

# Bunking ministers show up

Some ministers are making an effort to attend oversight committee meetings, but many others still play hooky

**Attendance of parliamentary committee meetings by Cabinet ministers (January to June 2017)**



**Bathabile Dlamini**  
Social development

Attended

**8**

meetings



**Hlengiwe Mkhize**  
Home affairs



**Ebrahim Patel**  
Economic development

Attended

**7**

meetings



**Senzeni Zokwana**  
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries



**Siyabonga Cwele**  
Telecommunications and postal services

Attended

**6**

meetings



**Gugile Nkwinti**  
Rural development and land reform



**Nomvula Mokonyane**  
Water and sanitation

Attended

**5**

meetings



**Edna Molewa**  
Environmental affairs



**Lynne Brown**  
Public enterprises  
Source: People's Assembly

Attended

**4**

meetings



**Nathi Nhleko**  
Public works  
THEUNS KRUGER, Grafi

## TALK TO US

**What enforcement mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that ministers account to Parliament?**

SMS us on 35697 using the keyword PARLY and tell us what you think. Please include your name and province. SMSes cost R1.50

ANDISIWE MAKINANA

andisiwe.makinana@citypress.co.za

**W**hile the attendance of parliamentary committee meetings by Cabinet ministers improved in the first six months of this year compared to the same period last year, International Relations and Cooperation Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and Human Settlements Minister Lindiwe Sisulu top the list of ministers with bad attendance records this year.

Bunking ministers are a thorn in the ANC and Parliament's side, and, in recent months, the governing party and the opposition have called for tougher action on truancy.

A performance indicator for President Jacob Zuma's 73 ministers and deputy ministers shows that the executive is increasingly becoming more willing to be accountable to its portfolio committees in Parliament.

However, Nkoana-Mashabane and Sisulu have not appeared before a parliamentary committee this year.

Nkoana-Mashabane has not appeared before her department's oversight committee in the past 16 months, frustrating legislators who oversee the department. Sisulu last appeared before her department's oversight committee in November.

City Press established that Sisulu attended the National Council of Provinces' select committee meeting on appropriations on May 30 this year, wherein policy issues on the Urban Settlement Development Grant and expenditure for the first three quarters of 2016/17 were discussed. Her office said the difficulty was that the human settlements committee meets on Tuesdays and its meetings clashed with the Cabinet committee on Social Protection, Community and Human Development, which meets bi-weekly. Sometimes she delegates her director general officer to present quarterly reports and the Annual Performance Plan, said her spokesperson Vusi Tshose.

A new tracking tool devised by the People's Assembly website to monitor ministers' attendance at parliamentary meetings reveals that, when compared with the first six months of last year, more ministers and deputies have attended the meetings of the oversight committees of Parliament.

Leading the pack are social development's Bathabile Dlamini and newly appointed Home Affairs Minister Hlengiwe Mkhize - they have already appeared before their respective committees eight times this year. Mkhize was previously the deputy minister of telecommunications and postal services, and the tracking tool has included her attendance from both portfolios.

The portfolio committee on international relations and cooperation raised concerns about Nkoana-Mashabane's continued absence, with an ANC committee member commenting in a committee meeting in October that "the absence is actually bordering on illegality ... engagement with her is paramount because there are issues that lie squarely on her shoulders and no one else can account for this".

The committee wrote in its year-end recommendations report that "on the minister's continuous absence from the committee's meetings ... the committee expressed its utmost disquiet and deep disappointment".

The department's spokesperson, Clayton Monyela, said Nkoana-Mashabane's continued absence was not because the minister didn't take her parliamentary obligations seriously, but because of her busy international schedule.

"It's an issue of scheduling and many international obligations that she cannot afford to miss in terms of her mandate. [It should be noted that] Nkoana-Mashabane's predecessors were not any better in terms of attending to their parliamentary obligations."

Gaile Fullard, the executive director of the Parliamentary Monitoring Group, which runs the People's Assembly website, said the committee system was probably the most effective forum for Parliament's role in holding the executive to account.

He said the constitutional role of the committees was refreshingly brought to the fore in June when the National Assembly's chairperson of committees, Cedric Frolick, wrote to the chairpersons of four portfolio committees directing them to ensure "immediate engagement with the concerned ministers to ensure that Parliament gets to the bottom of the allegations".

This was in relation to recent accusations of state capture linked to emails that implicated a number of Cabinet ministers.

Dlamini's impressive attendance record was due to the averted social grants payment debacle involving the SA Social Security Agency, which burst into the open in January with questions over the validity of a contract to disburse social grants to 17 million beneficiaries.

Both the social development committee and the standing committee on public accounts hounded her, demanding answers almost every week.

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his capacity as the leader of government business in Parliament, has for some time been promising to get ministers to spend more time in Parliament.

Fullard argued that public pressure could ensure ministerial appointees adhere to their constitutional responsibility.

For more visit <https://www.pa.org.za/mp-attendance>