



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ZAMBIA

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

22

ABSTRACT SERIES

THE MACE

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT
LUSAKA

PREFACE

This Abstract is part of the Parliamentary Abstract series. It looks at the origin and history of the Mace, its importance and uses in the House today. The Abstract also looks at the various relations and comparisons that have made the Mace become a bond of common identity and practice among different Parliaments of the world, especially in Commonwealth Parliaments.

However, the information contained herein is not exhaustive.

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INTRODUCTION

The Mace is an ornamented club carried by the Serjeant-at-Arms, who is assigned with the duty of attending to the Speaker of Parliament. It is a symbol of authority, which the State has invested in the House and the Speaker. The Serjeant-at-Arms is the custodian of the Mace and implements all orders and actions requested by the Speaker through the use of the Mace.

HISTORY OF THE MACE

Originally a weapon of war, the Mace has been used as far back as the Roman times. It gained prominence when Mediaeval Bishops carried Maces into battle instead of swords so as to conform to the canonical rule which forbade priests to shed blood.

With the passage of time, Maces became ceremonial with the earliest being identified in the 12th century, though they were initially intended for the protection of the king's person. These were borne by the Serjeant-at-Arms, a royal bodyguard established by the kings of France and England.

Since the 17th century, Maces have evolved from weapons of war to symbols of Parliament. Equally, their shape has also changed. The flanged heads have become smaller. The butt end, which carries the Royal Arms, has expanded to accommodate larger and more ornate Royal Arms, along with an arched crown surmounted by an orb and cross.

Today, Maces of the Commonwealth and indeed other allied Parliaments follow a design which is fundamentally similar to those of Westminster, although they vary in size and decorative detail, with ornamentation having a local significance.

To-date, no two parliamentary Maces in the Commonwealth or other allied Parliaments are alike, except at one point in time when the Mace once used by the House of Assembly of South Africa was a replica of the Mace of the House of Commons at Westminster.

THE MACE IN THE ZAMBIAN PARLIAMENT

The Mace of the Zambian Parliament is made of copper with ivory and natural amethyst set in the head and end. The materials used in the construction of the Mace are all purely Zambian and represent its natural resources. The cone of the Mace bears three copper eagles and engraved on the collars of the shaft are the following words:

'Republic of Zambia'

and

"One Zambia, One Nation."

USES OF THE MACE

The Mace is an essential part of the regalia of Parliament. Most of Parliamentary Practice and Procedure is based on its presence, making it a symbol of authority invested and bestowed on the House and the Speaker by the State.

As a symbol of legislative authority, the Mace is carried for the swearing in of the Speaker, First Deputy Speaker and the Second Deputy Speaker, at State House. It is held on the left shoulder by the Serjeant-at-Arms as the Presiding officers are sworn in by the Head of State.

Further, at the commencement of each sitting, the Serjeant-at-Arms bears the Mace on the left shoulder preceding the Speaker into the Chamber. As the Speaker takes the Chair, the Serjeant-at-Arms places the Mace on the Table. This serves as a sign that the House is properly constituted for proceedings. The presence of the Speaker in the Chamber determines the position the Mace takes on the Table. It remains in the Chamber during lunch, dinner, other breaks and during normal suspensions of the House. It is only carried out of the Chamber by the Serjeant-at-Arms when the House adjourns or when the Speaker demands that it be removed.

The Mace is also used when an MP is admonished in Parliament (standing behind the Bar). When it is not on the Table, but on the shoulder of the Serjeant-at-Arms, no Member except the Speaker is allowed to speak. In the same vein, if the Serjeant-at-Arms were to be sent out of the House with the Mace, no Business can be transacted.

POSITION OF THE MACE ON THE TABLE OF THE HOUSE

In the Chamber, the Clerk of the House, the Deputy Clerks or any of the Clerks-at-the-Table sit in front of the Speaker. Stretching out before them is the Table of the House that separates the two front benches (Government and Opposition). The Table is considered to be an extension of the Speaker's neutrality and it is on this Table that all documents brought before the House are laid.

At the end of the Table furthest from the Speaker are situated on top of the Table, two brackets (upper brackets) where the Mace rests while the Speaker is conducting Business in the House. When the House goes into Committee, the Mace is placed on the lower brackets below the level of the Table. The custodian of the Mace, the Serjeant-at-Arms, sits at the opposite end of the Chamber from the Speaker at the Bar of the House.

CONCLUSION

Certain mystical qualities surround the Mace such as the remoteness of its origin and the ancient traditions with which it is associated. This mystical significance attached to the Mace is compounded by the fact that the operations of the House in the Chamber are affected with its presence or absence. Thus, when it is not on the Table but, on the Serjeant's shoulder, no Member except the Speaker is allowed to

speak. If the Serjeant-at-Arms were sent out of the House with the Mace, no Business can be transacted. It can be said that the Mace of the House of any Parliament is the symbol of not only of the sovereign authority but of the authority of the House. And as the authority of the Speaker and the House are indivisible, it also symbolises the authority of the Speaker.
