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Zondo commission – Mzimela sticks by her Gigaba evidence

Former South African Airways (SAA) CEO Siza Mzimela has stuck to her guns on the conduct of Malusi Gigaba during what appeared to be an attempt to bully the national airline into relinquishing a flight route between Johannesburg and Mumbai, India. Gigaba was minister of public enterprises between 2010 and 2014.

Mzimela returned before the state capture commission on Tuesday to be cross-examined by Gigaba's legal representatives. In her previous appearance, she testified to the former minister's odd silence at two meetings in which representatives of India-based Jet Airways presented a case for SAA turning over the route to their company.

Naresh Goyal, whom Mzimela understood to be the airline's CEO, delivered his presentation in a condescending, rude way, she said, while Gigaba kept quiet. Only his deputy at the time, Ben Martins, spoke out against Goyal's conduct in the first meeting in January 2011, calling him to order for what he called his disrespecting tone towards senior public officials and members of the executive.

Cross-examining Mzimela, Advocate Mandla Gumbi asked what she understood Gigaba's silence in the meetings to mean, to which Mzimela said she could not speculate, but could only comment that she found it unusual.

Gigaba's then advisor Siyabonga Mahlangu called a follow-up meeting in Cape Town in April 2011, where he too spoke to Mzimela and other SAA executives rudely, according to her evidence. Mzimela told the commission on Tuesday that she understood the event to be a meeting of the minister as it had been called by his advisor.

Gumbi questioned Mzimela's point in her affidavit before the commission, in which she indicated that governance issues arose within SAA during Gigaba's tenure, which caused discomfort for its senior executives. She again stood by her evidence, saying that certain protocols of the airline were overlooked by his office and Gigaba at times got involved in operational matters, such as the Jet Airways meetings in question.

At the conclusion of her evidence, Mzimela raised a concern with the fact that while she was financially liable for the cost of legal representation she had to obtain due to Gigaba's application to cross-examine her, the former minister is not.

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