



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

State of the Nation Address



*"Celebrating the legacy of freedom through strengthening
the link between Parliament and the People"*

February is a momentous month for Parliament and all South Africans. It is a time for reflection, thinking ahead and prioritising the needs of our country. Each year in February the State of the Nation Address takes place, when the President addresses the nation as the head of state.

What is the State of the Nation Address?

The State of the Nation Address, at the annual opening of Parliament, is an address to the nation by the President of the Republic of South Africa. The address is delivered at a Joint Sitting of the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) of Parliament. It focuses on the current political and socio-economic state of the nation. The sitting is called by the President and is hosted by the Speaker of the NA and the Chairperson of the NCOP. It is one of the rare occasions where the three arms of state namely the Executive, represented by the President, Deputy President and Ministers; the Judiciary, represented by the country's Chief Justice and the Judge Presidents; and the Legislature, represented by the Presiding Offices and Members of Parliament (MPs) come together in one place.

Why is the State of The Nation Address important?

In the address, the President highlights the achievements and challenges experienced over the past year and maps the year ahead. The address covers political, economic and social matters and considers the general state of South Africa. It deliberates on South Africa's domestic affairs as well as its relations in Africa and abroad. The State of the Nation Address is an important means of accounting to Parliament and the South African public for what has happened over the past year and to involve the public in the political agenda of the coming year. The State of the Nation Address is also about a celebration of our nation and nation-building.

When does it take place?

The State of the Nation Address usually takes place in February. However, when there are general elections two addresses take place, one to mark the final session of the outgoing Parliament and the other after the elections, when the new President and Parliament are acknowledged. In a break from tradition in February 2010, the State of the Nation Address was presented in the evening for the first time, to give more South Africans the opportunity to witness the proceedings and to listen to the President's address. As a result of this change, television viewership shot up from about two million viewers to just short of four million viewers.

Public participation in the State of the Nation Address

Public participation is an integral part of the ceremony. Members of the public are invited to participate in the ceremony as invited guests of Parliament. South African citizens from across South Africa and from each province form part of the Junior and Civil Guards of Honour. The Civil Guard of Honour, who welcomes the President to Parliament, comprises ordinary South Africans. The Junior Guard of Honour is drawn from schools around the country and represents the youth, to whom South Africa entrusts the country's future. Eminent South Africans are usually invited to be part of the activities. They are drawn from the provinces and are individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the country.

The State of the Nation Address and the oversight function of Parliament

The State of the Nation Address forms an integral part of oversight and accountability. A true test of democracy is the extent to which Parliament can ensure that government remains answerable to the people. Oversight is a function granted by the Constitution to Parliament to

monitor and oversee the actions of government. Parliament is mandated to oversee all organs of State including those at provincial and local level in order to:

- ❖ Make government accountable to the people
- ❖ Make government operations more transparent and
- ❖ Increase public trust in government.

When performing oversight Parliament focuses on:

- ❖ How laws are implemented
- ❖ How budgets have been applied and
- ❖ Whether government departments are being effectively managed.

The oversight function entails the effective management of government departments in order to improve service delivery and to achieve a better quality of life for all citizens.

In the State of the Nation Address, the President takes the pulse of the nation and sets out policy objectives and deliverables for the year ahead. It is against these objectives and planned deliverables that the Minister of Finance introduces the Budget for the coming year, usually towards the end of February. The policy objectives and key deliverables form the basis of what government will have to do in the coming year. It is the benchmark by which Parliament holds government accountable to the people, for what it delivers on, and for how money allocated is spent.

What happens after the State of The Nation Address?

After the State of the Nation Address is delivered, it is debated by the two Houses of Parliament. Political parties have an opportunity to give their opinions and raise questions on matters addressed in the speech. Issues of concern are raised and areas of critical importance to the nation are highlighted. The public is invited to attend and observe this debate as is the case with all sessions of Parliament. In turn, the President responds to the points raised and questions arising from the debate.

What is Parliament's theme for this year?

Parliament's theme for 2011 is *"Celebrating the legacy of freedom through strengthening the link between Parliament and the People"*. Each year Parliament identifies a theme which is informed by Parliament's strategic focus. A truly democratic state seeks to derive its authority from the people, through regular elections and continued public participation in the processes of governance. The theme encourages the realization of a participatory, representative and constitutional democracy, where citizens are involved in matters of lawmaking and oversight. It reinforces Parliament's role, which is to represent the people and ensure government by the people under the Constitution. The work of Parliament and of its Members must focus on strengthening links between the people and their elected representatives. The success of Parliament depends on the active participation of all South African citizens to give direction to the work of their elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and to the institution.

How can the public participate in Parliament?

Involvement in the proceedings of the State of the Nation Address is one way in which the public can become involved in their Parliament. There are other ways of participating in Parliament and these include voting in elections, joining a political party, lobbying and joining a voluntary or non-governmental organisation, contacting MPs, making submissions or representations and sending petitions to Parliament.

Parliament is committed to making itself accessible to the South African public by creating opportunities for the meaningful involvement and participation of all: men and women, literate or not, working or unemployed, able-bodied or people with disabilities, the poor (especially the rural poor), and other target groups; to gather and express themselves on matters relating to their basic needs. Specific programmes such as the *People's Assembly*, *Taking Parliament to the People*, *Women's Parliament* and the *Youth Parliament* are all platforms aimed at engaging with the public to hear their views on what matters most to them. Parliament wants to broaden public involvement and participation in keeping with this year's theme "*Celebrating the legacy of freedom through strengthening the link between Parliament and the People*".

Would you like to visit Parliament?

The Public Education Office of Parliament offers free tours of Parliament and an opportunity for the public to observe debates. Arrangements can also be made for the public to meet with Members of Parliament and attend Public Hearings or Committee meetings. If you are unable to come to Parliament, you can visit our website www.parliament.gov.za and experience a virtual tour of our Parliament from any part of the world.

For more information on tours contact:

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FAST FACTS

- The State of the Nation Address (SONA) will again take place in the evening, on 10 February 2011.
- The SONA is broken down into three parts. The first is public participation when the Civil Guard of Honour welcomes the President and his guests as they walk along the red carpet. This is followed by a state ceremony which includes a 21-gun salute and Air Force flypast and finally the much-anticipated address by the President.
- Members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) line the route that the President takes to Parliament.
- The Military Guard of Honour also participates in the ceremony and the military band plays South Africa's national anthem.
- The 21-gun salute is fired in honour of the Head of State, the national flag, the Head of State of a foreign nation, a member of a reigning royal family and a former Head of State.

VISION

To build an effective people's Parliament that is responsive to the needs of the people and that is driven by the ideal of realising a better quality of life for all the people of South Africa.