



Publication: Daily News - Main
Title: MEC willing to hold talks with construction Mafia
Publish date: 10 Jul 2023
Page: 3

Reach: 8283
AVE:R 39536.11
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'UNBLOCKING'

MEC willing to hold talks with construction Mafia

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THE KWAZULU-NATAL Department of Human Settlements and Public Works' urgent agenda is to immediately unblock all stalled construction projects, and this includes meeting with the so-called construction Mafia.

MEC for Public Works and Human Settlements Siphon Nkosi indicated that he was willing to meet with leaders of the construction Mafia groups in the province before law enforcement agencies get involved. Nkosi was slated by the DA for making the statement.

Sello Seitholo, an MP and DA spokesperson for public works and infrastructure, stated that after hollowing out state institutions and giving organised crime syndicates the licence to do as they please, the ANC had taken the cowardly decision to negotiate with the criminal syndicates behind the construction Mafia.

Seitholo said Nkosi's ridiculous plan, if allowed to go ahead, would set a dangerous precedent where criminal organisations would engage in unlawful activities to force the government to the negotiating table.

"Nkosi is essentially trying to shield the construction Mafia groups from criminal liability by stepping into the purview of law enforcement organisations. The extortion activities of the

criminal Mafia are now a direct threat to the national interest as the multi-billion-rand construction industry has practically been held to ransom by marauding gangs demanding a 30% cut on contracts," Seitholo stated.

Human Settlements and Public Works spokesperson Mlungisi Khumalo said that when Nkosi was appointed, unblocking all stalled or disrupted projects was accelerated for both portfolios. Khumalo said Nkosi had unlocked the stalled Thubalethu Melmoth housing project, Mnyangweni Loskop project, Jika Joe Community Residential Unit (CRU) project in Pietermaritzburg and Menzi High School construction.

Nkosi expressed a need to listen and engage with those responsible for this disruptive act, with the intention of better informing them about how the 30% distribution of projects applied. Nkosi said it was pertinent to do so, as some wanted to be paid without lifting a finger.

Nkosi said that the rule of law should reign supreme and prevail at all times, and that law enforcement agencies should step up efforts to resolve the impasse surrounding the disruption of projects once all other efforts had been exhausted.

"The police have arrested over 700 people involved in what Nkosi terms a treasonous act of criminality and



HUMAN Settlements and Public Works MEC Siphon "KK" Nkosi during a construction progress inspection of the JG Zuma Secondary School in the M section, KwaMashu. | BONGANI MBATHA African News Agency (ANA)

economic sabotage," Khumalo said.

DA KZN spokesperson on Public Works, Marlaine Nair, said that the DA would write to Nkosi expressing its outright condemnation of this attempt to undermine legal authority by negotiating with criminals.

"What possible reason could there be for the government to negotiate with criminals that hold construction companies to ransom, bringing

projects to a halt and demanding up to 30% just to allow these projects to continue?" asked Nair.

"It is not just flood damaged infrastructure repair or government building refurbishments that are being stopped, but also the delivery of housing to thousands of people who continue to wait for years, Nair said.

ActionSA KZN provincial chairperson Zwakele Mncwango said it was

cause for grave concern that nobody was "cracking down on these criminals, who created fear and uncertainty among potential investors".

"The KZN government is beginning to recognise such groups as a structure in our community that needs to be negotiated with as a legitimate entity," Mncwango said.

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