

Fury over secrecy surrounding Nkandla report

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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's 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 has asked for an "appropriate mechanism" to consider the report for the same reasons.

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This was "owing to the confidentiality of its contents".

The decision has incensed opposition parties. DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazubuko said her party would dismiss the entire process as a "backdoor mechanism" to hide the report's contents from South Africans in order to "protect" Zuma should Sisulu not reconsider his decision.

She said the Joint Intelligence Committee, chaired by ANC MP Cecil Burgess, was too secretive to consider such a matter of national importance.

In a letter to Mazibuko, Sisulu said he received legal advice that certain aspects of the report might 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. The committee will be required to bring to the attention of the house those aspects that it is not empowered to deal with in terms of statute, for them to be referred to an appropriate committee," said Sisulu.

Sisulu said he had already informed Nxesi that the report would be referred to the relevant committee once submitted.

"I have written to the minister asking him to proceed and submit the report. As soon as the report is submitted, it will be tabled and referred accordingly," said Sisulu.

Mazibuko said Sisulu's decision meant the report would be referred to a committee which would meet behind closed doors and its 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 will prevent those at the very top from being held accountable," said Mazibuko.

She said she would write to Sisulu urging him to reconsider his decision and "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 backdoor mechanism to hide the contents of

this report from South Africans in order to protect (Zuma) from being held to account," said Mazibuko.

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

"Given that the details of the report relate to a national key point, there is a risk that almost all the information will be kept secret in the committee. Since the speaker has passed the buck to the intelligence committee, it will be their discretion as to what is made public. With chairperson Cecil Burgess at the helm, this is ominous," said Mazibuko.

UDM leader Bantu Holomisa also slammed Sisulu's decision.