

PARLIAMENTARY TERMINOLOGY

PARLIAMENT

A Parliament is a period of time during which the institution of Parliament (comprising the Sovereign, the Senate and the House of Assembly) exercises its powers. The process of starting a Parliament begins with the proclamation of the Governor General calling on the formation of a new Parliament and setting the date for a general election. A Parliament ends with its dissolution. A House of assembly has a constitutionally-determined maximum lifespan of five years.

SESSION

A session is one of the fundamental time periods into which a Parliament is divided, and usually consists of a number of separate sittings. A session begins with a Speech from the Throne when Parliament is summoned by proclamation of the Governor General; it ends with a prorogation or dissolution of Parliament.

SITTING

A sitting is a meeting of the House of Assembly of the Senate within a session. The Standing Orders provide times and days for the sittings of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

An adjournment is the termination of a sitting (pursuant to Standing Order or by motion.) An adjournment covers the period between the end of one sitting and the beginning of the next.

PROROGATION

Prorogation is the formal ending of a session of Parliament by the Governor General's proclamation to that effect. Prorogation also refers to the period of time a Parliament stands prorogued. Both the House of Assembly and Senate than stand prorogued until the opening of the next session.

EFFECTS OF PROROGATION

Prorogation of a session brings to an end all proceedings before Parliament. With certain exceptions, unfinished business “dies” on the Order Paper and must be started anew in a subsequent session.

DISSOLUTION

Dissolution is the formal ending of a Parliament by proclamation of the Governor General. A general election follows dissolution.

Opening of a Parliament and a Session

SUMMONING PARLIAMENT

Section 54 of the Saint Lucia Constitution Order 1978 provides for the summoning of Parliament: “Each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Saint Lucia and shall begin at such time, not being later than twelve months from the end of the preceding session if Parliament has been prorogued or one month from the holding of a general election of members of the House if Parliament has been dissolved, as the Governor-General shall appoint by Proclamation.”

The “Instrument” of proclamation is issued by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister and published in the Saint Lucia Gazette. On the day that Parliament is dissolved or prorogued, a proclamation is issued summoning Parliament to meet on a given day.

PROCEEDINGS ON OPENING DAY OF A PARLIAMENT

The opening of a Parliament is also the opening of the first session of that Parliament. Two procedures distinguish it from the opening of subsequent sessions. These are the taking and subscribing of the oath of allegiance by Members and the election of a Speaker.

MEMBERS SWORN IN

Following a general election in order for the elected Members to take their seats in the House, it is required by the Constitution of Saint Lucia that they first subscribe to an oath of allegiance. As an alternative to swearing the oath, the Members may make a solemn affirmation.

ELECTION OF THE SPEAKER

Section 35 of the Constitution of Saint Lucia provides for the election of a Speaker as the first item of business when Members assemble following a general election. The Standing Orders provide for the manner in which the Speaker is elected.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Speech from the Throne imparts the causes of summoning Parliament, prior to which neither House can embark on any public business. It marks the first occasion, after a general election, or a prorogation, that Parliament meets in an assembly of its three constituent parts: the House of Assembly, the Senate and the Sovereign, or Sovereign's representative.

The Speech from the Throne usually sets forth in some detail the government's view of the condition of the country and provides an indication of what legislation it intends to bring forward.