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Change apartheid-era Key Points Act – Cronin

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DEPUTY Public Works Minister Jeremy Cronin says Parliament should consider changing the apartheid-era National Key Points Act as it is contrary to the values of a democratic South Africa.

Cronin questioned the appropriateness and constitutionality of the legislation – cited by the minister, Thulas Nxesi, when he refused to make public the report on a departmental investigation into the R206 million security upgrade at President Jacob Zuma's private residence, Nkandla.

Cronin said although the act remained in force and the government relied on it for certain matters, particularly the security of office-bearers, including presidents and premiers, it was "awkward" legislation and Parliament needed to "evaluate if that's what we want in the new South Africa".

The act applies to "any place or area" so important that its loss, damage, disruption or immobilisation may "prejudice the republic".

It also prohibits anyone from providing "any information relating to the security measures, applicable at or in respect of any National Key Point or in respect of any incident that occurred there".

It was used by the apartheid government to draw a veil of secrecy over its security and military operations. The act has been used by Nxesi to withhold details of the Nkandla security "enhancements".

Cronin had included his views on the act in the written version of his speech during the debate this week on Zuma's State of the Nation address, but omitted them when he delivered his speech, leading the DA to call for him to clarify his position.

DA spokeswoman on public works Anchen Dreyer said although

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Cronin, in his prepared speech, had mentioned the "probably excessive and undoubtedly extremely costly security operational requirements" at Nkandla, he had failed to express his views during the debate.

His draft speech had also referred to the National Key Points Act, saying "Parliament needs to look at this anachronistic and problematic piece of legislation, it may well be unconstitutional".

Cronin said yesterday he hadn't had time to read his speech in full. Also, the Nkandla spending had been addressed by Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula.

Cronin later told Independent Newspapers that while he felt the act should be replaced with "more democratic legislation", there should be guidelines concerning sensitive information about the security of government officials. "I'm not suggesting we should have a free-for-all concerning security... as long as the legislation meets the ideals of a democratic country... that's what I'm calling for."

DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko slammed Zuma for failing to address the Nkandla issue in his response to the debate.

"Spending R206m on the upgrade of his private residence will remain a symbol of the high-level corruption in his government, until he provides answers for how he let this happen, endorses a full parliamentary inquiry, and makes public the Public Works report."