

# King unhappy with palace refurbishment

Bongani Hans

KING Goodwill Zwelithini has claimed that millions of rand allocated for the refurbishment of his palace in Ingwavuma, northern KwaZulu-Natal, were squandered by people who did a shoddy job.

During the opening of the provincial parliament in Pietermaritzburg this week, the king requested economic MEC Sihle Zikalala, Premier Willes Mchunu and public works MEC Ravi Pillay to send a team of officials to Machwebeni Palace to assess the work done last year. This is one of eight palaces belonging to the king.

It was reported that the provincial government had spent R15 million in renovating the palaces in the 2012/13 financial year. In the following financial year, another R20m was allocated for the overall maintenance of the royal household infrastructure, including the refurbishment of palaces, but it is not clear whether this money was spent.

King Zwelithini said the quality of the work did not amount to R10m. "The money spent there does not even amount to R7m. The money was stolen."

He also complained about the quality of material used.

"If I am sleeping on a windy night I can hear some flappings inside, and it is terrible when it is cold. The house I built in Osuthu Palace is far better as I sleep in peace," he said.

He said he would find time to accompany the team to show them the shoddy work.

"I know where the Zululand government stopped the construction and where the KwaZulu-Natal government took over and ended," he said.

The king said the money had not been allocated for reconstruction from scratch, "but was just refurbishment".

He said he had raised the matter with Parliament last year.

"The curtains also do not even have linings. The bedrooms are bad. My wives (queens) can tell you what is happening. No one had spoken to me about the refurbishment of that palace," he said.

Mchunu's spokesperson, Thami Ngidi, said the premier's office had noted the king's concerns.

## Investigation

"As far as I am aware there is no investigation by the office of the premier. The department to speak to is Public Works," said Ngidi.

Pillay's spokesperson, Mbulelo Baloyi, said the MEC's office had not been aware of the condition of the palace.

Baloyi said department officials from the North Coast region who were responsible for the Ingwavuma area said they were not involved in the work.

"It was the responsibility of the Royal Household when the premier was Senzo Mchunu. We are not involved."

Royal Household Trust chairman Professor Sihawu Ngubane distanced the trust from the project.

"The money was not allocated by our trust, it came from the government and they must answer," said Ngubane.

The king's adviser, Judge Jerome Ngwenya, said the former chairman of the now defunct Royal Household Trust Board had also said the question should be directed to the provincial government.