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NATION

Parly awaits R118m in fire damages

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PARLIAMENT, which will require R2.2 billion to fix fire-damaged buildings, is expecting to receive a R118 million allocation from Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana during his adjustment budget on Wednesday.

This was revealed by Secretary to Parliament Xolile George when he briefed Parliament's the joint standing committee on financial management on Friday.

George said the national legislature had made submissions to the National Treasury for unavoidable expenditure that was occasioned by the fire that broke out on January 2.

"Although we could not receive the amount we requested, we nevertheless received an indication that they will allocate us an amount of R118m out of the total request we made to help respond to issues," he said.

The amount would be used for the preparation for next year's budget, State of the Nation Address and offices of MPs.

"Such an amount will help us go a long way with the restorative part of our work, including the enhancement of the digital infrastructure," George said.

National Assembly Speaker Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula said she had held a meeting with Godongwana to discuss how the National Treasury could come on board in the restoration of Parliament. "We agreed with the minister that, perhaps, the transfer payment should be given to Parliament so that Parliament accounts for the spending of this allocation or refurbishment of the institution. We also agreed that we will look into the procurement system, which will allow on time spending of money allocated for this. It will ensure that it has proper checks and balances," Mapisa-Nqakula said.

There will be a trilateral arrangement of a project steering committee involving Parliament, National Treasury and Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to monitor spending of monies allocated for restoration of damaged buildings.

According to Mapisa-Nqakula, the cost of restoring Parliament was estimated at R2.2 billion, including furnishings and IT systems.

The cost to restore the Old Assembly building amounts to R300m and R1.9 billion for the National Assembly building.

Mapisa-Nqakula said they had abandoned putting up a temporary structure in the form of a modular structure with the precinct.

"When we did calculations we discovered that the money to spend on the modular structure is money we could spend on restoration. For instance, the Old Assembly building will cost more or less the same amount

of money.

"Hence the decision from our side together with the National Treasury that we may as well look into the possibilities of restoring Parliament."

She said the issue of relocation of Parliament was not an item on the agenda and that they had an obligation in terms of the South African Heritage Resources Authority to renovate Parliament's current buildings.

"The issue of restoring that building has become urgent right now."

ANC MP Bheki Radebe said they were happy that the modular structure was set aside because its cost was to be similar to the restoration efforts.

Radebe also welcomed that there would be a trilateral steering committee consisting of the three departments to monitor the expenditure.

"They must give a commitment that the Office of the Auditor-General will be side-by-side with them as they meet," Radebe said.

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