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Zondo Commission – Bruce Koloane resigns as Netherlands ambassador after being recalled to Pretoria

Bruce Koloane has resigned as South Africa's ambassador to the Netherlands, said Naledi Pandor, minister in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco), in response to an oral question in Parliament on Wednesday.

Koloane had been recalled to Pretoria, she said, where he served previously as chief of state protocol, but instead opted to leave the department's employ.

"I have decided that it would be in the public interest to transfer Ambassador Koloane back to head office in Pretoria," said Pandor. "A letter to this effect was sent to him on the 12 of August. In terms of the provisions of the law, we allowed the ambassador the opportunity to make representations as to why he should not be transferred back.

"After considering his representations I decided to transfer him back to head office on the basis that it was in the public interest to do so."

Koloane was last in the spotlight in July when he admitted before the commission of inquiry into state capture that he abused his powers in 2013 when he gave instructions - using the name of former president Jacob Zuma - for permission to land a private plane at Waterkloof air force base. The Jet Airlines plane carrying over 200 passengers who were to attend the wedding of Vela Gupta, the niece of the Gupta brothers, arrived in the country on 30 April that year. The controversy was widely reported on at the time, and following the media pressure the plane was ordered off the base by senior officials of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and re-positioned at OR Tambo international airport until the guests returned from the wedding venue in Sun City.

On his first day of appearance on 8 July, a defensive Koloane cautiously skirted the probing questions from evidence leader Advocate Thandi Norman and commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. He pleaded ignorance on some of the evidence compiled by the commission, while his lawyer Don Mahon argued against his unfair treatment in relation to access to information on evidence that implicated him.

At the centre of the argument were several audio recordings that Koloane claimed at the time he had not had the opportunity to listen to, implying that the commission had kept them away from him. He had been asked to explain the contents of the recordings. Three of them featured Koloane in conversation with SANDF officials, where he was heard asking for clarity on processes for allowing planes to land at Waterkloof, and in another giving instruction for permission to be granted.

In the interest of fairness, Zondo explained, he allowed Koloane and his legal team time to go through the recordings and return the next day better prepared. On his return the next day Koloane conceded that the

contents of the recordings were authentic and proceeded to admit that he did name drop in Zuma's case as he wanted to impress the Indian high commissioner, who had sent him the initial request.

From the time of his appearance at the commission, speculation has been rife over Koloane's future, given that he admitted to abuse of power in a senior office. Pandor said on Wednesday that he was due back in the country in the middle of September as he had to serve a month's notice since resigning in mid-August.

Koloane is the second witness to resign from public office after having appeared before the commission. Former finance minister Nhlanhla Nene tendered his resignation to President Cyril Ramaphosa in October last year, days after he admitted under oath that he had previously lied about having met with members of the Gupta family.

Nene had, prior to his appearance, said in a television interview in 2016, following his dismissal by Zuma from the same office, that he had only had casual encounters with the brothers, who have been implicated by several witnesses in benefiting from preferential treatment in relation to tenders from government departments and state-owned enterprises.

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