

## Overcoming the Covid-19 Pandemic for better tomorrow, the role of parliamentarian

The National Assembly of the Gambia having recognized the menace posed by the Covid- 19 pandemic, they quickly and readily marshalled whatever they have within their abilities to support the national effort to stem the pandemic.

Some of the initial reactions taken by the Parliament at the outset of the pandemic was the establishment of a Special Committee charged with the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of all the activities earmarked for the Covid-19 responses. The special Committee was established worked with all relevant stakeholders on the ground such as the Ministry of Health, the National Assembly Health Committee, and the National Disaster Management in a coordinated effort to control the spread of the disease.

Respective National Assembly members took the responsibility as soon as the pandemic broke out to embark on a massive sensitization in their respective constituencies on the Safe Hand Hygiene Campaign launched by WHO.

The parliament has also restricted its plenary meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic and had approved the declaration of public emergency by the Government due to the alarming rate of the pandemic. However, it also continued to scrutinize the Government's actions by holding regular sessions with the Minister of Health, members of the Special Committee for COVID-19 and the Emergency Task Force Committee to provide updates about COVID-19 cases in different provinces and decide on actions to overcome the crisis.

The House was also meeting physically during this trying time but with a limited number of plenary sessions and committee meetings, and fewer parliamentarians and staff in the building, others were working remotely to enforce the physical distancing protocol. Given the fact that there are 58 MPs in the Gambian Parliament, physical distancing could easily be observed in the parliamentary meetings room.

Aside from the above, MPs also rendered support to the poor and needy both economically and through the provision of food. Some of the MPs have gone to the extent of even lobbying assistance in the form of food provisions or [PPEs ] personal protective Equipment] from philanthropists or charitable foundations for the people of their constituencies just to ensure that provisions and sanitary materials reach every part of the Gambia regardless of any political affiliation.

They make sure that activities of front-line workers were strictly monitored during the peak of the pandemic to make sure that the overall implementation of the Covid-19 rules and regulations were strictly adhered

to. Relevant committees also did hold regular debriefing session to inform MPs as to what obtains in the field,

Such efforts by the MPs paid dividend because it was able to facilitate the enforcement of the imposed temporary lock down and significantly curbed the spread of the disease.