

# Millions spent on 'unfit' presidential home

**SIHLE MANDA**

THE JL DUBE Presidential House in Durban has been condemned as unfit for habitation despite R40 million being pumped into renovations the year Jacob Zuma became head of state.

Plans are at an advanced stage to pour in a further R10m to revamp the presidential home. This would bring the total spend on renovations to R50m since 2009.

Newly appointed Presidency spokesperson Khusela Diko revealed that only 15% of the house was habitable despite the multimillion investment in its facelift.

The structure is considered so dangerous that large parts of it have been secured to prevent use.

"The balance of the house has been condoned off and no one can utilise it," said Diko.

Three months ago, the Department of Public Works appointed a contractor to do "general repairs" to the house after the house was damaged by floods in April 2016.

At the time, the house was deemed "temporarily unfit for human habitation" and could not be used by the Presidency until repairs were done.

Despite this, former president Jacob Zuma in his last days in office hosted Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in the house during a three-day state visit. The JL Dube House is one of three presidential houses, the others being the Mahlaba Ndlopfu in Pretoria and Genadendal in Cape Town. All three houses are national key points.

It is understood that renovations and repairs were expected to be done

on the main house, the housekeeper's flat, the guesthouse as well as the replacement of the roof of the house manager's house.

Security installations were also expected to be conducted.

This was confirmed by Public Works spokesperson Thami Mchunu, who said the project was expected to take eight months to complete. A Durban-based construction company was appointed as contractor in January.

The project comes after the house received a R40m renovation in 2009.

Asked why it had taken two years to fix the house, Mchunu said comprehensive investigations and feasibility studies had to be done before construction commenced.

"When the storm damages occurred, the site was secured by boarding up the broken glass panels and windows in the tower and skylight to avoid any further damages," he said.

A second investigation was instituted after it was discovered that further repairs to the roof structures were required after a Wood Borer beetle infestation was found.

Mchunu defended the decision to let Zuma host Kenyatta in a house declared not unfit for habitation, saying the storm damages had not affected the entire building.

"It was only the upper deck, the dome and the staircase areas that were affected. That is why certain areas of the residence remained usable to hold meetings," he said.

The Edwardian-style house, built in 1904, has been the residence of several South African presidents and many visiting heads of state.