

Tough-talking Cronin tones it down for MPs

THABO MOKONE

PUBLIC Works Deputy Minister Jeremy Cronin hinted in the text of a speech prepared for delivery in the National Assembly yesterday that the apartheid-era National Key Points Act — which the government has used to justify its secrecy about security upgrading at President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla home — might be unconstitutional.

In the draft, Cronin wrote: "This parliament does need to look at this anachronistic and problematic piece of legislation; it might well be unconstitutional."

The text was sent to journalists by the ANC and there had been no retractions at the time of going to print.

But when he spoke in the National Assembly yesterday Cronin made no mention of the National Key Points Act, and omitted as well other contentious sections.

The draft, if not the speech as delivered, will raise eyebrows as the government continues to refuse to disclose information on the

Attacks Key Points in draft, not in speech

security upgrading at Nkandla, citing the National Key Points Act.

What has emerged is that R206-million of public funds was spent to renovate the president's family compound in Nkandla.

Cronin also pointed a finger in the draft text at former defence minister and COPE leader

Mosioua Lekota, claiming that he had initiated the "costly" security arrangements at Nkandla when he was defence minister.

He said in the prepared text that, if memory served, it was under Lekota that the Department of Defence became involved in the security assessment that paved the way for the security upgrading at Zuma's private home.

"Lekota expresses outrage at the expense of the security arrangements at President Zuma's private residence at Nkandla. But [he] forgets that it was under his watch

that the Department of Defence was involved in the security assessment at the Nkandla residence — which laid the basis for the probably excessive, and undoubtedly extremely costly, security operational requirements put in place," Cronin wrote.

Lekota, Cronin said in the draft, had the opportunity, when he was minister of defence, to amend the National Key Points Act to bring it in line with the constitution but had failed to do so.

But Cronin did not mention Lekota, the National Key Points Act or Nkandla when he delivered his speech in the National Assembly yesterday.

When the debate on Zuma's State of the Nation Speech began on Tuesday, Lekota told MPs that he was outraged that expensive security had been provided at

Zuma's Nkandla home.

But Cronin insisted that Lekota was suffering from amnesia.

"I am not laying the entire blame on Lekota, I am just trying to help cure his amnesia ... as the current government we are not running away from our responsibilities in this matter, and we will not sweep abuse under the carpet."

Lekota was earlier rebuked by Public Service and Administration Minister Lindiwe Sisulu for his assertion in a speech on Tuesday that leaders of the ruling party were giving public service jobs to their "concubines".

"I am very offended by the sexist and downright insulting language that was used here by Lekota. I know of no 'concubines' in the public service. I feel it was unethical and conduct unbecoming."

'Lekota laid basis for probably excessive spending on Nkandla security'

@ HAVE YOUR SAY
Should government review this legislation?
tellus@thetimes.co.za
or SMS 33971 Each SMS costs R1.50