

R50m state house repairs

Church pays tribute to Winnie



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THE heritage J.L. Dube presidential house in Durban has been condemned as unfit for habitation, despite R40 million being pumped into renovations the year Jacob Zuma became the head of state.

Plans are at an advanced stage to pour in a further R10m to revamp the home of the president, which would bring the total spend on renovations alone to R50m since 2009.

The Presidency's newly appointed spokesperson Khusela Diko said only 15% of the house was habitable, despite the multimillion-rand investment into 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 cordoned off and no one can live in it," said Diko.

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

At the time, the house was deemed "temporarily unfit for occupation", 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 his three-day state visit.

The J.L. Dube House is the third presidential house, the others are Mahlabisa Ndlopfu in Pretoria and

Despite heritage dwelling declared derelict

Genadendal in Cape Town. All three houses are national key points.

The Star understands that renovations and repairs were expected to be carried out on the main house, the housekeeper's flat, the guest house as well as the replacement of the roof to the manager's house.

Security installations were also expected to be made.

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 apparently appointed as the 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 could commence.

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

Mchunu said a second investigation was instituted after it was discovered that further repairs to the roof structures were required after wood borer infestation was found.

He defended the decision to let Zuma host Kenyatta in a house declared unfit for habitation, saying the floods had not damaged the whole building.

"Only the upper-deck, the dome and the staircase were damaged. That is why certain parts of the residence remained usable, for instance to hold meetings," he said.

To ensure that the heritage aspects of the facility were not compromised, Mchunu said "the Heritage Council in KwaZulu-Natal (Amafa) was approached for input and approval of the repairs".

DA MP John Figg said he has asked for clarity from the department through a parliamentary question. He questioned the price tag, saying it was renovated a few years ago.

An ANC MP and Parliament's public works committee chairperson, Humphrey Mmembezi, said the committee had not been briefed on the project by the department.

The residence, previously known as King's House, was renamed in 2012 after the founding ANC president, John Langalibalele Dube.

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