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This Infosheet is the eleventh in a series produced by the OCLA to explain the work of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa

Infosheets in the 2014 series include

6. Parliamentary Services
7. Parliamentary Documents
8. System of Government
9. Opening of a New Parliament
10. Parliamentary Publications
12. Privilege

Infosheets on a range of topics will be added to this series in the future

Available online at www.parliament.gov.ws



11. THE CHAMBER

WHAT IS THE CHAMBER?

The word 'chamber' refers to an enclosed room or space and in a parliamentary context it usually refers to the Assembly's meeting space. Samoa's Parliament House is referred to as the 'Maota Fono'; a large circular building modelled on a traditional Samoan fale. This Infosheet describes the set up of the Chamber as well as other distinctive features such as the Mace, 'Table' and the Speaker's hour glass.

THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR

The Speaker's chair is located at the front of the Chamber, circled by member seats and two galleries for officials, media and the public. The raised position of the Chair signifies the presiding role of the Speaker over parliamentary sittings.

The chair was a gift from the Kingdom of Tonga in honour of Samoa's independence in 1962 and is appropriately engraved with Samoa's coat of arms. Three chairs were made for the Speaker; one is used in the Chamber, the other is in the Speaker's office and the third is at the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.



The Speaker's Chair inside the Chamber

ALLOCATION OF SEATS

The seats that are located directly in front of the Speaker are reserved for the Clerk and Deputy Clerk who preside alongside the Speaker over parliamentary sittings. Their role is to provide procedural advice to the Speaker and to keep accurate records of proceedings.

The curved seats on the right of the Speaker are occupied by the Government with the front seat closest to the Speaker's right reserved for the Prime Minister. Currently, HRPP occupy a total of 36 seats in the House, with the front row being

allocated for Ministers. The left side of the chamber is primarily occupied by the Opposition, *the Tautua Party*, with their leader sitting directly to the Speaker's left. The front of the House where the Speaker and permanent officers sit, as well as the two rows allocated for members are not accessible by anyone other than members and parliamentary officials. Also seated in the gallery areas are the Sergeant at Arms and the *Salelesi* (cultural messenger).



Inside the Chamber looking towards the Speaker's chair. The two chairs in the forefront of this picture are for the Sergeant at Arms (left) and the Salelesi (right).

THE MACE

The Mace is a symbol of the Assembly's authority and is carried in by the Sergeant at Arms during the Speaker's procession before the commencement of each Parliament sitting and placed on the table. The Samoan Parliament has two Maces; the original Mace was gifted by the New Zealand House of Representatives in 1958. The current Mace was gifted from Great Britain in 1972 to commemorate the opening of the current Maota Fono. When the Mace is laid on top of the table (and not covered) it signifies that the Speaker is presiding in the House and that the Assembly may officially conduct its business.



The Original Mace which is currently housed in the Parliamentary Library

PARLIAMENTARY TABLE

The Parliamentary table is located directly in front of the Clerk and Deputy Clerk. It is where parliamentary documents are laid. This act is where the phrases 'tabled papers' and 'tabling' are derived from. This is also the table where all members present themselves to swear the Oath of Allegiance. Once papers have been tabled, they may be available for member viewing and review by the Assembly.



The 'Table' where parliamentary documents are laid

THE SPEAKER'S HOUR GLASS

The hour glass is used by the Speaker to monitor the last two minutes of member speeches. He will turn the hour glass when he announces that a member has two minutes remaining at the end of which the member must discontinue speaking. The hour glass was presented to the Assembly by the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia to mark Samoa's independence in 1962.



Hour Glass

MORE INFORMATION:

The Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa

B.L.Clare, *The Parliament of Western Samoa*, 1964

Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa, 2010

Parliamentary Practice and Procedure Manual, 2012, Legislative Assembly of Samoa

Legislative Assembly of Samoa: www.parliament.gov.ws