

STATEMENT IN HONOUR OF THE OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD) DEPARTMENT
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COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE AND INTERIOR

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make a statement ~~today~~ *in honour of the Hansard
Dept of the Parliament of Ghana.*

The Official Report, which is also referred to as the Hansard, is a verbatim transcript that reports, in a clear and concise manner, on everything that is said on the floor or in committee in line with Standing Order 34 (2) which reads as follows: "An Official Report, entitled 'Parliamentary Debates', containing the debates of each Sitting of the House which shall be as nearly as possible verbatim, shall be prepared under the authority of Mr. Speaker". Standing Order 34(2) is based on article 120 of the 1992 Constitution which establishes the publication of a contemporaneous report of proceedings. Although the Hansard is supposed to be an accurate record of proceedings on the floor, some corrections are made in order to ensure the substance of the debate is not lost.

2. Mr. Speaker, one may ask for further clarification on the importance of such a report. The verbatim report is of high importance for the following principal reasons. Firstly, given that all Members of Parliament carry a mandate given to them by their constituents to represent them on the floor, these need to have evidence of what, on behalf of them, happens on the floor of parliament. Secondly, parliamentary debates also serve as instruments for the interpretation of laws. As outlined in Section 10 (e) of the Interpretation Act [2009], in Ghana, a judge may refer to the entirety of parliamentary debates prior to the passing of the bill, in the course of interpretations. Lastly, the Hansard also serves as a historical archive. Some examples of important national events that have been captured therein include the declaration of independence, the swearing-in of heads of state and the visit and addresses of various dignitaries.

3. Mr. Speaker, the Hansard Department of the Parliament of Ghana works assiduously to provide timely and accurate reports of the happenings on the Floor. The staff of the Hansard Department sit in the chamber in ten-minute shifts to have an in-person experience of the mood and activities on the floor in order to accurately capture events on the floor in addition.

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CHALLENGES

4. I am compelled to make this statement in order to bring more attention to the invaluable role the Hansard Department plays in making proceedings of the House accessible to all Ghanaians. The current working conditions and resources available to the Department are challenging to say the least. I wish to express profound appreciation to the unseen hands that keep the accurate recording of parliament archives.

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5. Mr. Speaker, the Official Report Department is currently facing grave challenges that are hindering their day-to-day operations. The challenges range from lack of adequate logistics and equipment to the resulting low motivation among its staff. With reference to the equipment constraints, the department is confronted with outdated hard- and software. According to reports, all the Central Processing Units (CPUs) for the batch of Dell computers procured in 2018 to enhance the department's performance, are defective. In addition, reporters lack basic equipment such as overhead earpieces and foot pedals. Some offices in the Hansard Department do not have access to television sets for the purpose of monitoring proceedings in the chamber. Furthermore, the internet access and cell-phone reception in the basement are erratic, leaving the department detached and isolated from the dynamic reality of the proceedings on the floor.
6. In line with the software challenges, it is reported that the department is in deficit of a modern software for Page Planning. Such software, for example MS Publisher and Adobe-in-Design, allows for planning of the pages of the final report, to give a prototype of the final outlook of each page – in line with international practices. Presently, the Department relies on Word 2019, which, as a matter of fact, is meant for word processing.
7. Referring to even more challenges that the Department encounters, one to mention is the lengthy validation process prior to the tabling of the Hansard. At present, the department readily delivers each Hansard by the end of the following day. However, following this first step, prior to publication, a copy of the document is submitted to the Office of the Clerk for validation. Lamentably, receiving feedback takes multiple days due to the busy nature of the Clerk's schedule. In view of this, Mr. Speaker, the validation process must be reviewed to allow for a more rapid tabling of the report before the House.
8. Mr. Speaker, with regards to the staff of the Hansard Department if the staff neither feel appreciated nor fulfilled in the execution of their responsibilities as members of staff and if their working conditions are not improved, the motivation will plummet even more and the whole House will feel the effects of an inoperative and ineffective Official Report Department to the detriment of the Parliament of Ghana.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Finally, Mr. Speaker, with the current government's ambition to move towards digitisation, we must not leave out departments in public institutions that contribute to facilitating operations, especially the Hansard Department. We must invest in state-of-the-art equipment to keep up with counterpart Hansard Departments within the Commonwealth and beyond. The Hansard Department hopes to contribute more meaningfully to the growth and



development of parliamentary democracy. In the nearest future, the Department has laid out a set of goals, including for example the digitisation of all previous issues of the Hansard (starting from the 1950s), the digitisation of all previous issues of verbatim reports on the public hearings of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and of the Appointments Committee in the Fourth Republic and the production and publishing of documentaries on the history and development of the Hansard in Ghana.

10. Mr. Speaker, as the Principal Budget Controller of Parliament your input and support are highly sought. Furthermore, The Parliamentary Service Board (PSB) and the Clerk to Parliament, who is the Principal Spending Officer of this institution, are hereby also petitioned.

11. To bring my statement to an end, I would like to raise the public's awareness to the fact that working in the Hansard Department is a career option worth considering for those who are doing degrees in English. Students and graduands should not only consider teaching and the likes as career options, but should also consider contributing their skills to the Official Report Department of the Parliament of Ghana, where they are needed."

12. To all the gallant men and women of the Hansard Department, past and present, I say ayekoo! Thank you for ensuring that there is an accurate record of deliberations on the floor, thank you for always delivering despite the challenges you face and thank you for your hard work.

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Sources:

Standing Orders of the Parliament of Ghana
Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992)
