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Pressure mounts on JZ to come clean over Nkandla

GAYE DAVIS
POLITICAL BUREAU

POLITICAL pressure is mounting on the government to make public the report of a Public Works task team that found R206 million had been spent on President Jacob Zuma's private home at Nkandla.

DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko said Zuma should "come clean" on whether he saw a letter addressed to him in November 2010 by then-minister of public works Gwen Mahlangu-Nkabinde, whom he later sacked.

Initially published by City Press and the Mail & Guardian, and now in the public domain, the letter, addressed to Zuma, is a progress report on work at Nkandla and lists improvements that were being made. These included the supply of water, electricity and a sewerage treatment plant; a helipad, clinic, tuckshop, guard room, cattle culvert, bullet-proof and high-impact windows, a tunnel and "safe haven" as well as inner and outer security fencing.

Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi – along with Justice Minister Jeff Radebe and State Security Minister Siyabonga Cwele – have insisted that Zuma was not aware of the cost of the exercise, which is likely to rise.

The letter to Zuma does not reflect the cost of the items, but merely states that the funds for security and related matters would come from Public Works, while "direct contracts" would be for Zuma's personal account.

Mazibuko said she would submit a series of parliamentary questions to Zuma to try to establish "the true extent of his involvement".

"This correspondence directed to Mr Zuma clearly contradicts the (Nxesi's) concerted campaign to prove that the now-secret Nkandla gate report 'vindicates' him of all wrongdoing. Instead of answering key questions about President Zuma's involvement, it targets low-ranking officials in the department.

"It is a slap in the face of accountability and transparency." Mazibuko said South Africans deserved "to know the truth". "When public money is abused

for the unnecessary benefit of a sitting president, it has the potential severely to undermine trust in public institutions in general and in the government in particular.

"Our constitution sets out clearly the ethics and principles upon which our democratic South Africa is founded," she said.

"It is about time Mr Zuma took these seriously and did what is right: come clean on Nkandla now."

On Sunday, Nxesi cited security issues as the reason for withholding the report.

He said the report would be handed to law enforcement agencies for investigation and possible criminal charges against officials whose flouting of procedures gave rise to the many irregularities uncovered by the probe. The investigation also found R48m of the R206m bill had been spent in consultancy fees.

The IFP and Freedom Front Plus have added their voices to calls by the DA, Cope and the African Christian Democratic Party for the report to be tabled in Parliament, where the public spending watchdog, the standing committee on public accounts, is delving into the matter.

IFP MP Petros Sithole said not enough information had been provided at the briefing.

"The minister's vague and superfluous rendition of the report... failed to provide exact details about the renovation of (Zuma's) home," he said.

Parliament needed to be provided with a "detailed account of each and every single cent spent in this waste of taxpayers' money".

"Withholding this report from the public shows that there are more secrets behind this issue, which the minister is not willing (for the public to see)," Sithole said yesterday.

Pieter Groenewald, the FF Plus spokesman on public works, said: "The comprehensive report must be made public and (Nxesi) cannot hide behind security."

Groenewald said the government should also say what the annual costs were to run Nkandla.

Auditor-General Terence Nombembe is already investigating the Nkandla spending, as is Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, whose report is expected to be ready in March.