

# ‘Commission out to tarnish my image’

## Nxesi blasts report, denies wrongdoing

By **Thabo Mokone**

A minister has launched a blistering attack on a constitutional body charged with ensuring compliance with public service regulations, accusing it of conducting a “witch hunt” against him.

In a submission in response to a preliminary report by the Public Service Commission (PSC), public works minister Thulas Nxesi said the Chapter 9 institution was being driven by “ulterior motives” in its investigation into the alleged irregular appointment of the department’s CFO Cox Mokgoro.

The PSC preliminary report, presented to parliament’s standing committee on public accounts last month, found Mokgoro’s appointment to be irregular and that Nxesi had a hand in it.

It found that Mokgoro was hired under dubious circumstances as his appointment came about as a secondment facilitated by private firm Honey Cloud Enterprises, a company in which Mokgoro is the sole owner and director.

This effectively meant that Mokgoro seconded himself to the department from his position as an audit committee member of the Independent Development Trust (IDT), one of the entities of public works.

But Nxesi said the PSC had in July accepted his explanation of how Mokgoro became CFO and he was now puzzled by the somersault.

“DPW made it very clear to the PSC back in July 2018 that Mokgoro was con-

tracted by the IDT after being persuaded by the then chair of the IDT board and its CEO at the time of the secondment to DPW to help address the skills deficit.

“The PSC accepted my explanation. It is not clear what has changed since then,” the minister said.

Nxesi said the probe appears to be a witch hunt. “It appears the PSC report is designed to pursue ulterior motives which are aimed at tarnishing the image of the minister without necessarily getting at the bottom of the challenges faced by DPW in managing secondments.”

Nxesi also said he was not happy that the PSC had made no findings or observations regarding the role of his predecessor Nathi Nhleko, and current director-general Sam Vukela, who had extended Mokgoro’s previous secondments.

Nxesi said he was stunned that the report made no findings on the role of Vukela and other officials who played a role in the secondment of Mokgoro.

Nxesi and Vukela do not see eye to eye regarding the management of the department, and the minister has since asked President Cyril Ramaphosa to intervene in their stand-off by transferring Vukela to another department.

At a meeting between the department, the PSC and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts a fortnight ago, Vukela said he accepted the findings of the PSC.

The PSC had not responded to requests for comment at the time of going to print.

PSC spokesperson Humphrey Ramafoko said it did not discuss investigations in the media.

Nxesi could not be reached for comment but his deputy, Jeremy Cronin, confirmed the submission to the PSC.