

Nxesi appears to have forgotten he defended Nkandla – analyst

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Whatever happens in the ugly spat taking place in public works, Ramaphosa will need to act to improve SA's directors-general problem. Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi should lay criminal charges against his director-general, Sam Vukile, if he believes he has been "tainted by the Nkandla scandal", according to independent political analyst Ralph Mathekga.

This follows the ugly spat between Nxesi and Vukela, now referred to President Cyril Ramaphosa for intervention and a possible redeployment for the DG. "Looking for a gentleman's agreement in this case through a suggested redeployment ... does not resolve the key issue," said Mathekga.

"If the minister claims the DG has been tainted by Nkandla involvement, he should not forget he was in the forefront of defending former president Jacob Zuma on the same issue." Nxesi made headlines a few years ago at the height of the Nkandla scandal for sticking to the government line that the swimming pool at Zuma's homestead was in fact some sort of "fire pool".

Two years ago, the Constitutional Court accepted National Treasury's calculations that Zuma owed R7.8 million for improvements to his Nkandla home in KwaZulu-Natal, made at taxpayers' expense. In the letter to Ramaphosa, Nxesi has claimed that "keeping Vukela in the DG post could return the department to the days of the Nkandla scandal".

Vukela has retorted that the minister misinformed the president with "lies". Mathekga said the high turnover of DGs in government showed there was "something very wrong with the public service".

He explained: "Government should look at how DGs are appointed. The solution should lie in DGs being appointed by ministers in conjunction with the president to maintain balance." He said tensions between ministers and DGs were "something with deep and serious implications for the efficiency and functionality of government".

"What we are dealing with is not a minor issue, but goes to the core of how best we should align roles of the minister as political head and those of the DG, who is an administrative appointee," added Mathekga.

Following the recent ANC lekgotla, Minister in the Presidency Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma has reportedly pushed for ministers to be stripped of powers to fire and hire DGs, with the authority solely resting with the president.

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