



25 August 2020

Zondo commission – Mokonyane birthday party evidence challenged

The evidence of former environmental affairs minister Nomvula Mokonyane that no birthday party of hers was ever paid for by Bosasa nor hosted at the Victoria Guest House in Krugersdorp has been contradicted by the owner of the venue, Frederick Coetzee. He appeared before the commission of inquiry into state capture on Tuesday.

According to Coetzee, his establishment hosted Mokonyane's 40th birthday party in June 2003, and not her 50th as per the evidence of former Bosasa CFO Angelo Agrizzi last year. He gave details of how despite the initial planning for 80 guests, the number eventually grew to twice that size, with his staff having to cater for 174 guests at the last minute. Invoices for the costs of the event, said Coetzee, were sent to Agrizzi and it was his understanding that these would be settled by Bosasa. Coetzee described the last-minute scrambling about by his staff to meet the needs of the now-doubled guest complement, where they had to source extra seating and make eleventh-hour changes to the menu.

Asked by commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo how he was able to recall small details of the night in question, Coetzee said it stayed on his mind because of the demands of the night on him and his staff.

"Normally as a venue when we do events, you cater for 10 or 15 people extra," he said. "Luckily for us for that evening their speeches were quite long, so then we in the kitchens managed to get enough food. We changed the menu slightly to accommodate everybody."

Mokonyane is on record as saying the venue never hosted any birthday party of hers, while Coetzee further confirmed that the event was organised by Agrizzi, whom he knew because Bosasa had been one of his corporate clients for years.

Agrizzi told the commission last year that Mokonyane was among government officials who accepted bribes and other forms of gratuity from the company in return for influence that favoured its business interests. Bosasa held lucrative contracts with the Department of Correctional Services for years, which ran into around R1-billion annually. Mokonyane's relationship with the company, said Agrizzi, goes back a long way, from the time she was MEC of safety and security in Gauteng, and later premier. Favours were done for members of her family as well, Agrizzi testified, with two of her children having benefited from Bosasa.

According to Agrizzi, Mokonyane received monthly cash payments of R50 000, as she was regarded as a powerful political player with influence. When she appeared before the commission in July, Mokonyane denied all accusations levelled against her by Agrizzi, whom she labelled as racist and sexist with a vendetta against her. She further denied that Bosasa paid for her 50th birthday celebration in 2013, which Agrizzi had described as an extravagant affair.

Her personal assistant Sandy Thomas made a brief appearance before the commission on Tuesday, where Zondo read her the riot act for breaching the terms of a summons for her to appear on the day. Neither Thomas nor her lawyer Gugulethu Madlanga presented themselves in the morning as per the directive of the summons, and it was only after a short adjournment given by Zondo for evidence leader Advocate Viwe Notshe to enquire about their whereabouts, that the commission learned that Madlanga would soon avail himself.

Zondo further instructed Notshe to relay a message to Madlanga to ensure that Thomas too was present, and gave a longer break for this to happen. On return from the longer adjournment, Zondo heard Madlanga's move to apply for a postponement of his client's evidence, citing late receipt of a notice of her implication by another witness who is yet to be heard. Madlanga sought to make Thomas's affidavit available to the commission by 2 September, but Zondo was adamant that even without it she could proceed with giving oral evidence. The impression he had gotten from the commission's staff who dealt with Thomas, said Zondo, was that she had been unco-operative, hence there was no affidavit. He granted postponement of her evidence to Monday 31 August.

He did not mince his words, however: "It is unacceptable for someone to receive a summons, and without having been excused first, to stay away. If it's a situation where somebody is in hospital, that's different. But somebody must appear and say 'this is the situation'. You can't just stay away just because the lawyers will apply for a postponement, because who said their postponement would be granted?"

Earlier in the day Zondo heard from Bongive Dube, a former Bosasa staffer who testified to having been told in December 2017 of a bulk order of meat from Food Boys, that was meant to be delivered to Mokonyane. Dube's colleague, Catherine Mathabathe, handled such orders for Mokonyane – usually made and delivered in December – but on this particular occasion she was unavailable, and Dube handled the confirmation request from Food Boys. In his testimony last year, Agrizzi detailed how Mokonyane would receive large orders of meat and alcohol, courtesy of Bosasa, around the Christmas holiday season.

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