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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ZAMBIA
PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

11

ABSTRACT SERIES

PARLIAMENTARY DECORUM AND ETIQUETTE

PREFACE

This Abstract is part of the Zambian Parliamentary Abstract Series and describes the Parliamentary Conduct, Decorum and Etiquette expected of Members of Parliament and the public. It is based on the Standing Orders of the Zambian Parliament, the Members' Handbook and the traditions and practices of Commonwealth Parliaments. It is intended to serve as a quick reference guide on Parliamentary Decorum and Etiquette.

However, the information contained herein is not exhaustive.

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INTRODUCTION

Members of Parliament are expected to observe a certain standard of conduct both inside and outside the House, in order for them to carry out their functions properly. Their behaviour should be in a manner that enhances the dignity of Parliament. The conduct of Members should not be derogatory to the dignity of the House, or in any way inconsistent with the standards which Parliament expects of its Members.

RULES OF PARLIAMENTARY CONDUCT, ETIQUETTE & DECORUM

Parliamentary Etiquette is a system of rules and conventions that regulate the social and professional behaviour of Members of Parliament.

Parliamentary Decorum refers to the appropriate character which is expected to be exhibited by Members of Parliament in accordance with their status in society. It is the pattern of acceptable behaviour for Members of Parliament that enables them carry out their representative functions in a respectable, honorable, orderly and dedicated manner.

While the House is sitting, Members are expected to observe Rules of Parliamentary Etiquette. These are based on conduct of business in the House and on rulings by the Speaker from time to time.

The rules of Parliamentary Etiquette and Decorum are provided in the Standing Orders and are also based on traditions and practices of Commonwealth Parliaments and on rulings of the Speaker from time to time. These Rules are set out hereunder.

1. General Conduct of Members

Standing Order Number 203¹ provides for the conduct of Members of Parliament as follows:

- (1) A Member shall at all times conduct himself or herself in a manner that upholds the dignity, integrity and decorum of the House.
- (2) A Member shall not act in a manner that brings the House or other members generally into disrepute.
- (3) In accordance with sections **four, five and six** of the Parliamentary and Ministerial Code of Conduct Act, a member shall:
 - (a) not acquire dishonestly or improperly any pecuniary advantage;

¹ National Assembly of Zambia Standing Orders, 2021

- (b) disclose any pecuniary interest to the House before speaking on the matter before the House; and
- (c) declare interest in a Government contract made or proposed to be made between the member and the Government.

2. Parliamentary Decorum and Etiquette

Standing Orders (204) (2) provide for the Parliamentary decorum and etiquette as follows:

- (a) a Member shall be in the House or in a meeting room a few minutes before the appointed time for commencement of the sitting of the House and after health breaks;
- (b) a Member shall stop any conversation and rise in his or her place as soon as the Speaker's procession enters the Chamber;
- (c) a Member who enters the Chamber when the Speaker's procession is entering, shall stand silently in the gangway until the Speaker has taken the Chair;
- (d) after adjournment of the House, a Member shall remain standing in his or her place until the last person on the Speaker's procession has completely left the Chamber;
- (e) a Member shall bow to the Chair on entering or leaving the Chamber, or taking or leaving his or her seat;
- (f) a Member shall not interrupt another member holding the Floor by making noise or other disorderly expressions;
- (g) a Member shall listen in silence to the debates in the House;
- (h) a Member shall not obstruct, interrupt proceedings or make disruptive running commentaries when another member is speaking;
- (i) a Member shall not applaud when a stranger enters the galleries;
- (j) a Member shall not shout political party slogans or display political flags, emblems or any such articles in the House;
- (k) a Member shall not leave the House immediately after debating. Instead, a Member shall resume his or her seat to listen to debates of other members and only leave the House afterwards, if necessary;

- (l) a Member shall not distribute literature, a questionnaire, pamphlet, flyer, press notes or any such material, within the precincts of Parliament;
- (m) a Member shall not bring into the Chamber boards for writing purposes;
- (n) a Member shall not smoke in the Chamber or walk into the Chamber carrying a coat or jacket on his or her arm or shoulder;
- (o) a Member shall not sit or stand with his or her back towards the Chair;
- (p) a Member shall not carry a walking stick or a medical aid into the Chamber without permission of the Speaker;
- (q) a Member shall not tear an official document in the House;
- (r) a Member shall not sing or play music in the House;
- (s) a Member shall not pass in between a presiding officer and a Member who is speaking;
- (t) a Member shall not talk to other members in a manner that disturbs the proceedings of the House. If it is unavoidable to consult another member during proceedings, a member shall talk in a very low voice;
- (u) a Member shall resume his or her seat as soon as the presiding officer rises to speak or calls out 'order' or "a Point of Order is raised";
- (v) a Member shall be referred to by his or her constituency name and not by individual name;
- (w) a Member shall not read a book, newspaper or any literature, unless the literature is connected with the Business of the House then under consideration;
- (x) a Member shall not argue with another Member who is debating. The member may, however, wait for his or her turn to rebut or contribute to the debate; and
- (y) a Member shall not sign in or log in the Chamber multimedia system on behalf of another Member.

A Member who breaches a rule of etiquette may be sent out of the House for one sitting day.

3. **Gross disorderly conduct**

Standing Order 205 provides for what constitutes gross disorderly conduct for Members as follows:

A Member commits an act of gross disorderly conduct if the member:

- (a) defies a ruling or direction of a presiding officer;
- (b) declines to retract words ruled unparliamentarily by a presiding officer or declines to offer an apology, when ordered to do so;
- (c) demonstrates or makes disruptive utterances against the suspension of a member;
- (d) attempts to or causes disorder of whatever nature during an address by the President or a visiting dignitary;
- (e) uses violence against a member or other person in the House, committee or within the precincts of the Assembly;
- (f) attempts to or disrupts the Speaker's Procession when the Procession is entering or leaving the Chamber;
- (g) attempts to or removes the mace from its place in the Chamber;
- (h) deliberately gives false information to the House;
- (i) acts in any other way to the serious detriment of the dignity or orderly procedure of the House; or
- (j) commits an act that, in the opinion of the Speaker, constitutes gross disorderly conduct.

4. **Dress Code For Members**

According to Standing Order 206 (1) and (2):

1. *The official dress for male Members of Parliament shall be:*

- (a) a formal executive suit, or a pair of long trousers, a shirt, a neck tie and jacket;
- (b) a toga;
- (c) a decent traditional attire such as *siziba*; or
- (d) a safari suit, with long or short sleeves and a scarf or a neck tie.

2. The official dress for a female member shall be:

- (a) a formal dress, formal executive suit either with a skirt below the knee or a pair of trousers; or

- (b) a decent traditional attire such as a formal 'chitenge' outfit with long or short sleeves, *musisi*.

RULES FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Parliament is open to members of the public who wish to attend the sittings of the House, either as individuals or in groups. The following rules apply to members of the public:

1. Members of the public are required to wear smart attire, either office or casual wear.
2. Visitors are not allowed to take into the gallery articles such as walking sticks, umbrellas, briefcases or parcels of any type, magazines or cellular phones. All such articles must be deposited at the Reception Desk.
3. While in the galleries, visitors are not allowed to take part in the proceedings of the House, except for rising when the Speaker enters or leaves the Chamber.
4. Visitors are not allowed to rise or move from one place to another while the Speaker is speaking.
5. Visitors are not allowed to take notes, applaud, laugh or converse whilst the House is sitting.
6. Visitors must withdraw from the galleries when so ordered.

CONCLUSION

The Speaker, who is the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly, regulates debates and enforces strict observance of the Rules which govern orderly conduct in the House. He preserves the order and dignity in the proceedings of the Assembly.
