

• **Petition to Parliament**

A petition is a written application or request from a group or persons to a body or an authority to redress a particular situation or to ask a favour or a privilege.

A petition can make a request for Parliament to take a view on a matter of public interest or concern; amend existing legislation; or introduce new legislation. It allows individuals, community groups and organisations to participate in the democratic process. It raises issues of public concern with the Parliament and influence decision makers to consider the issues raised.

• **What is the procedure for petitioning?**

- Any person or group can petition the Parliament.
- A Petition can be written in any language: provision is made for translation.
- A petition must be delivered or deposited with the Secretary of the National Assembly/Council.
- If the Petition complies with all the requirements, the Secretary shall submit it to the Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs for consideration.

• **What should be included in a Petition?**

- The names of the Petitioners or their description.
- The issues the Petitioners wish to raise with Parliament.
- That the Petitioners have already requested the relevant Ministries or Agencies to look into the matter.
- That the issues raised have not previously been brought before Parliament.
- That the Petition is not dealing with a matter that falls in the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.
- A Petition should include a Prayer. A prayer is a clear and concise request setting out exactly what the Petitioners wish the Parliament to address.
- The signature and addresses of all the Petitioners.

• **Become involved in a pressure group**

Pressure groups focus on a particular area or areas of concern and seek to influence decision makers. People join pressure

groups to show their support for or opposition to a particular issue and to join other like-minded people in trying to influence politicians. Some people feel that working in a group like this gives them a louder voice in getting their message across.

• **Keep yourself informed**

In order to be able to influence decisions taken in Parliament you must be aware of what is going on in Parliament and in the broader society. Keep in touch by talking to people, reading newspapers, listening to news broadcasts on radio and television. The legislative process is structured to achieve well thought-out solutions to complex problems.

Contact Numbers for Political Parties at Parliament

COD	(061) 288 2525
DTA	(061) 288 2543 / 202 8555
NUDO	(061) 288 2646
MAG	(061) 288 2581
RP	(061) 288 2624
SWAPO Party	(061) 288 2578 / 202 8666
UDF	(061) 288 2602 / 202 8777

Published by: Parliament of Namibia
Divisions: Research and Information Services
1st Edition: August 2005
Private Bag 13323/13371, Windhoek, Namibia
Tel. +264-61-202 8000 / 288 9111
Fax: +264-61-226 121 / 231 687
Physical Address: Parliament Building
Love Street, Windhoek



A GUIDE TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE LAWMAKING PROCESS

Why should I participate?

It is important for you to understand and take part in decision-making and nation-building. Since 1990, it has become possible for all citizens to participate in governing the country. It is up to one of us to make use of all the opportunities we have to try to influence the decisions that our political representatives make at national, regional and local levels. Public participation gives people power to influence or understand the decisions which affect their lives.

Many people may not know how to participate. Some may say that they do not wish to participate and that the politicians must get on with the job of running the country. One of the things we all need to know is that we have a stake in how our country is run. The underlying principle of democracy is that the people should have a say in what happens and what is decided. It is by participating in our democracy that we play our role as citizens of this country.

How can I participate?

• Vote

One of the most important ways in which people can participate is by voting. They do this usually at election time when the electorate is given the opportunity to choose who they want to represent them in Parliament. Elections to the National Assembly take place every five years and those to the Regional Council's every six years.



• Attend Parliamentary Sessions and Committee meetings

Members of the public can attend Sessions of the National Assembly and National Council Chambers or Committee meetings, except when a motion to exclude the public has been adopted and supported by a two-thirds majority of Members of the House.

You are encouraged to participate by communicating with Members of parliamentary committees whose functions cover your area of interest. You can attend any committee meeting or hearing in Parliament as an observer or witness. If you wish to make a submission or presentation, phone or write to the Committee Clerk to make an arrangement. The calendar for Committee meetings can be obtained from the Committee Services at Parliament.

• Lobby the Members of Parliament

Lobbying means trying to influence decision making on, for example, a Bill or any matter of public interest or concern.

• How can I lobby?

- Write to a Member of Parliament in your constituency.
- Make information available to a parliamentary committee discussing a particular issue.
- Actively present your viewpoints through associations or national bodies.
- Write to the local or national newspapers.
- Make your views heard through the electronic media.

There is a designated lobbying area in both Chambers of Parliament called the "Lobby Room". Alternatively you can make an appointment to visit the office of a Member of Parliament at the Parliament Building.

While you may not get an immediate commitment from a Parliamentarian at your lobbying encounter, you are encouraged to follow up on your meeting with additional correspondence, facts or figures. This may influence the final position of the Parliamentarian.



• Participate in Public hearings

Public hearings are meetings conducted by parliamentary committees to provide the public with an opportunity to convey its views on draft legislation (bills) and issues of interest. These hearings or meetings are "public." They are open to the public i.e. citizens, community groups, interest groups, NGOs, government ministries, media, specialists/experts and other stakeholders.

Hearings are important methods of gathering information about bills or controversial policy issues. They can also be used to help conduct oversight of government's activities within a committee's portfolio. Hearings often assist the committee in gathering information about problems and possible solutions. A Committee will often ask for informed opinions (from academics, professionals, members of civil society) before deciding on an issue. Hearings also enable the committee to assess the strength of support for or opposition to a Bill.