

# STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDING OFFICERS OF PARLIAMENT ON THE RESUMPTION OF THE BUSINESS OF PARLIAMENT THURSDAY, 16 APRIL 2020

BUSINESS OF PARLIAMENT » PRESS RELEASES

1. Last month Parliament took a decision to suspend the programme of its two Houses. This decision was taken a few days before the start of the constituency programme of Parliament. It was as a precautionary measure relating to COVID-19, to drastically limit numbers of people at the precincts in Cape Town and at the off-site parliamentary activities.
2. Parliament's Presiding Officers, Chief Whips and political party representatives agreed at the time that the remaining House sittings – on 18 and 19 March – would consider only time-bound matters.
3. Members of Parliament fall under the category of essential services in terms of South Africa's COVID-19 nationwide lockdown regulations. So, despite suspension of the programme until further notice, Members of Parliament continued to work in communities they represent from 23 March to 13 April.
4. The Presiding Officers used this time to assess how Parliament could best resume its business after the constituency period and to benchmark best practices by other legislatures around the world in the fight against COVID-19. Consequently, we have taken a decision that the business of Parliament must resume with immediate effect, following conclusion of the constituency programme on 13 April. The leave period for MPs, which was scheduled from 28 April to 4 May, has been cancelled.
6. The Constitution requires Parliament to scrutinise and oversee Executive action, to pass legislation, to provide a forum for public consideration of issues and to facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes. In this regard, it must be emphasised that the role of Parliament remains

indispensable, during this period of national lockdown and the extended period of social distancing, which is expected to continue for months.

7. The current period, in which all sections of society are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, calls for radical alteration and adjustment to the normal way of functioning. For Parliament, there has never been a more important time to work in an extraordinary manner and intensify our technological capabilities for our transition to an e-Parliament – as also directed by our new strategic plan – to ensure that the execution of our constitutional responsibilities continues uninterrupted.
8. Parliament has been putting in place the necessary information and communications technology infrastructure to ensure its readiness for virtual meetings.
9. In the past few days, a number of virtual meetings have taken place. These include meetings of the Presiding Officers; forums of party chief whips of the NA, the NCOP chief whip and provincial whips; and the Speakers' Forum. These meetings have considered an amended framework for administering the business of oversight committees and plenary sittings, as well as an adjusted programme for the period ahead.
10. Parliament will prioritise a schedule of virtual committee meetings, whose scope of oversight relates to government departments driving COVID-19 response measures.
11. These committees will be required to intensify their oversight engagements, particularly on COVID-19 matters, and will conduct joint meetings.
12. Chief Whips represented in Parliament have agreed to draft guidelines and rules on how these virtual committee meetings and voting must be conducted. These are based on procedures, precedents, practices and conventions, which Parliament has developed over time.

13. Sittings of two Houses will also have to take place during this period and the Presiding Officers have framed rules to make provision for virtual House sittings.
14. Virtual sittings of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces will deal with legislation and other matters needing approval or consideration from the Houses. Questions for written reply and oral question and answer sessions with members of the Executive will be explored. We will publicise, in due course, the details about how virtual House sittings will be conducted once agreed.
15. In processing the Division of Revenue Bill (which the NA passed on 18 March), the NCOP and provincial legislatures will facilitate public involvement by calling for public submissions and holding virtual meetings. It is envisaged that the Bill will be passed on 2 June 2020.
16. We are mindful of possible revision of the Budget, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be addressed through the established processes of Parliament.
17. Parliament supports and commends President of the Republic Mr Cyril Ramaphosa and his Executive, as they lead the nation through this battle, and the men and women, such as, those in the healthcare, law enforcement, defence and essential goods retail sectors, who are risking their lives to defeat this novel virus. We also extend our gratitude to the millions of South Africans and residents in our country who continue to heed the President's call to stay at home. This is a selfless contribution to combating the spread of this deadly virus.
18. We commend all sectors and individuals, businesses, public representatives and public servants, who continue to contribute to the Solidarity Fund to help combat COVID-19. We welcome the decision of the political parties in Parliament to support the Fund and, accordingly, determining how to contribute.
19. As Presiding Officers, we have also decided to support this good initiative and we will donate one third of our monthly salaries to the Fund for the next three months.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**