

T T Mboweni: South African Reserve Bank launches upgraded banknotes

Speech by Mr T T Mboweni, Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, at the launch of the upgraded banknotes, Pretoria, 17 January 2005.

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Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to the South African Reserve Bank. Today we take great pride and pleasure in unveiling South Africa's upgraded banknotes. The preparation for the issue of this upgraded series has been a complex and a painstaking one and we are very proud of the result.

The South African Reserve Bank has the sole authority to issue banknotes and coin in South Africa. The Bank has a concomitant responsibility to ensure that the public has confidence in the currency. To this end, the Bank will be issuing upgraded banknotes with improved security features and with some aesthetic changes to the design of the banknotes from 1 February 2005. Continuous improvements in currency design and security features protect the economy and your money.

Banknotes, which are usually taken for granted, are not only a means of payment. They are pieces of craftsmanship that are a window on the country, its people, heritage and culture, portraying its national character. The big-five theme on our banknotes is a reflection of our African heritage whilst the economic sector themes on the reverse of the banknotes more specifically reflect South Africa. The improved security features and the modified design features ensure that our banknotes remain credible and aesthetically pleasing, while reflecting in very concrete ways how far we have come as a democracy. Our banknotes have always been highly regarded, both nationally and internationally, for their design and security features and one of their strengths has been that the banknotes have withstood any major counterfeiting threat over the years.

According to international best practice, the security features on banknotes are upgraded or new banknotes with new design and security features are issued every six to eight years. South Africa's current banknotes series has been in circulation since 1992. With the advent of improved technology and with heightened security and criminal threats, it has become necessary for the Bank to be proactive and to take the necessary steps to upgrade the security features in our banknotes. We have also utilised the opportunity to change some of the design features to align our banknotes with the changes in our country.

Ladies and gentlemen, we wish to use this opportunity to thank the President and Cabinet for their endorsement of the upgraded banknote series. In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to the Minister of Finance and the National Treasury for their support and cooperation. Let me highlight some of the salient events in the extensive process leading up to this significant event. The design and development of the banknotes, even though these are only upgraded banknotes, has been a complex and intricate task. Our team has spent a number of years on this endeavour. We had to obtain the services of international companies in the determination of the changes, both for the design and security features on the banknotes, as well as the supply of banknote paper, inks and security threads.

The changes to the banknotes have been widely consulted on with the key stakeholders. Consultations have taken place with the Department of Arts and Culture on the Coat of Arms, with the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) on the language changes, with the National Council for the Blind on the changes with regards to the features for the blind or partially sighted and with various international and local service providers and the banking industry on the utilisation of the security features in processing and vending machines that have become part of our daily lives.

Today is a momentous day as the Bank unveils the upgraded banknotes to the public. Simultaneously, today we launch the communication campaign to inform and educate the public on the changes to the design and security features of South Africa's banknotes. The objective of the communication campaign is not only to inform and educate the public on the security features, but also to get the public to habitually examine their banknotes to ensure that they have good money. I trust that our key partners in the private and public sectors will play a significant role in ensuring that their constituencies know about the new features and encourage them to check the features on their banknotes.

We trust that the media will also play its rightful role in informing and educating the public and in so doing protecting the public and ensuring that we give no quarter to criminals should they attempt to counterfeit our currency.

All five denominations of the upgraded banknotes will go into circulation on 1 February 2005. The new banknotes will be issued gradually over time. We must therefore highlight that the upgraded banknotes and the current banknotes will circulate simultaneously.

It is important to note that the SA Reserve Bank has not “demonetised” any of its currency. This means we can all confidently continue to use all South African money, even if it is part of a previous series.

We encourage all South Africans to know the security features and make the checking of money second nature. The security features on South African Rands are only useful if people use them. It is every user’s responsibility to get to know the upgraded banknotes and check the security features.

May we also take the opportunity to thank the team and their collaborators for their energy and effort in ensuring the success of the project as a whole and ensuring that the banknotes are distributed on time and for the efforts in ensuring public confidence in our banknotes.

Thank you for coming here today and for your participation in this process and we wish to encourage all of you to spread the message about these very important changes to our banknotes.

Thank you.