**BILL WATCH 57/2021**

[6th August 2021]

**Update on Parliamentary Business from 27th to 29th July**

As promised in Bill Watch 54/2021 of 3rd August which gave the agenda for the National Assembly this week *[*[*link*](http://www.veritaszim.net/node/5186)*]*,this bulletin contains an update on business in both Houses of Parliament from Tuesday 27th to Thursday 29th July.

**In the Senate 27th to 29th July**

**Bills**

Cyber and Data Protection Bill  Although This Bill went smoothly through all its stages on 27th and 28th July, and was passed by the Senate without further amendment.  On 29th July, however, it was announced the Bill had been recommitted.  The reason for this recommittal and what the recommittal means for the Bill was explained in Bill Watch 53/2021 of 2nd August *[link]*.

The other two Bills on the Order Paper were not brought up. They were the Forest Amendment Bill, recently sent up from the National Assembly, and theMarriages Bill, still apparently stalled following disagreements between the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and Senator Chiefs.

**Petition received on Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

On 29th July the Deputy President of the Senate announced that a petition had been received from the Hope Alliance for Life Trust requesting Parliament to facilitate (1) the urgent submission of Zimbabwe's initial report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and (2) the recognition of the rights of disabled persons as provided for in the Constitution.  The Thematic Committee on Human Rights will consider the petition and report back to the Senate.

**Motions**

In honour of the statue of Mbuya Nehanda in the City of Harare  Senator Kambizi moved this motion which applauds the Government for having erected this statute in recognition of the iconic leader's contribution to the history of Zimbabwe.

Approval of a new Standard Scale of Fines [and its gazetting as law]

On 28th July the Senate approved a draft of a new statutory instrument for the Standard Scale of Fines proposed by the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs.  The Minister's motion was presented and approved entirely without discussion, presumably an indication that Senators were happy with the increases in the fines.

Two days later, in the Government Gazette of 30th July, having secured the prior approval of both Houses of Parliament [the National Assembly had already approved it on 22nd July], the Minister published the statutory instrument as the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) (Standard Scale of Fines) Notice, 2021, SI 209 of 2021 *[*[*link*](http://www.veritaszim.net/node/5180)*]*.  The SI was identical to the draft approved by both Houses of Parliament.  This SI 209 repeals the contested SI 25 of 2021.

**Question Time**Thursday's Question Time was waived to allow Senators to follow virtual proceedings in the National Assembly, where the Minister of Finance and Economic Development was delivering the Mid-Term Fiscal Policy Review Statement *[see below].*

**In the National Assembly 27th to 29th July**

**Presentation of 2021 Mid-Term Budget and Economic Review Statement by Minister of Finance and Economic Development**

On Thursday 29th July Hon Mthuli Ncube tabled this statement in the National Assembly and moved his motion with for the House to take note of the statement.  The Minister's opening speech, the ensuing debate and the Minister's response to MPs' questions and comments took 3 hours 8 minutes.  The proceedings ended with the Speaker congratulating MPs for their attentiveness, as demonstrated by their incisive questions put to the Minister, and the Minister for his comprehensive response to all questions.  The motion was then adopted and the House adjourned for the weekend.

The Minister's statement is available on the Veritas website *[*[*link*](http://www.veritaszim.net/node/5183)*]*.  Also available is the 2022 Budget Strategy Paper *[*[*link*](http://www.veritaszim.net/node/5182)*]* which the Minister had tabled at the beginning of the sitting.

The two Bills on the Order Paper – the Pension and Provident Funds Bill and the Zimbabwe Independent Complaints Commission Bill – were not considered.

The Parliamentary Legal Committee [PLC] did not report on the four Bills under consideration following their First Readings on 21st July – the Copper Control Amendment Bill, the Police Amendment Bill*,* the Public Finance Management Amendment Billand the Guardianship of Minors Amendment Bill.

**Reports and other documents tabled by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development** [*all tabled on 27th July*]

* Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency [ZIDA] – Annual Report for 2020
* Zimbabwe Revenue Authority [ZIMRA] IT Forensic Audit Report of November 2016
* ZIMRA Forensic Audit Report of September 2016
* Auditor-General's Report of 2017 on the agency relationship between People's Own Savings Bank [POSB] and Zimbabwe Posts (Pvt) Ltd [ZIMPOST]
* Constitution of Presidential and National Scholarships Fund in terms of the Public Finance Management Act.
* Ministry's Response to the Portfolio Committee Report on 2019 Familiarisation Tour of Border Posts.

**New time limit on MPs' contributions to debates**

On 28th July the Speaker informed the House of the reduction to ten minutes of the time that an MP can contribute to debate on a motion.  The reason he gave was the need for MPs to adhere to curfew regulations necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Six New Petitions received**

On 28th July the Speaker announced that six admissible petitions had been received and referred to appropriate Portfolio Committees.  The petitions requested Parliament to:

1. Implement the recommendations of the Smith Commission for compensation of affected pensioners as a matter of urgency to avert any further prejudice to them [from Calisto Kereke and others].
2. Oversee the disbursement of social protection and social safety nets during the COVID-19 pandemic [from the Women's Coalition].
3. Exercise its oversight function to protect the rights of pupils with disability [from Deaf Zimbabwe Trust].
4. Amend the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act to provide a mandatory sentence for rape [from Musasa Project].
5. Amend section 31 of the Mines and Minerals Act on pegging of mining claims on agricultural land allocated to communities [from Mlimisi Sibanda].
6. Enact a policy guiding the National Youth Service before the policy’s implementation [from the National Association of Youth Organisations].

**Motion adopted**

Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day

The Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Hon Monica Mutsvangwa, delivered a lengthy response to the motion, which can be summed up in her own words: *“The hallmark of the current media reforms that we are implementing as Government is the creation of an ecosystem that enables journalists and all other media practitioners to fully realise their constitutionally guaranteed rights.”*  Hon Mokone, the mover of the motion, than wound up the debate and the House approved the motion, which calls on it to acknowledge World Press Freedom Day by enacting legislation enhancing press freedom and encourage the media fraternity to conduct their activities diligently and without fear or favour, while at the same time using their freedom *"to report objectively and to foster a culture of unity and harmony among our citizens so that everlasting peace can always prevail".*

**Constituency Information Centres**

The lack of progress in building Constituency Information Centres was among the housekeeping topics mentioned by the Speaker on 28th July before Question Time began.  The Speaker explained that, as the amount allocated for this purpose in this year’s Budget, was sufficient for the construction of only 11 such centres, the task would have to be tackled in phases to be decided on by the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders in due course.  MPs were urged to be patient and meanwhile to consider finding out whether private sector companies had spare buildings that could be made available for use by MPs as information centres.

**Question Time**

When announcing the list of Ministers who had presented apologies for their non-attendance, the Speaker said the list include some Ministers who were self-quarantining after coming into contact with persons who had tested positive for COVID-19.  Hon Gonese suggested that such Ministers, if fit enough, could surely participate in Question Time virtually instead of being physically present in the House; most MPs, he pointed out, were virtually present.

The Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development [on behalf of the absent Vice-President Chiwenga] answered many questions about measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, including how many vaccine doses had been acquired.  He assured MPs that 12 million doses had already been paid for and would arrive in stages.

The Deputy Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Fisheries and Rural Resettlement, Hon Karoro, in answer to a question about silted dams and a particular dam that had gone 27 years without being scooped out, assured MPs that the Ministry had an open door policy for complaints and asked MPs to please inform the Ministry of such cases coming to their attention; he said that the Ministry had received many letters of appreciation for its assistance in clearing dams where siltation was a problem.

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