

STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS
PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

2015



WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS?

- The State of the Nation Address is an address to the nation by the President of the Republic of South Africa as the Head of State. It is commonly referred to as the annual opening of Parliament.
- The President uses this occasion to set out the government's key policy objectives and deliverables for the year ahead in a wide-ranging address to Members of Parliament, which is the basis for executive action during that calendar year.
- Since 1994, the tone of the State of the Nation Address has been inclusive, joyful and informal. The Opening of Parliament became an opportunity to showcase the country's cultural diversity and a chance for ordinary citizens, especially children, to become part of this special day.
- It is one of the rare occasions where the three arms of State, the Executive (Government), the Legislature (Parliament) and the Judiciary (the Courts) gather in one place.
 - The Executive is represented by the President, Deputy President and Ministers
 - The other spheres of government are represented through the Premiers and representatives of local government.
 - The Judiciary is represented by the country's Chief Justice and the Judge Presidents; and
 - The Legislature is represented by the Presiding Officers and Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Members of the public also attend the State of the Nation Address and participate in the occasion in the form of the civilian guard. This is usually by invitation only.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMPORTANT RULES RELEVANT TO THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS?

- The State of the Nation Address is a special sitting of the two Houses of Parliament, referred to as a Joint Sitting, and called by the President as stipulated in (Section 42(5) of) the Constitution.
- (Additional notes: The address is delivered at a Joint Sitting of the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). A Joint Sitting is where the National Assembly (NA) and National Council Provinces (NCOP) sit together.)
- This particular sitting is regulated by the Joint Rules of Parliament.
- Assembly Rules 10 & 11 state that the Speaker of the National Assembly informs and reports to the Assembly the time at which the President will open Parliament.
- Assembly Rule 12 states that when the President has delivered his or her Opening Address, the Secretary to Parliament places it on the agenda of the National Assembly for discussion.
- Council Rule 83 (1) states that when the President has delivered the Opening Address, the Chief Whip of the National Council of Provinces may place it on the agenda of the Council for discussion.
- It is interesting to note that each sitting is regulated by its own rules. For example, in the NA sitting, NCOP sitting and Joint Sitting the respective House Rules and Joint Rules apply according to the sitting being held.

WHY IS THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS IMPORTANT?

As indicated earlier, this is the yearly occasion when the President sets out government's key policy objectives and deliverables for the year ahead. It lays the foundation for executive action during that calendar year.

- In the address, the President highlights the achievements and challenges experienced over the past year and maps the year ahead and beyond.
- The State of the Nation Address also focuses on the government's programme of action for the year and beyond.
- The address covers wide-ranging political, economic and social matters and considers the general state of South Africa.
- Further, it deliberates on South Africa's domestic affairs as well as its continental and international relations.

- The State of the Nation Address is an important means for the government to account to Parliament and the South African public for what has happened over the past year, and to inform as well as involve the public in the political agenda of the coming year.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING AND AFTER THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS?

- The President is afforded an opportunity to deliver his or her speech without any interruptions or questions. This is accepted practice amongst all political parties, as members will have an opportunity to engage with the President's speech during the debate. Also, no provision is made in the rules for debate or the asking of questions during this special joint sitting.
- Political parties have an opportunity to interrogate, comment and raise questions on matters addressed in the President's speech. Issues of concern are raised and areas of critical importance to the nation are highlighted. This, however, takes place at separate sittings after the address.
- Thereafter, the President will have an opportunity to respond to questions, issues or concerns raised by the Members.
- After the State of the Nation Address is delivered, the Presiding Officers, who include the Speaker of the NA, the Chairperson of the NCOP and their Deputies, initiate a debate in their respective Houses separately. However, at the beginning of the fifth Parliament last year, the State of the Nation Address was debated in a Joint Sitting of the two Houses.
- The rationale for the debate to take place in a Joint Sitting was based on the fact that the State of the Nation Address is delivered to a Joint Sitting of the two Houses and there was nothing in the parliamentary rules preventing the debate from taking place in a Joint Sitting.
- The debate on the State of the Nation Address is conducted over two days. The President replies to the debate on day three.
- The public is invited to attend and observe these debates as is the case with all plenary sessions of Parliament.
- The link between the State of the Nation Address and the oversight function of Parliament?
- Oversight is a function granted to Parliament in terms of the Constitution to monitor and oversee government actions at national, provincial and local levels. (Ch4, Sec 55 of the Constitution)
- The State of the Nation Address is one of the benchmarks against which Parliament holds government accountable to the people for what it delivers on and how the allocated budget is spent.
- Since the President sets out the government's programme of action for the coming year, the address provides Parliament with a yardstick against which to measure government's performance.
- When performing its oversight function, Parliament focuses on:
 - How laws are implemented;
 - How budgets have been applied;
 - Whether government departments are being effectively managed; and
 - Whether government has done what it said it would do.

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THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS AND BUDGET

- The State of the Nation Address precedes the Budget Speech of the Minister of Finance. The Budget therefore is in line with the priorities outlined in the President's Address.
- Towards the end of February, the Minister of Finance introduces the Budget for the coming year
- The departmental budgets are allocated based on the priorities agreed to for the year i.e. priorities outlined in the Address.
- The Budget is a significant tool of oversight i.e. government is held accountable for how public funds are spent.

WHEN DOES THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS TAKE PLACE AND WHAT IS THE THEME FOR THIS YEAR'S STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS?

- Parliament's theme for 2015 is "20 years of a democratic Parliament". The theme seeks to reflect on how far we have come since our first democratic Parliament in 1994 with its emphasis on promoting a participatory, representative and constitutional democracy.
- The State of the Nation Address will take place in the evening at 19:00, on 12 February 2015. The proceedings will be broadcast live from Parliament from 5pm onwards. The proceedings can also be viewed via video streaming on Parliament's website: www.parliament.gov.za.
- It will be broadcast live on several SABC radio stations as well as on SABC TV, DSTV channel 408, ENCA and ANN7.

HOW CAN YOU ACCESS MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS OR ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OUR PARLIAMENT?

- For further information please contact Parliament via telephone at
- 021 403 2911 or E-mail: info@parliament.gov.za
- You may also visit Parliament's website at www.parliament.gov.za or visit our mobile site on m.parliament.gov.za
- You can also follow us on twitter on [@ParliamentofRSA](https://twitter.com/ParliamentofRSA) and check our Facebook page for updates.
- You may also "Subscribe to Parliament's YouTube channel on youtube.com/ParliamentofRSA

FAST FACTS

- The State of the Nation Address (SONA) will again take place in the evening, on 12 February 2015.
- 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.