

# Some live it up even in face of poverty

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CARLY HELFAND

HOW THE other half lives. In terms of residence at Nkandla, that statement implies much amid allegations of misuse of public funds.

Even Cosatu has weighed in, calling the spending grotesque and "grossly insensitive to the workers, the poor and the homeless". But the union has added that it doesn't question the need for the state to take adequate measures to safeguard the president; it just suggests that there should be "a norm".

As far as what defines "adequate measures" around the world, there doesn't seem to be a norm.

From the two officers parked on a dirt

road beside the farmhouse of Uruguayan President José Mujica, to US President Barack Obama's electromagnetic pulse-resistant Air Force One jet, world leaders have vastly different presidential allowances, which begin with security and span residences, privileges and lifestyles.

Nkandla is not, of course, the only thing that has brought Zuma's spending habits into question recently.

Late last year, the Mail & Guardian published key findings from a confidential September 2006 report it had obtained that suggested Zuma had taken more than R7 million from benefactors to support his "reckless" lifestyle.

This week, a report released by Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi

confirmed that R206m had been spent on updating Nkandla's security measures, but only R71m of it had been spent directly on security.

However, the reality is that Zuma's lifestyle pales in comparison to that of his dictatorial neighbour to the north, for example. Robert Mugabe has been in power in Zimbabwe since 1980, during which time he has witnessed the collapse of his country's agriculture-based economy after a government seizure of nearly all white-owned commercial farms. Inflation has rocketed, and both unemployment and food shortages have hurt Zimbabweans badly.

Yet Mugabe himself is doing just fine. In 2009, the New Zimbabwe website reported the completion of Mugabe's mansion in the suburbs of Harare - a 55m (R70m) mansion complete with 25 bedrooms, two lakes and 17 hectares of landscaped grounds.

The house - three times larger than the Zimbabwean state house, Mugabe's designated home - features imported materials such as marble and crystal from Europe, the Middle East and China, New Zimbabwe said.

Mugabe's wife - nicknamed "Gucci Grace" - is famous for her love of posh shopping, with UK paper The Sun once reporting that she spent £75 000 in two hours in Paris fashion houses.

The sultan of Brunei, on the other hand, puts even the Mugabes to shame in terms of his lavish lifestyle. Legal battles between Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and his brother in recent years have exposed the spending records of the head of state, who now also serves as the finance minister.

residence of prime ministers dating from 1735, is nothing to be scoffed at. The front door hides a series of rooms and staircases that have taken over much of the adjacent 12 Downing Street, and in the 18th century the prime minister's house was also joined to a larger and more elegant building behind it.

And then there is Mujica, whose run-down house on the outskirts of Montevideo was once called a "cave" by political opponent Luis Alberto Lacalle.

Mujica and his wife chose to remain in the house they'd lived in for years rather than move to Uruguay's presidential mansion after his election in 2009.

According to a recent New York Times feature, Mujica's net worth when he entered office in 2010 was about \$1 800 - the value of his 1987 Volkswagen Beetle, and his monthly salary remains around \$800. That salary figure comes after subtracting the 90 percent or so that he donates to charitable causes - including a programme for expanding housing for the poor. It also aligns his earnings with that of the average Uruguayan citizen.

"I've lived like this most of my life," Mujica told the BBC last November. "I can live well with what I have."

A former guerrilla, Mujica spent 14 years in jail, including 10 in solitary confinement, where living conditions were dire. The farmhouse where he and his wife now grow chrysanthemums seems luxurious in comparison.

"I'm called 'the poorest president', but I don't feel poor," he told the BBC.

"Poor people are those who only work to try to keep an expensive lifestyle, and always want more and more."

Oil was discovered in the tiny country in 1926, and when it gained its independence in 1984, its current sultan was in line to benefit. By 1987, he was the richest man in the world at a worth of \$40 billion, according to Vanity Fair. He built an unparalleled collection of luxury items, including 17 private jets, thousands of fancy cars, and an assortment of jewels and treasures from the art world.

In contrast, while being the president of the US may not come with a free flow of cash - spending is overseen by the US Government Accountability Office, a nonpartisan agency that investigates how the federal government spends taxpayer dollars - the job certainly has its perks.

Like most of the presidents before him, Obama and his family live in the White House, a six-floor, 132-room building that serves as both an office and a residence, with amenities such as a private cinema. He is also granted unlimited use of the state-of-the-art jet Air Force One, which is equipped with 65 phones and 19 televisions, according to the UK's The Telegraph.

British Prime Minister David Cameron hails from a wealthy family, but has "sought to cultivate a fresh, unstuffy image", according to BBC.

His "frugal" lifestyle, which included cycling to work before he took his most recent political post, even earned praise from Pakistani terrorist Hafiz Saeed last year, who called living in the prime minister's residence - small in comparison to Pakistan's palatial government houses - "truly Islamic".

But though it might not look very big from the front, 10 Downing Street, the historic office

## How much other leaders earn

BIANCA CAPAZORIO

WHAT other world leaders earn per year:

- The world's highest-paid leader, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loon, took a 36 percent pay cut after a committee he set up to look at remuneration recommended it. He now earns \$1.7 million (R15.11m).
- Regarded as the world's poorest leader, José Mujica of Uruguay gets a salary the equivalent of about R1.2 million. He reportedly gives most of this to charity.

- Former Japanese prime minister Yoshiko Noda took a pay cut in 2011 to \$359 000 as part of a plan to cut public servants' salaries to help the country rebuild after a massive earthquake and tsunami.
- US President Barack Obama earns \$400 000 and has an additional \$50 000 allowance. However, a book detailing White House spending, titled *Presidential Perks Gone Royal* by Robert Keith Gray, indicated that the first family cost taxpayers about \$1.4bn. Chief among this is the cost of staff (among them a dog

- Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard earns \$495 000, after her salary was hiked twice in the space of three months.
- Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper earns a total of \$315 462, with an additional \$2 000 car allowance. However, he raised eyebrows when two armoured vehicles were flown to India for his use at a cost of \$1m.

trainer earning \$100 000 a year and the cost of Obama's security. This is still less than the \$1.6bn the White House cost to run under George Bush.

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