this Government Policy and that has been amplified by the Tourism Policy which have just been concluded. By looking at that policy, it was not difficult for us to engage the World Bank because they have never made any physical investment in the tourism sector since in the 70s. Today, you go there now, roads have been built. We hope that this project will make a big difference and I urge you to go through the website of the World Bank, the entire project design and all that needs to be done is there. I hope when the project is launched, I will have an opportunity to come before Members of this Assembly to give you an insight of it so that you can also understand the project well and be able to scrutinize it based on your responsibilities.

On that note, Honourable Speaker, let me take the opportunity to thank you and Honourable Members for their contributions, and for accepting to ratify this convention unanimously. In the same vein, I would also like to thank my staff including the Permanent Secretary, the Director General who have been working with me on this. It is gratifying that, when people are speaking the same voice, they make a difference in what they want to do. On that note, Honourable Speaker, I thank you so much. I beg to move.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. Honourable Member for Central Baddibu the floor is yours.

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. The response from the Honourable Minister is welcoming that he intends to build a museum or to turn former President Jawara's House into a museum. I do not know whether you have a plan because to me, Sir Dawda should be buried in Barrajalley so

that tourism can be taken to the Rural Gambia as is the case for other former presidents in Africa.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, these debates and suggestions can continue at your various committee levels, and I am sure the relevant Ministries or institutions are opened to discussions. Honourable Minority Leader and Member for Brikama North.

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: I also want to comment on the statement by the Honourable Minister challenging the Select Committee to come with amendments of the laws that will attract the investors to invest on river transportation. This was the challenge the Select Committee put to the Ministry to try as much as possible and make the necessary arrangements so that the river transportation can be revived. In as much as the committee can come up with the Committee Bill, equally, you can have the Government Bill, it is faster that way. I put the challenge to you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. Honourable Members, to be honest, it is in our advantage to try to revitalize our river transport. Besides all that was mentioned, it will ease the workload on our road network. So, I think that one is both sides: both the Executive and the relevant committees can do that. And I hope from time to time, you will be challenging the Honourable Ministers to push them to bring a bill to ensure that those things are done.

Let me thank the Honourable Minister and his technical team. I think you have done a very wonderful job in presenting your case convincingly to Honourable Members. You must be commended, and your responses were definitely very informative. Yes, we have fought here in this

Chamber, but we have not said it, we remained the best of friends outside Chamber, and we want that spirit to continue. People may have different opinions on issues, it does not make you enemies, we should always remain as brothers.

Honourable Members, I appreciated your contributions and the enthusiasm shown in this convention. I want to thank all of you for your contributions.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[Be it Resolved that this Honourable Assembly do ratify the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, Paris, 2021].

Congratulations Honourable Minister.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Assembly be adjourned until Monday, 26th September 2022 at 10:00am prompt].

ADJOURNMENT