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MEDIA STATEMENT

SCOPA Inquiry into Public Works halted

This morning the Speaker's Office of Parliament declared the investigation into Public Works, instigated by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) Chair, Honourable Themba Godi, to be un-procedural and illegal - and therefore void. This follows months of engagements and appearances before SCOPA, including an irregular instruction to the Public Service Commission (PSC) to present for public debate a report that was still preliminary in nature regarding the appointment of Mr Cox Mokgoro by Public Works.

While we respect the decision of the Speaker's Office to suspend today's planned SCOPA briefing, this has disadvantaged the Department and myself, as we have still not been afforded an opportunity to respond to highly prejudicial allegations made in the previous SCOPA engagement.

At all times the Minister, Deputy Minister and Officials of Public Works have made themselves available and supplied comprehensive documentation to SCOPA as early as June 2018 to clarify the matters raised.

The process became highly compromised, when in a public session of SCOPA, the Director-General of the PSC presented a preliminary report casting unsupported aspersions over the role of Mr Mokgoro and the Minister, with wild speculation by members on the possibility of fraud and corruption. As the Chair of the PSC pointed out, at the time, this flouted the rules of the PSC, compromised the confidentiality of the process and opened the process to the possibility of judicial review.

Whilst I respect the integrity of parliamentary and government institutions and their role in holding the executive and officials to account, I am concerned at the real and

unfounded reputational damage to the Department, myself as Minister, and Mr Mokgoro – a committed professional credited with the improvement of the audit outcomes of Public Works in recent years. The present situation is highly unsatisfactory with allegations placed in the public space, with no opportunity for those accused to be heard.

In the light of this, we are currently taking legal advice with a view to taking the process that has unfolded on judicial review.

In fact, the Chair of SCOPA implied this morning that the ‘final’ PSC report – which has not been made available to the Executive Authority - has shifted away from the narrative of fraud and corruption to focus on technicalities around the secondment process. Unfortunately, the unfounded reputational damage has been done.

But in terms of the allegations in the preliminary report, what have we got to show after numerous engagements with SCOPA and the PSC?

- Evidence of fraud and corruption? – Zero. (These words were loosely thrown around in relation to the PSC presentation of the preliminary report.)
- Evidence of trading with the state and dodgy tenders? – Zero. Members of SCOPA do not seem to be aware that Mokgoro had nothing to do with tenders.
- Evidence of the use of an SCM (Supply Chain Management) process which was declared a deviation by the National Treasury – Zero. This SCM process was never implemented.

Let me say what I think is going on here. This has all the hallmarks of a fight-back by the corrupt syndicates that operate within Public Works – what Minister of Public Enterprises, Pravin Gordhan, refers to as ‘Bell-Pottinger: Phase 2.’

The orchestrated allegations – unsupported and usually anonymous - which came against some of my senior management started after my reappointment to Public Works at the end of February 2018 when I announced two investigations:

- The SIU (Special Investigations Unit) investigation into emergency day-to-day maintenance – a happy hunting ground for collusion and corruption; and

- An investigation into the suspiciously high number of appointments from the end of 2017 (some 683 in four months) in the period before my return to the Department.

These diversionary tactics – allegations against those fighting corruption - are not new. They are happening all around us. We are just called upon to start connecting the dots.

ENDS

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