

Nkandla probe 'secrecy' slammed

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

Citing legal advice, Sisulu said that the Department of Public Works task team's 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.

The latter refers to any buildings or sites of national importance that could pose a security risk.

Incensed

Sisulu said that Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi had asked for an "appropriate mechanism" to consider the report for the same reasons "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 intelli-

gence 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.

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

Mazibuko said Sisulu's decision meant that the report would be referred to a committee that would meet behind closed doors and which would 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," 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," she said.

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

"Since the speaker has passed the buck to the intelligence committee, it will be their discretion as to what is made public. With chairman Cecil Burgess at the helm, this is ominous," said Mazibuko.

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

"It is the culture of the ANC. Whenever one of them is in the public eye, they close ranks," said Holomisa.

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