

# **Public Works corruption is still bleeding department dry**

Minister Patricia de Lille continues to clamp down hard on crime within the department that is putting government's billions of rands in assets in jeopardy.

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Patricia de Lille with Mogoeng Mogoeng, being sworn in as a minister.

Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Patricia de Lille has uncovered more disturbing corruption revelations within the department and has called for an overhaul of its register, as well as intensified action against corrupt officials.

A senior official told Sunday Times that de Lille wants to know “what the hell is going on”, ahead of Auditor-General Kimi Makwetu’s report, to be tabled in November.

The department’s register findings will be included in the report.

De Lille, who has actively instilled action since taking over the department, admitted to Sunday Times in an interview that the register contains significant problems.

She told the publication that despite the department being custodians of over 30 000 pieces of land and more than 81 000 buildings, values and status of properties are mostly unknown.

She added that unregistered and unsurveyed properties are especially at risk of illegal occupation. The register, which is reported to have open accessibility, is said to be facilitating illegal leasing and selling of property belonging to the state.

In July, de Lille announced that all tenders issued by her department will be open for public scrutiny, from evaluating the documents to the adjudication, in a bid to root out corruption related to leases, and ensure that land and assets owned by the state are “used for the public good”.

This warning also included those in the property industry who facilitate the corruption conducted by officials.

“I am appealing to the property industry, if you are involved, we are going to expose you because you are paying the corrupt officials in the department,” she said.

She also directed that lifestyle audits be conducted on the department’s senior staff, between August 2019 and June 2020.

The Special Investigating Unit (SIU) also conducted 2 325 probes in the department, half of which were reported to be finalised in July. It has been tasked with recouping some R403 million in looted money and is still investigating 2 162 building leases that have raised red flags.

At the time, the Public Service Commission was also said to be finalising its report into irregular appointments within the department, with Phase One revealing that 11 out of 37 senior management members were irregularly appointed. Phase Two dealt with the appointment of 677 staff members at levels below senior management, of which 94 were already found to have been irregularly appointed.

De Lille told Sunday Times that other than knowing that a piece of land or a building belongs to the state, nothing else is revealed. She explained that hundreds of properties listed as vacant often have buildings and houses that are active and functional, adding that officials who continue to plunder the department’s funds work with criminals to identify properties that are vacant and neglected.

Properties are then transferred to third parties, where they are sold or leased, earning officials and criminals millions.

The situation does seem to be improving slightly, with officials saying that register audits only began two years ago, but due to the sheer number of properties and land owned by the state, the department is far from where it needs to be.