



Publication: Mercury, The - Main
Title: Zikalala questions costly refurbishments
Publish date: 22 May 2023
Page: 1

Reach: 10990
AVE: R 17281.04
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PUBLIC Works and Infrastructure Minister Sihle Zikalala has vowed to probe lavish spending on refurbishments and maintenance at government-owned facilities.

This comes as he appointed a team to investigate spending including R1.4 million on the refurbishment of a kitchen, curtain rails procured to the value of R54 000 and fumigation at a cost of R240 000.

DA MP Dr Leon Schreiber said the R1.4m renovation of a kitchen at a house in Cape Town, the R240 000 to fumigate a house in Albert Street, Waterkloof to rid it of cockroaches and the replacement of a fallen curtain rail at a house in Waterkloof Ridge at a cost R54 000 were just some of the exorbi-

tant expenses for government properties. Department spokesperson Lennox Mabaso said the panel would comprise a senior legal practitioner and experts in government procurement processes.

According to Mabaso, the move was in line with Zikalala's stance to do away with wasteful or any excessive, unreasonable or potentially corrupt practices.

He added that the lavish spending on the refurbishments was in stark contrast to the directive issued by President Cyril Ramaphosa to his Cabinet to stamp out any unnecessary spending of public funds. "This puts a stain on the public representatives and portrays them as if they have sanctioned such procurement. We have a duty to lead by example and

set the right tone in spending public monies. We are alive to the reality that everyone is facing a financial squeeze because of the rise in the cost of living.

"We therefore need to ensure that we take good care of public money," said Mabaso.

Mabaso said Zikalala believed that it was time to clean up the maintenance programme at government properties.

"We need to stem any perception or allegation of wrongdoing associated with the maintenance of state properties. The unfortunate part is that these actions lead to the amplification of the narrative which seeks to discredit the leadership of the government. This year we expect it to be worse as it will

go from cars, to generators, to staff. Misrepresentations will arise under the pretence of a constructive narrative."

He stressed that the properties undergoing maintenance were not privately owned by public representatives but are state assets, many of which are very old and require maintenance.

"However, all this should be reasonable and costs justifiable.

"The minister is also working on a new proposal to be taken through all government decision-making bodies which will resolve such issues and protect the integrity of government," Mabaso said.

Schreiber said the DA would report the inflated expenses to the public pro-

sector.

IFP MP Inkosi Mzamo Buthelezi said it would be premature to make a conclusive statement without seeing the contents of the expenditure.

He noted that there were three areas in which public representatives and government officials resided in Cape Town, and this had to be factored when looking at the amounts spent.

"As much as there is rot in government departments we need to be responsible when commenting and so there is a need to see the report before commenting," said the MPL.

Zikalala will present the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure budget vote tomorrow, where he is expected to outline, among other, initiatives how the department will use the revival of public infrastructure to stimulate economic growth.

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