

- **CLERK: Prayers!**
- **HON. SPEAKER: Hon. Speaker leads in prayers.**
- **CLERK: Communication from the Chair!**
- **HON. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I convey to you a warm welcome as we return to this Chamber to commence the Third Ordinary Session of the National Assembly in the 2023 Legislative Year, since the adjournment of the previous Ordinary Session of the Assembly in June 2023.**

As we begin the Third Ordinary Session of 2023, I express my profound gratitude to Allah, The Almighty, for our lives and for making it possible for us to interact once again, in the service of our dear country and people. I pray that Allah continues to guide us through this Session and beyond.

Honourable members, may I recognise your tremendous efforts and commitment to duty, and to the Clerk and Staff of the National Assembly

Service for the usual support and guidance throughout the process. I urge all of us to keep up the momentum or even do better.

Honourable Members, there has been some concerns in the media and public about the purchase of vehicles for Assembly Members. I want to clarify once again that the purchase of the vehicles was done in a fair and transparent manner, following every due process.

As an equal arm of the State, the necessity for these vehicles should be understood by everyone who wishes this Assembly to function well. Beyond that, in this creative scheme, the vehicles were not fully funded by the government but rather purchased on a 50-50 basis between the Members and the National Assembly Authority.

It is important to recognize that our Parliament has traditionally been at a disadvantage since independence. To properly perform its functions

and take its rightful place in our governance structure, Parliament must be equipped with the necessary resources. The Assembly is committed to making this happen.

At this juncture, I wish to thank His Excellency, President of the Republic, Mr. Adama Barrow and Government for their understanding and cooperation throughout the process in ensuring that this Assembly is efficient, effective and independent in carrying out its functions.

Honourable Members, it is thus, understandable today, that some of the brilliant initiatives being taken by the National Assembly Authority would receive some backlash from the public.

However, this Assembly being a democratic institution, takes note of all opinions and concerns being raised by the citizens. Indeed, constructive public opinions are the most supreme means of accountability.

Honourable Members, the recent rains have triggered severe floods in certain parts of the country devastating farms and properties. Part of this is also attributed to the adverse climate changes that we face as a planet and there is need for concerted efforts to address this phenomenon. In the short term, there is need for our farmers to adopt smart agricultural mechanisms to ensure sustainability and acquire food self-sufficiency. We are in solidarity with our people on these unfortunate incidents and hope that the Government will investigate ways of addressing these problems.

Honourable Members, the sub-region is witnessing the prevalence of military coups against constitutionally elected governments, grossly undermining the supreme will of citizens who have exercised their civil democratic political rights to put these governments into power. Coups are not and should not be any means of changing governments.

Hon. Members, by way of an update to this august Assembly, the Labour Act, 2023 was passed during the Second Ordinary Session of the National Assembly in the 2023 Legislative Year on 12th June and assented to by the President of the Republic on 23rd June, 2023.

Hon. Members, as published in the Order Paper for today, the Hon. Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs as provided for under Order 94 (1) of the Standing Orders will deliver his Statement on the Implementation and Monitoring of the Annual Budget, the Hon. Attorney General and Minister for Justice will also present the First Reading of a Bill while the Defence Minister will also move a Motion for the consideration and ratification of this Assembly as scheduled.

Honourable Members, the Approved Agenda for this Ordinary Session has been circulated to all stakeholders concerned.

Finally, I would urge Hon. Members to, once again, take note of the relevant provisions of the Constitution and the Standing Orders of the National Assembly during this Ordinary session. Thank you.