

# South African Flag Guide

A guide to the correct usage of South Africa's National Flag, compiled by the Southern African Vexillological Association.

## Treat your flag with respect

The National Flag must at all times be treated with dignity and respect. In the Regulations Regarding the Flying of the National Flag, published just before the flag was adopted in 1994, the dos and don'ts are clearly spelled out. The flag must never:

- Be allowed to touch the ground or floor.
- Be used as a table cloth, or draped in front of a platform.
- Be used to cover a statue, plaque corner stone etc. at unveiling or similar ceremonies.
- Be used to start or finish any competition, race or similar event.
- Be manufactured or used as underclothes, bath and floor mats or any similar demeaning application.
- Be used for any commercial advertising in a manner that will distort or show disrespect to the flag.

*Permission to manufacture or reproduce the flag in any manner is required from [The Presidency](#).*

## Traditional rules for handling the flag

There are a number of traditional rules of respect that should be observed when handling or displaying the National Flag:

- The flag should always be hoisted at the start of the working day and lowered again before or at sunset. It is not to remain flying at night unless suitably illuminated. In South Africa, this rule still applies to government-designated flag stations, while through common usage the flag can be displayed 24 hours a day outside of official stations.
- The flag should be hoisted briskly and lowered ceremoniously.
- Whenever a person sees an official flag hoisting or lowering ceremony in progress, he or she should come to a halt and stand respectfully to attention for the duration. If a hat is worn, it should be removed and the right hand should be placed over the heart in salute. Persons in uniform should salute in the manner prescribed by their service. (The same rules apply when the National Anthem is being played or sung.)
- The flag should never be depicted, displayed or flown upside down. Flying a flag upside down is the traditional sign of surrender! When displayed horizontally, the black triangle should be to your left and the red band uppermost.



- When draped vertically, a flag should not merely be rotated through 90 degrees, but also reversed. In the case of the South African flag, the black triangle must be uppermost and the red band to your left. (One "reads" a flag like the pages of a book - from top to bottom and from left to right - and after rotation the results should be the same.)
- It is also insulting to display the flag in a frayed or dirty state. The same rule applies to the flagpoles and halyards used to hoist the flag - they should always be in a proper state of maintenance.
- The flag may never be defaced by placing slogans or any writing or design directly on the field of the flag.

## Correct display of the flag

- When two flags are fully spread out horizontally on a wall behind a podium, their hoists should be towards each other with the red stripes uppermost.
- When the flag is displayed on a short flag pole, this should be mounted at an angle to the wall with the flag draped tastefully from it.
- When two national flags are displayed on crossed staffs, the hoists must be towards each other and the flags must be fully spread out.
- The flag should never be used as a cloth to cover tables, lecterns or podiums, or be draped from railings.

## In company with other national flags

When the National Flag is flown outdoors in company with the national flags of other countries, the following rules apply:

- It must always occupy the position of honour. This means it must be the flag furthest to the right (observers' left) of all the flags on display, with the flags of other countries being arranged alphabetically.
- All the flags should be approximately the same size, with no flags being larger than the South African flag.
- Each country's flag should be on a separate pole, with no national flag being flown on top of another from the same pole.



**In**

When the such as

**company with non-national flags**

National Flag is displayed in company with other flags that are not national flags, corporate flags and advertising banners:

- The South African flag must always be hoisted first and lowered last.
- If the South African flag is displayed on crossed poles, the South African flag's pole should be in front and the flag to the right (observers' left) of the other flag.

viewpoint of the onlookers, or at least other flags in the group, or its flagpole in the group.

- If on the same staff, it must be the uppermost flag.
- If carried in procession with other flags, it must be at the head of the procession.
- If carried with a row of flags in line abreast, it must be carried to the right of the procession.



- If on separate staffs, the National Flag should be in the middle, or the furthest left from the one flag's breadth higher than the other poles

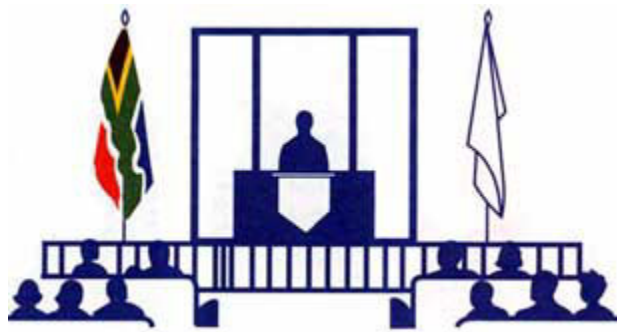
uppermost flag. must be at the head of the

abreast, it must be carried to the

**Displaying the flag indoors**

Whenever the National flag is displayed indoors in halls at public meetings or gatherings of any kind, it should:

- Always be on the right (observers' left), as this is the position of authority. So when the flag is displayed next to a speaker in a hall or other meeting place, it must be placed on the speaker's right hand; when displayed elsewhere in the hall, it should be to the right of the audience.



- The flag should be displayed completely spread out with the red stripe on top. If hung vertically on the wall behind the podium, the red stripe should be to the left of the onlookers facing the flag with the hoist cord at the top.

**Parades and ceremonies**

The flag, when carried in a procession or parade or with another flag or flags, should be on the marching right or alone in front in the centre.



The flag may form a distinctive feature of the unveiling of a statue, monument or plaque, but should never be used as the covering for the object.

As a mark of respect to the flag, it should never be dipped to a person or thing. Regimental colours, organisational or institutional flags may be dipped as a mark of honour.

During a ceremony where the flag is hoisted or lowered, or when the flag is passing in a parade, all persons present, except for those in uniform, should face the flag while standing at attention with the right hand over the heart. Hats should be removed and held in the right hand at the left shoulder with the hand over the heart. Those present in uniform should salute. The same rules apply when the National Anthem is played.

### **Half masting**

The South African flag should be half-masted as a sign of mourning only on instructions from the Presidency, who will also give a date ending the mourning period. When the flag is to be flown at half-mast, it must first be raised to the top of the mast and then slowly lowered to half-mast. Before being lowered at sunset or at the appropriate time, the flag is first raised to the top of the pole and then lowered. ONLY the National Flag is half-masted. All other flags remain at normal height.

### **Disposal**

When no longer in a fit condition to be used, a flag should be disposed of in a dignified manner, preferably by burning.

*Source: Southern African Vexillological Association (SAVA). For more information, e-mail [Bruce Berry](#)*