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POLITICS

DA, Zikalala lock horns over 'construction Mafia' arrests

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THE DA has refused to retract a statement accusing Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Sihle Zikalala of lying with his claims that about 200 people alleged to be part of the construction mafia have been arrested to date.

The department yesterday demanded an apology from the party within seven days for its "defaming and fallacious" allegations against Zikalala.

In a statement, the department said the DA allegations were "another dose of untruthful and misleading propaganda".

"Under normal circumstances we would not respond to any DA drivel as our comments will dignify their garbage. We are responding because the media and the public at large have now become victims of being infected with falsehoods and propaganda and we respond to protect the vulnerable members of the public.

"The department confirms that its information that there are over 200 arrests made by the police involving work of the construction mafia is correct and authenticated by official documents in its possession," the department said.

"While the DA seems to have beef with their access on obtaining information from the police, they have gone out of their way to cast aspersions on the minister and made defaming inferences on the minister. We demand that the DA apologises and withdraw its despicable and amateurish statement within seven working days.

"The rights of the minister and the department are reserved in this regard."

DA's shadow minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Sello Seithlo, said: "We stand by our statement and we will not be apologising. The minister first claimed that 200 arrests had been made in relation to construction mafia crimes. Later he upped the figure to 600 on the JJ Tabane show. The onus is on him to prove that this is true using proof of arrests obtained from SAPS. Until he does, the DA stands by its statement that he is misleading the public.

"On July 10, the DA submitted a Paia (Promotion of Access to Information Act) application to SAPS requesting that they provide us with a breakdown of the specific construction projects that were targeted and the related category of crimes for which the 200 individuals, who were alleged to be part of the construction mafia, were arrested. In addition, SAPS had to provide clarity on the exact number of individuals," Seithlo said.

He added that the police "failed" to provide records on proof of arrest to substantiate the 200 arrests claim, wrote to the DA to ask for an extra 30 days to look for the information, and that period has allegedly lapsed.

Police spokesperson Athlenda Mathe said during the national commissioner's media briefing earlier this year, it was reported that certain companies, individuals and gangs are utilising mafia-type tactics by among other things, demanding tenders from municipalities as well as contractors on major infrastructure projects.