

Furore over Nkandla report

Babalo Ndenze
Political Bureau

PARLIAMENT'S joint intelligence committee will have a final say on what aspects of the so-called Nkandlagate probe will be made public, National Assembly Speaker Max Sisulu has ruled.

Citing legal advice, Sisulu said the Department of Public Works' task team report on the R206-million upgrade on President Jacob Zuma's compound would be discussed behind closed doors by the committee because the probe dealt with a national key point.

He said Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi had, for the same reasons, asked for an "appropriate mechanism" to consider the report.

DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko said that the joint intelligence committee was too secretive to consider a matter of such national importance.

In a letter to Mazibuko, Sisulu said he had received legal advice that certain aspects of the report could fall within the Intelligence Services Oversight Act.

"For this reason, the report will be referred to the joint standing committee on intelligence to consider and report to the House on those aspects that fall within the purview of the act," Sisulu said.

Aspects the committee was not empowered to deal with would be "referred to an appropriate committee".

Mazibuko said Sisulu's decision meant the report would be referred to a committee that would meet behind closed doors. It could be barred from sharing the contents with third parties.

"The DA is strongly opposed to this decision, which will essentially bury the information in the report and prevent those at the top from being held accountable," said Mazibuko.

She would write urging Sisulu to reconsider and to "make public the legal opinion on which he is basing this decision".

"Should this not happen, we will consider the process to be fundamentally flawed and a back-door mechanism to hide the contents of this report from South Africans in order to protect President Jacob Zuma from being held to account," said Mazibuko.

"Nkandlagate" must be brought into the open so those implicated could be forced to answer "for this flagrant abuse of state resources".

United Democratic Movement (UDM) leader Bantu Holomisa said Parliament risked receiving a "doctored" report from Nxesi's department, "which investigated itself".

He said Sisulu had failed to discuss his decision with the chief whips of opposition parties.