SCOPA WANTS COMPREHENSIVE BRIEFING ON STEINHOF PARTICIPATE IN PARLIAMENT » NEWS

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) yesterday told the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) that it wants a comprehensive briefing on the Steinhof matter. In calling for the comprehensive briefing, the Chairperson of Scopa, Mr Mkhuleko Hlengwa, said: “There is a need to develop a reporting mechanism along the lines of monthly reports, even if in writing. I think the matter has been too protracted and has not come into any sort of convincing direction or any conclusion for that matter. We are at pains because it seems as if there is a business-as-usual approach, whereas a lot of things went wrong,” he said.

Scopa was receiving a briefing from the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI) and the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) on Covid-19 procurement investigations, state-owned companies’ corruption cases and the Steinhof investigation.

Scopa was informed by the national head of the DPCI, Gen Godfrey Lebeya, that 220 statements have been filed in the docket. These include affidavits obtained from witnesses, subpoenas in terms of section 205 of the Criminal Procedures Act (CPA), statements in terms of section 236 of the CPA, and affidavits in terms of section 212 of the CPA.

“Monthly case plan meetings with the prosecutors are ongoing, meetings with multi-disciplinary partners are ongoing, appointed auditors give monthly progress report to investigators and prosecutors and the Assets Forfeiture Unit of the NPA is on board,” he said.

A member of Scopa, Mr Alf Lees, said it is encouraging to see what appears to be considerable progress on this case. “However, there is not a word about who we believe to be the main protagonist here. We have stated the importance of this matter being seen to a conclusion, where everyone involved is held accountable,” he said.

Another member of the committee, Mr Sakhumzi Somyo, agreed with Mr Lees that the Steinhof matter has become a matter of national and even international interest. “So it would be one of the encouraging matters that we tighten up and begin to act on it,” he said.

Scopa member Ms Veronica Mente agreed that an extensive programme is needed to deal with Steinhof issues. “We cannot keep the issue of Steinhof on standby . . . It should be at some point finalised. We need to sit down and analyse: what are the stumbling blocks, why are we not knowing who are the culprits to this day?” she asked.

The National Director of Public Prosecutions, Adv Shamila Batohi, tried to explain the payment of money for the forensic audit into the Steinhof matter. “Given the fact that all of the previous Board, including the executive, are no longer there, the company is in fact cooperating very much and is regarded as a complainant in many of the cases that have been opened up. We don’t see any risk that there will be an attempt by the company to in fact prevent persons from being held accountable,” she said.

However, Scopa members had concerns with this approach and stated that it doesn’t augur well for the NPA. Mr Hlengwa said, “It goes on to the issue of funding, because both of these things are from a perception point of view. No matter how noble the intentions may have been and no matter how nuanced the explanation can be, from a perception point of view on its own, it just doesn’t augur well and is quite worrisome.”

Mr Hlengwa said this matter needs to be look at holistically from a reporting and financial implications point of view, because the NPA has shortfalls in funding. “We need to look at the state machinery’s ability to fund some of these urgent matters . . . All these things combined require a far more concerted outlook of oversight and reporting,” he said.

Ms Mente also voiced concerns with Adv Batohi’s statement. “I am not comfortable, NDPP, when you say you do not foresee the Steinhof management blocking you or manipulating you with the outcomes and the investigations that you are driving,” she said.

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