

# SO MANY QUESTIONS



Deputy Minister of Public Works Jeremy Cronin has criticised the National Key Points Act, which the government used to block questions about President Zuma's Nkandla estate. *Chris Barron* asked him . . .

**Do you believe in open government?**  
Absolutely.

**Is this your idea of open government?** I think we are certainly trying to be open.

**Are you trying hard enough?** Clearly, there are issues which require sensitive handling. The danger with any government is that sensitivities are used to cover up wrongdoings.

**Is this what's happening with the National Key Points Act?** I don't think the act is being used for that purpose.

**To cover up government spending on Nkandla?** No. It's the law. As sordid as it may well be as a piece of legislation, the fact of the matter is that the residence has been declared a national key point and as government we obviously can't break our own law.

**Is that compatible with open government?** I think with any piece of security legislation that was passed in 1980 there must surely be a case for worrying about its constitutionality.

**Is it compatible with open government to rely so heavily on this law to cover up things like Nkandla?** I'm not aware that it has been used heavily for this purpose. This certainly has come up in relation to the private residence of President Zuma, but I'm not aware of other occasions.

**Would you agree it has been used to block information about Nkandla?**  
That's not the intention.

**Isn't that the reason your minister gave for not disclosing more information about Nkandla?** My minister is moving towards providing parliament with all the information that we have garnered so far [for] the task team that he appointed to look into what seems to us to have been a serious inflation of costs and distortions in the contract . . .

**This doesn't change the fact that he has used the act to block information about Nkandla, does it?** He has said that he has been placed in a difficult position because the president's private residence is covered by the act.

**How do you feel about being a senior member of a government that uses such an act to hide the truth about**

**Nkandla from voters and taxpayers?** I think we all agree that in the case of sensitive localities it would be unwise to reveal whatever security arrangements might be in place.

**Is the public asking you to reveal the president's security arrangements or simply to tell us exactly how much has been spent on Nkandla and for what?**  
We've already said that. As far as we know, over R200-million was spent through the budget of public works.

**We haven't been told exactly what it was spent on, have we?** One assumes it was spent on potentially sensitive matters that we do not want the Boeremag or al-Qaeda to have knowledge of, obviously.

**How do you feel about being deputy minister of the department that financed Nkandla?** We've made no secret of the fact that it's a department that is riddled with problems, including corruption . . .

**How do you feel about the financing of Nkandla?** My responsibility as deputy minister, and the minister's responsibility, is to get to the bottom of the financing of Nkandla and discover whether, as seems likely, there has been a corrupt escalation of costs.

**Do you support this kind of expenditure of taxpayers' money on the president's private residence?** I think it certainly needs to be closely interrogated.

**If this were FW de Klerk, wouldn't you be screaming for his head?** There are two sets of responsibilities . . .

**More than R200-million of taxpayers' money has been spent on the president's private residence. Do you support that or not?** It's been spent, ostensibly, on the operational security arrangements . . .

**More than R200-million on security for his private residence?** There needs to be an investigation on how does one justify certain items that, on the face of it, go beyond security.

**Can the expenditure of taxpayers' money on these items be justified?** On the face of it, I think absolutely not.