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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ZAMBIA

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

10

ABSTRACT SERIES

THE ROLE OF WHIPS IN A MULTI-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

PREFACE

This Abstract is part of the **Zambian Parliamentary Procedure Abstract Series** and describes the **Role of Whips in a Multi-Party Parliamentary System**. It is hoped that this Abstract will give some basic understanding of the **Role of Whips in a Multi-Party Parliamentary System** and serve as an easy reference guide.

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'Whip' is derived from fox-hunting where whippers use whips to hunt or hound foxes so as to prevent them from straying. In parliamentary circles, this applies to the regular communication by each Whip to all Members within the same party, notifying them of Parliamentary business and requesting their attendance at appropriate times.

In Zambia, the Office of the Whip and its role are provided for under Standing Orders 45 to 49. The Whips consist of the Chief Whip, the Deputy Chief Whip of the ruling party and Whips of all other political parties, including independent Members, in the House.

1. The Government Chief Whip

The Government Chief Whip in Parliament belongs to the party in power and performs the following duties:

- (i) liaising regularly with the Speaker, Leader of Government Business and Leader of the Opposition on Business of the House;
- (ii) ensuring that there is a quorum in the House at all times;
- (iii) ensuring attendance and participation in the House by Members of the ruling party;
- (iv) ensuring an adequate number of Members of the party are present during voting in the House;
- (v) keeping Members of the ruling party informed of parliamentary Business;
- (vi) co-ordinating parliamentary Business with the Leader of the Opposition and party whips or whip;
- (vii) granting Members permission to be absent from parliamentary Business; and
- (viii) assisting the Presiding Officers maintain discipline in the House.

The Government Chief Whip is a member of both the Standing Orders Committee and the House Business Committee.

2. The Deputy Government Chief Whip

The party in Government appoints a Deputy Government Chief Whip from among its backbenchers, whose duties include:

- (i) in the absence of the Chief Whip, perform the functions of the Government Chief Whip; and
- (ii) carry out any functions that may be delegated to him or her by the Government Chief Whip.

3. Party Whips and Independent Whips

An opposition political party with ten or more Members in the House may appoint a Whip and Deputy Whip. Where there are ten or more independent Members in the House, the independent Members may elect a Whip and a Deputy Whip from amongst their number. The duties of a Party Whip or an Independent Whip include:

- (i) ensuring attendance and participation of party or independent members in the House;
- (ii) keeping party or independent members informed of parliamentary business;
- (iii) ensuring all or an adequate number of party or independent members are present during voting;
- (iv) coordinating parliamentary business with the Government Chief Whip and the whips; and
- (v) assisting the Presiding Officers to maintain discipline in the House.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTY WHIPS

The Government Chief Whip is directly answerable to the Leader of Government Business in the House. Subject to Cabinet, the overriding responsibility for the progress of the Government's legislative programmes starts with the Leader of Government Business in the House. Under the authority of the Leader of Government Business in the House, the Government Chief Whip makes the day-to-day arrangements for the Government's programme of business and discusses the proposed business arrangements with Opposition party Whips. The Chief Whip is also responsible for securing majorities for the Government. He/she should be frequently consulted by the Leader of Government Business in the House. Opposition Whips carry out similar duties for their parties.

The Government Chief Whip, together with the Whips of opposition parties, constitute what is known as the "usual channels" through which communications pass regarding business arrangements and other matters which concern the convenience of Members as a whole. The Government Chief Whip is responsible for establishing and maintaining good and amicable relations between the Government and the Opposition benches, which is a pre-requisite for the smooth running of parliamentary business. Where it is crucial for the Ruling Party and the Opposition Parties to agree, the Government Chief Whip plays a major role in resolving matters of common interest and ensuring that the parties understand and accommodate one another.

TYPES OF THE WHIPPING SYSTEM

There are three types of whipping systems used by political parties in Parliament, as outlined below:

- (i) **'one-line whipping' (or single-line whipping) system**, where a party tells its Members which side it supports officially and gives Members notice to attend the vote. This is not binding, meaning that a Member may not be required to be in attendance during the vote;
- (ii) **'two-line whipping' system**, where a party stipulates how it wants its Members to vote, and requires Members to be in attendance during a vote, unless a Member obtains leave of absence from the Whip's office; and
- (iii) **'three-line whipping' system**, where Members are told to vote and are, under no circumstances, allowed to be absent during a vote. Under this system, Members are required, by the Whip's office and the party leadership, to turn up and vote as they are told, failure to which serious consequences are meted out.

A 'three-line Whip' is often used during crucial votes or major events like the Second Readings of significant Bills or amendments on the Constitution, Budget approval and Motions of no confidence.

CONCLUSION

Whips are there to ensure that all Members of Parliament attend the sittings of the House following the laid down National Assembly procedures. This, in turn, helps ease the work of Whips in maintaining a quorum and helps to reduce questions and other business of the House from lapsing, which has a bad reflection on the House as a whole.
