

PARLIAMENT WATCH

15 February 2022

KEY MESSAGES FOR PARLIAMENT ON ITS OPENING FOR THE YEAR

Parliament Watch (ParlyWatch) is a collective of independent organisations working towards the advancement of social justice, the realisation of human rights and strong constitutional democracy in South Africa. Collaborators include the Dullah Omar Institute, UWC (DOI); Equal Education Law Centre (EELC); Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF); Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG); Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM); The Right to Know Campaign (R2K); Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT); Social Justice Coalition (SJC); Witzenberg Rural Development Centre and Women on Farms Project (WFP). A diverse range of individuals from the member organisations participate in Parliament Watch, including community activists, volunteers and staff.

Parliament Watch has compiled nine key messages which outline requests and recommendations for the improvement of the legislatures in 2022 and beyond. Although these are specifically addressed to Parliament, they can also be applied to the nine provincial legislatures.

The ten key messages are outlined below as follows:

1. While we appreciate that Parliament strives to be open and transparent in its work, there is still room for improvement in this area. We call for all meetings to be livestreamed in the public interest beyond the lockdown, regardless of the implementation of hybrid meetings by the legislature. Parliament must be clear on how the public can continue to access the legislature physically and virtually.

2. Parliament must be clear on how it plans to address issues arising from the State Capture reports, particularly for the portfolio committees affected by state capture and corruption. Parliamentary oversight came under heavy scrutiny during the Zondo Commission hearings and this would be the time for Parliament to demonstrate effective accountability and oversight by implementing recommendations arising from the report.
3. Parliament must hold the Executive accountable in its decision-making and responsiveness to queries by the legislature. The [Testing the Limits of Openness, Transparency and Access To Information](#) research report by DOI and PMG, released in February 2021, made specific recommendations that include the use of timeframes when requesting information from the Executive and found that there were inadequate follow-ups made by parliamentary committees when requesting information.
4. Renewed and innovative ideas to improve and expand public involvement in the work of the legislature is expected in 2022. This includes public access to committee meetings, documents presented in the meetings as well as communication between members of Parliament during virtual meetings.
5. We were pleased that there were few closed meetings in 2021. This practice should continue in 2022 and if a meeting is closed, it must be accompanied by adequate notice and reasons provided for why meetings are not open to the public.
6. Parliament should continue to use a variety of channels to communicate with the public and aim to make use of channels that are widely accessible for members of the public across all socio-economic standards. Wider reach can be achieved for example through the regular use of community radio stations and a Parliamentary website that can be accessed by the public without data.
7. Parliament can advance meaningful public involvement and access to information on budgetary/ Money Bills processes to the public by creating platforms for more engagement on public finances and information to the public in plain and easily accessible language.

8. Timely notification about parliamentary business is important for the public to follow proceedings. The legislature should continue to build on existing mechanisms to improve timeous communication.
9. Lastly, there is very little information about constituency offices and their performance. Parliament must ensure that this information is accessible to the broader public and that political parties are held to account if they fail to submit this basic information.

These key messages are endorsed by the following organisations including those involved in Parliament Watch:

- Auwal Socio-Economic Research Institute
- Defend Our Democracy
- Dullah Omar Institute, UWC
- Equal Education Law Centre
- Heinrich Boell Foundation
- Judges Matter
- Land Rights Organisation of South Africa
- My Vote Counts
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group
- Public Service Accountability Monitor
- Right2Know Campaign
- Social Change Assistance Trust
- Social Justice Coalition
- Women on Farms Project
- Witzenberg Rural Development Centre

Contact: Motlatsi Komote, Parliament Watch Coordinator and member

mkomote@uwc.ac.za / 072 872 2200