

FINANCIAL BURDENS

Bill to ease sale of state real estate abroad

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The government says it will accelerate efforts to dispose of all its redundant properties located abroad that are a financial burden to the state.

Once signed into law, the Foreign Service Bill will enable the department of international relations to swiftly sell off the properties. The bill was passed by the National Assembly in December 2018 and is awaiting President Cyril Ramaphosa's signature before promulgation.

It makes provision for the minister of international relations and co-operation to dispose of properties under the department's custodianship, in consultation with the ministers of public works and of finance.

Last week, public works minister Thulas Nxesi said that in the early 2000s, the government identified a number of properties in various countries as redundant and a financial burden to the state.

At the time 18 properties were identified for disposal. They included 13 in Namibia, two in Bonn, Germany, one in Zurich, Switzerland, one in Madeira, Portugal, and a parking bay in Paris, France.

In August 2008, the then minister of public works

approved the disposal of all the redundant properties through public tender. However, the public works department prioritised the disposal of the Namibian properties as a pilot project.

"It was then in 2009 that the acting director-general of the department of public works along with his counterpart at the department of foreign affairs approved the establishment of a joint foreign disposal committee to facilitate the disposal of all identified foreign properties," Nxesi said in a written reply to a question from the DA.

Nxesi said in 2010 the sale of the Namibian properties was advertised on public tender.

Of the 13 properties only five were disposed of and the remaining eight could not be disposed of, as the bidders failed to raise funds.

"Since then, the department of public works and department of international relations have tried to resume the process of disposal of the identified properties located abroad without success," said Nxesi.

However, he said promulgation of the new bill would hopefully "enable the department [of international relations] to move swiftly to deal with properties that are redundant and a financial burden to the state".