



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

FACT SHEET **10** | HANSARD

Hansard is an official report of debates in Parliament. It is an edited verbatim report of parliamentary proceedings and/or speeches delivered by members during House sittings. Therefore, it provides an unbiased record of debates in Parliament.

Hansard is a legacy of the United Kingdom parliamentary system which was eventually adopted by many Commonwealth countries, including South Africa. It is named after Thomas Curson Hansard (1776 – 1833), a London printer and publisher, who was the first official printer to the Parliament at Westminster. As a record of debates, Hansard plays a significant role in preserving institutional memory as it provides a historical account of parliamentary proceedings. “Hansard is one of the few traditions of Parliament that has not only survived the test of time, from the formation of the Union in 1910 to the present, but grown and adapted from shorthand scribbling to digital formatting and an internet presence.”¹

Parliamentary proceedings and/or speeches are recorded, reported, checked, collated and published electronically as Unrevised and Revised Hansard and in hard copies. In the South African Parliament, proceedings and speeches by members are recorded by Hansard reporters who traditionally sit just above the Presiding Officer in the Assembly Chamber. Speeches are recorded electronically, and entries of speakers’ names and the time they start and end their speeches are captured. The entire recorded debate is broken down into manageable speeches called ‘takes’. These takes are allocated to reporters in the Reporting Unit for reporting and editing. The attentive reporting and editing

process entails the omission of repetitions and redundancies, as well as the correction of obvious mistakes.

Reported takes/speeches are loaded on uVimba in the publishing folder as Unrevised Hansard for members to check if their speeches have been captured accurately. However, members are not permitted to make alterations of substance to their speeches and neither may they add anything to their speeches. Speeches delivered in languages other than English are reported in the floor language. These speeches are later translated into English. Reported takes are checked to ensure accuracy, conformity with Hansard style and procedural correctness. These are then collated to reflect the parliamentary proceedings.

Hansard publications are a valuable resource and are made available electronically on the parliamentary website to be accessed by members, staff and the public. Hard copies are also available in selected libraries. These publications contain a wealth of information for ordinary citizens, academics, government institutions and non-governmental organisations. The publications contain the following: debates on Bills that ultimately become law; debates on issues of national importance; the State of the Nation Address; the Budget; Members’ Statements; and Questions to and replies by members of the Executive.

¹ In Session, Vol.10, Issue 9, October 2010, p 20, RSA Parliament.