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Call to probe minister Macpherson over 'meddling' in IDT

Media been used
to get rid of trust's
chief executive

By **Bongani Mdakane**

The ongoing controversy surrounding the governance of the Independent Development Trust (IDT) has now reached the portfolio committee on public works and infrastructure after Norma Mbatha, chairperson of the non-profit organisation Izwi Labantu submitted a formal complaint against minister Dean Macpherson to committee chairperson Carol Phiri.

In her letter, also copied to Macpherson and his deputy Sihle Zikalala, Mbatha alleges that Macpherson has been "meddling in the affairs of the IDT", particularly by influencing media coverage to justify the appointment of new IDT board members and the attempted removal of the IDT's CEO.

This escalation comes after Izwi Labantu and Black Forum South Africa failed in their urgent Pretoria High Court bid to stop Macpherson from appointing a new IDT board. The court dismissed their application, but Mbatha insists the dismissal was on technical grounds, not



Minister Dean Macpherson has been accused of 'meddling' in the affairs of the IDT by Izwi Labantu chairperson Norma Mbatha. / Gallo Images

the merits. "The court did not rule on whether the appointments were lawful," she says.

"We continue to challenge these appointments and advocate for transparency, which directly affects the marginalised communities we serve."

Mbatha specifically accus-

es the minister of colluding with certain media outlets in an orchestrated campaign. "WhatsApp messages have emerged, allegedly between the minister and media figures, suggesting a coordinated effort to orchestrate the CEO's removal by leveraging media reports."

She further argues that this reliance on media "undermines constitutional principles of fairness and rationality. "Media reports often lack the rigour of independent investigations and do not provide affected parties with a fair opportunity to be heard."

The crux of Izwi Labantu and Black Forum South Africa's objection is the lack of transparency in the IDT board appointments. The organisations claim the appointments violated the IDT Trust deed, which requires a transparent nomination.

Mbatha adds, "In a 25 March 2025 letter, the minister claimed the trustee appointments were under clause 9, but appointment letters cite clause 8.2.2. This inconsistency shows a lack of due diligence."

She further criticises Macpherson for publicly attacking their urgent court application as "an abuse of court processes" before any ruling had been made, stating this caused "significant reputational harm among stakeholders who support our community projects".

Mbatha calls on the portfolio committee to summon Macpherson to account for his actions, investigate the authenticity of the alleged WhatsApp messages, and direct the minister to suspend any attempts to

“ Reliance on media undermines fairness and rationality **”**

remove the IDT CEO until due process is followed.

"An independent investigation into these messages is necessary," she writes, urging a forensic analysis of the involved mobile phones to verify the alleged communications.

"Minister Macpherson's actions regarding alleged unlawful appointments, defamation, and media collusion threaten the integrity of the IDT, the welfare of marginalised communities, and the rule of law. Urgent intervention by the portfolio committee is essential."

In response, Macpherson acknowledged receipt of Mbatha's letter but dismissed her demands. "My rights are reserved to respond to any allegation in an appropriate forum," he wrote. "Your letter selectively omits part of the quote in my statement of 11 April 2025... I deny that anything said in my statement is defamatory. The demands in your letter are refused."