

# **THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT**

## **AT A GLANCE**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The ECOWAS Parliament, also known as the Community Parliament is a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus for representatives of the peoples of West Africa with the aim of promoting integration. It was established under the article 6 and 13 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993.

The Protocol relating to the Parliament was signed in Abuja on the 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1994 and entered into force on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2002. It provides for the structure, composition, competence and other matters relating to the Parliament.

### **STRUCTURE**

The Parliament is the Assembly of the peoples of the Community. Members of the Parliament, who are also known as "Representatives" represent all the peoples of the Community.

### **SEAT OF PARLIAMENT**

At its 25<sup>th</sup> session held in Dakar, Senegal on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2001 the Authority of Heads of State and Government decided that Abuja shall be the seat of the Parliament

## COMPOSITION

The Parliament is composed of 120 seats. Each of the 15 Member States has a guaranteed minimum of five seats. The remaining 40 seats are shared on the basis of population. Consequently, Nigeria has 35 seats, Ghana, eight seats, Cote d'Ivoire, seven seats, while Burkina Faso Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal have six seats each. The others - Benin, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia Sierra Leone and Togo- have five seats each. Whenever necessary, the number and distribution of seats shall be reviewed by the Authority either by its own initiative or on the recommendation of the Parliament.

## COMPETETENCE

The Parliament is empowered to consider issues concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens; interconnection of energy networks; interconnection of telecommunications systems; increased cooperation in the area of radio, television and other intra- and inter-Community media links; as well as development of national communication system.

The Parliament may also be consulted on matters relating to public health policies for the community; common educational policy through harmonization of existing systems and specialization of existing universities; adjustment of education within the community to international standards; youth and sports; scientific and technological research; and community policy on environment.

Other areas for consideration include any issues affecting the Community, especially as they relate to the review of the ECOWAS Treaty, citizenship and social integration. On these issues, the Parliament may make recommendations to the appropriate institutions and/ or organs of the community.

## **ELECTION AND TERMS OF OFFICE**

**Representatives and their alternates are to be elected by direct universal suffrage by citizens of Member States. Pending when Members of Parliament are thus elected, the National Assemblies of Member states or their equivalent institutions or organs are empowered to elect members from among themselves. The duration of the transitional period is subject to the approval of the authority of Heads of States and Government.**

**Representatives are to be elected for five years from the day they are sworn in. During the transition period, representatives who are not re-elected at the national level will remain in the office until the new representatives from their respective Member States take their position.**

**The Parliament which is in transition at the present, functions in an advisory capacity. This means that it does not, as of now, have specific decision-making powers, and its members are not directly elected.**

## **VACANCIES**

**Vacant seats will be filled by the first non-elected candidate registered on the same list containing the name of the out-going Member of Parliament.**

## **WRITTEN DECLARATION**

**Before assuming duty, Members of Parliament sign the following declaration: 'I declare on my honor that I will faithfully serve the interest of the Community and that will not submit to any direct or indirect pressure from any Member State of group'.**

## **IMMUNITY**

**Representatives will enjoy Parliamentary immunity in all Member States. Thus, they may not be prosecuted, summoned, arrested, detained or sentenced, except in case of flagrante delicto, whether Parliament is in session or on recess. Before any Member of Parliament is apprehended in case of flagrante delicto, duly established, suits or confirmed sentence, clearance must be sought from the Bureau of the Parliament**

The Parliament can, through a two-thirds majority, request from the competent authority the suspension of a detained order on or a suit against a Member of Parliament.

## **INCOMPATIBILITY**

The protocol forbids any Member of Parliament, while in office, from being a member government, the constitutional council, the supreme court of a Member State; a judge, lawyer or registrar in the Community Court of Justice and the Court of Arbitration, member of Courts and Tribunals of member States, member of any ECOWAS institution created in application of the Revised Treaty, or any other post in an international organizations or a civil / public servant in Member State.

## **SESSIONS OF THE PARLIAMENT**

The Parliament has two ordinary sessions every year, to be convened by the Bureau subject to provision of Article 14 of the protocol establishing the Parliament. Each Session may not exceed three months. For now however, the sessions are limited to two weeks each .The first session are

to be held in May and the second, in the first week of September. The Parliament adopts its budget during the second session.

Extra-ordinary sessions can be held at the initiative of the chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government or at the request of an absolute majority of Members of the Parliament, to discuss a specific agenda. Conducts of all Sessions are in accordance with the rules of procedure.

All sessions of Parliament are held at its seat, unless a simple majority of its members decide to hold it somewhere else, within the sub region.

Sessions end once the agenda is exhausted.

## FIRST SESSION / MEETING

The inaugural meeting was convened by the then chairman of the Authority and President of Mali, His Excellency, Alpha Oumar Konare in Abuja, November, 2000. The meeting was chaired by the oldest member - Mr. Oumarou Sidikou of Niger; and the youngest member, Mr. Assan Seibou of Benin, acted as the secretary.

## THE SPEAKER

The Speaker of the Parliament is elected for the life of the Parliament and directs the business of the Parliament and its organs. He presides over meetings and conducts the debates in accordance with the provisions of the Rules of Procedure.

The incumbent Speaker is Professor Ali Nouhoum Diallo from Mali.

## RULES OF PROCEDURE

Parliament adopts the rules of Procedure by a two-thirds majority after which the Speaker initiates the election of other Officers of the

Bureau. All matters not provided for in the Protocol establishing the Parliament are determined by the Rules of Procedure.

## **THE BUREAU**

Besides the Speaker, Members of the Bureau are elected for one year, and eligible for re-election. The Bureau comprises the Speaker, Deputy Speakers, Treasurers and Parliamentary Secretaries

The first Session of the Parliament, held in Abuja on 21<sup>st</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2001 adopted the Parliament's rules of Procedure (which determines all matters not provided for in the Protocol) and elected its 6 Deputy Speakers, three Treasurers and six Parliamentary Secretaries.

## **THE SECRETARIAT**

The Secretary-General is appointed by the Speaker after consultation with the Bureau. Consequently, Mrs. Halima Ahmed, a former staff of the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat from Nigeria, was appointed to head the Secretariat of the Parliament. Also appointed as her deputy is Mr. Mohammed Diakite from Guinea, also a former staff of the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat.

## **STANDING COMMITTEES**

The Parliament constituted of 13 Standing Committees to study matters within its competence as stipulated in the Rules of Procedure and as may be referred to it. The Chairmen of the various Committees, together with the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers make up the Conference of Chairmen. The 13 Standing Committees are:-

- Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, Defense and Security.
- Laws, Regulations, Legal and Judicial Affairs, Human Rights and Free Movement of Persons.
- Rural Development
- Transport and Communications Environment and Natural Resources
- Public Health and Social Affairs
- Education, Training, Employment, Youth and Sports
- Economy, Finance and Trade
  
- Industry and Mines
- Energy, Technology and Scientific Research
- Women's and Children's Rights
- Tourism, Culture and Handicrafts

Joint Committees may be set up to study issues of relevance to the committees whereas special committees may be constituted by the Parliament for a specific matter and purpose through a resolution stating the purpose thereof, the mission, term of office and the modalities for appointing its members.

## **PUBLIC ATTENDANCE**

Debates in the Parliament are open to public, unless otherwise directed by the Speaker. Verbatim reports are expected to be published in the Official Journal of the Community, while summary reports must be published in the National Gazette of each Member State.

## **BUDGET**

The Parliament is financially autonomous, the preparation and execution of its budget must be in accord with the Financial Regulations and Manual of Accounting Procedure of the Community.

## **OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

**The official and working languages of the Parliament are those specified in the ECOWAS Treaty - English, French and Portuguese.**