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## Limpopo MEC hauled over the coals over R179m tender

Tender was issued to a company with no tax registration

By **Tshwarelo Hunter Mogakane**

Authorities within the Limpopo department of public works, roads and infrastructure, have admitted failing to hold anyone accountable for hundreds of millions of rands wasted under their watch.

MEC Nkakareng Rakgoale, head of department (HOD) Dikgole Seroka and chief financial officer (CFO) Mahlasedi Mhlabane could not provide adequate answers when they recently appeared before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) in the provincial legislature in Polokwane.

They were grilled on why the department awarded a R179-million contract to a company whose directors did not comply with tax requirements, only to describe the illegal transaction as negligence

for which they issued a warning letter against the responsible official.

"MEC, this thing can't happen under your leadership, unless there is a brotherhood and sisterhood in this department to protect one another.

"There is justifiable evidence of what should happen but you are quiet. As a standing committee, we are tired of coming here and speaking about the same matters.

"If somebody doesn't feel like doing their job, let them resign. There is no time for friendship here. There is time for work. You need a whip MEC. You must whip [officials] because the law allows you to," said committee member Jerry Maseko.

The committee found that the department spent the past eight years explaining away irregular expenditure that had accrued to R191-million without any severe steps taken against any of the responsible officials.

Instead of following the Public Finance Management



**MEC Nkakareng Rakgoale was not capable to explain to Scopa how hundreds of millions of rands were wasted under her watch.**

Act guidelines on recovering irregular expenditure, the committee found that some officials were made to pay once-off amounts of less than R5000 as punishment for unlawful spending.

"The law is as clear. Since this is negligence, you must tell us about the amounts you are recovering. The amount we are talking about here is R191-million. You cannot tell us about R4500 being recovered. I heard

that someone paid R208 while he earns R1.4-million, and they want us to ululate and celebrate," said committee member, Rudolph Phala.

When given an opportunity to explain herself, Rakgoale handed the responsibility over to her HOD, who in turn asked CFO Mhlabane to respond to the committee.

"We are the first people to acknowledge that indeed since 2014/15 when issues of

irregular expenditure were raised within the department, we really did not take effective steps to make sure we prevent it from recurring," said Mhlabane.

Mhlabane failed to give adequate answers on why the investigations they conducted so far were done internally, which is against public finance legislation. Rakgoale added she gave Seroka a written warning in relation to the irregular expenditure.

The committee rejected the explanations and demanded that the irregular expenditure be recovered.

"The only action they take in this department is a written warning, which is a waste of paper and time. They tell you that for R28-million that was incurred irregularly, all the officials involved incurred written warnings.

"They are saying 'our work is done', and they can dance and ululate.

"It is like a birthday present. This is nonsense," added committee member Phala.