

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF SEYCHELLES



**THE FINANCE & PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
COMMITTEE**

**PUBLIC HEARING GUIDANCE
FOR OFFICIALS & WITNESSES**

1ST EDITION

This guidance is a methodical and reference-based approach to the procedures and functions of the Public Hearings of the Finance & Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly. To forthwith not only describe the niche functions and proceedings of the Committee but treat in practice the methods required to be serviced by Parliamentary Officials of the National Assembly Service and for witnesses appearing and providing oral evidence under oath.

THE FINANCE & PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE is empowered to consider the accounts referred to in article 158(3) of the Constitution; report to the Assembly on any excess of authorised expenditure; propose any measure necessary to ensure that the funds of the Government are properly and economically spent; and examine the financial statements of any public or statutory body.

The Committee is a Standing Sessional Committee under Article 104 of the Constitution, the powers of which are also set out in the National Assembly Standing Orders, 2020, principally, SO 88-92 and Part III of the National Assembly (Privileges, Powers & Immunities) Act, 2011.

The below guidance is aimed at assisting officials appearing before the Committee for a Public Hearing and detail the necessary procedures that will be undertaken.

The below sections are covered in this document:

1. Procedures Before a Public Hearing (pg.3)
2. How FPAC Staff can Assist Officials (pg.3)
3. The Setting of the Public Hearing Room (pg.3)
4. Procedures on the Day of the Public Hearing (pg.3-4)
5. Procedures During the Public Hearing (pg.4-5)
6. The Behaviour Code (pg.5)
7. Procedures After the Public Hearing (pg. 5-6)
8. What happens to Oral Evidence (pg.6)

1. PROCEDURES BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEARING

The Committee will have sent you a summoning letter requesting for a Confirmation of Attendance to give evidence and List of officials. It is important to ensure that the necessary information is sent swiftly, within a notice of seven (7) days and that the full names of officials, their designation and post titles are submitted. For Example – *Dr. John Doe, Chief Executive Officer, the Agency*

It is also imperative to attend a Hearing after being summoned.

The Committee will normally make an announcement on the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation and Telesesel of its Hearings. The committee will also publish the details of the Public Hearings to the Media and may do so on the parliamentary website and social media platforms. It will include the date and time of the hearing and the names of the witnesses/officials.

2. HOW FPAC STAFF CAN ASSIST YOU

The Secretary to the Committee will be the main point of contact and will send you an e-mail with the electronic copy of the summoning letter to invite you and your delegation to give oral evidence. The FPAC staff (Committee Secretary and Assistant Secretary) can provide further information about the public hearing and answer any questions you may have on the procedures and technicalities. If you attend in person, a Committee staff will provide you with this guidance document, the dress code and any other relevant information including ensuring security clearance for when you enter Parliament on the day of the Hearing. Committee staff will offer you a full briefing by telephone a few days before the session, to give you time to prepare if need be or requested by you.

3. THE SETTING OF THE PUBLIC HEARING ROOM

Public Hearings are usually held in Committee Room 3 of the National Assembly which is located in the West Wing of the Building on the 1st Floor. There are cameras set up in the room for the live filming of the Hearing which is independently handled by the Media Operations Unit of the National Assembly. If you have any questions regarding the filming of the Hearing seek the guidance from the FPAC Staff.

The layout of the Committee Room is a U-Shape with the witnesses/Officials at the head of the table facing the Committee. FPAC Staff will guide you.

4. PROCEDURES ON THE DAY OF THE PUBLIC HEARING

Usually, Oral evidence sessions during a Public Hearing usually last for up to 45 mins to two hours, but at times it may take longer.

Please be aware that the Hearing will be broadcast live on the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation, Telesesel and the National Assembly's Youtube Channel, and archived online.

Arrival at the Precinct

Upon your arrival, Protocol Officers of the National Assembly will guide you in the waiting area and may assist with any queries. You should aim to arrive at the Parliamentary Precinct, at least 15 minutes before you are due to appear before the Committee for the Hearing. You will need to pass through a specific security checkpoint to enter the parliamentary precinct. We request that the directives of the security officers are always respected and adhered to.

Please let the Committee staff know in advance if you would like to discuss access arrangements for the Hearings.

Water will be provided during the Hearing, but food and other drinks are not permitted unless there is a break. If you need to have food or drinks other than water as a reasonable adjustment, please discuss with the Committee staff.

5. PROCEDURES DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING

Oath Taking:

A Committee Staff assigned by the Chairperson of the Committee will administer the taking of the Oaths before you and the accompanying officials can provide Oral Evidence. You will be asked to stand and raise your right hand to take the Oath.

The Oaths are as below:

Swear

I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help me god.

Affirmation (non- religious)

I affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth.

The Public Hearing Session

The Chairperson of the Committee will lead and facilitate the Public Hearing. The Chair will introduce the session and Committee Members followed by inviting the Accounting Officer/Head of the Delegation to introduce themselves and their delegation. Then the Members of the Committee will put questions to the witnesses/delegation.

Questioning Witnesses/Officials

Some questions may be directed at individuals, for example about their written evidence or specific audit findings in the reports being scrutinised. Others may be directed at the whole panel. If you do not have anything to add to what the other witnesses have said, you are encouraged to say this so that the Committee can move on to other topics. **It is important to ensure answers to the Committee are directed through the Chairperson.** The focus of the evidence session is on the Committee asking witnesses questions. In some circumstances, the Chair may ask witnesses to make an opening statement before questioning starts. You should be

told in advance if this is the case. However, committees generally prefer to start asking questions immediately. For that reason, if there is information you would have liked to include in an opening statement, please consider whether you could instead provide it to the Committee in writing.

You may appeal to the Committee Chairperson if you consider that a particular question is unfair or that you are not the appropriate person to answer it. You can ask for time to consider an answer or to seek advice.

If you do not have the information to answer a question immediately to hand, you may offer to come back to the Committee in writing on a particular point. This request will be recorded by Committee Staff and will be followed up on.

Dishonest or Fraudulent Evidence

It is important for witnesses to be honest and open in the evidence provided to the Committee. To knowingly mislead a committee is an offence under **Sections 16, 17 and 18 of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act, 2011**.

6. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BEHAVIOUR CODE

Whether you are a Parliamentary Staff, an official or a visitor there are clear guidelines in place on how you should be treated, and how you should treat others on our precinct.

- *Respect and Value Everyone - bullying, incivility, harassment and sexual misconduct are not tolerated*
- *Reflect and think about how your behaviour can impact others*
- *Act Professionally and respectfully towards others*
- *Ensure the Assembly meets its high ethical standards of integrity, professionalism, accountability and mutual respect*
- *Report any unacceptable behaviour you see using the proper channels*

You can expect all parliamentary staff and Members of the Committee to treat you with respect, courtesy, and professionalism. If for any reason you feel your treatment falls short of the standards of the Behaviour Code, please contact Committee staff for further guidance.

7. PROCEDURES AFTER THE PUBLIC HEARING

The Committee would be grateful if you could send any further information which you agreed to provide as soon as practicable. This information is ordinarily treated as written evidence.

Verbatim of the Hearing

A verbatim of what was said in oral evidence is produced by the Hansard of the National Assembly two weeks after the Hearing and may be published on the parliamentary website. You may also be sent the verbatim by the Committee staff upon request and ask to identify any additional information asked for by members of the Committee.

8. WHAT HAPPENS TO ORAL EVIDENCE

The evidence you give in a Public Hearing is carefully considered by the Committee and is used to help inform the conclusions and recommendations of its inquiry which is reported back to the House. If your evidence is referred to or quoted in the Committee's report, the verbatim will be cited in a footnote. The evidence is archived and preserved as per the internal policies and procedures of the Parliament.

If you gave oral evidence to the Committee during a Public Hearing you may receive a copy of the report. The Committee may occasionally hold press conferences to coincide with report publication.

We appreciate it can be very time-consuming to give oral evidence to a Committee during a Public Hearing. Hearing your evidence is a core and crucial part of Committee's scrutiny of the expenditure of public funds and the public financial management processes of Government.