

Maseko ready to face Zuma and the Guptas

He is willing to testify in court

By **Karyn Maughan**

Themba Maseko is ready to testify against former president Jacob Zuma and Ajay Gupta in a criminal trial – and has welcomed the Hawks’ announcement that the case against the pair is under “on-going” investigation.

The former government communications head was speaking to Sowetan on

Thursday after he completed giving his evidence-in-chief at the state capture inquiry. He added that he was ready to face cross-examination from the Guptas’ lawyers.

Zuma’s lawyers are yet to confirm if they will seek to cross-examine witnesses.

“I’m ready. I’d welcome any cross-examination from anyone,” he said.

Maseko, who lost his position a few months after he refused to channel state advertising funds to the Guptas’ *The New Age* newspaper, said he believed taking the stand was “worth it”.

The National Prosecuting Authority is currently deciding whether Maseko should be charged over his alleged role in a public works contract concluded 13 years ago. That case was opened against him after he went public with his claims that Zuma had asked him to “help” the Guptas.

Maseko said the case is “baseless” and its timing deeply suspicious. He told the state capture inquiry on Thursday Ajay told him that Zuma would “sort out” any minister who refused to hand over their advertising budget to him.



Ajay also allegedly boasted that Zuma had dinner with his family on a weekly basis and claimed ministers were “summoned” by the president or to their Saxonwold home when they were “not cooperating”.

“He said ‘listen, this is how things are going to work ... you must go to all the departments, talk to ministers, tell them to transfer all the budgets into ... the GCIS [Government Communication and Information System] account’.

“He said ‘your only job is to ensure that the money comes to me and *The New Age* newspaper’,” Maseko said, adding that Ajay’s “aggressive” demeanor left him with the impression that he was issuing an “instruction” to him.

Maseko said Ajay instructed him to meet with government departments and force them to channel R600m in government advertising spend to the family’s media interests.

“He said that if I have other problems, or difficulties with any of the ministers refusing

to transfer their money to me, I must come back to him and he will call the ministers to order and he will make sure that they deliver.”

Maseko had earlier testified that, shortly before he met with Ajay in Saxonwold in 2010, Zuma had called him.

Maseko said Zuma told him in Zulu: *Kuna labafana bakwaGupta badinga uncedo lwakho. Ngicela ubancede* [The Gupta brothers need your help. Please help them].”

During that 90-second conversation, Maseko said, Zuma did not specify how exactly he wanted him to help the Guptas. But the call left Maseko with the impression that Ajay had asked Zuma to contact him as part of an attempt “to demonstrate his power and influence”.

Inquiry legal counsel Vincent Maleka said the state capture commission would lead evidence about how much of the government’s advertising budgets was allocated to Gupta media houses.