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Fear could be holding back senior whistle-blowers – Themba Maseko

Former head of government communications Themba Maseko took the stand at the commission into state capture on Wednesday, to declare that although many of his former colleagues in senior departmental positions may have knowledge of incidents of state capture, fear of reprisal could keep them from coming forward.

Maseko was asked by evidence leader Vincent Maleka to read some excerpts from a memorandum developed by a group of former directors-general (DGs), some of whom left public office under pressure owing to the increase in evidence of the Guptas' irregular influence over processes and appointments.

The document in question was, upon completion, addressed to ministers including then finance minister Pravin Gordhan; his public enterprises counterpart Ngoako Ramatlhodi; then deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa and former president Jacob Zuma's offices.

While receipt of the document was acknowledged by all, it was only Ramatlhodi's office that responded to the group, through his advisor, by saying that the minister would revert to them with a possible date for a meeting.

Asked by Maleka why the document only had signatures of former DGs, Maseko explained that although it was never the intention of the group to exclude other public officials from the process, they happened to have common interests that included their collective history in the liberation struggle.

"We are all a generation that participated in the liberation struggle; we share a common commitment to democracy, to ethical government. But there was no intention to exclude anybody."

Guptas fingered by former DGs

The group specifically names the Gupta family in the document, as they are associated with the bulk of the irregular processes that are captured by them. "There were a lot of media reports at the time on corruption and the Guptas' influence on executive appointments and government tender processes."

Following the distribution of the memorandum, the ANC announced, through then secretary-general Gwede Mantashe, that the party was inviting all members with information that relates to incidents relating to state capture to come forward.

"It was essentially an ANC process," Maseko told the commission, "so if there was an employee of the state that was not a member of the ANC they could not participate in the process."

Maseko took the opportunity to come forward as per the ANC invitation, first meeting with Mantashe, who requested his evidence in writing. He handed this written statement to him at a subsequent meeting.

“I must say friends and colleagues thought I was extremely naïve to do this.”

Maseko continues to testify before the commission.

Useful links:

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

[Zondo Commission](#) website

Public Protector’s [State of Capture](#) report, released in November 2016