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Zondo Commission – Koloane's Waterkloof transgression not a problem for Dirco

Former minister of international relations and co-operation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane told the Zondo commission today that former president Jacob Zuma was aware of who Bruce Koloane was before he appointed him as the South African ambassador to the Netherlands. Nkoana-Mashabane told the commission that she believed Koloane had served the sanctions he received for the Waterkloof Air Force base scandal so there was no reason to not use his experience elsewhere.

Koloane was chief of state protocol when the private Gupta plane carrying wedding attendees landed at Waterkloof airbase, a national key point, without proper approval. In allowing this Koloane broke state protocol and in a disciplinary hearing, he was found guilty and suspended for two months without pay.

Nkoana-Mashabane admitted that she only found out about the landing when she saw it on television. She said she immediately called the then director-general Jerry Matjila, who is the ambassador in New York now.

Nkoana-Mashabane said that after the disciplinary process, it was suggested that Koloane be moved to another branch to revive the confidence in and integrity of state protocol. She also admitted that she could not keep Koloane sitting at the office doing nothing while he had the experience and served his suspension.

Commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo asked the minister what it took for someone to be considered for the role of ambassador.

The former minister replied that one has to possess a high level security clearance and must have the best interests of South Africa at heart. She said an ambassador is not even allowed to accept gifts from a foreign country; if they do they will be removed as an ambassador. "Being an ambassador is not a promotion nor a demotion, it is an honour," she said.

Zondo then asked if it made sense to her for her to suggest someone who has broken state protocol to be made ambassador, given the requirements she had just described for someone to be an ambassador.

Nkoana-Mashabane said that Koloane's nomination for ambassador was like any other nomination and there was no record of him breaking protocol post the disciplinary hearing and as an ambassador. She further said none of the processes or sanctions against Koloane suggested he should not be made ambassador so they had to use his experience. She added that the nomination letter for ambassador to the president does not normally carry every detail

about the candidate but the discussions between the minister and the president do. Nkoana-Mashabane said she informed the then president about Koloane's role in the Waterkloof saga, and also told the president that Koloane had pleaded guilty to all charges against him.

She further explained to the commission that Koloane was the most eligible candidate and his nomination would not have disturbed the operations of any department. He had represented South Africa well.

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