

3 September 2018

GCIS decimated by Faith Muthambi, Phumla Williams tells Zondo Commission

In its third and final – according to the programme – week of the first round of hearings the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture continued with acting DG of the government communication information system (GCIS) Phumla Williams continuing where she left off on Friday.

Williams continued to talk about her strained relationship with former communications minister Faith Muthambi, who, Williams testified, dismantled the institution in her attempts to loot its funds. Last week Williams told the commission about how she went from being the former minister's favourite to a foe – when Muthambi arrived she had always praised Williams' work, but that all suddenly changed when the latter challenged some decisions taken by CFO Zweli Momeko.

Last week Williams said that Muthambi always wanted to be addressed as "honourable" which also caused tension between the two and led Muthambi to subsequently question Williams' work performance, Williams took the matter to then president Jacob Zuma, who promised to deal with the matter as ministers can only be addressed as such when they are in Parliament. Muthambi had also complained about the letterheads used by GCIS as she wanted them to use her version. GCIS was not yet used to the idea of being under the Department of Communications so most of the time they would continue using their own official stationery.

Williams says Muthambi went as far as refusing to remunerate her for 16 weeks of acting as the cabinet spokesperson – which led to Phumla taking the matter to the Public Service Commission, which found that she should indeed be compensated for her role. Even after that, however, she was not remunerated. According to Williams, it was only after Ayanda Dlodlo was appointed minister of communications that she received what was due to her.

Stripped of responsibility

"I arrived one day to find a letter telling me that the minister has directed Mr Donald Diphoko to take over almost all of my functions. Diphoko was the accounting officer at that time which is why he was told to take my functions. Usually the minister doesn't get involved in the running of the department so hearing Mr Diphoko telling me about those instructions shocked me," Williams recalled. "In fact it is wrong."

Williams said during that time even the cleaners were reporting to Diphoko, as was everyone else because the portfolio of deputy director-general was removed. Williams wept as she compared the treatment she received from Muthambi to that she received during apartheid, and how it almost forced her into early retirement.

"I was tortured for weeks and Muthambi did things that really affected my mind and my body, I even wanted to take an early retirement as I could not go to the doctor anymore. I was arrested in Soweto but tortured in Piet Retief, and I never thought the effects of my torture would come back. I had panic attacks, all these symptoms had been gone after taking medication but little did I know that they would be opened up by the same people I call comrades. They are the ones who did this to me."

The reason she withdrew her retirement is because she could not sell out, Williams testified. “I had to accept that this is not a minister but an enemy. I said to myself I would be failing the people of this country if I allow this thief to win,” she added.

Post of DG of GCIS vacant for almost six years

Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, the chairperson of the commission, then asked Williams how long she had been acting DG, and for how long has the position been vacant. She told Zondo that since Mzwanele Manyi left the position in 2012 it had never been filled, which means it has been vacant for almost six years.

“Even though the post was said to be prioritised to be filled, that has never happened, hence I am still acting.”

This revelation stunned Zondo who then asked how this inexcusable conduct has affected the institution. Williams answered that to her knowledge, any institution must have an accounting officer because not having one for a long period affects the organisation at management level. She also revealed that some people at some point might have been sceptical to apply for the post as there was a lot of bullying happening.

Zondo further asked if the president of the country has ever been made aware that one of his departments remains without a director, to which Williams said: “I am able to say that every year the Auditor-General has been raising the concerns about the issue. It has been raised with all relevant ministers including Muthambi, and the president must be aware because whenever we are sitting in a meeting I am addressed as acting so by default he should know there is a vacant position.”

The regulations say posts must be advertised within six months of a vacancy arising, and be filled within 12 months.

Leaderless organisation

“The damage that was done by Minister Muthambi will be felt for a very long time. Muthambi took over and all the directors resigned, members left, the organisation was dysfunctional, we lost a lot of senior people, she refused to fill those posts, people had to double up and sometimes people refused to do the work that they were not hired for,” Williams said. “

“She removed the editor of *Vukuzenzele* and gave him to another department even though we told her we don’t have an editor but she said we will manage. There were lot of instances that I can recount but when Dlodlo arrived she fast-tracked everything in order to get the organisation in running order by filling some of the positions.”

Williams continued to say during Muthambi’s era the organisation was operating on auto – there was no strategic direction from the leader.

Useful links:

[Zondo Commission](#) website

[Government Communication and Information System](#) (GCIS)

South African Police Service - [Hawks](#)