

Citizens should focus on good things in land reform report — De Lille

PUBLIC Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille believes South Africans are being narrow-minded in only focusing on land expropriation without compensation.

In an interview with News24, De Lille — who helped draft the country's Constitution — said people were making a mistake by not fully studying the land commission's report on land reform, and only focusing on certain aspects of it.

The 144-page report, released in July, recommends that the state increase funding for land reform, discourage individuals retaining unproductive land, and change the Constitution to allow for land expropriation without compensation.

"Lots of people have not read [the report] because they've only looked for expropriation without compensation," De Lille said.

"The whole thing in the country is about expropriation without compensation. How dumb can you be?"

She said land reform included restitution, land redistribution, giving



Patricia de Lille ... 'Our country is ... in an economic crisis. And so I'm just going to do my bit to try and prevent us going down that cliff.'

PHOTO:
PETER ABRAHAMS (FILE)

people title deeds, and helping new farmers. "Let's focus on the good things in that report.

"I think we need to change our communication around land and begin to show South Africans that land reform means lots more things."

De Lille, who opposed a change to the Constitution during the 2019 elections, said more consultation

would have to be done before Parliament considered adding land expropriation without compensation to the Constitution.

"You must look at that land reform report very carefully because, although they support expropriation without compensation, they said it must be under very, very strict circumstances," she added. "They even

take it further, that that decision can only be taken by a court of law."

President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed De Lille as a minister in May — the only opposition party represented in cabinet — after her Good party won two National Assembly seats in the May 8 elections.

The political party was formed in December, only two months after she resigned as Cape Town mayor and left her previous political home, the Democratic Alliance (DA).

De Lille said her reputation preceded her before arriving at the Public Works Department.

"They know that I understand the urgency of being in government."

She said, since arriving, she had tried to restore Batho Pele (people first) principles which have been lost during years of mismanagement, and had tried to ensure that the department paid its creditors on time.

Other short-term plans include handing over title deeds to farm owners in Limpopo, setting up the infrastructure department, and

achieving a clean audit. "I want to achieve [a clean audit] in this financial year and next financial year," De Lille said, adding it was a key performance indicator in the contracts of the department's managers.

She said R430 million, identified by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) as being lost to corruption, also needs to be recovered.

"You know that ... we don't have the time anymore; even some days I feel tired, but we don't have the luxury of time," De Lille said. "Our country is on the brink of an economic ... no, it's in an economic crisis. And so I'm just going to do my bit to try and prevent us going down that cliff.

"There is a young generation that is emerging that [is saying] we should create a country where they can grow up free, where they can grow up in an integrated society." De Lille said she wanted to use the Public Works Department to help achieve that integration, by using public land for public good.

— News24.