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Zondo Commission – Hawks deputy head calls veracity of Jonas’ testimony into question

Former deputy finance minister Mcebisi Jonas refused to co-operate with the Hawks in its investigation of the Gupta family, even after the intervention of then Hawks head General Berning Ntlemeza, despite his public announcement that Ajay Gupta offered him a bribe. This is the testimony of current national deputy Hawks head Lieutenant-General Yolisa Matakata, who on Tuesday told the commission of inquiry into state capture that her team went as far as writing to former National Assembly speaker Baleka Mbete in an effort to get Jonas to work with them.

Jonas’s version in his own testimony in August last year is that it was the Hawks who blocked his attempts to make a statement back in 2016. He first publicly announced in March of that year that Ajay Gupta offered him a R600-million bribe and a promotion to become finance minister back in October 2015, which he refused. The case with the Hawks, however, was later opened by the DA’s David Maynier and Cope’s Dennis Bloem, against the Guptas. It was in support of this case, said Matakata, that investigators wanted Jonas’s statement.

According to her, lead investigator Major-General Zintle Mnonopi finally reached out to Ntlemeza, after struggling to get hold of Jonas for a statement. Ntlemeza then intervened by phoning Jonas from his office, while both Mnonopi and Matakata were present.

“[Ntlemeza] called the deputy minister ... he indicated to him that General Mnonopi, who had been assigned to his matter, is really looking for him and raising concerns that she had been trying to get hold of him to depose to an affidavit.” Jonas’s response to this, said Matakata, was that he did not open a case, was not a witness, and was therefore not going to give a statement.

However, by the end of the conversation - which was played through the speaker - Jonas had agreed to a suggestion by Ntlemeza to come to the Hawks head office in Pretoria and give his statement there. He did not show up as expected, and only met with Mnonopi in July 2016.

In his previous testimony in August last year, Jonas implicated Mnonopi in the stalling of the investigation. He accused the Hawks of trying to “kill” the case by doctoring a statement he had previously made, leading him to give up on the effort. Mnonopi submitted an answering affidavit to the commission, counter-claiming that it was actually Jonas who did not support the efforts of the Hawks. Matakata corroborated Mnonopi’s version that Jonas was unavailable.

It was during a press briefing that Jonas initially made the startling revelation against Gupta, detailing how in October 2015 he was invited to a meeting at the Gupta home in Saxonwold and told by Ajay Gupta that because of the influence Ajay wielded, he could have Jonas appointed as finance minister, replacing then incumbent Nhlanhla Nene.

According to him, Duduzane Zuma and businessman Fana Hlongwane were also at the meeting. Zuma has since testified that Jonas lied before the commission, claiming that while a meeting did happen, Ajay was neither present, nor was there a bribe offered to Jonas.

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