

## Discussion and activities

### 1. Questions for Answers

In pairs, create the question for each of the 10 answers below. For example, for number 1, the question is: Who is the head of state in Fiji?

Answers:

- |                       |                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. The President      | 6. The Serjeant-at-Arms         |
| 2. Standing Orders    | 7. Portfolios                   |
| 3. A majority         | 8. The Leader of the Opposition |
| 4. The Mace           | 9. The Speaker                  |
| 5. The Prime Minister | 10. The Secretary-General       |

### 2. Match the Word Meanings

Copy the words in the left-hand column. Match each word with a statement from the right-hand column.

Column 1	Column 2
Election	When a party has more than half the seats.
Confidence	Not taking sides during a debate.
Majority	The person responsible for keeping order.
Sitting Day	The Prime Minister and Ministers.
Impartial	Approval of the President.
Oath of Allegiance	When people get to choose their representatives.
Executive	A person whose job is to manage members in his party.
Serjeant-at-arms	When members swear their loyalty to the Constitution.
Assent	When a party has support of the House to form a Government.
Whip	A day when Parliament meets to debate.

### 3. Try This

Plan several key points for a Speech from the President to open Parliament that says what the Government plans to do for young people (especially young people around your own age).

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# DISCOVER Parliament

## How Does Parliament Work?

To make sure that our country is governed fairly and well, Parliament has many rules and procedures for how its work is done. There are clear roles, responsibilities, and traditions that go back to when Parliament first started. The rules of Parliament (known as the Standing Orders) are reviewed regularly and changes are made when needed.

## Forming a New Government

After each general election in Fiji, there is a new Parliament and a new Government. The number of Members of Parliament is determined by the Electoral Commission before each general election. Each MP takes a "seat" in the House. In most cases, the party that wins the most seats begins the process of forming the Government. If that party has not won more than half the seats (a majority) in Parliament, it will invite other parties to join it. Those parties will make agreements to make sure that the Government has enough support to govern with "the confidence of the Parliament". A Government made up of more than one party is called a coalition government.

Once the final election results have been announced, Parliament must meet within 7 days. But first, a special ceremony takes place to "open" Parliament's new session. This ceremony is called the *State Opening of Parliament*.



The State Opening of Parliament in 2016





# The State Opening of Parliament

On the opening day after an election the members of Parliament are "sworn in". This means they swear to uphold the Constitution. This process is called "taking the oath". Once all members have been sworn in, they elect a Speaker of the House and a Deputy Speaker.

Then the formal ceremony to open Parliament takes place. The President gives a speech outlining the Government's plans and policies for the next four years.

## THAT'S INTERESTING

*Cabinet is the group of Ministers chosen by the Prime*

*Minister to make the main decisions for the Government.*

*Cabinet discusses and decides many things including*

*Government finances, proposals for laws, and policies*

*[plans the Government wants to carry out]. Meetings are*

*chaired by the Prime Minister and are confidential.*

## DID YOU KNOW ?

*In medieval England, the Serjeant-at-Arms was a royal bodyguard armed with a mace (a lethal club) who could arrest people. In the 1400s, a serjeant was appointed by the King to attend the House of Commons (the British Parliament) with the power to arrest people who misbehaved in the House. The serjeant's mace became a symbol of the authority of the Parliament. In Fiji, the Serjeant-at-Arms is responsible for making sure that the rules for behaviour in the House are followed. The Mace bearer carries the Mace and also assists the Serjeant-at-Arms.*

## What Rules Does Parliament Follow?

Parliament has its own set of rules, known as Standing Orders. These rules make sure that all aspects of parliamentary business happen in a fair and approved way. Standing Orders cover things like:

- The election of the Speaker;
- The sessions, sitting periods (sitting days) of Parliament;
- The times when Parliament is in session;
- How many people can speak in a debate and how long debates can be; and
- How questions can be put to Ministers and other members.

Standing Orders are made up of numbered rules, and it is the Speaker's responsibility to enforce them all!

## Who's who in Parliament?

Many of the people in Parliament have special roles. Some of these roles date back hundreds of years.

### PRESIDENT

The President is the head of state. The President's duties include giving the assent (approval) to new laws, officially opening a new Parliament after an election, formally closing a Parliament at the end of a Parliament's term (dissolution), and giving instructions for a general election to be held.

### SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker chairs the meetings of Parliament, keeping order and making sure that the rules of Parliament are followed, but does not take sides in debates and must be impartial. Outside the House, the Speaker is responsible for the management of Parliament Buildings and services provided to members of Parliament (MPs) to help them carry out their jobs. The Speaker is elected by the MPs when the House first meets after a general election.

### PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister is head of the Government. He or she is the leader of the party that wins the most seats in Parliament. The Prime Minister is also the leader of Cabinet. The Prime Minister can call an election by advising the President to dissolve Parliament.

### LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

The Leader of the Opposition is the leader of the largest party in Parliament that is not in the Government. The Leader of the Opposition can lead opposition responses in major debates.

### MINISTERS

Ministers have responsibility for specific areas such as education, health, police, and social welfare. These areas of responsibility are called "portfolios". Ministers are selected by the Prime Minister from the members of Parliament who are in the Government. Ministers can have more than one portfolio.

### EXECUTIVE

The Prime Minister and Ministers are called the Executive. The Ministers are responsible for making day-to-day decisions in the areas of government they are responsible for. Ministers are also part of a small group called the Cabinet. Together, the Prime Minister and Cabinet make the Government's most important decisions.



*The Mace of Parliament*

### WHIPS

Each political party represented in Parliament has a whip. The whip organises the MPs in their party to work as a team. For example, he or she prepares lists of who will speak in a debate, they make sure that members are in the Parliament Chamber when needed, and they organise votes for their parties during a party vote.

### SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Secretary-General is the officer of the House who advises the Speaker and MPs about the rules (Standing Orders) and practices of Parliament. The Secretary-General supports the work of the House and select committees and records their decisions. In the Chamber, the Secretary-General sits at the Table, directly in front of the Speaker.

### SERJEANT-AT-ARMS

Serjeant-at-Arms is an official of the House responsible makes sure that the rules for behaviour in the Chamber are followed and he is assisted by Mace bearer who carries the Mace and leads the Speaker into the debating Chamber at the beginning of a House sitting. A number of chamber and gallery staff helps the Serjeant-at-arms, including staff sitting in the public galleries and around the debating chamber. Also looks after security administration when Parliament is not sitting.



*H.E. the President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau delivering the President's Speech from the Speaker's Chair during the opening of the new parliament session on Tuesday 7th October, 2014.*



*Dragging of the Speaker, Hon. Dr Jiko Luveni, 2014*