



SPEECH OF THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER ON THE OCCASION OF THE END OF THE 2020 2ND EXTRA ORDINARY SESSION

Protocols

It is with a deep sense of delight and fulfilment that I present this address to you today, being the last day of our deliberations at the 2020 Second Extra Ordinary Session. The Session held virtually via zoom and admittedly recorded significant success, despite obvious limitations associated with connectivity, as well as the inability for us to have physical contacts and interactions. As politicians, we are always able to achieve much when we meet physically, talk, persuade, convince and ultimately influence opinions. That was not to be, due to our efforts at containing the spread of the corona virus.

2. We have recorded success to the extent that the Session had achieved its set objectives. The referrals were successfully handled. I am adequately satisfied with the participation of Members of Parliament in the technical discussions leading to the conclusion of Parliament's advisory opinion. The work Members have done during this short period of the Session, despite identified limitations associated with virtual meetings, have demonstrated their total commitment to the ideals of our integration. Colleagues have indeed proved that they are fellow stakeholders in the ECOWAS project and they are dependable allies of the people they represent.

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

3. Let me, on your behalf, express our profound gratitude to the President of the ECOWAS Commission, His Excellency Dr. Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, and his team of competent Commissioners and Technocrats, for the collaboration between our two important Institutions. Over the years since

the inception of the Parliament, our collaboration with the Commission had grown wider; covering virtually all areas associated with the integration process. Ours is a symbiotic relationship, in which we as politicians are expected to promote the ideals of the Community at the level of Member States, while the Commission, with its team of competent technocrats, is to ensure total implementation of programmes and policies. We are determined to reap maximal benefits out of this relationship and we expect it to yield adequate rewards for the promotion of the vision of our founding Fathers.

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

4. This Legislature, unfortunately, had to encounter a great challenge almost immediately after inauguration. Like I noted during my opening address, our usual scheduled activities for the year have yet to commence. Our greatest impediment is the prevailing Covid 19 pandemic, which has ravaged the world. Meanwhile, there is so much work to be done out there. Our people are wallowing in poverty, which has further been compounded by the downward trend in economic activities occasioned by the prevailing situation. The world, especially our sub-region, is under the threat of hunger. Even though we are in the rainy season, restrictions occasioned by the pandemic have made farming activities difficult. As Parliamentarians, we must fashion out a way of proposing cushioning effects. There is no doubt that the remaining part of 2020 and early 2021 would be highly challenging, both economically and socially. Ours is to collaborate with our Governments, both at national and regional levels, to ensure that we protect the interest of our people and work towards easing their affairs during this anticipated difficult period.

5. There is no doubt that we have the capacity to play that role. But we must remain committed and dedicated. We must remain steadfast and always put the interest of the people above self-interest. We must be prepared to face some little inconveniences in our daily routine just to serve our people at these highly unprecedented times.

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

6. Permit me to state that one of the negative effects of the ongoing pandemic is the lack of access to medical care by our people with other ailments. Admittedly, Covid 19 is highly contagious and everybody wants to do all within his/her power to avoid being infected. That is a natural human response to a situation like the one we found ourselves. But we are aware that several patients with other ailments are being turned back, especially where symptoms are similar to that of the corona virus. Patients on the other hand, have resulted to self-medication due to the general reluctance to visit hospitals and consult medical personnel, again for fear of getting infected. I am afraid that at the end of the pandemic, we may be faced with two sets of fatalities; those whose deaths are a result of the virus and those who, for fear of the virus, succumb to other ailments. It is important at this juncture to counsel on how to ensure that our people access health care facilities despite the pandemic.

7. Our medical workers need all the protection to be able to discharge their functions. To this end I appeal to our Governments, donor organisations and wealthy individuals to assist by providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). This would in no small measure, boost the morale of health workers and give them adequate latitude to give their best. Furthermore, all health facilities should provide for handwashing, as well as social distancing, while attending to patients. On their part, patients should ensure they wear face masks always, especially when visiting hospitals. They should also endeavor to be factual in their narration to Doctors and avoid going to conventional hospitals when they feel Covid 19 symptoms or believe they were exposed at any point in time. These measures, if adopted, would assist significantly in mitigating fatalities during this very difficult period

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

8. It is very difficult for us to predict when the situation would improve significantly enough for the Parliament to commence its annual activities.

As you are aware, several Member States are continually easing restrictions, despite rising infection rates. It is a sign that the world is ready to co-exist with the virus, pending the discovery of a vaccine, or better still, a permanent cure. Major economic activities are opening up, with a “new normal”. The aviation industry has designed methods of commencing business. In fact, several airports around the world, our sub-region inclusive, have reopened, especially for local operations. We are expecting that in the coming weeks, international operations may commence and air links between our Member States would be restored. Only when that happens can we, as a Parliament, take another look at our activities and determine those that can be executed in the remaining part of the year.

9. It is, however, necessary for me to point out that resumption in flight operations, leading to the continuation of our activities is not a guarantee that life has returned to normal. The virus is very much present and has the capacity to wreak havoc. Perhaps the world is reopening due to additional knowledge about how the virus spreads, hence leading to more knowledge about preventive measures.

10. Should the situation permits us to resume executing our programmes, which I hope would be soon, we would devise our own internal preventive mechanisms, in addition to what is already in place. Much as we desire to serve our people, we are determined to ensure that we protect the individual Members of Parliament from likely infection in the course of discharging their Community responsibilities. I pledge to do the needful in that regard.

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

11. As we draw the curtains on the 2020 2nd Extra Ordinary Session, let me task you that our duty as Community Parliamentarians is not restricted to when we hold meetings or other activities. We remain Community Members of Parliament where ever we find ourselves. We should, therefore, endeavor to preach the ideal of ECOWAS at all times and in all places.

12. While thanking all Members for sparing time to attend this Session, I also wish to thank the Secretary-General, Directors and all staff of the Parliament, as well as service providers, for making this virtual Session a success.

13. I, therefore, declare this 2020 2nd Extra Ordinary Session closed. Thank you and God bless.

His Excellency Sidie Mohamed Tunis
Right Honourable Speaker
ECOWAS Parliament

Freetown, Sierra Leone
23rd July, 2020