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Zondo Commission – police crime intelligence corruption revealed

Because it is very easy to abuse state assets when you work in the crime intelligence unit of the South African Police Service (Saps), some of its senior officials did so with impunity for years. As a result of this, crime intelligence abused the system of classifying documents to hide corruption and fraud. This is according to Kobus Roelofse, an official from the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (Ipid) who testified before the commission of inquiry into state capture on Tuesday.

Roelofse was previously with the Hawks, and before that the Scorpions, having joined Saps in 1986. The commission kept his identity hidden from the public prior to his testimony, which implicates over 50 people, including General Richard Mdluli and Colonel Solomon Lazarus. Mdluli is the former head of crime intelligence who was dismissed following a kidnapping case that implicated him in his days as a senior police official in Vosloorus.

According to evidence leader Veruschka September, Mdluli was among those implicated persons who wanted Roelofse's testimony to be postponed, but this was dismissed by the commission's legal team.

Roelofse told commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo that he had received threats prior to his appearance before the inquiry, but decided it was important for him to do so nonetheless. In response to this, Zondo thanked him for continuing with his commitment to testifying, in spite of the threats.

In his experience in relation to investigating members of Saps who were implicated in wrongdoing in the past, Roelofse recalled, there were many attempts by officials from both Saps and the National Prosecuting Authority to obstruct investigative processes.

"These individuals became part of the problem," he said. "I think they obstructed the course of justice and defeated the ends of justice."

Lazarus for one, said Roelofse, was "instrumental" in appointing certain officials to key positions within crime intelligence whom he could trust to manipulate its financial systems for his personal benefit. The slush fund that was created around 2011 benefitted senior crime intelligence officials, but required a network that Roelofse said included journalists who would report along the lines of a particular narrative to distract the public from what was happening within the unit. A shelf company, which Roelofse referred to as "Company X", was used to pay agents and contacts who helped advance their interests.

Another benefit to Mdluli and Lazarus was that their families enjoyed services of the unit, which were paid for through the slush fund. Members of Mdluli's family, for instance, could fly around the country at the expense of taxpayers, through the fund, while Lazarus used the facilities of a safe house – normally reserved for debriefing informants – as a second home while his own was undergoing renovations for some time.

These abuses were hidden because documentation relating to their authorisation would be classified under the guise of protecting witnesses, informants of agents. Over R1-million was found to have been used under these circumstances by Roelofse during his investigations.

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