Corrupt public servants facing jail time

Crooked companies also in Sisulu's firing line in crackdown

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PUBLIC servants doing business with the state will find themselves in a spot of trouble in the near future – facing up to a year in jail if found guilty.

This was Public Service and Administration Minister Lindiwe Sisulu's warning yesterday. She has upped the ante in her shake-up of the public service by introducing legislative amendments to criminalise the practice.

Sisulu has also set her sights on private sector businesses that are seen as the "corrupter" in most cases involving public servants, and they, too, will face the "full wrath" of the law.

Under the proposed amendments, companies found guilty won't be allowed to do business with the government for 10 years.

Amendments to entry-level requirements for directors-general and deputy directors-general are also on the cards to ensure that adequately qualified people are deployed to head government departments.

Addressing the media ahead of her department's budget vote yesterday, Sisulu said her team had indicated right from the outset that they were "very concerned about the environment" in which our public servants are able to do business with government.

"(It's) because we think it is very unethical and it creates an environment where it is possible for corrupt practices to thrive, and we indicated that we're going to prohibit public servants from doing business with government and we've done so. It is in the bill that was accepted by the cabinet committee (on Tuesday) and will be in Parliament soon.

"We also indicated our fervent commitment never again to find a perception in the public that public servants are corrupt," said Sisulu.

She added that, in line with this plan, her department had now established an anti-corruption bureau to be able to deal with outstanding misconduct cases.

She said the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) has minimum sentences for people found guilty of certain transgressions, and her department would include something similar in the amendments the department was making to the Public Service Act.

"We thought we could borrow very comfortably from that clause and use the same in our situation as well, perhaps with higher sanctions than the PFMA," said Sisulu.

The minister also touched on the need for the "bloated" public service to be "pruned" into shape by cutting down its payroll.

Sorry picture painted by Auditor-General

THE AUDITOR-General recently released a damning report on the country's national and provincial audit outcomes, which showed that just one in five state entities received clean audits in the last financial year.

Terence Nombembe's report also showed that last year nearly R600 million in tenders was awarded to suppliers linked to employees of the relevant departments, and that in some cases, senior managers were responsible for the awards.

In November last year, the Public Service Commission also called for public servants to be barred from doing business with the state after it found an alarming increase in the cost of financial misconduct.

According to the commission, in 2008/09, financial misconduct cost the state R100m. The next year it more than tripled to R346m, then soared in 2010/11 to R932m. – Staff Reporter