

SAHRA STATEMENT TO JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF PARLIAMENT

20 May 2022



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CORE BUSINESS

- Archaeology, Palaeontology and Meteorites
- Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage
- Heritage Objects
- Burial Grounds and Graves
- Built Environment
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1. Background

This report is submitted by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) to provide a statement on:

- 1.1 The historical significance of the Parliament Precinct to South Africa
- 1.2 The damage to the heritage value and loss to the nation as a result of the fire
- 1.3 The applicable legislation in terms of restoration

2. Historical Significance of Parliament

Parliament of South Africa and the **Parliamentary Precinct**, which includes **Erf 95165; Erf 95164; Stal Plein Erf 3741; Erf 9557; Erf 3789; erf 3790; erf 3794 and erf 3798** has been identified as a heritage resource with qualities so exceptional that it is of special national significance (See Annexure A: Gazette Notice). Section 3(3) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act 25 of 1999) outlines criteria for determining the significance of a site or object to be included as part of the national estate. For purposes of this statement these have been summarized as follows:

1. Historical value
2. Aesthetic value
3. Scientific value
4. Social value
5. Rarity
6. Representivity

On assessment, the Parliament of South Africa is extremely unique in that it was found to meet all the criteria for National Heritage status. This is discussed further below.

2.1 Historical Value

Historical value reveals the importance in the pattern of the history of South Africa exhibiting richness and diversity. It also reveals the importance in association with events, developments and cultural phases that have had a significant role in the evolution of the nation. In addition to the foregoing, it also has strong and special association with the life and work of persons, groups and organizations of importance in history whose works and activities have been significant within the history of the nation. In 1853 the Cape Colony was granted a constitution which would foster two Houses of Parliament- a Legislative Assembly (Lower House) and a Legislative Council (Upper House). The Legislative Assembly met at Iziko Slave Lodge and the Legislative Council at the Good Hope Masonic Lodge. In about 1872 it was decided to create a single Parliamentary Building to locate both houses in one building. The Precinct is made up of several buildings namely:

- **National Council of Provinces**

Since its use from 1885, the buildings have been used by the Cape Colony Parliament and, later, as the Parliament Buildings of the South African Government until 1980 when the Senate was abolished. In addition to the above it has played a significant role in the constitutional history of South Africa. The building and site, with its different elements, forms an imposing ensemble of buildings of cultural-historical significance. After 1994 the Senate was reestablished until 1997 as one of the two Houses of the First Democratic Parliament of South Africa. In 1997 the Senate was replaced by the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

- **The Old Assembly Building**

The Unification of South Africa in 1910 resulted in an addition to the original 1885 building- a chamber built for the Union Parliament. It was used for this purpose until 1961. From 1961 to 1994 it was used as the House of Assembly of the Republic of South Africa (Komnick 2013:2). In conclusion, after the unification in 1910, the second chamber of the Cape Parliament was changed into a stately dining area for members and their guests. In addition changes were made over time resulting in the addition of two wings with about 80 offices as well as two meeting rooms. The latest of these was done in 1979.

- **National Assembly Building**

The National Assembly Building was built between 1983 and 1985. It was designed with the Tricameral Parliament in mind. It was added to the south side of the building.

It has a large assembly chamber currently used for the plenary sittings of the National Assembly and for joint sittings of the two Houses. The building also provided new office suites for the Speaker of Parliament, the Deputy Speaker, the Chief Whip and the Secretary to Parliament. A new restaurant and staff canteen and additional committee rooms were provided in addition to several additional floors of office accommodation. The main chamber can seat the combined National Assembly and National Council of Provinces 450 seats and an additional 600 seats in the public gallery.

- **Marks Building**

The Marks Building, located on land bought by Sammy Marks in 1895, houses the Members of Parliament staff of the opposing parties, parliamentary staff and offices of the SABC.

The building was commissioned by Sammy Marks in 1902 that employed Herbert Baker and Francis Massey to design the seven storey office block. From 1904 onwards it was rented by the state and later sold to Department of Public Works. Various state departments were housed here until they were moved 120 Plein Street. It was made available to the Parliament in 1976.

- **Africa House**

The building was the office of the former British High Commissioner in Cape Town. The site dates back from 1937, designed by Perry and Lightfoot. The building was eventually sold to the Department of Public Works in 2003 and extensively renovated in 2008-9. It was renamed Africa House and houses the Joint Standing Committee of Intelligence, JSCI, and the Protocol Office of Parliament.

- **Good Hope Building**

This building has links with Parliament that goes back a long time, as it was used for sittings of the Cape House of Assembly from 1854 – 1884. After that it served as the banqueting hall of the Good Hope Masonic Lodge until destroyed by a fire in 1892. It was then rebuilt as a music hall and theatre in about 1900 and was known as the Good Hope Theatre.

The State purchased it from the Freemasons in 1916 for staff offices for the Governor who was seated in Tuynhuys. A new façade was built in 1925 in the Cape Revival style. It subsequently served as the State President's Office and the seat of the President's Council in the 1980s. Parliamentary members of the Inkatha Freedom Party occupied the building from 1994 – 2004. Since then it is used by ANC MPs and the Presidency.

- Tuynhuys

Tuynhuys, which houses the Presidential offices, falls under the Presidency and is managed independently from Parliament. It is closed to the public. It was used as an official residence by almost all the governors of the Cape - Dutch, Batavian and British - and by State Presidents after the country became a Republic in 1961. It seems that it began as little more than a tool shed. This was converted into a guesthouse for important visitors to the Cape in the year Simon van der Stel became Governor in 1679, and by 1710 the guesthouse had already become a double-storey building with a flat roof.

However, there is evidence that Tuynhuys was not always livable. Lord Charles Somerset, who was responsible for adding a beautiful ballroom and for much of the re-decoration, had to move out of the building in 1824 as it was uninhabitable. Towards the end of the 19th century a debate as to its very existence occurred as authorities considered demolishing it. Historically Tuynhuys (or Government House as it was called by the British) provided the grounds on which Parliament was built, with each extension creeping southwards into Tuynhuys gardens until in 1988 the buildings reached the Tuynhuys building itself. Tuynhuys still shares the same erf number with Parliament, and together were declared national monuments in 1984. In 1971 the architect Gawie Fagan and his wife Gwen led the restoration of Tuynhuys. The centre of the building was restored to its original Baroque period, the wings were kept in the Victorian style and the Stalplein side reflects the Georgian period. The gardens were restored to a Baroque layout.

This beautiful building witnessed one of the most important turning points in South African history when FW de Klerk announced from its steps, on 18 March 1992, that South Africa had 'closed the book on apartheid'.

- Stalplein

The large open area between the main gates and the front of Tuynhuys is called Stalplein. This name is derived from the Governor's horse stables. This area was originally the back yard of the building, with the main entrance on the side of the Government Avenue and the Public Gardens. This changed in 1913 when Government Ave was closed to vehicular traffic, and it became the main entrance to Tuynhuys. Until 1978, when the State bought the land from the City Council, Stalplein was a public square and Parliament Street a traffic thoroughfare. The redevelopment of Stalplein took place under the direction of the then Prime Minister P W Botha. The architects that worked on the project were originally Revel Fox & Partners, and later Munnik, Visser, Black & Fish. The area in front of Tuynhuys was redesigned and railed off, the statue of Louis Botha was moved to the Stalplein entrance gates, and a memorial garden with the grave of the Unknown Soldier and an Eternal Flame was created. It was officially opened on 31 May 1986.

- Parliament Street

The 1885 Houses of Parliament were built on Grave Street, which was renamed Parliament Street. Grave Street got its name from being adjacent to the graveyard of the Dutch Reformed Church, whose congregation members were buried here until 1755. At that time a smallpox epidemic caused the graveyard to become overcrowded. A new graveyard was established in District One in Green Point, which was used until 1898 when Maitland Cemetery was opened.

2.2 Aesthetic Value

The Parliamentary Precinct and Buildings exhibit particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a number of communities and cultural groups in South Africa. This unique aesthetic character is created by individual components which, collectively, form a cultural urban landscape with landmark qualities. The design of the Parliamentary buildings and precinct emanated from a competition held in 1873. Seven designs were received of which the winning design was submitted by Charles Freeman.

The Parliamentary buildings form an imposing classical Victorian Building with a combination of red brickwork and plastered Corinthian pilasters. The foundation of the building was laid on the 12th May 1875 by the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly.

Subsequent to this the Parliament Buildings were extended by Sir Herbert Baker. Further extensions were done in 1927, 1937, 1960 and 1964 to accommodate the growing need for offices, meeting rooms and Committee Rooms. An additional wing to the south of the building was added in 1988 to facilitate all three houses.

2.3 Scientific Value

The Parliamentary has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of natural and cultural heritage.

The site, in conjunction with the Company Gardens, the primordial vegetable garden for the replenishing station and its relationship to the built and natural context, has revealed information contributing to a wider understanding of natural and cultural history by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality, reference and benchmark site. The Company Gardens speaks of the first European settlement at the Cape, and the introduction of *alien* vegetation, now part of this unique cultural landscape, is layered with a range of historical moments relating back to watercourses and the *primordial people's* use of this space.

In addition to records, Hansard, history books, research documentation and art works stored at the Parliament Buildings, it is a repository of great Africana. In its vast repository, paintings, Marquette's and statuettes of important figures in history are retained and maintained- including colonial and apartheid era histories inclusive of our more recent democratic history. The Library houses a vast number of rare photographs, paintings and sketches of South African and of Cape Town's history.

2.4 Social Value

It has strong and special association with the South African community and different cultural groups for social, cultural, political, symbolic, aesthetic and educational reasons. The site has importance as a place highly valued by all South African communities (interest groups) and cultural groups for the above reasons. But its highest value lies in its ability to absorb the strains of history and its ability to move from a site of political, social and cultural exclusion to

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a site valued by all and held in the highest esteem because of its role as a site of universal inclusivity.

2.5 Rarity

The rarity value of the Parliament and the Parliamentary Precinct is ensconced in the fact of it being an uncommon structure, part of a special landscape, the Company Gardens and, what could conceivably be seen as a cultural precinct. The Parliament Buildings and Precinct further demonstrates a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function and a unique design clearly of exceptional interest to the nation.

2.6 Representivity

The Parliament Buildings and related Precinct is unique in that it demonstrates the principal characteristics of a particular national institution and cultural place the attributes of which identify it as being characteristic of its class. Further to the above it has importance in demonstrating one of the principal characteristics of human activities, the exercise of political will and rights, derived from the Greek, *Polis*. These activities includes a way of life, philosophy, custom, process, land-use, function, design or technique) in the

3. OFFICIAL HERITAGE STATUS

The Parliament Precinct including the buildings damaged by the fire (The Old Assembly and New Assembly Buildings) is a **Grade I Heritage Resource** as well as a declared **National Heritage Site**.

4. LOSS OF HISTORICAL VALUE

As Parliament is a National Heritage Site, the fire has had a devastating impact on the National Estate of South Africa. The buildings of Parliament house the legislative capital of South Africa which is composed of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces. From 1910 to 1994 parliament has undergone various changes and transformation, which in 1994, culminated into a democratic, non-racial and inclusive participation of all South African in all legislative processes. Apart from the political history the buildings have exceptional architectural design which compares to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The structural damage to the buildings is extensive with the entire roof of the Old

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Assembly destroyed and the wooden beams that support the structure of the New Assembly have been severely affected. Despite interrupting the day-to-day business of parliament, it must be stated, that heritage resources are finite and therefore the material loss of the destroyed historical fabric cannot ever be replaced, despite restoration efforts.

5. APPLICABLE LEGISLATION

The National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), (Act No. 25 of 1999) requires that permits (section 48) be acquired from the relevant heritage authorities for any alterations or development on any formally protected heritage resource. The Parliament Precinct including the buildings damaged by the fire (The Old Assembly and New Assembly Buildings) is a Grade I Heritage Resource as well as a declared National Heritage Site and are therefore formally protected.

Section 27 (18) of NHRA (25 of 1999) states that no person may destroy, damage, deface, excavate, alter, remove from its original position, subdivide, or change the planning status of a national heritage site, provincial heritage site, provisionally protected place or structure without obtaining a permit from the relevant heritage resources authority.

Permit applications to SAHRA are made through the South African Heritage Resources Information System (SAHRIS) which is found via SAHRA's website; or directly at: <https://sahris.sahra.org.za>.

The South African Heritage Resources Agency recommends that the National Department of Public Works appoint a suitably qualified heritage consultant that will advise on the impacts of proposed actions during the restoration process as well as liaising with SAHRA, and making their applications on SAHRIS.

SAHRA also further recommends that a Heritage Assessment be conducted as soon as possible to determine which actions would be least impactful to the remaining historical fabric of Parliament; which portions of the building are still salvageable; and to advise on possible actions to retain the remaining significant material on site.

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