**(FURTHER) SUBMISSION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON REVIEW OF ASSEMBLY RULES**

**(27 May 2022)**

**A. Guidelines for displaying placards and bringing objects into the House**

*Introduction*

On 13 May 2022, the Subcommittee on Review of Assembly Rules (the Subcommittee) considered the question of guidelines and possible options in this regard. It also considered the use of members’ backgrounds on the virtual platform.

Concerning placards and objects, the view of the majority in the Subcommittee was that members should not be permitted to bring or display placards, objects nor dangerous or threatening articles in the House, unless with the prior approval of the Speaker.

*Current Rules*

At present **National Assembly Rule 64 (e)** states that –

*“Members must at all times accord the presiding officers of the National Assembly and members due respect and conduct themselves with dignity and in accordance with the decorum of the House and are required (inter alia) – not to bring weapons of any kind nor dangerous or threatening articles or objects nor replicas of any such articles or objects into the Chamber, excluding cultural objects with the prior approval of the Speaker.” (Our emphasis)*

*Option 1*

**Amend the rule** to prohibit members from bringing any placards into the House as well as other objects, except with the prior permission of the Speaker. This could include a prohibition on any *“articles”* or, alternatively, only “*dangerous or threatening articles,”* as per the existing provision.

*Option 2*

**Adopt a guideline** in support of the application of National Assembly Rule 64:

1. Members may not bring weapons nor placards of any kind into the Chamber; and
2. Members should seek the prior approval of the Speaker before bringing any articles or objects into the Chamber, whereon the Speaker must rule whether any such object or article is dangerous or threatening; or could be considered as a cultural object or article, or relevant to the proceedings of the House.

**B. Guidelines for Members’ Backgrounds on the Virtual Platform**

*Introduction*

With regard to members’ backgrounds on the virtual platform, the Subcommittee resolved that members must use the current parliamentary background, or a blank background, or a blurred background, or a static picture of a member without party symbols or statements.

It is necessary to note that the Subcommittee also resolved that, before finalizing the guidelines, the Executive be requested to provide inputs into the matter.

*Guidelines*

1. In terms of the rules for virtual sittings of the House, as adopted by the Assembly on 9 June 2020, the current rules on order in public meetings and order in debate are applicable in a virtual or hybrid meeting;
2. Members on the virtual platform are therefore required to conduct themselves as if they were physically present in the House; and
3. Members must use the current parliamentary background, or a blank background, or a blurred background, or a static picture of a member without party symbols or statements.

**C. Interpellations and Opportunities for Ministers to Reply**

*Interpellations*

1. This summary provided below is to assist in giving context on the development of practices on questions.
2. During the period of 1994 up until 5 April 2000, the National Assembly Rules provided for the practice of Interpellations. Provision was also made for interpellations in the Senate. This practice was, however, discontinued with the advent of the National Council of Provinces.
3. An interpellation was a 15-minute “mini-debate”.
4. During the interpellation debate the time was distributed as follows:
5. 3 Minutes – Minister reply to the interpellation
6. 3 Minutes – Interpellant respond to the Minister’s reply in a speech
7. 2 Minutes – Minister speaks (usually in response to the interpellant
8. 2 Minutes – Other member speaks
9. 2 Minutes – Minister speaks
10. 2 Minutes – Other member speaks
11. 1 Minute – Minister replies to the debate.
12. In a memorandum, submitted to the Chief Whips’ Forum on 26 January 2000, the following reasons were cited as to why the interpellations should be discontinued:
    1. It was not seen as an effective form of interaction between members and the Ministers; and
    2. It left insufficient time to deal with the ordinary oral questions on the Question Paper.
13. Following deliberations in the Forum, the Assembly passed a resolution on 16 March, suspending interpellations with effect from 5 April until 23 June 2000.
14. Following several extensions of the suspension of the interpellations and the old rules, the Assembly adopted the new rules for questions on 26 June 2002, effectively ending the use of the interpellation.

*Opportunities for Ministers to reply*

*Introduction*

1. In terms of National Rule 138(1) an attempt was made to obtain a fair spread of questions among Ministers by introducing a clustered system of government portfolios. At first, there were three clusters of portfolios introduced in March 2000. Later it was expanded to four and, in 2019 the Rules Committee once again confirmed and decided on a previous determination of five clusters.
2. In so doing, the Rules Committee intended for a fair spread of questions on a question day. However, political parties make a determination of their priority questions.

*Option*

A consideration may be to reduce the number of questions in terms of the current quota of 10 per minister on a question day (Rule 138(7) (Ninth Edition of the Rules, 2016)) to four per Minister on a question day (as per Rule 114(4) of the 1999 Edition of the Rules) to achieve the desired effect of spreading questions among the Ministers.

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